Module 5 (Part 1)

Active Voices: Digital Media as a Catalyst for Civic Engagement

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Module 5 (Part 1/4)

Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation

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Module 5
Active Voices: Digital Media as a Catalyst for Civic Engagement

This module explores how digital media enhances civic participation and the involvement of underrepresented groups in democratic causes.

Structure Of Module 5

YOU ARE HERE

MODULE 5 (Part 1)
Topic 1 (47 slides)

Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation

examines the role of digital activism in shaping political and social movements in Europe, while addressing challenges such as censorship, surveillance, and misinformation.

MODULE 5 (Part 2)
Topic 2 (51 slides)

Using Social Media for Political Engagement Best Practices and Ethical Considerations

Examines how social media can be used effectively and ethically for political engagement, while addressing risks such as misinformation, data privacy, and polarization.

MODULE 5 (Part 3)
Topic 3 (45 slides)

Digital Participation and Engagement of Underrepresented Groups: Encouraging Democratic Involvement

Evaluates how digital platforms enhance democratic participation and address digital literacy barriers.

MODULE 5 (Part 4)
Topic 4 (37 slides)

The Role of Digital Media in Strengthening Civic Dialogue and Social Movements

Assesses how digital media enables inclusive civic dialogue and mobilises grassroots movements through impactful campaigns.

Focus Areas (4) – Each of the **4 Topics** covers **3-4 Focus Areas**, with – Introduction, Context, Case Studies, Videos, Tools etc.

Resources Section: Each topic has a **Resources Area** complete with a set of **digital tools, exercises and resources** to assist learning application and to provide a deeper interactive level of understanding.

Conclusions: Provided on each topic at the Module in **Part 4.**

Module Overview

This module explores how **digital media enhances civic participation** and the involvement of underrepresented groups in democratic causes. It focuses on the use of **digital activism and crowdsourcing** to mobilize communities and **promote social change through online platforms**. It also examines the role of digital media across Europe in fostering political participation, civic engagement, and advocacy for social transformation.

01 **Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation**

02 **Using Social Media for Political Engagement Best Practices and Ethical Considerations**

03 **Digital Participation and Engagement of Underrepresented Groups: Encouraging Democratic Involvement**

04 **The Role of Digital Media in Strengthening Civic Dialogue and Social Movements**

Module Snapshot

Focus Area: Digital Activism & Governance

Aim: Focuses on the **involvement of underrepresented groups in digital activism** to **mobilise communities** around **democratic causes**

This section explores how digital media **empowers civic engagement** and **involvement of underrepresented groups** in **democratic causes, leveraging digital activism** and crowdsourcing to mobilise communities and drive social change through online platforms

Key Words: Activism, Underrepresented groups, Digital Activism, Civic Participation, Political Engagement, Democratic Causes, Crowdsourcing, Online Digital Campaigning, Community Mobilisation, Digital Activism, Social Movements, Advocacy
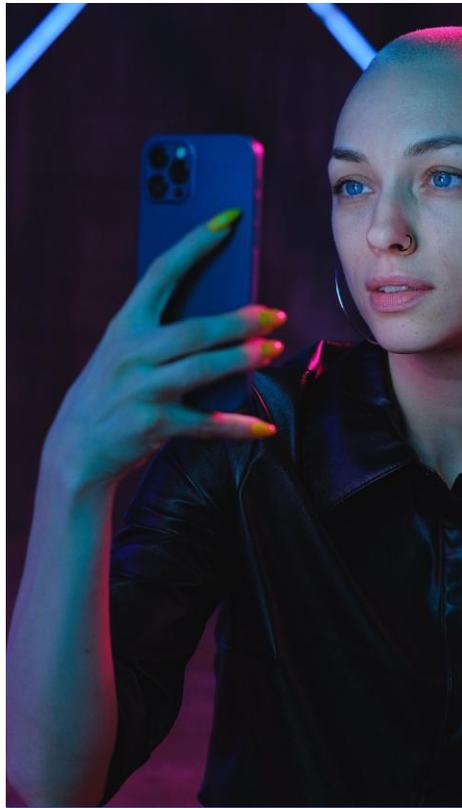
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Module 5 (Part 1) Interactive Learning Elements

