Module 5 (Part 4)

Active Voices: Digital Media as a Catalyst for Civic Engagement

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Module 5 (Part 4/4)

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

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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

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.

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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 under-represented 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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Resources

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Module 5 (Part 3) Interactive Learning Elements

37 Slides

01 Exercise

02 Videos

01 Case Studies

1 Digital Tools

02 Toolkits & Guides

03 Articles & Reports

9 Real World Examples

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Overview

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

Digital platforms and social media have become the new public forums. They are the town squares of the 21st century, with all the potential and challenges of rapidly developing technologies and enormous potential. This section examines how digital media **facilitates civic dialogue and strengthens social movements**, analysing both the opportunities and challenges of **promoting online civic discourse.**
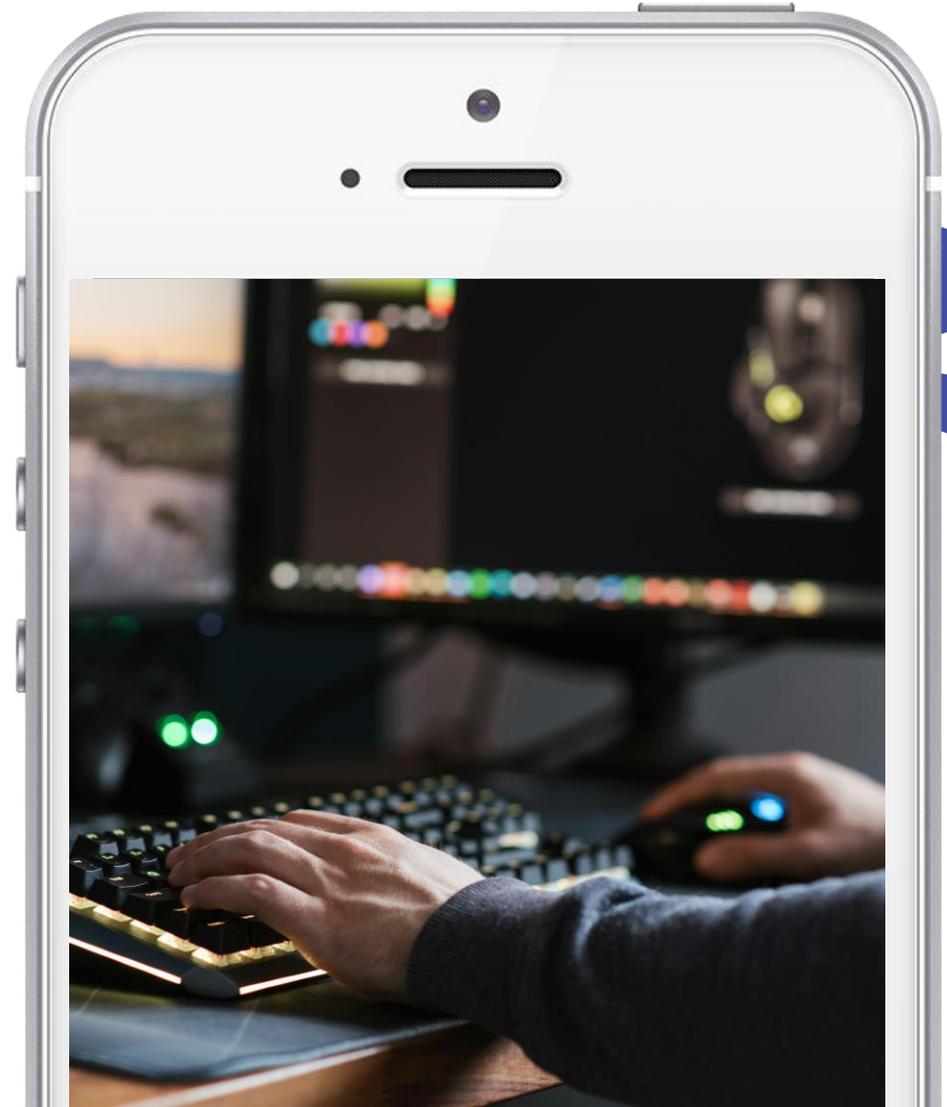
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Learning Outcomes

Topic 4: The Role of Digital Media in Strengthening Civic Dialogue and Social Movements

- Assess how digital media facilitates inclusive civic dialogue and mobilises grassroots movements.

- Examine case studies of successful digital campaigns that have led to meaningful political or social change

Key Definitions and Concepts

- **Civic Dialogue in Digital Spaces:** Online platforms as forums for political discussion.

- **Digital Movements:** How social media contributes to grassroots activism.

