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# Social media impact on Human Rights Advocacy

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to shed a more wholistic light on the overall impact of the influence of social media on human rights advocacy. It does so through an exploration and analysis of relevant literature and illustrative case studies. In doing so it tracks down the main non-state actors who take part in generating such digital advocacy and how the approach to advocacy as a whole is being shaped by the growing use of social media platforms. The thesis gives space to the two side of the discourse: the cyber-positive point of view which believes social media are positively impacting human rights in general and its advocacy, the thesis dealt with two example of such view the support of social movement and hacktivism; and the cyber-pessimist point of view which believes social media are destined to become a tool of authoritarian regimes. The thesis intends to find a possible balance between this two side of the spectrum using real cases of social movement who have been deeply and famously impact by social media. Such cases are the Egypt revolution of 2011 and the more recants protest of Black Lives Matter.

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**INTRODUCTION**

On March 28, 2019, a rubber boat carrying 108 people departed from Libya in search of safety in Europe. After being rescued by the merchant vessel El Hiblu 1, it became clear that European authorities had instructed the captain to return the passengers to Libya, a war-torn and unsafe country where they would face the threat of violence and torture. In a collective non-violent protest, the passengers refused to accept being sent back and convinced the boat's crew to sail towards Malta. Three young men, aged 15, 16, and 19, who spoke some English, took on the role of translators and emerged as leaders of the action, as identified by the authorities. However, even before the merchant vessel reached the port in Valletta, misleading information about the incident began circulating on social media. Media headlines spoke of an "alleged" hijacking of an oil tanker by "rescued migrants" who were now "safe in Europe,"[1] and referenced Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, well-known for his populist views and regular portals on social media as a defender of the homeland against immigrants on rescue ships,[2] who stated that the event constituted "the first act of piracy on the high seas with migrants."[3]

Furthermore, the three teenagers who had taken on the role of translators were arrested by Maltese authorities upon their arrival at the port in Valletta. Even four years later, they are still facing trials on charges of terrorism and hijacking, which carry the possibility of significant imprisonment. However, other survivors who were also on the boat refute the allegations and emphasize that the teenagers primarily acted as mediators and translators, not as instigators of violence. These three young boys, named Amara, Abdalla, and Kadar, including two minors, find themselves trapped in a bureaucratic legal nightmare in Malta.[4] Their story, however, quickly gained traction thanks to the power of social media and received support from permanent refugee rights and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Through social media channels, their story was widely shared among individual activists across Europe, leading to the formation of the ElHiblu3 campaign and the Freedom Commission: An independent alliance of renowned human rights advocates, sholars, and activists who are united in their demand for the freedom of the ElHiblu3 and seeking justice for their unjust treatment (*ibid.*).

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[1] "Rescued Migrants Safe in Europe after Hijacking Oil Tanker," AP News, April 20, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/060deaff96314791bfbe904f762ed8f6.
[2] Are You Syrious?, "Ays Daily Digest 30/07/2020: Trial against Salvini and the El Hiblu Three," Medium, July 31, 2020, https://medium.com/are-you-syrious/ays-daily-digest-30-07-2020-trial-against-salvini-and-the-el-hiblu-three-87282b2c483.
[3] Valentin J. Schatz, "The Alleged Seizure of the El Hiblu 1 by Rescued Migrants," Völkerrechtsblog, March 31, 2019, https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/de/the-alleged-seizure-of-the-el-hiblu-1-by-rescued-migrants/.
[4] "Free ELHIBLU3," ElHiblu3, accessed July 14, 2023, https://elhiblu3.info/commission.

It is evident that social media has played a pivotal role in raising awareness and generating support for the El Hiblu 3 since the incident in 2019. Various human rights organizationshave utilized hashtags, such as #FreeElHiblu3 and #DropTheCharges, to amplify the cause. Thousands of individuals from around the globe have expressed solidarity, shared messages online, and written letters to policymakers as part of the "Demand justice for the El Hiblu 3" campaign organized by Amnesty International (AI).[5] The international pressure created through online activism has caused the Maltese judicial system to proceed cautiously in resolving the matter. As a result, the three individuals have remained in Malta for four years, where they are now rebuilding their lives with strong support from the human rights community.[6] Though the media attention turned to the case on social media enabled the EL Hiblu 3 a different level of awareness and interest, one that was until not long ago only to human rights defenders from the West could gather, and even that only when portrayed as saviors giving the black boys an opportunity to actually seek justice and be granted the better future.[7] However, this example known as El-Hiblu 3 is only one case in an exponentially growing number of cases in which we can observe ever-increasing influence of social media and its ability to positively and negatively affect how human rights advocacy functions.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the 21st century, our world has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent. This transformation has been greatly influenced by advancements in technology, particularly the rise of social media platforms. These platforms have revolutionized the way we communicate, interact, and engage with global issues. In the realm of social science, scholars often refer to social media as the "third place," a concept introduced by sociologist Ray Oldenburg.[8] The theory of the third place suggests that our lives revolve around three main spaces: home, work, and a third place where community is built, ideas are shared, and leisure time is spent. Traditionally, this third place was associated with physical locations such as pubs, clubs, parks, or churches. However, with the emergence of social media, this concept has transitioned into a virtual space. In the context of this thesis, it is important to view social media as a virtual third place where individuals engage in online interactions that have replaced face-to-

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[5] "Demand Justice for the El Hiblu 3," Amnesty International, January 24, 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/w4r-2020-malta-el-hiblu-3/
[6] Michaela Pia Camilleri, "22 Organisations Urge Ag to Drop Terrorism Charges against El Hiblu 3," Newsbook, March 25, 2023, https://newsbook.com.mt/en/22-organisations-urge-ag-to-drop-terrorism-charges-against-el-hiblu-3/.
[7] YouTube (YouTube, 2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5cAHOVarc4.
[8] Oldenburg, R. (1999) The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community (2nd edn). New York: Marlowe & Company. Oldenburg, R. and D. Brissett (1982) 'The Third Place', Qualitative Sociology 5(4): 265–84. Soukup, C. (2006). Computer-mediated communication as a virtual third place: building Oldenburg's great good places on the world wide web. *New media & society*, 8(3), 421-440.

face communication. Social media platforms serve as virtual meeting places where people with similar interests come together, interact, exchange ideas, and share opinions. It has become a space where community is formed and connections are made, mirroring the functions of a physical third place.