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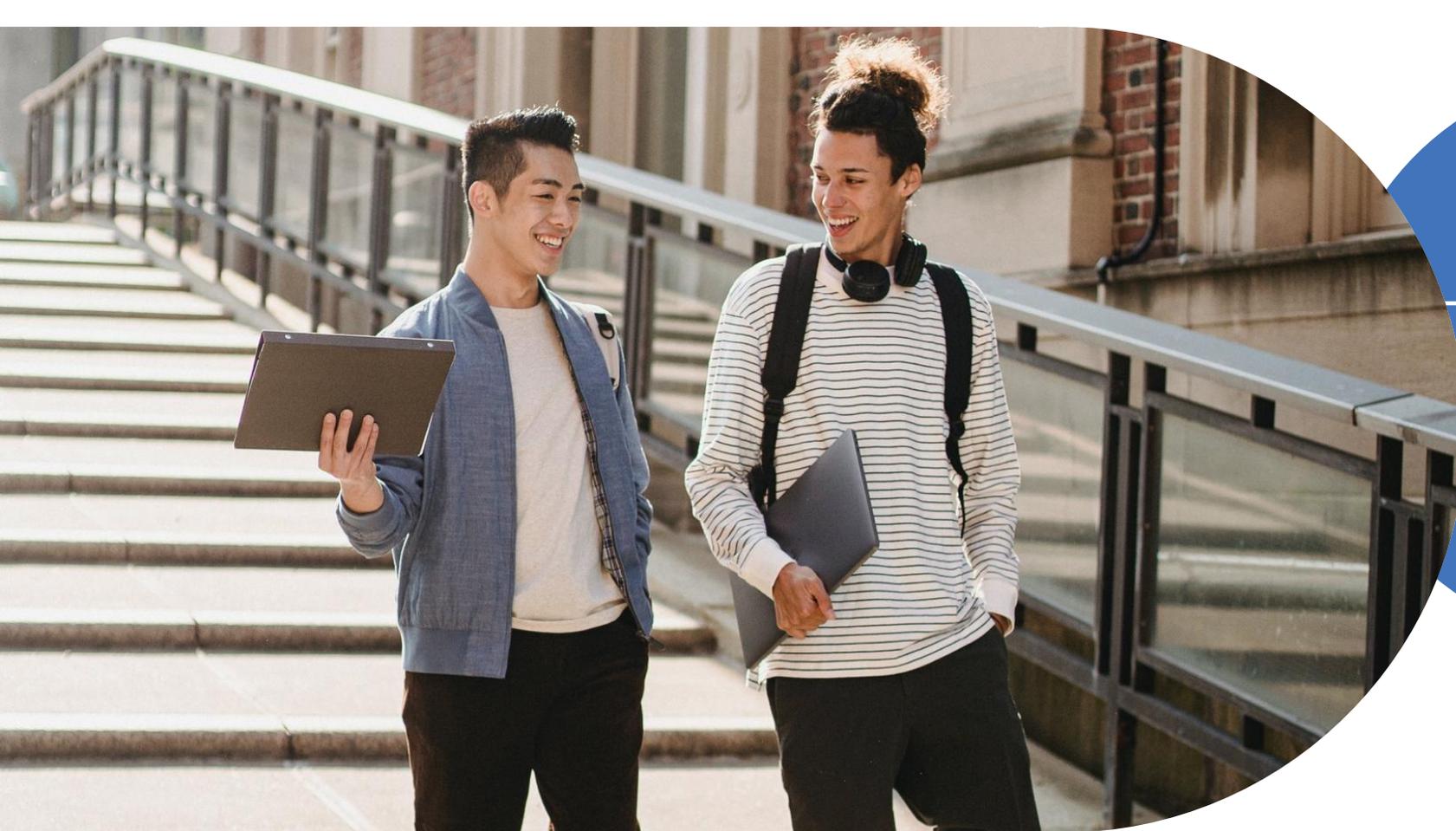
Overview

Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation

This section explores how **digital activism is shaping civic participation in Europe**, analysing both its **potential for mobilisation and the risks associated with online advocacy**. It examines successful **digital activism campaigns** and the challenges of ensuring ethical, inclusive, and effective digital movements**.**

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Learning Outcomes

Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation

- Examine the role of digital activism in shaping political and social movements across Europe.
- Assess the challenges faced by digital activists, including censorship, surveillance, and online misinformation.