- **Ethical Moderation of Online Discussions:** Ensuring constructive and inclusive dialogue.

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Focus Area 1

Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

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

The emergence and development of digital platforms and spaces such as online forums, social media and participatory websites has drastically and irreversibly changed the way civic and political debate is conducted.

The virtual realm has become a space where ideas are discussed and disseminated, and where people interact directly, without traditional filters or mediation. In the virtual realm, a wider audience can access these spaces and place their issues on the agenda. At the same time, polarisation and disinformation also find fertile ground.

Focus Area 1

Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

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

Key aspects:

- Expansion of the audience. And therefore, the possibility for groups with less access to the media and political parties or entities to express their opinions and concerns.

- Facilitation of democratic dialogue through the implementation of e-democracy and e-participation initiatives

Among the different experiences on e-democracy we are going to highlight:

- Have your say

- European Citizens' Initiative.

- Decidim

Let's look at them!

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

- The European Commission has a specific virtual space called Have your say, which connects citizens' views on current laws and policies.

- European Citizens' Initiative Forum The European Citizens' Initiative is a centre for expert advice, practical guidance and sharing experiences of citizens. The ECI has a discussion forum where participants can contribute on different topics topics in their own language. There is also an online ECI community.

- At the **local level**, participatory platforms have also been developed, such as those already mentioned in other topics, for example, Decidim.

Focus Area 1

Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

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

What are the benefits of digital democratic dialogue?

- **Greater accessibility and inclusion**. Digital platforms can facilitate access to participation for groups that are very familiar with the virtual environment, for example.

- **More transparency in the decision-making process**. The fact that citizens can propose and contribute to the political agenda is an important element.

- **Increased legitimacy** of political decisions. When citizens feel that the policies implemented respond to their needs, the democratic process and existing institutions are more likely to be legitimised.

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

What are the challenges facing digital democratic dialogue?

- The digital divide remains the biggest challenge of digital platforms. The lack of access and digital knowledge and skills among significant sections of the population could lead to them being doubly excluded from decision-making processes.

- The **quality of political discussion**. Online political discussions are difficult to manage or moderate, can be superficial and can end up being monopolised by a few, discouraging the majority.

- **Trendiness**. If participation platforms are developed only because they are trendy but do not 'take root' in information and participation dynamics, they lose all their usefulness and can have a delegitimising effect.

Focus Area 2

The impact of digital media on the evolution of contemporary social movements

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

Hashtag activism and online collective action have reshaped civic movements worldwide. They have shown that they can be powerful tools for mobilising the population, crossing borders and raising awareness of local causes. This demonstrates the capacity of digital social activism to connect and spread ideas.

Digital activism has enabled rapid mobilisation and coordination of actions (calling for protests, real-time dissemination of information, etc.). It has also provided a space for the creation of collective identities and spaces for mutual support. As mentioned above, the visibility of issues and groups, as well as the possibility of putting items on the political agenda, is an element that has developed in recent years.

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Focus Area 2

The impact of digital media on the evolution of contemporary social movements

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

The **#MeToo #MeTooEU** movement has influenced European policies on gender-based violence. These hashtags went viral globally and empowered thousands of women to share their stories. The massive following of this movement has put pressure on institutions and governments and is allowing the debate on gender-based violence and the need for structural and legislative changes to be addressed.

Multiple examples have followed #MeToo, such as: #BringBackOurGirls. A campaign demanding the rescue of 276 Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists. This campaign showed that a local problem could find global resonance and solidarity.

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

Focus Area 2

The impact of digital media on the evolution of contemporary social movements

#StandWithUkraine. Massive digital mobilisation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, featuring blue and yellow profile pictures, donation campaigns, and information sharing;

#GazaCrisis / #CeasefireNow. Digital campaigns about the war in Gaza, with various hashtags promoting humanitarian concerns;

#FreeIran / #MahsaAmini. A global digital movement following the death of Mahsa Amini in Iran, focusing on women's rights and government oppression.

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Focus Area 3

Balancing freedom of expression and responsible engagement in online discussions

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

The digital realm faces a series of challenges related to the spread of hate speech, disinformation and the tendency towards polarisation of political opinions.

Striking a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of users of digital networks and platforms is vital. This involves the need to implement digital moderation policies, but also highlights the need to promote digital literacy and critical thinking.

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Focus Area 3

Balancing freedom of expression and responsible engagement in online discussions

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

Some steps are being taken to move forward in this direction, although they are baysteps. In this regard, it is noted that:

- The report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) highlights the fact that current content moderation tools do not remove hate speech content that focuses mainly on women, people of African descent or Roma people.