However, the popularization of social media and growth in virtual spaces has also caused scholars across different disciplines to identify negative consequences, particularly in terms of their impact on social interactions, communication, and political engagement. One such early phenomenon was the "the social bubble,"[9] which is created, in part, by algorithms behind social media platforms. These algorithms tailor users' experiences by exposing them primarily to news, content, and ideas that align with their existing ideological or cultural perspectives, often excluding or misrepresenting opposing viewpoints. This phenomenon becomes particularly concerning in an already politically polarized environment that has characterized the last two decades. Furthermore, the social bubble often coexists with another aspect of social media: the sense of globalization. Over the past two decades, our society has witnessed an unprecedented increase in connectivity and globalization. Social media platforms have played a pivotal role in this transformation by enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in real-time communication, share information, and participate in collective action on a scale never seen before. As a result, social media has emerged as a powerful tool that transcends geographical boundaries and bridges gaps between individuals, communities, and even nations, while also making them more visible. It enables almost instant diffusion of information, initiatives, and movements beyond their original geographic allocation.

While social media is not the sole technological advancement contributing to globalization, its impact is profound. The accessibility and widespread use of social media platforms have democratized access to information, allowing the general public and marginalized communities to share their narratives, highlight issues they face, and make their voices heard without intermediaries. Platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have revolutionized the way people access and share global news and information, contributing to the rapid spread of information worldwide. This exposure to a diverse range of global events, societal challenges, and personal narratives has broadened people's perspectives and made previously obscured or inaccessible issues more visible. Moreover, the added value of social media for human

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[9] "Social Bubble Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary," Social bubble definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/social-bubble.

rights advocacy lies in its ability to foster empathy, raise awareness, and catalyze collective action, as scholars of human rights advocacy have increasingly observed.[10]

After all, social media platforms provide accessible spaces for individuals to express their ideas and views on various matters. In contrast to previous eras of globalization, social media platforms promote openness and empathy, encouraging a sense of interconnectedness among users that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. In this way, social media has fostered the emergence of new advocacy organizations that disrupt the traditional landscape of human rights advocacy. These organizations utilize new digital technologies and mobile-based platforms to expand grassroots engagement and facilitate volunteer-led campaigns, as exemplified by the Progressive Engagement Network.[11] However, it is important to recognize that the impacts of social media can be viewed from different perspectives, as many scholars have shown. While some take a more optimistic stance, highlighting the far-reaching influence of social media platforms on personal interactions, entertainment, and even human rights politics, others adopt a more pessimistic view.

Indeed, the use of social media has led to increased surveillance, hindrance of non-state human rights actors, and the spread of misinformation. It is crucial to acknowledge that, despite its positive effects in disseminating information instantly, mobilizing communities, empowering individuals, and amplifying marginalized voices, social media also presents challenges. Techno-pessimistic scholars point out the unregulated nature of these platforms, which has given rise to issues such as misinformation, online harassment, and potential manipulation of public opinion. The long-term impact of social media on human rights and whether its benefits outweigh its drawbacks remain subjects of concern. Moreover, it is difficult to determine whether social media ultimately helps or hinders human rights movements, supports the goals of activists, or merely serves as one tool among many in their toolkit, potentially even hindering their activities.

Scholars over the year have stationed themselves within the spectrum cyber-optimists who believe that digitalization means progression and Cyber-pessimists fear the consequences of rapid

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[10] Hall, N. (2019). When do refugees matter? The importance of issue salience for digital advocacy organizations. Interest Groups & Advocacy, 8(3), 333-355. Hall, N., Schmitz, H. P., & Dedmon, J. M. (2020). Transnational advocacy and NGOs in the digital era: New forms of networked power. International Studies Quarterly, 64(1), 159-167. Hall, N. (2019). Norm contestation in the digital era: campaigning for refugee rights. International Affairs, 95(3), 575-595. Dennis, J., & Hall, N. (2020). Innovation and adaptation in advocacy organizations throughout the digital eras. Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 17(2), 79-86. Bloodgood, E., Bruno-van Vijfeijken, T., Hall, N., Mitchell, G. E., Pallas, C., & Schmitz, H. P. (2019). The future of transnational NGO advocacy. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Hall, N. (2020) Transnational Advocacy in the Digital Era, Oxford: Oxford University Press
[11], E., Bruno-van Vijfeijken, T., Hall, N., Mitchell, G. E., Pallas, C., & Schmitz, H. P. (2019). The future of transnational NGO advocacy. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

digitalization They fear that algorithms will disempower, not empower, citizens. Multiple scholars who could be defines as positivist such as Nina Hall, Clay Shirky have openly supported the positive perception of social media as a tool and argues that social media platforms have the power to facilitate collective action, citizen journalism, and political mobilization, leading to positive societal changes. On the other side of the spectrum the cyber-pessimist such as Evgenyi Morozov who has strongly position himself as critical of what he describes as "net delusion" that fails to see how easily social media can turn into a repressive tool of control and abuse. Same idea is supported by Shoshana Zuboff author of "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism." Who has primarly focus on the erosion of privacy and the potential manipulation of individuals and societies from the hand of social media platforms. Because of this separatism of view I decided to research the actual impact whether positive pr negative that social media has on human rights advocacy.

Recognizing the existence of diverse contributions that emphasize the positive and negative aspects of social media on human rights advocacy, this thesis aims to address the lack of robust and holistic conversations in the interdisciplinary study of human rights. It seeks to bring together these diverse conversations and examine the value of social media for human rights advocacy. To achieve this, the thesis incorporates different claims regarding the effectiveness of social media for human rights advocacy and explores key empirical case studies used as evidence. The central research question guiding this thesis is as follows: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the proliferation of social media for modern human rights advocacy non-state actors?

This thesis thus ambivalently explores, that is by weighing the existing discussions and provided evidence on balance and recognizing that change is both difficult and possible,[12] what role social media plays in modern human rights advocacy. Here, modern human rights, are understood as encompassing three intertwined constellations of human rights, with the intent of making visible as many relevant human rights advocacy non-state actors as possible. The constellations of modern human rights thus operate not only at the international level, where the dominant understandings of global human rights related to the legal apparatus of laws and courts (that is Western influenced) can be found. But also, at the level of counter public approaches embracing alternative epistemologies, which are usually based in feminist and antiracist politics; and at the level of social praxis constellation, which reflects how social actors mediate between the first two constellations through practice of human rights. By critically examining the multifaceted role of social media in the context of different constellations where human rights advocacy takes place, this thesis seeks

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[12] Social Media and social movements - kidd - 2016 - sociology compass ..., accessed July 14, 2023, https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/soc4.12399.

to shed a more wholistic light on the overall impact of the influence of technological phenomenon. Through an exploration and analysis of relevant literature and illustrative case studies, this master thisis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding this issue and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of social media and research in human rights.