Key Concepts Covered

- **The role of digital media in civic activism:** enabling rapid mobilisation and awareness-building for social causes.

- **Barriers to digital participation:** challenges such as government restrictions, algorithm bias and digital divide.

- **Ethical considerations:** digital advocacy requires transparency and safeguarding against manipulation.

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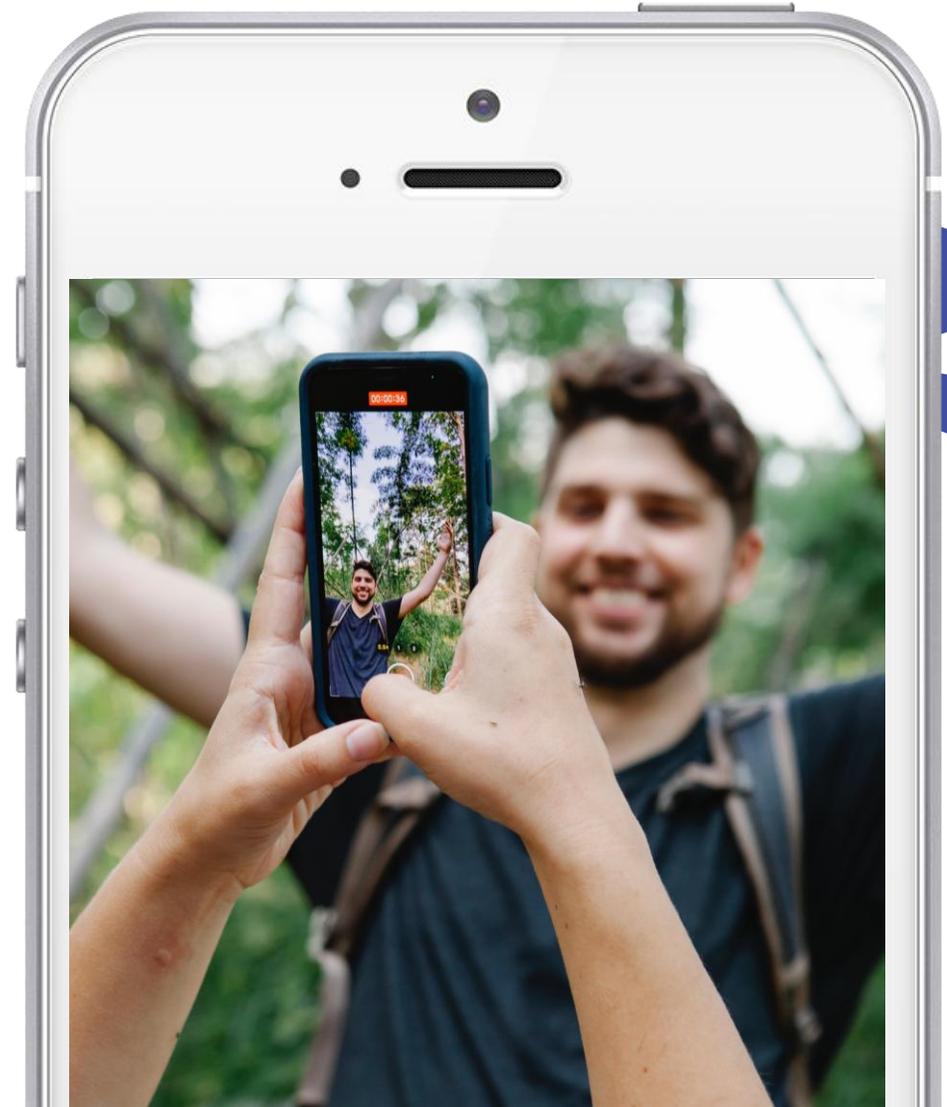
Digital activism in Europe

