**So will the real activist please stand up?**

Just the other day, I was scrolling through my Facebook news feed when I chanced upon this:

*“TO ALL MY FACEBOOK FRIENDS !!! Will you all be willing to donate your status for just a few minutes to HONOR a fallen Marine who’s just passed away while serving our country? Cpl. Derek Wyatt (USMC) died Dec 6 while serving in Afghanistan. He leaves behind a wife and a newborn son named in his honor, who was born approx. 24 hours after news of his death. Repost to honor this Hero and his family……Thanks”*

Initially, I ignored it and carried on scrolling. Not long passed before a second one along similar lines appeared. I couldn’t help but stare in disbelief as I noticed the number of ‘shares’ each had received. This provoked an epiphany, of sorts. Something that I personally dismiss as absolutely ridiculous and irritating seems to appeal to an entire generation of cyberspace. A generation too lazy to care. A generation where donating time, money, or effort to a cause has been replaced by *donating* statuses, ‘likes’, and #tweets. Is it simply the new ‘in’ thing to do, or is there a more deep-rooted cause for this pseudo ‘activism’?

Why specifically HONOR Cpl. Derek Wyatt and not all the other marines who lost their lives serving in Afghanistan? It’s quite evident that what emotionally appeals to us is his newborn son back home. Surely then the objective should not be to only honour the fallen Marine, but to also aid his family in some way. Honor alone is not going to pay for a child’s education. Sharing a status is not going to support the family in any way, making this whole exercise utterly pointless apart from ‘subtly’ telling ALL YOUR FACEBOOK FRIENDS that you’re a sympathetic, selfless person. It takes a true hero to give up his status for “just a few minutes”.

Off late, the term ‘slacktivism’ has gained prominence across the blog universe, what with the recent developments of ‘KONY 2012’. It is defined as a “the act of passively supporting causes in order to tap into the satisfaction that accompanies philanthropy, without having to do any heavy-lifting (or heavy spending).” Essentially, what we have is people, sprawled on their beds with their laptops, ‘liking’, ‘sharing’, and ‘tweeting’ pages thinking they’re making a real difference, when in fact they’re doing nothing but filling the void their guilty consciences create at having the luxuries and lifestyles that the people they read about do not. Social media’s expansion has provided the ultimate platform for the lazy activist to practice his trade: portraying himself as compassionate and caring with minimum effort.

Let’s discuss KONY 2012. After a long, patient wait for the video to load, to tell you the truth I was expecting better. Was I the only one that felt overly patronized watching that video? The situation in Uganda is not as simple as ‘good guys’ versus ‘bad guys’. Jason Russell has tried to oversimplify a complex issue to make it accessible to the general public; which is commendable, no doubt, but not if it means distorting information. Facebook and Twitter have given people the opportunity to appeal to the emotions of masses through the persuasive tools of language and creativity. What gives him the right to classify Kony as “The worst”? The atrocities of World War Two were far more widespread, devastating, and disastrous to entire nations.

For anyone who has supported the campaign, watch this: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rU_1jnrj5VI>

Watch the scenes of outrage and violence, as incensed Ugandans throw rocks at the projector, confused and puzzled at why people are *celebrating* their suffering by wearing KONY 2012 t-shirts. To tell you the truth, I’m as puzzled as they are.

Then there was the Cover the Night event, supposed to be an integral part of the campaign. One only had to step outside that night to see the deserted, empty streets. The silence, deafening. Tweets like “Kony is so last month” resonated as the event failed miserably, emphasizing the brief and passing nature (almost highlighted by the status donation for “just a few minutes”) of genuine interest these slacktivists have. Rory Carroll claims “the movement’s phenomenal success in mobilizing young people online, flopped in trying to turn that into real world actions.”

Having said this, it would be foolish not to consider the potential of social media as a tool for activism. Take the Egypt revolution. A Facebook page on the death of Khaled Said, a journalist, became a centre for the revolution as it served as a means through which 470,000 ‘fans’ organized their dissidence. Amplified by a YouTube video, news reporting on Al Jazeera, and Twitter posts, the campaign took place, with protests lasting for weeks. Why did it work? After years of facing the oppressive rule of Hosni Mubarak, the atrocities had reached a tipping point. All that was needed was a catalyst; Khaled Said’s death proved to be exactly that.

Daphni Leef, a filmmaker from Tel Aviv (what is it about filmmakers?) created a Facebook page in protest against the increasing housing costs – one thing led to another, and eventually 300,000 angry citizens took part in the country’s largest social protest movement.

We can see from these success stories, that for any social media movement to materialize, the issue needs to be something that visibly affects the people taking part. Uganda and Afghanistan are so distanced and detached that it is difficult to truly be affected or care enough to make an effort.

I’m not doubting the ability of Facebook and other social media to raise awareness. With high-density connections, there is a significant pass-on effect. It has high potential to be harnessed to our advantage as it serves as a medium for co-operation. But we all need that extra push to stand up and actually make a difference.

**Rationale:**

The text type I have chosen is a personal blog. I enjoy this form, as it provides the freedom to express thoughts in a conversational manner while maintaining a personal engagement with the topic. I can strongly relate to ‘slacktivism’, having witnessed the Kony 2012 campaign come to life. Expressing my opinions on something I already felt strongly about made the task easier. Class discussions about social media’s influence on the spreading of information along with research on blogs/articles regarding media activism helped enhance my understanding and form my argument.

I believe blogs are platforms for expressing one’s own unique writing style, and therefore I have chosen not to model mine around the language of another specific blogger. However, I picked up on various language features used by others and utilized them to show my understanding of the text type. I mirrored Malcolm Gladwell’s use of sarcastic humour to argue points in his personal blog in lines like “subtly telling ALL…” The use of rhetorical questions and others’ opinions (e.g. Rory Carroll) are features I observed in Kriss Deiglmeier’s writing. I have presented two sides of the argument by first ridiculing slacktivists, and then arguing that it has the potential to be used effectively. I have also used persuasive language like the rule of three (e.g. “liking”, “sharing”, and “tweeting”) to emphasize my points. My opinion clearly comes through during the entire piece, as I have used personal pronouns regularly.

Through my work I have attempted to portray how the media can be used to communicate with large groups of people by tapping their emotions and spreading awareness. My blog did this both through content and through highlighting how blogs themselves can be used to spread opinion.

Word Count: 287 words

**Sources**

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