This thesis is structured in three substantive chapters. In chapter 1, the modern digital human rights advocacy is explored though analysis focused on key trends and actors that now participate in modern human rights constellations. This examines thus delves into the realm of non-state actors in human rights advocacy and essentially builds its discussions on foundations social constructivist understanding of the role of non-state actors in international human rights advocacy.[13] It explores the specific categories of non-state actors, including NGOs, civil society organizations, and individual human rights defenders, that now participate in the digital advocacy turn, because understanding the diverse roles and contributions of these actors is crucial in comprehending the multifaceted nature of contemporary human rights advocacy. In addition, the key trends regarding strategies and messaging of human rights advocacy are also examined in this chapter, which have been most strongly influenced by the digital turn. The goal of the first chapter is thus to highlight how the digital turn has influenced all aspects of modern human rights advocacy in which non-state actors participate.

It is important to note that this master thesis focuses on the time frame of human rights advocacy development from the turn of the 21st century onwards, coinciding with the emergence of WEB 2.0. Coined by Darcy Di Nucci, WEB 2.0 refers to the new approach to the internet that emphasizes social networking, user interactivity, collaboration, and the sharing of information among internet users. This shift towards user-generated content has presented both opportunities and challenges in the field of human rights advocacy.

Followingly, in the second chapter, we turn towards an analysis of the role of social media for digital human rights. The chapter, for this reason, analyses the concept of digital advocacy, exploring the various digital platforms and tools utilized by advocates. Additionally, it highlights the positive effects of social media on human rights advocacy. Specifically, because various examinations of non-state human rights advocacy actors engaging with social media have been studied across many disciplines of social sciences, such as for example, social movements scholarship, communications studies, interdisciplinary media and social media scholars, which

have approached them with different angle in regards to key questions, diverse theoretical and methodological tool kits, and varying awareness of existing research on human rights advocacy, the key contribution of this chapter is in its strength of systematically reviewing and bring the key contributions in a common conversation.[14] For this reason, this section discusses positive and negative effects of social media along an already well-known non-state actor typology, which helps it be more organized and provide richer insights.

To provide practical illustrations, the third chapter of this thesis focuses on two case studies that examine seminal human rights events from the past 25 years. These case studies draw on existing secondary literature and intend to shed light on the ambiguous role of social media in human rights advocacy The first case study examines the Arab Spring, specifically the revolution that took place in Egypt in 2011. This event has been extensively researched and serves as a prime example of the power of social media in mobilizing and coordinating protest movements.[15] Including this case study is crucial to highlight the ambiguous role played by social media in the context of human rights advocacy. The second case study explores the mobilization of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement, which emerged as a significant advocacy movement in the early 21st century. This case study demonstrates how technological advancements in the past 15 years have transformed the landscape of digital advocacy, shaping new dynamics for raising awareness, organizing demonstrations, and documenting incidents of human rights violations. By examining these illustrative cases, the thesis aims to contribute to a nuanced and ambivalent understanding of the effectiveness of social media in human rights advocacy. In the final conclusion, the findings from these case studies, along with reflections and limitations, will be consolidated to shed light on the future of advocacy in the digital age.

# 1   NON-STATE ACTORS, DIGITAL SPACES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The rapid advancements in digital technologies, particularly the widespread use of social media platforms, have revolutionized the landscape of activism and transformed the way individuals engage

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[14] The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review | Science Advances

[15] Khondker, H. H. (2011). Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring. Globalizations, 8(5), 675–679. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2011.621287 Halaseh, R. (2012). Civil Society, Youth and the Arab Spring. 254–273. Honwana, A. M. (2019). Youth Struggles: From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter &amp; Beyond. African Studies Review, 62(1), 8–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/ASR.2018.144 Harrelson-Stephens, J., & Callaway, R. L. (2014). You Say You Want a Revolution: the Arab Spring, Norm Diffusion, and the Human Rights Regime. Human Rights Review, 15(4), 413–431. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-014-0315-5 Monshipouri, M. (2016). Human rights, youth, and technology: Agents of change? V Routledge Handbook on Human Rights and the Middle East and North Africa (str. 182–195). Elsevier Scopus. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750972

with human rights issues. However, as scholars have observed since the end of the Cold War, human rights advocacy involves a diverse range of actors who work towards promoting and protecting human rights on various fronts.[16] These actors, both state and non-state, play crucial roles in raising awareness, advocating for policy changes at both national and international levels, and holding governments and institutions accountable for human rights violations. Particularly interesting from a research perspective is the diverse constellation of modern human rights advocacy, which includes non-state actors such as human rights groups, social movements, democracies, and regional organizations.[17] These actors can join hands and engage in networks of non-state actors that hold persuasive power and share principles and ideas that influence how they work on shaping national and international human rights policies.[18] For the sake of this thesis and its context, I focus on exploring non-state actors known for diffusing human rights ideas and playing an important role in fostering human rights progress.

The academic term "non-state actors" in human rights advocacy most commonly refers to individuals, organizations, or groups that actively participate in promoting and defending human rights but are not affiliated with or part of any government or state institution.[19] These actors are known to operate independently from government structures and often fill the gaps left by states in addressing human rights violations and advancing the protection of human rights. By operating outside of governmental structures, non-state actors have the flexibility to work across borders, nationally and internationally, and challenge oppressive regimes or practices that undermine human rights in a way that state actors cannot match.[20] Non-state actors in human rights advocacy can therefore fulfill two primary roles. Firstly, they can act as watchdogs, bringing attention to human rights violations and exerting pressure on governments and international bodies to take action. Through their vigilant monitoring and reporting, they play a crucial role in exposing human rights abuses and holding responsible parties accountable. Secondly, non-state actors serve as educators, actively promoting human rights to the public and disseminating knowledge about human rights issues on platforms that have a broad

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[16] Tobias Berger et al., "Forum: New Perspectives on Transnational Non-State Actors—a Forum Honoring the Work of Thomas Risse," International Studies Review 24, no. 3 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac039.

[17] Thomas Risse, "'Let's Argue!': Communicative Action in World Politics," International Organization 54, no. 1 (2000): 1–39, https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551109.

[18] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 1998).; Thomas Risse-Kappen, Steve C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, The Power of Human Rights International Norms and Domestic Change (New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999). https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/power-of-human-rights/3E62C6D43DE50B0F6179C2BD2B3D3EBB

[19]"Non-State Actors," ESCR, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.escr-net.org/resources/non-state-actors#:~:text=Non%2Dstate%20actors%20include%20organizations,paramilitary%20and%20armed%20resistance%20groups.