In the digital age, **activism has taken on new forms**. From the Arab Spring to the indignados movement to MeToo, the use of technology and digital platforms to launch messages, create spaces for gathering and discussion that can grow into communities, create critical mass to induce policy change, amplify citizen voices, and more, has become not only commonplace but also necessary.

Digital activism - the practice of using digital technology to initiate, support or participate in social or political movements - has **enabled individuals and communities to mobilise quickly, influence policy debates and challenge traditional power structures.**

Activists across Europe face a complex reality: **unprecedented access to digital tools** for mobilisation and expression, alongside **growing barriers** such as misinformation, government oversight and ethical dilemmas around data and privacy.

Digital activism in Europe

Widespread access to social media and its use, along with the ability to receive, send and generate content instantaneously, has profoundly transformed the dynamics of activism in Europe.

The immediacy and potential reach of messages disseminated by users and activists have given a voice to millions of people and brought to light issues that were previously off the social, political or media agenda.

Digital activism in Europe

Thanks to digital activism, all types of issues can potentially find a space for public debate. They can be discussed and collective action can be carried out at both local (at the street) and global levels (digital networks), breaking down traditional physical barriers and promoting coordinated global actions.

Digital platforms and digital social networks have become the new 'agoras' (town squares) and have facilitated new forms of socialisation, new and innovative forms of mobilisation, new communication strategies and new ways of building collective identities, thus expanding the possibilities for participation and collective action.

Digital activism in Europe

The spontaneity, sometimes unexpected or unforeseen, with which digital activism appropriates and re-signifies the web, digital platforms or digital social networks with a transformative purpose is a fact.

Social movements within the digital sphere have created and developed a series of values, language, symbols, rituals and myths. All these elements contribute to a collective and distinctive identity.

Digital activism in Europe

Exemples of use of language, symbols or myths linked to social movements with a digital collective action side are:

- Use of reivindicative Hashtags. Example: #MeToo, #FridaysForFuture or #JeSuisCharlie are a few examples. After the Charlie Hebdo attack in France, the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie became a symbol of solidarity. Subsequently, the formula #JeSuis and the element with which a person stands in solidarity has spread.

JE SUIS CHARLIE

Digital activism in Europe

Cyberactivism has taken elements of the media culture:

- The most iconic is the Guy Fawkes' mask, also known as the mask of V for Vendetta. It was used by the movement Anonymous, by the Occupy Wall Street movement and also in online and offline actions in other contexts

- Other iconic messages have been used by online campaigns, like the ones related to Star Wars or the Handmaid's Tale, in which there is a resistance against a "dark" power and hopeless .

Digital activism in Europe

Some challenges that digital activism faces are the following:

- Censorship and self-censorship
- Misinformation/Overinformation. That can lead to an Information Fatigue Syndrome.
- Digital repression
- Algorithm policies and transparency; and how to avoid algorithmic invisibility
- Strike the balance between playful activism (that uses entertainment formats to convey messages) and spaces for reflection, communication and building a strong community
- Protection from hate speech.

During the following module we will explore these topics.

Exploring 3 Focus Areas in Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participations

1. The role of digital media in amplifying civic activism and advocacy campaigns

2. Barriers to digital participation, including online censorship, misinformation, and accessibility.

3. Ethical considerations in digital activism,including privacy or accountability.

The role of digital media in amplifying civic activism and advocacy campaigns

Digital activism in Europe

Digital social media and digital platforms enable rapid mobilisation and awareness-building for social and political causes. They appear as public spaces where debates take place and also offer the conditions for digital activists to:

- Mobilise their followers instantly.
- Share real-time updates on protests and campaigns.
- Amplify marginalised voices.
- Attract international attention.