- Fact-checking initiatives. Organisations such as Maldita.es and PolitiFact work to verify the information circulating online. These initiatives promote more responsible consumption of information.

Focus Area 3

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Balancing freedom of expression and responsible engagement in online discussions

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

- **Digital moderation.** The *Code of Conduct+*, based on the EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online (agreed in 2016 by major online platforms), aims to strengthen how these platforms handle content considered to be illegal hate speech. Its main goal is to prevent and respond more effectively to the spread of illegal hate speech online.

Case of study. Freedom of speech vs hate speech

Context

Below is a hypothetical situation that students should reflect on following the relevant instructions.

In the comments section of an online newspaper article about climate migration, the following text appears, posted by Patriot95_l:

This is ridiculous. 'Climate migration' is just another woke lie to justify people from other countries who only want to steal and abuse our education and healthcare system coming to take our jobs. We pay and they enjoy the subsidies. We should expel them all and close the borders NOW!

A conversation quickly begins to develop around this comment. The comment receives likes and feeds other comments that add more stereotypes. Others try to refute the claims with facts. Other comments call for the post to be deleted, but this is countered by users who invoke freedom of expression.

Case of study. Freedom of speech vs hate speech

Objective

- Apply frameworks (such as the checklist based on the Council of Europe guidelines) to identify hate speech and disinformation in online comments.

- Analyse the ethical dilemmas associated with interacting (or not interacting) with comments based on hate and disinformation.

- Reflect critically on the balance between freedom of expression and the responsibility to maintain a safe and respectful online environment.

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Case of study. Freedom of speech vs hate speech

Material for the case study:

- Toolkit for analysing a case of hate speech https://rm.coe.int/advanced-guide-toolkit-how-to-analyse-hate-speech/1680a217cd

- **Dangerous Speech and What We Can Do About It - Susan Benesch**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EP42auFOSW8 (min 1-43:56)

Case of study. Freedom of speech vs hate speech

Analyse the comment based on the elements provided in the working material, following these guidelines:

- Identification of hate speech: Does the comment contain elements of hate speech according to common definitions? Which ones?

- Identification of disinformation: Does the comment contain false or misleading statements about climate change and migration? Which ones?

Case of study. Freedom of speech vs hate speech

Reflect on the ethical dilemma of engagement:

- Is it helpful or counterproductive for other users to engage in direct debate with the user who posted the comment?

- Are they being given a platform, or is their discourse being effectively countered? What are the risks of 'feeding the troll'?

- Freedom of expression vs. responsibility: Where is the line drawn between protecting freedom of expression and preventing harm caused by hate and disinformation on a European news platform?

04

Resources

Digital Tools

Have your say

Description: It's a EU platform for Public consultations and feedback that uses the chatbox technology.

Link:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say_en

Exercises. Topic 4

Analyse the elements that make digital activism content effective.

Instructions

❑ Search social media (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, etc.) or online news for an example of digital content (a post, a short video, an image, a thread of tweets) that you find particularly impactful or mobilising, related to a current or past social movement.

❑ Save the link or take a screenshot (for your personal reference).

Reflection

❑ Briefly describe the content. What makes it stand out? (E.g., the emotion it conveys, the clarity of the message, the visual creativity, the call to action, the personal story it tells)

❑ What platform was used, and do you think it was appropriate for that type of content and message? Why?

❑ If you had wanted to create a similar message, what would you have done the same and what would you have changed?

Resources. Videos

Shell campaign - on/off line

Balancing digital with non-digital activism: Activism vs. Slacktivism by Naomi McAuliffe (Poverty and Human Rights Campaign Manager, Amnesty International UK).

Naomi McAuliffe advocates that good activism requires a balanced approach and using the right technology, not just popular technology.

BEFORE POSTING: QUESTION YOUR INTENTIONS!

Youth activism Eden shares the importance of social activism, particularly as we reimagine our future

Interview

Debating More Effectively in the Digital World |Prof. Walid sheds light on how society can adapt to digital environment by navigating the topics of social media etiquette, managing emotions in a debate, and expanding our worldviews beyond our echo chambers

Support and resources.