[20] Hans Peter Schmitz and George E. Mitchell, "The Other Side of the Coin: Ngos, Rights-Based Approaches, and Public Administration," Public Administration Review 76, no. 2 (2015): 252–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12479.

audience outreach. By raising awareness and fostering understanding, they contribute to the advancement of human rights values and principles within society.

In summary, scholars recognize a group of key non-state actors that shape the discourse around human rights advocacy and digital activism. These actors are commonly referred to as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society (CS), and human rights defenders.[21] However, within these three categories, there exists a constellation of smaller non-state actors with diverse identities, each playing multifaceted roles in human rights advocacy. One significant development is that non-state actors now have access to new tools through social media platforms, which enable them to raise awareness, engage with audiences, and mobilize support. These tools strengthen their ability to gather and disseminate scientifically grounded information and exert pressure on noncompliant state actors to adhere to broadly shared human rights norms.[22]

However, while authors increasingly emphasize how ICTs and social media have transformed the landscape of human rights advocacy,[23] the existing scholarship still lacks a comprehensive and detailed examination of the positive and negative aspects of strategies employed by non-state actors when utilizing social media for human rights advocacy. This inquiry is crucial in understanding how to harness the transformative potential of digital platforms to advance the protection and promotion of human rights in the digital age. To provide analytical clarity regarding the categories used in the analysis, the next sub-chapter will briefly discuss the descriptions of the three categories of non-state actors under consideration: NGOs, CS, and individual human rights defenders. This discussion aims to establish a foundation for the subsequent analysis on how social media has impacted the move towards the digital human rights advocacy.

### 1.1 Key categories of non-state actors in modern human rights advocacy

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[21]  Anna Holzscheiter, Sassan Gholiagha, and Andrea Liese, "Advocacy Coalition Constellations and Norm Collisions: Insights from International Drug Control, Human Trafficking, and Child Labour," Global Society 36, no. 1 (2021): 25–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2021.1885352.

[22]  Steven Livingston, "Digital Affordances and Human Rights Advocacy," essay, in SFB 700 Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood  (Berlin, Germany: Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 700, n.d.), 3–4.

[23]  Hall, N. (2019). When do refugees matter? The importance of issue salience for digital advocacy organizations. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, *8*(3), 333-355. Hall, N., Schmitz, H. P., & Dedmon, J. M. (2020). Transnational advocacy and NGOs in the digital era: New forms of networked power. *International Studies Quarterly*, *64*(1), 159-167. Hall, N. (2019). Norm contestation in the digital era: campaigning for refugee rights. International Affairs, 95(3), 575-595. Dennis, J., & Hall, N. (2020). Innovation and adaptation in advocacy organizations throughout the digital eras. Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 17(2), 79-86. Bloodgood, E., Bruno-van Vijfeijken, T., Hall, N., Mitchell, G. E., Pallas, C., & Schmitz, H. P. (2019). The future of transnational NGO advocacy. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Hall, N. (2020) Transnational Advocacy in the Digital Era, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

NGOs are generally considered central non-state actors in the constellation of human rights advocacy because they operate at the forefront of such efforts. They are known for their independent organizational structures, operating outside of governmental frameworks, which grants them flexibility in addressing human rights issues in various ways. NGOs conduct research, document human rights abuses, and provide assistance and support to affected individuals and communities. They are also recognized for their global approach, adhering to international norms while working locally to facilitate implementation.[24]

While acknowledging the crucial role of human rights NGOs in challenging authoritarian regimes and advocating for justice across the globe, it is, however, also important to acknowledge there is a need to critically examine different aspects of their work, particularly in relation to neoliberalism and Western ideology. After all, as critical scholars have argued, there exist many neoliberal connections between human rights NGOs and their approaches to addressing global social and economic issues, which may not always adapt to the cultural contexts in which they operate. These approaches often shift the responsibility for poverty and hunger away from the (neo)colonial global economy and place it on developing states, perpetuating power imbalances.[25] Therefore, it is important to critically consider the underlying ideologies and structural influences that shape the work of NGOs to ensure a comprehensive understanding of their impact on society.

Moreover, NGO commonly engage in lobbying and advocacy efforts, working with policymakers, raising public awareness, and pressuring governments to implement human rights standards.[26] It is for that reason, that they have been known to typically play a central role in initiating actions and exerting pressure on national and international policymakers.[27] Compared to other categories of non-state actors in the constellation of human rights advocacy, NGOs have established themselves as the most prominent actors in the human rights discourse and often have a more direct line of contact with decision-makers, which can facilitate their work through recognized hierarchical structures.

[24] Anja Mihr, "NGOs and Human Rights," Handbook of Research on NGOs 4 (2018): 196, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785361685.00017.

[25] William Callison, "The Morals of the Market: Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism. by Jessica Whyte. New York: Verso, 2019. 288P. $29.95 Paper.," Perspectives on Politics 18, no. 4 (2020): 1188–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592720002790.

[26] Anna Holzscheiter, Sassan Gholiagha, and Andrea Liese, "Advocacy Coalition Constellations and Norm Collisions: Insights from International Drug Control, Human Trafficking, and Child Labour," Global Society 36, no. 1 (2021): 25–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2021.1885352.

[27] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 1998).

With the increasing popularization and widening usage of social media by public across the globe, NGOs have begun to be influenced by digital advocacy turn and have accordingly adopted their advocacy strategies. For example, a well-known environmental NGO Greenpeace, which fights for environmental rights, was one of the first to launch MobLab, a digital mobilization team inspired in part by the model used by MoveOn, a digital advocacy organization.[28] Moreover, NGOs also strengthened and built their presence on social media platforms, with the intent of reaching a broader audience and become key players in spreading information, leveraging the credibility they have gained over the years as primary non-state actors in human rights advocacy constellation. Additionally, as scholars argue, the hierarchical structure of NGOs has been proven to be in this regard beneficial for NGOs, because it helps produce more effective and targeted digital campaigning compared to campaigns led by more loosely networked groups, thanks to staff specialization and a unified strategy.[29]

However, initial research suggests that while most NGOs have websites and engage with technologies such as social networking, many organizations simply use the internet to enhance their existing programs and activities. NGOs are less likely than individual activists to undertake cutting-edge and creative activities that fully utilize the potential of new technologies. They tend to stay within their comfort zones instead of experimenting with new ways of mobilizing social media to advocate for rights or promote their activities.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):