These platforms can turn individual actions into viral movements or digital campaigns. Hashtags such as #FridaysForFuture, #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter have crossed national borders, catalysing solidarity and common purpose. Movements and campaigns have given voice to marginalised people or causes both in the virtual realm and physical reality.

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Digital activism in Europe

Focus Area 1

The role of digital media in amplifying civic activism and advocacy campaigns

Principal characteristics of a successful social digital campaign:

➢ **Strategic communication plan**. To create a strategic communication plan, we need to answer these questions:

- What is our goal?
- What are we going to convey?
- Who is our target audience?
- What kind of engagement do we want from our audience?
- What messages are we going to disseminate and how?
- What is our timing?
- What do we need in terms of technology, human resources,…?

Focus Area 1

The role of digital media in amplifying civic activism and advocacy campaigns

Digital activism in Europe

➢ **Participation**. What spaces are we going to create, moderate and/or mediate for enabling the exchange of information across our target audiences?

➢ **Dissemination campaign focused on** creating clear and specific arguments and dissemination material for activists that will allow them to produce messages that will be shared, that will be the foudation of their engagement with the target audiences and that will support the creation of communities

➢ **Timing**. When are we going to carry out the campaign? Time is key in terms of giving visibility to the cause.

Digital activism in Europe

Some of the main challenges of digital activism are:

➢ Traditional offline collective actions such as strikes, demonstrations, boycotts,... have been strategies for social change. On social platforms and digital social networks we can also see digital collective actions (the use of hashtags, for instance). However, many voices question the effectiveness of online activism

➢ Slaktivism. It is a concept that merges the terms activism and slaker. It describes a sort of political and social actions with no real impact that give a sense of satisfaction to those who do these actions. To give a like, sign a online petition,... are considered slaktivism if they are not accompanied by other more significant online and offline actions.

Focus Area 1

The role of digital media in amplifying civic activism and advocacy campaigns

Digital activism in Europe

Examples of successful social digital campaigns:

➢ **#FridaysForFuture**

Launched in 2018, focused on environmental topics (climate change) and headed by Greta Thunberg. It uses social media networks to communicate, disseminate content and coordinate actions.

➢ **Stop Deshaucios** (Stop Evictions)

Campaign on the right to Access to Housing led by the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (platform of people affected by mortgages) in Spain.

Both examples merged digital and face-to-face mobilisation.

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Digital activism in Europe

Examples of successful social international digital campaigns:

➢ **Write for Rights**

Launched by Amnesty International (AI). In December every year, AI launches a campaign addressed to mobilise people to fight injustice and support human rights defendants or people under threat through letters, petitions or shared stories.

➢ **It takes a Community**

International, multi-stakeholder, social media communications campaign that showcases the positive contributions that migrants and refugees make in their communities.

Focus Area 1

The role of digital media in amplifying civic activism and advocacy campaigns

Case Study:

The following case study invites you to work on the topic of digital collective action.

As we have seen, there are some critic voices that point to a form of digital activism that lacks genuine commitment and effectiveness. Is this really the case?

Watch or read the transcription of Melissa Landgdon's speech "Transforming slactivism into action"

Case Study:

Digital collective action. **Transforming slactivism into action: Melissa Langdon**

The intervention focuses on virtual civic engagement and real social and political change through different examples. It addresses how digital media can contribute to educating people on topics they are not aware of; how social media can help to communicate and form virtual communities and how social media can enable content creation by citizens with a potential social and political change.

Key Questions!

- *Are actions meaningful by themselves?*

- *Are digital actions complementary to physical collective actions?*

Case Study:

Answer the following questions:
- According to Melissa Langdon, are digital actions meaningful by themselves? Why?

- Identify a particular digital campaign (you can use some of the mentioned before). Once you have one:
    - Describe the objectives and actions linked to the campaign.
    - Answer and reflect:
    - What level of commitment do these actions?
    - Are they accompanied by actions on the physical realm?
    - Do you think that these digital actions could be identified as slacktivism? Why?

