

Everyone experiences adversity at some moment in their life. However, the long endured challenges and injustices faced by a number of groups in American society have recently gained national attention. All follow a similar pattern, where alarming videos, photos, and news reports of hatred and exclusion tell the stories of unfortunate realities faced by citizens in CT, America, and the world.

In the past, the most effective way for citizens to respond to such stories was through physical demonstrations that were covered by news reporters, broadcast by famous television channels, or simply seen by the public because of their grandeur. However, the proliferation of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter have made online discussion more rapidly accessible. By rewarding social interaction with publicly displayed likes, shares, and follows, social media encourages every individual to vocalize their opinions and reactions. Besides promoting an inclusive environment where anyone can share their past or ongoing grievances via simplified content creation, social media gives individuals the opportunity to personally interact with large-scale movements without the restrictions of geography, occupation, or resources.

Yet amidst this seemingly welcoming environment, the recent bloom of social media based movements has created a new concern: performative activism. Conflict of interest in wanting to use social media to the fullest by supporting campaigns with simple taps on a screen, but fearing the implications that an action is a trend (considering that social media revolves around motivations of public perception) is a concern that I felt when social media emerged as a prevalent form of protest during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the dangers of transmitting Covid-19 deterred many from public demonstrations, social media replaced public gatherings as the primary outlet for activism, and ease of use led feeds to bloom with personal or reposted

statements on a given topic. But, as much praise as the online activism roused, it also raised questions about sincerity and value. Was it lazy to show support for a movement by adding popularized hashtags to personal posts and profile bios, or did that just enact what the creators of those symbols had intended: simple ways to identify a movement? Was it a responsibility to use social media posts to demonstrate support for a movement, or did that feed into the recycling of threads, links, and information that diminished a serious movement to a trend?

Initially, such questions brought hesitation to my use of social media even as so many seemed confident to share their views. Compared to legislators, large-scale organizations, and famous figures, my outreach on social media as a student seemed miniscule and insignificant. And amidst the flood of posts that reflected my beliefs already being published by thousands of other users daily, I dreaded that my post would just be another echo. In that environment, I felt that perhaps my role was best focused on internal change, and influencing a small circle of people that I was closest to. Looking back now, however, as new movements continue to emerge in social media, I wonder what is the most effective form of action: dynamic and visual initiatives by powerful people and organized groups that target large-scale change, or internal undertakings that reach a narrow yet more personal audience?

In my experience, both are incomparable and valuable. There is always enormous value in dynamic and visual activism, like public gatherings, marches, parades, symbols, and trends on social media, because they are flashy enough to trigger instant response. National level debates revolve around the intrigue of striking events. But, the purpose of these performances comes down to the desire to influence societal thinking, to prompt individuals to agree with policies that will affect their lives. In that respect, something as sensitive as a belief system is deeply

impacted by intimate conversations with friends and family. Targeting a small audience with close personal relations can evoke the willingness needed for a change of heart.

Seeing the external collaborations of many on social media provides reassurance to the victims of suffering that their stories have reached a wide audience. Further, the presentation of a movement on such a widespread platform is bound to prompt internal actions that lead to valuable conversations with family and close friends. Ultimately, both public and undeclared actions work together in all movements to truly prompt change and bring healing.