CSOs, which often encompass a wide range of groups including community-based organizations, social movements, and digital advocacy organizations, are commonly referred to as "The Third Sector," "the independent sector," or "the nonprofit sector" by the UN. This lack of terminological clarity highlights the range of actors covered under the umbrella concept.[30] This wide range, into which human rights NGOs sometimes also fall, is instigated by the fact that civil society refers commonly to "social institutions that fall outside of the confines of households, state and market,"

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[28]   Nina Hall, Hans Peter Schmitz, and J Michael Dedmon, "Transnational Advocacy and Ngos in the Digital Era: New Forms of Networked Power," International Studies Quarterly, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz052.
[29] Ibid
[30]   "Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts," United Nations, accessed July 14, 2023, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/504170.

and civil society institutions are known to be characterized by "varying degrees of self-governance, voluntarism, and not-for-profit operation."[31]

These CS organizations, including human rights NGOs, are well-known for mobilizing individuals and communities to advocate for human rights, often focusing on specific issues or marginalized groups. CSOs engage in a variety of activities, such as public campaigns, awareness-raising events, community organizing, and providing direct support to vulnerable populations.[32] They amplify the voices of marginalized communities and hold governments accountable for human rights violations.[33]

Notably, the online sphere has emerged as a crucial tool for CSOs in navigating the challenges posed by the shrinking civic space, criminalization, and suspicion. It is increasingly observed, that even in established democratic states, CSOs have been at the forefront of combating the erosion of civil space in light of the rising threat of populism. However, this does not take away from the face that they also have to increasingly face mounting obstacles such as restrictive legislation, stigmatization, and heightened scrutiny. However, social media has emerged as a powerful means for CSOs to maintain contact with the wider public and mitigate the impact of these limitations.[34]

As it will be discussed more in the following subchapter,[35] it is now clear that online spaces and social media platforms in particular have become indispensable to CS, and this was made very visible in the context of the European refugee crisis, where social media provided a crucial tool for CSOs to take up a pivotal role in providing humanitarian assistance and advocating for refugee rights. CSOs were, for example, able to document and share real-time updates on the situation because of social media, and in that way shed light on the challenges faced by refugees and the need for support.[36] CSOs in addition use social media to mobilize public opinion, gather resources, and generate solidarity through online campaigns, petitions, and crowdfunding initiatives.[37] They can mobilize public opinion, gather

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[31]  Theo Lynn et al., "Digital Technologies and Civil Society," Digital Towns, 2022, 91–108, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91247-5_5..

[32]  Katharine Dommett, "The Rise of Online Political Advertising," Political Insight 10, no. 4 (2019): 12–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905819891366.

[33]  Anna Holzscheiter, Sassan Gholiagha, and Andrea Liese, "Advocacy Coalition Constellations and Norm Collisions: Insights from International Drug Control, Human Trafficking, and Child Labour," Global Society 36, no. 1 (2021): 25–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2021.1885352.

[34]  Antoine Buyse, "Squeezing Civic Space: Restrictions on Civil Society Organizations and the Linkages with Human Rights," The International Journal of Human Rights 22, no. 8 (2018): 966–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1492916.

[35] More detailed discussion on the topic of CS, social media and populism can be found in subchapter 2.2.2

[36]  Nicolas Schmid, Sebastian Sewerin, and Tobias S. Schmidt, "Explaining Advocacy Coalition Change with Policy Feedback," Policy Studies Journal 48, no. 4 (2019): 1109–34, https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12365.

[37] Antoine Buyse, "Squeezing Civic Space: Restrictions on Civil Society Organizations and the Linkages with Human Rights"

resources, and generate solidarity through online campaigns, petitions, and crowdfunding initiatives.[38]

Therefore, it can be said that CSOs, in particular, focus on utilizing social media platforms in their activities. This is in part because social media they have become the go-to actors for younger generations, who find it easier to follow their growth and activities through social media platforms. These organizations are characterized by low levels of bureaucracy and transformed concepts of membership. Joining them often involves simple actions such as receiving email communications or signing up for online petitions. Members have a high degree of power in shaping the organization's direction and level of involvement. These organizations engage in "analytic activism" by surveying members to identify campaign issues and strategies. They can quickly initiate and switch campaigns at low costs, utilizing email, petitions, and social media.[39] CSOs, with their looser and less hierarchical structure, therefore enjoy greater freedom in their activities and communication. This positive flexibility can be observed in organizations such as BLM movement and Fridays for Future, which have successfully mobilized large numbers of people both online and offline, in large part exactly due to their timely and strategic use of social media platforms, which became the primary tool that critically contributed to their success.[40]

Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders are individual activists who actively promote and protect human rights through their advocacy work. They play a crucial role in exposing human rights violations, providing support to victims, and advocating for justice and accountability. Human rights defenders often work on the front lines, documenting abuses, raising awareness, and pressuring authorities to take action. However, they also face significant risks, including threats, harassment, and violence, as a result of their activism.[41] The invention and popularization of social media has had a significant impact on the work of human rights defenders. It has provided them with the ability to reach a larger audience with their advocacy work, making it easier for them to publicly share both their struggles and the testimonies they bring forward. Importantly, social media has also brought about positive and negative changes in the landscape for individual human rights defenders.

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[38] Theo Lynn et al., "Digital Technologies and Civil Society"
[39] Nina Hall, Hans Peter Schmitz, and J Michael Dedmon, "Transnational Advocacy and Ngos in the Digital Era: New Forms of Networked Power,"
[40] Nina Hall, Hans Peter Schmitz, and J Michael Dedmon, "Transnational Advocacy and Ngos in the Digital Era: New Forms of Networked Power,"
[41] Anna Holzscheiter, Sassan Gholiagha, and Andrea Liese, "Advocacy Coalition Constellations and Norm Collisions: Insights from International Drug Control, Human Trafficking, and Child Labour,"

On one side, social media has expanded the range of 'acceptable backgrounds and geographies for activists,' removing many of the barriers that previously existed.[42] It has enabled activism to rise from within marginalized communities, giving voice to those affected by political decisions at the national and international levels.[43] For example, Vanessa Nakete an Ugandan climate activist gained international recognition for her efforts to combat climate change. She became a prominent figure in the global climate movement, advocating for climate justice and highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on African countries and marginalized communities. She utilized social media as a platform to raise awareness about the urgent need for climate action and to amplify the voices of those most affected by environmental degradation.[44] In addition, when the Ugandan activist had appeared at a joint press conference in Davos with four other prominent white climate activists, including Greta Thunberg, but got cut from the image from the event, published by the famous and globally known news agency the Associated Press. She addressed a tweet to the news agency to why she had been cropped out of a photo, thus starting an "international conversation on erasure and diversity within the environmental movement,"[45] thus showing how social media platforms can also be use to criticize exclusions and erasures of marginalized voices.