Digital activism in Europe

Focus Area 2

Barriers to digital participation, including online censorship, misinformation, and accessibility

Digital activism presents itself as a space for social mobilisation with great potential for placing issues on the political agenda and initiating or consolidating a social transformation.

This great potential to digital participation is accompanied by significant barriers. As a reflection of physical reality, the virtual realm reproduces social, economic,… inequalities. This is known as the digital divide and is evident in:

- Internet Access: limited Internet connection)
- Access to technology: lack of access to adequate devices
- Knowledge or skills for using technology: lack of digital skills
- The quality of internet and technology use: lack of effective use of the internet and technologies

We can observe barriers to digital participation that respond to inequalities: between rural and urban areas, based on social class, gender, age, etc.

Some communities can experience digital marginalisation due to cultural or social factors.

Focus Area 2

Barriers to digital participation, including online censorship, misinformation, and accessibility

Digital activism in Europe

One of the challenges to digital participation include digital repression.

Given the potential of internet and digital social networks and platforms, strategies and actions are emerging to control and repress initiatives for social change. Thus, some states and private enterprises use digital technologies and tools to surveil, coerce or manipulate with the aim of deterring specific activities or beliefs that challenge the status quo.

This way, tepression and coercion in the physical sphere are transferred to the virtual sphere.

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Focus Area 2

Barriers to digital participation, including online censorship, misinformation, and accessibility

Digital activism in Europe

Different forms of digital repression, exercised by states against their citizens, have been reported, among others:

- Accessibility: Limitations on internet access and use of temporary internet blackouts
- Censorship: Filtering of content accessible on the internet

Private operators can also exercise digital repression. The following strategies or actions have been identified:

- Moderation of specific content or content created by activists
- Making access to information more or less difficult: down-ranking content or activists, for instance.

Both states and private operators use strategies based on disinformation, misrepresentations, strategies of flooding content networks as a distraction manoeuvre in order to undermine or delegitimise digital activists or digital campaigns.

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Focus Area 2

Barriers to digital participation, including online censorship, misinformation, and accessibility

Digital activism in Europe

Throughout the day, you have probably searched for information about a topic or person at least once. You have probably used an online browser or some form of artificial intelligence. In any case, through these strategies or others, you have come into contact with an algorithm that filters and prioritises accessible information.

Algorithms change, prioritising some content over others. Sensationalist content is generally prioritised, with more thoughtful content being less visible. In some situations, when this more thoughtful and status quo-questioning content is 'hidden' or underrated, the result is the marginalisation of those voices that call for social justice or wish to draw attention to non-prioritised issues.

Digital activism in Europe

Focus Area 2

Barriers to digital participation, including online censorship, misinformation, and accessibility

The qualitative and quantitative importance of disinformation in the digital realm is indisputable. The main aim of digital disinformation is to manipulate <u>deliberately</u> public opinion through the use of digital media platforms and communication technologies. The fact that anyone can create and distribute false information has undoubtedly contributed to this.

The processes of validation and verification (data analysis, verification of sources, etc.) are slower than the distribution of disinformation. Constructing and spreading fake news is cheaper and faster. Dismantling a lie takes a lot of time and effort and it is slow and expensive.

In the case of digital activism, disinformation leads to polarised opinions, discredits activists and social movements, and often weakens advocacy processes.

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Focus Area 2

Ethical considerations in digital activism, including privacy, accountability, and misinformation

Digital activism in Europe

How digital activists can identify disinformation? First of all, accessing accurate resources that provide tools that support this effort:

- The EU Digital Media Observatory (https://edmo.eu/about-us/edmoeu/).
- The Guide on digital tools for countering disinformation (https://en.hive-mind.community/blog/803,countering-disinformation-your-essential-digital-tools-guide)
- OSINT Toolkit to Detect and Analyse Identity-Based Disinformation https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ This toolkit seeks to equip potential disinformation victims with the tools and methodologies to detect, analyse, and gather evidence to counter these threats.