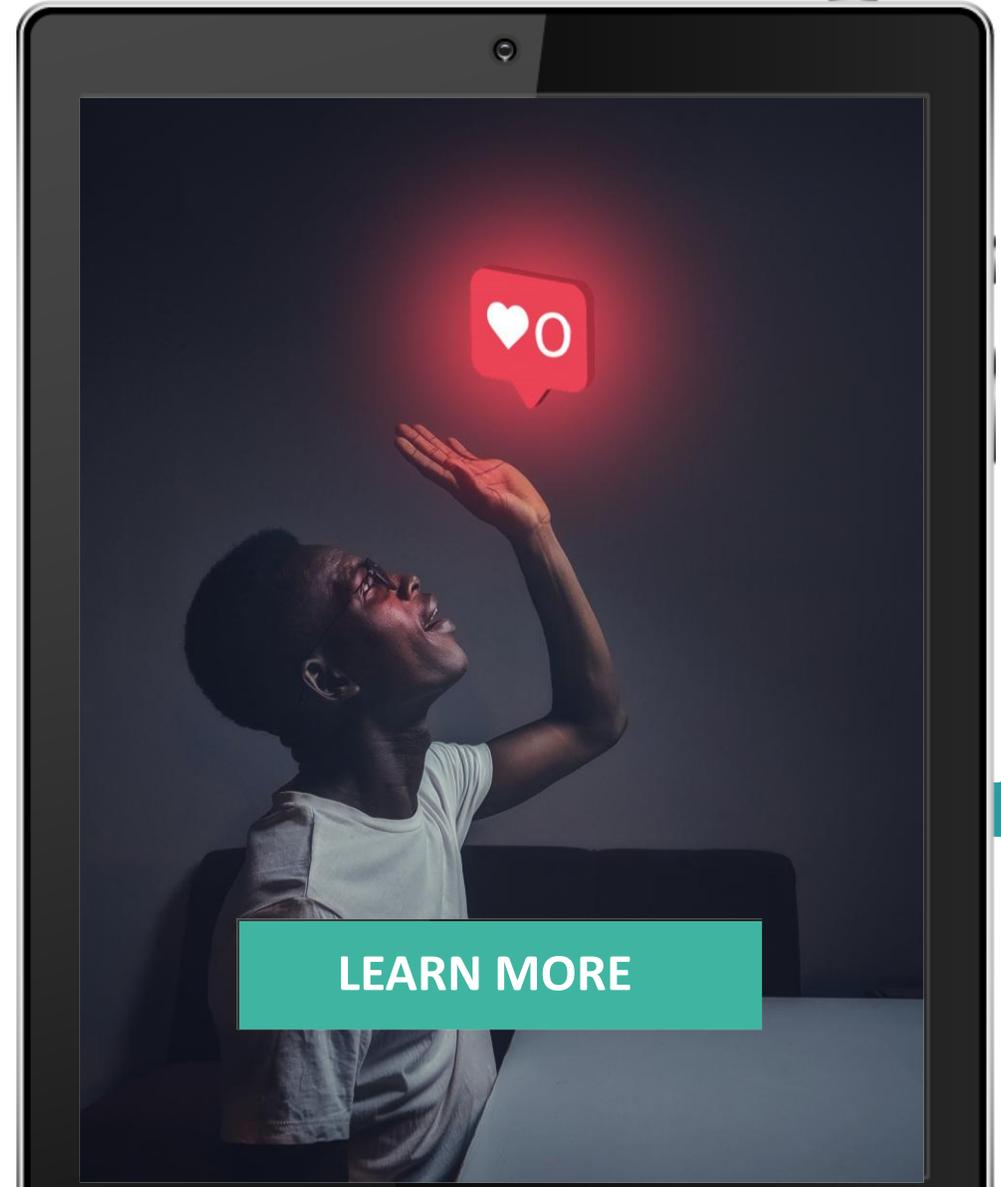| Name of the initiative and link	Content
Borge, R., Esteve, M., & Prieto-Martín, P. (2020). Does e-participation matter? An analysis of the role of ICT in the improvement of democratic quality at local level. *Local Government Studies, 46*(2), 295-317.	❖ Analysis of the quality of the discussion in electronic participation processes
Digital Civics Toolkit	❖ The toolkit is a collection of resources for educators to support youth to explore, recognise, and take seriously the civic potentials of digital life.
European Parliament. Youth, social media and the European elections	❖ The article addresses the the influence of social media, for instance TikTok, in the ❖ youth vote in the 2024 European elections. It also reflects on misinformation on social media related to elections.

Support and resources.

Name of the initiative and link	Content
EU Election Disinformation Bulletin, EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory), 2024	❖ The Bulletins had as main objective to Monitor, identify, analyze, and report on disinformation campaigns and narratives specifically targeting European Union elections
Elections24Check	❖ Database that gathers information for European countries and citizens ahead of the 2024 European Elections

Conclusions of the module

Throughout this course, we have explored the transformative potential of online activism. We have observed how the virtual realm reproduces the inequalities of the physical world but also offers possibilities to make the voices of under-represented groups visible and amplify them, as well as to promote political engagement and transformative civic participation through various strategies of individual and community mobilisation.