On the other side, the negative effects of social media platforms on human rights defenders can also not be ignored. After all, human rights defenders now also increasingly have to the deal with the rise of the so-called "digital authoritarianism," because social media platforms also enable governments, state-aligned entities, and non-state actors to target individual activists through online tools such as surveillance, censorship, harassment, and incitement.[46] Connectedly, it is also very important to note a worrying trend in regard to non-state actors engaging in human rights advocacy, where there has been observed a rise of actors that stand against progressive or left-wing groups, which have been known to be more open to supporting human rights social progressive causes. This is important to mention, because scholars have also noted a rise of more conservative groups, which have increasingly attempted to emulate the model of digital advocacy organizations, albeit with varying degrees of success. In particular, it has been observed that right-wing organizations have recognized the power of digital advocacy and have created their own platforms to mobilize supporters and

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[42] Mallika Dutt and Nadia Rasul, "Raising Digital Consciousness: An Analysis of the Opportunities and Risks Facing Human Rights Activists in a Digital Age," Sur - International Journal on Human Rights 11 (2014): 427-436.

[43] Mallika Dutt and Nadia Rasul, "Raising Digital Consciousness," 428.

[44] "Vanessa Nakate - Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth," United Nations, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/vanessa-nakate/.

[45] 'Like I Wasn't There': Climate Activist Vanessa Nakate on Being Erased from a Movement," The Guardian, January 29, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/29/vanessa-nakate-interview-climate-activism-cropped-photo-davos.

[46] Richard Ashby Wilson, "Digital Authoritarianism and the Global Assault on Human Rights," Human Rights Quarterly 44, no. 4 (2022): 704–39, https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2022.0043.

advocate for conservative values.[47] Moreover, abortion opponents have also been increasingly known to use the social media platform like a weapon to fight against activists for reproductive rights.[48]

In summary, the three key categories of non-state actors in human rights advocacy strategically frame human rights issues and utilize social media platforms to capture attention and establish meaningful connections with their target audience. Their primary goal is to shape public opinion, challenge existing norms, and influence decision-making processes. Social media plays a crucial role in enabling them to achieve these objectives, although it can also be used against them and hinder their intended goals. Nonetheless, human rights advocacy remains increasingly reliant on social media platforms. These advocacy actors utilize various frames to highlight human rights violations, identify the responsible parties, and propose solutions. By emphasizing the ethical dimensions of these violations, they aim to mobilize support and advocate for policy changes. However, the changing landscape of tools and technologies, including the increasing use of ICTs and wider access to diverse public audiences, has led non-state advocacy actors to rely on different styles and strategies of advocacy. These include the more traditional approach of "naming and shaming," as well as the newer approach of "hope-based communication."

## 1.2 Altering the content: modifications in strategy and messaging of communication in human rights advocacy

### 1.2.1 *From "naming and shaming" to hope advocacy*

Ever since the gradual institutionalization and popularization of human rights in diplomatic practices happened during the 80s and 90s,[49] scholars note that collecting information and evidence on human rights abuses as well as publicizing them has become one of the key strategies among global advocates for human rights to achieve human rights improvement.[50] This strategy, better known in academic and policy circles as "naming and shaming" or "naming and blaming" in Human Rights advocacy circles combines public exposure campaigns and elite lobbying efforts  and is the process where the advocate (whether a singular person or more commonly a NGO) publicly state human rights

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[47]  Nina Hall, Hans Peter Schmitz, and J Michael Dedmon, "Transnational Advocacy and Ngos in the Digital Era: New Forms of Networked Power,"

[48]  Robin Marty, "The Anti-Abortion Movement Is Killing It on Twitter - Dame Magazine," Dame Magazine -, December 9, 2017, https://www.damemagazine.com/2017/10/16/anti-abortion-movement-killing-it-twitter/.

[49]  Samuel Moyn, The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History, 2012, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjk2vkf.

[50]   Amanda Murdie, David R. Davis, and Baekkwan Park, "Advocacy Output: Automated Coding Documents from Human Rights Organizations," Journal of Human Rights 19, no. 1 (2020): 83–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2019.1671173.

violations of a country usually through press realizes and reports.[51] When a government violates the fundamental rights of its citizens, the advocacy non-state actors thus respond by employing moral pressure to hold that government accountable and pressure the state into compliance.[52]

A common example of such tactic would be when Amnesty International's call for signatures on a petition to support a political prisoner in China or the United Nations Human Rights Council's issuance of a resolution condemning state violence in Syria. This action are often used from NGOs who would issue reports about human rights violation that they would observed by the courageous activist that would endanger their life to bring abuses into the spotlight. This was the case for example of Amnesty International who issued more than 200 press releases, background reports and urgent call for actions requests abut Colombia only in the spam of 4 years (from 1998 to 2001).[53] These instances exemplify the practice of publicly exposing and condemning oppressive countries while urging them to undertake necessary reforms to protect human rights. In this way the advocacy non-state actors can try to instigate accountability in the state that is violating human rights[54] and by using their media presence raise awareness on the abuse and push this violation into an international agenda.[55]

The impact of naming and shaming can manifest in both direct and indirect ways. In the case of direct influence, states may reevaluate their own actions and make changes aimed at reducing future instances of human rights violations.[56] This implies that the act of publicly exposing and condemning a government's misconduct can prompt internal reflection and reform. On the other hand, naming and shaming also operates indirectly by disseminating information to the international community. This dissemination of information serves as a catalyst for various actors to mobilize and exert pressure, pushing for a transformation in the problematic behavior.[57] In this manner, the act of naming and shaming not only holds governments accountable but can also mobilize collective efforts toward

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[51] Joel R. Pruce and Alexandra Cosima Budabin, "Beyond Naming and Shaming: New Modalities of Information Politics in Human Rights," Journal of Human Rights 15, no. 3 (2016): 408–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2016.1153412.
[52] Suzanne Katzenstein, "Reverse-Rhetorical Entrapment: Naming and Shaming as a Two-Way Street," Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law 46, no. 4 (October 2013): Article 4
[53] Amanda Murdie, David R. Davis, and Baekkwan Park, "Advocacy Output: Automated Coding Documents from Human Rights Organizations," Journal of Human Rights 19, no. 1 (2020): 83–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2019.1671173.
[54] G. Heathcote, "Naming and Shaming: Human Rights Accountability in Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010) on Women, Peace and Security," Journal of Human Rights Practice 4, no. 1 (2012): 82–105, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/hus003.
[55] Katzenstein, "Reverse-Rhetorical Entrapment," Article 4.
[56] Amanda M. Murdie and David R. Davis, "Shaming and Blaming: Using Events Data to Assess the Impact of Human Rights INGOs," International Studies Quarterly 56, no. 1 (2012): 1–16, accessed [access date], http://www.jstor.org/stable/41409819.
[57] Ibid.

change that helps protect basic human rights. The combined direct and indirect effects of naming and shaming underscore its potential to bring about meaningful shifts in human rights practices, both within states and on a broader international scale.