Focus Area 3

Ethical considerations in digital activism, including privacy, accountability, and misinformation

Digital activism in Europe

Digital activists often face ethical dilemmas related to **privacy.**

In many instances, digital activism involves the sharing and storage of personal data. This is the case when signing an online petition, for example. Is this data vulnerable to security breaches of the platforms on which it is hosted? Can it be tracked? Can it be used for surveillance of individuals? If this data can be used for surveillance of individuals, it can pose a serious threat to activists in authoritarian spaces, for example.

Priority must therefore be given to: consent in the transfer of data, privacy of personal data and data security.

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Digital activism in Europe

Focus Area 3

Ethical considerations in digital activism, including privacy, accountability, and misinformation

Digital activists have an ethical responsibility to generate and share content based on truthful information and knowledge. This implies that activists should confirm the veracity of the information they share through fact-checking and double-checking and prioritise the use of reliable sources of information.

However, digital activism faces the ethical dilemma of how much effort and time to invest in identifying and refuting disinformation. Especially when it is absurd or based on bad faith and occurs in scenarios where the creation of this disinformation has a great capacity for innovation and speed in the creation of hoaxes and falsehoods.

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Digital activism in Europe

Focus Area 3

Ethical considerations in digital activism, including privacy, accountability, and misinformation

On the other hand, ethical dilemmas are identified in **accountability processes**.

The public exposure of individuals, companies, entities, etc. linked to the implementation or support of bad or dubious practices, often associated with what is known as 'online shaming' or cancellation culture, has serious ethical implications.

Implications related to proportionality, the potential abuse of these practices and the negative impact on the reputation of individuals and entities if the accusations are not true or are biased.

04

Resources

Digital Tools

Truly Media

It verifies digital user-generated content residing in social networks, mainly. It's a web-based collaboration platform.