We have also seen how polarisation, algorithms and hate speech are also part of the 'environment' with which digital activism must coexist. And we have analysed the ethical dilemmas that a digital activist may face.
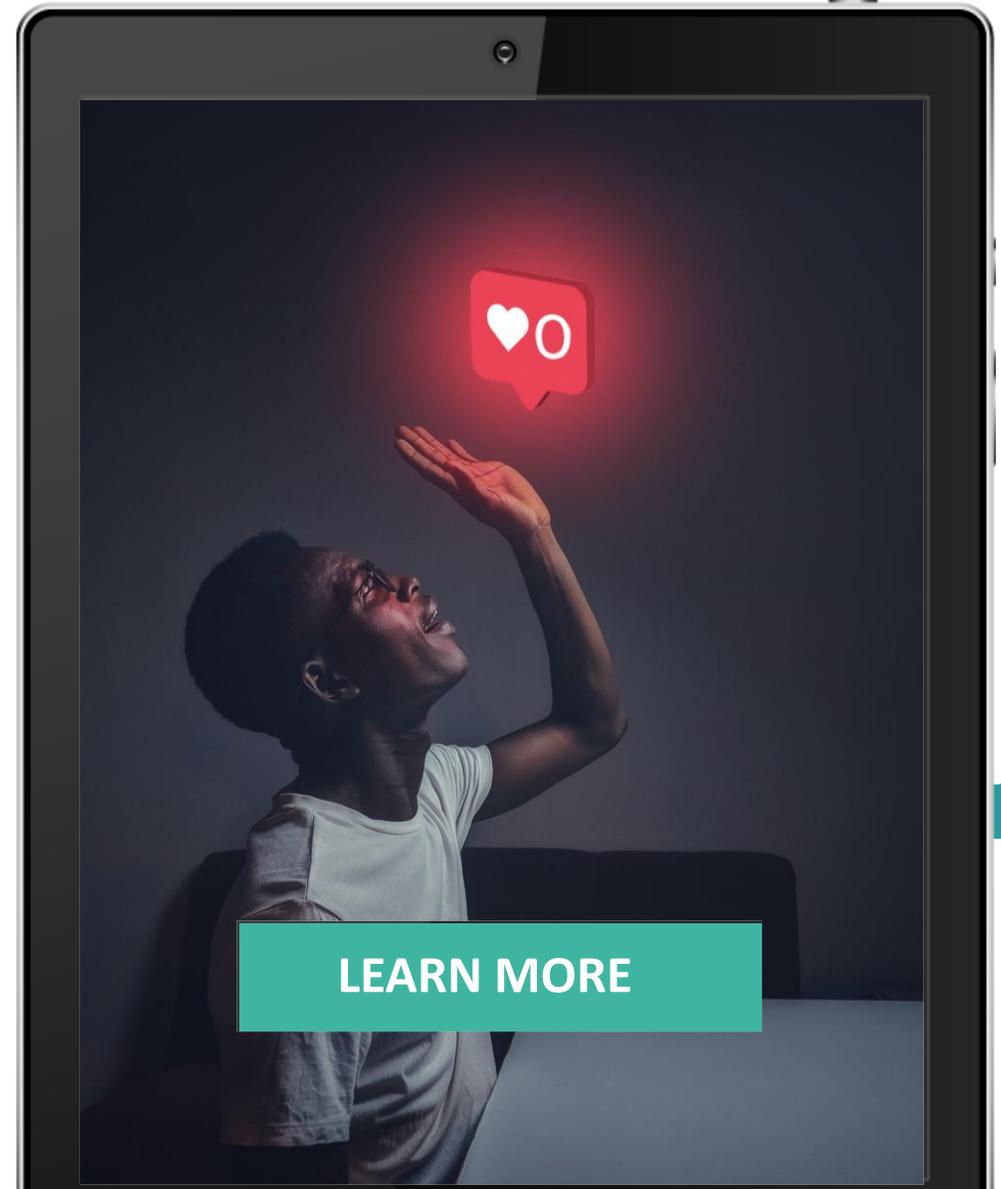

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Conclusions

We have also seen how advocacy actions can place issues of interest to under-represented groups on the political, social and media agenda at both the local and global levels.

The development of new technologies and their use, activists' creativity, and accessibility will be fundamental elements in the realisation of digital activism, which is dynamic, adaptive, and is here to stay.

We encourage you to start or continue your own journey in digital activism.

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Thank you
Any Questions?

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