The leverage of "naming and shaming" lays in the attack of the reputation of the state violator,[58] which can turn in a domino effect of indirect "punishments." This attack on their reputation and to their legitimacy and power are the leading reason that why states respond to naming and shaming.[59] Practically, what "naming and shaming potentially does is influencing the perception and reputation of a country internationally making harder for them to cooperate and interact with other country, which can bring a whole new set of negative consequences such as interruption of their economic relationship.[60] Furthermore, worsened international reputation of state actor can lead to internal instabilities and questioning regarding the legitimacy of the actions of violators.[61] Moreover, the attack on reputation of violating actor can incentivize activist to join the momentum and increment their activity reinforcing the intent of pressuring the government into oblige thought the use of strikes and manifestation that would eventually damage the state economy.[62]

It is important to recognize that the effectiveness of the naming and shaming approach on increasing protection of human rights is influenced by the existing relationship between the human rights advocates and the targeted government and the identity of the actors who participate in shaming practices. These relationships and roles, taken up usually by a variety of non-state actors, play a pivotal role in determining the extent to which naming and shaming can yield positive outcomes. Non-state actors and media might lack authority while state-actors might lack legitimacy.[63] As researchers showed, shaming can be caused by a number of non-state political actors, such as religious groups, philanthropic organizations, multinational corporations, social movements and (human rights) NGOs, that tend to be more successful in their actions compared to the shaming in which foreign countries partook (who still had their influence on the state) or to shaming from International Governmental organizations (IGOs) who lack efficiency in comparison.

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[58]    Nanette Verburg, "The Theory Behind Naming and Shaming: A Qualitative Analysis of the Effect of Political Legitimacy and Domestic Activism on Human Rights Compliance in Bolivia and Colombia" (PhD diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2020).
[59]    Katzenstein, "Reverse-Rhetorical Entrapment," Article 4.
[60]    Matthew Krain, "J'accuse! Does Naming and Shaming Perpetrators Reduce the Severity of Genocides or Politicides?1," International Studies Quarterly 56, no. 3 (2012): 574–89, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2012.00732.x.
[61]    Matthew Krain, "J'accuse! Does Naming and Shaming Perpetrators Reduce the Severity of Genocides or Politicides?1,"
[62]    Verburg, "The Theory Behind Naming and Shaming."
[63]    Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, "Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem," International Organization 62, no. 4 (2008): 689–716, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818308080247.

One of the key determining factors in the examined link is the relationships that this "shamers" have with the "violator". This is because a charitable religious group or a human rights NGO tends to have less interest in "sugar coating" their report and were often clearer on their evaluation of the human right state of the country and often provided their expectation on improvements that the violators have to apply. On the other hand, other foreign country that might have some kind of diplomatic relationship with the "violator" country or International Government organizations who do not have any authority for material punishment didn't provide as effective reports and "shaming". Moreover, more generally country who famously violate human rights know how to avoid being examinate by IGOs such United Nation or United Nation Commission on Human Rights.[64]

However,, "Naming and shaming bring with it a possible realm of positive and negative effects. On one hand the government who are shamed and names as human rights violators often improved their protection of political right after being publicly criticized. On the other hand, "naming and shaming" often doesn't translate in a complete cessation of political terror and incredibly is sometimes followed by more violations.[65] The reasons for this paradox are multiple. One factor is the relative ease with which certain governments can initiate reforms within their legal or political frameworks, particularly in terms of safeguarding specific political rights. This can be accomplished, at least on a theoretical level, through measures like conducting elections or enacting legislation. However, addressing violations committed by non-state actors or agents of terror, which lie beyond the direct control of governments, presents a greater challenge.

Another reason behind the differential reform capabilities of governments pertains to strategic human rights abuses. In response to international pressure for reform, some authoritarian leaders employ tactics of terror, such as killings or physical violence, as a mean to undermine the effectiveness of their political reforms. These despotic regimes utilize such brutal methods to counterbalance the perceived impact of implementing superficial changes in response to global demands, such as organizing elections. These factors highlight the complexities involved in reform processes, as certain governments may find it relatively easier to address specific human rights concerns within their jurisdictions, while struggling to tackle violations involving non-state actors. Additionally, some despots strategically employ human rights abuses to counteract and neutralize the impact of political reforms prompted by international pressures.[66]

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[64] Fames C. Franklin, "Shame on You: The Impact of Human Rights Criticism on Political Repression in Latin America," International Studies Quarterly 52, no. 1 (2008): 187–211, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00496.x.
[65] Hafner-Burton, "Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem,"
[66] ibid

Lastly, there are numerous anecdotes that lend support to the notion that governments often find it easy to disregard the practice of "naming and shaming". Certain prominent Asian leaders, such as those from Singapore, India, and China, have become known for dismissing, ignoring, and even dismantling accusations of human rights violations. They often hide behind arguments of cultural determinism and "Asian values".[67] Despite the international spotlight and the persistent efforts of organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others, some governments have demonstrated a capacity to dismiss or downplay the implications of such scrutiny.[68]

Given these reasons, it is unsurprising that the "naming and shaming" strategy itself has undergone significant development in the past two decades. The most notable shift occurred after 2015 when social media became a key tool for daily communication. This forced human rights advocates to adapt to new channels of communication, specifically social media platforms. This shift not only changed the focus of their campaigns but also significantly altered the targeted audience and direction of their activities. The target audience expanded to include citizens, students, journalists, elected officials, and philanthropists, depending on the specific goals of the campaign. The "naming and shaming" strategy had to be adapted to effectively leverage this tool, although it may not be perfectly suited for the intended goals of this tactic.

In conclusion, advocacy non-state actors have moved beyond solely relying on "fact-based reporting aimed at exposing abuse". They have embraced a wider range of resources and communication activities, indicating a shift in their approach. Notably, the growing diversity of resources demonstrates their efforts to reach and engage with mass audiences.[69] Additionally, social media platforms provide a means for "naming and shaming" campaigns to amplify their accusations and attract greater attention to human rights violations. However, it remains uncertain whether this increased attention significantly impacts the effectiveness of these campaigns. Non-state actors are thus continuously expanding and experimenting with new forms of advocacy that are better suited to the tools and platforms they have at their disposal.