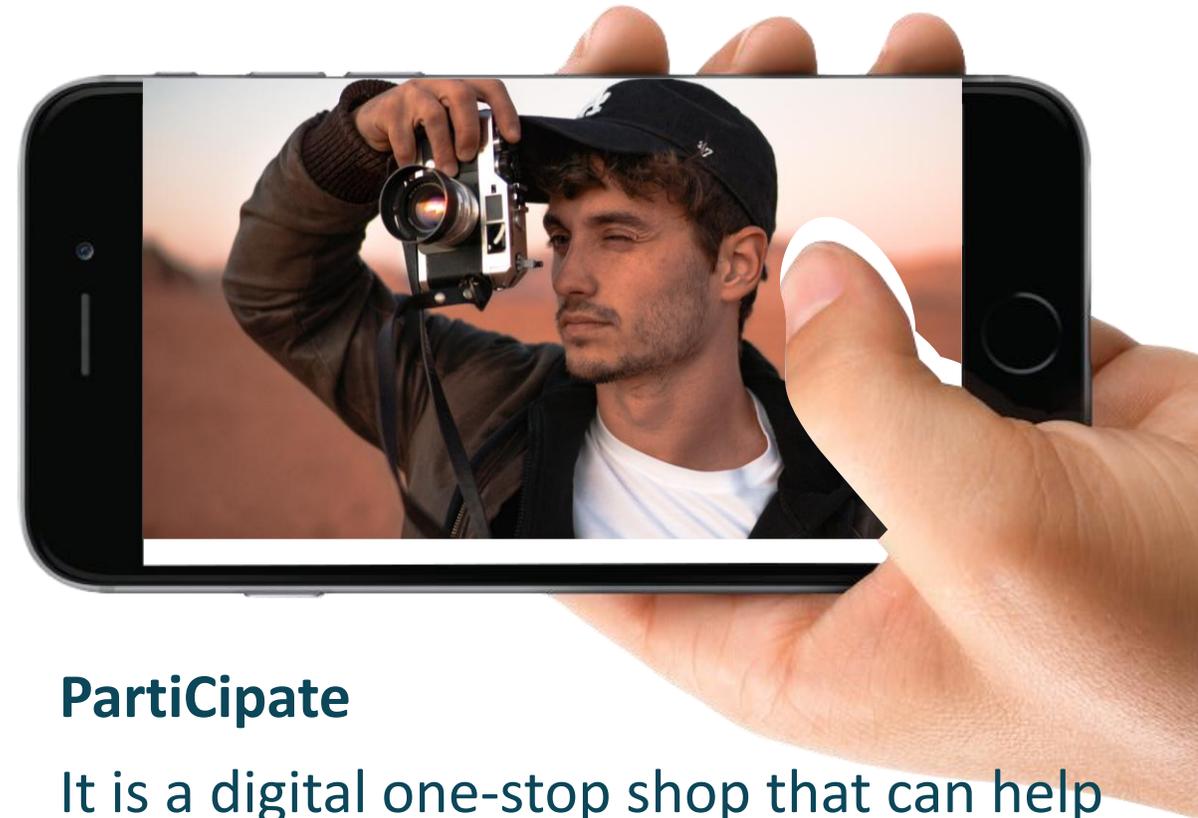**Link:** https://www.truly.media/

Digital Tools

Change.org

An open digital platform where citizens can create online petitions on various topics that can be signed and sent to the relevant decision makers

Link: www.change.org

PartiCipate

It is a digital one-stop shop that can help you to enable inclusive participation processes. On the section on Platforms for digital participation, at least, 4 platforms can be found.

Link:https://participation.digital/platforms-for-digital-participation/

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Exercises

Identify a current digital campaign whose theme is related to human rights (migration, gender equality, access to housing, ...). Read carefully the sections dedicated to explaining the campaign (promotors, objectives, actions,...) and:

❑ Identify the name of the campaign and the geographical area in which it is taking place (if applicable).

❑ Analyse:

   ❑ What platforms or social networks is the campaign using?

   ❑ What audience is it targeting?

   ❑ Does it use specific language (use of concepts such as Resistance, for example) or symbols/images that differentiate it?

   ❑ Has the campaign generated enough material for activists to take ownership of the message and spread the actions associated with the campaign?

   ❑ Do you identify any ethical dilemmas?

Resources. Videos

Hashtag politics: 4 key ways digital activism is inegalitarian | Jen Schradie | Big Think

https://youtu.be/n6xT0smHeX0?feature=shared

Jen Schradie, author of "The Revolution that wasn't" talks about the limitations of digital collection and marginalised groups.

https://youtu.be/OiYH1tiML3s?feature=sharedT

The future of social movements: online activism and the media by Ben Rattray, founder and CEO change.org

The video lasts 41:30 but it is divided into pieces of information. Please, look at the section chapters in which you will find chapters such as Media inspiring change (min 17:31), "The Guardian" (19:22) or "What happens when a campaign doesn't succeed" (35:16)

Interview

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY   #WEBELIEVEINYOUTH

"Those of us who do have a seat at the table need to really push the existing structures - to include young people, to partner with young people."
— Kate Mahoney

EPISODE 3

https://www.podbean.com/ep/pb-2vvdj-14ddddc

A podcast aimed at highlighting the vital role of youth participation in shaping the future of humanitarian efforts, and how the inclusion of the youth is critical to building a more inclusive and effective global response to crises.

Support and resources. Topic 1. Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation.

Name of the iniciative and link	Content
United Nations Network on Migration	❖ Repository of practices
The Commons. Social Change Library	❖ Digital campaigning. Tips and resources
YEE (Youth and Environment Europe)	❖ Creating a successful digital campaign. The resources focused on environmental topics but the elements that are covered can be replied in other topics.
Countering Disinformation: Your Essential Digital Tools Guide	❖ It is a guide that aims to equip activists and organizations with practical knowledge and tools that enable them to actively identify, analyse, and counter disinformation.

Module 5: Active Voices: Digital Media as a Catalyst for Civic Engagement

Thank you

You have completed **Part 1 (Focus Area 1)**
Digital Activism in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Participation

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Next is **Part 2 (Focus Area 2)**
Using Social Media for Social Change: Best Practices and Ethical Considerations

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Any Questions?

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