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[67]Demystifying human rights protection in Asia, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/asie669anglaisbassdef.pdf. & Fred Dallmayr, "'Asian Values' and Global Human Rights," Theories of Rights, 2017, 393–409, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315236308-20.

[68] Adrian Gallagher, "To Name and Shame or Not, and If so, How? A Pragmatic Analysis of Naming and Shaming the Chinese Government over Mass Atrocity Crimes against the Uyghurs and Other Muslim Minorities in Xinjiang," Journal of Global Security Studies 6, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab013.

[69] Joel R. Pruce and Alexandra Cosima Budabin, "Beyond Naming and Shaming: New Modalities of Information Politics in Human Rights," Journal of Human Rights 15, no. 3 (2016): 408–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2016.1153412.

### *1.2.2 Changing the substance and framing: the rise of the hope-based communication*

Another important trend observed in the changing landscape of human rights advocacy in the 21st century is the shift in the substance and framing of messages. Non-state actors have increasingly embraced a strategy known as hope-based communication. With the introduction of social media as a new channel for human rights advocacy, non-state actors recognized the need to approach a wider target audience in a different way. Hope-based communication not only changes the approach and framing of human rights advocacy campaigns, but also reconfigures how goals and ideas are disseminated. It involves sharing positive campaigns and stories that depict a more prosperous future. By evoking hope instead of negative emotions, advocacy actors aim to instigate a sense of optimism in their audience, moving away from fear and anger.

This approach brings to the forefront the importance of rehumanizing human rights issues. Academic studies have supported the success of hope-based communication, where researchers have especially emphasized that the sentiment of hope can last in a spectator's brain for up to 24 hours, while negative emotions such as anger, fear, and disgust only last for much shorter durations.[70] Additionally, studies on primordial human reactions to different communication approaches indicate that fear can lead to paralysis and other negative emotions that hinder proactive engagement."[71] The finding of these research has positively resonated within human rights policy circles, because the impact of a campaign based on hope instead of fear can have a more lasting impact on the receiver, on top of generating a more proactive response from the audience members. The method of positive communication employed as a part of hope-based communication, can therefore aim to trigger empathy, compassion, and rational thought, tapping into the higher parts of the brain.

As explains the reasoning behind the need for a change in communication style, Thomas Coombas, founder of "hope-based communication," who came up with the idea in 2017 on International Human Rights Day, the style of communication in advocacy campaigns of human rights actors needs to change because:

> "we use quite a lot of fear and anger sometimes in a desire to create outrage and make people share the outrage we feel about things happening in the world, but also potentially inadvertently triggering fear, and while that might get short-term results in the long term if you want to organize a movement

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[70]Philippe Verduyn and Saskia Lavrijsen, "Which Emotions Last Longest and Why: The Role of Event Importance and Rumination," Motivation and Emotion 39, no. 1 (2014): 119–27, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-014-9445-y.

[71] Human behavior, strategic opinion research and the audacious pursuit of ..., accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Heartwired-digital.pdf.

you actually need more positive emotions, and that's why I say anger mobilizes but hope organizes."[72]

Positive communicational strategy and advocacy approach presents a new steppingstone from the previous widespread "naming and shaming" trend in Human Rights, because it refocuses the attention on the receiving audience rather than institutions committing the violations. In the realm of human rights advocacy, it has in the past decades becomes very evident that a sole focus on laws and their enforcement is insufficient. This sentiment is encapsulated by George Orwell in his 1945 essay, "Freedom of the Park," where he astutely remarks that the relative freedom enjoyed by individuals is contingent upon public opinion. Merely having laws in place does not guarantee protection, as the execution of these laws and the behavior of law enforcement agencies rely on the prevailing societal disposition. If a significant number of people prioritize and advocate for freedom of speech, it can persist even in the face of legal prohibitions. Conversely, if public opinion remains apathetic or unresponsive, marginalized groups may face persecution, regardless of existing protective legislation.[73] Likewise, human rights activists might work less on constantly pressing to raise the standard of accountability and more on making sure that existing standards of accountability are not flouted.[74]

Non-state actors are constantly expanding and experimenting with implementing new form of advocacy that could cause improvements in results of their advocacy efforts, which includes trying out the new digital tools they have now been added to the toolkit they have in their possession. For example, AI is in fact often emphasized as the world of human rights advocacy actor to be considered a pioneer in adapting its strategy to new sources and way to re-elaborate human rights communication. This is because AI was at the in the beginning of its work already understood to be a pioneer of the "naming and shaming" and was able to distinguish itself from other human rights advocacy non-state actors due to the amplified campaign focus on putting the spotlight on countries' violations and urge to reform. It is, thus, of no surprise that AI was again among the first NGOs to change its pace and style of communication, which happened around 2017 when hope based communication was introduced as a concept.

[72] Webinar with Thomas Coombes: Hope Based Communications, an Antidote to NGO Apathy?, YouTube (International Civil Society Centre, 2019), https://youtu.be/x_6WFd8L0Ks.
[73] Thomas Coombes, "Hope, Not Fear: A New Model for Communicating Human Rights," Medium, October 27, 2019, https://medium.com/@the_hope_guy/hope-not-fear-a-new-model-for-communicating-human-rights-d98c0d6bf57b.
[74] Kathryn Sikkink, Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century (Princeton University Press, 2019).

An illustrative example of this shift in approach can be seen in Amnesty International's "Thrill of Victory" campaign launched in 2018[75]. The campaign aimed to showcase instances where human rights were successfully protected, highlighting the organization's contributions to these victories worldwide. This strategic shift was driven by feedback received from surveys, which indicated that followers of the organization desired to understand how human rights changes were achieved and wanted to be part of successful endeavors. Amnesty International sought to evoke positive emotions and motivate supporters by emphasizing that change is possible. By conveying the message that "change can happen," the organization instilled hope and assured its audiences and followers that despite the present challenges and setbacks, dedicated efforts can bring about meaningful change. In essence, Amnesty International tapped into the belief that as members of the human rights movement, both the organization and its followers must strive for something positive—a vision of change and a brighter future.

Importantly, this change in communication style, catering to a wider audience through social media platforms and ICT, is closely tied to a shift in vocabulary and perspective of the conveyed message. By replacing fear with hope, the organization effectively connects with people's positive emotions such as joy, humor, compassion, and empathy. This approach emphasizes the organization's commitment to promoting positive change, guiding individuals not only in what they should stand against but also in what they should stand for.[76] A remarkable example that highlights the impact of this approach is the global mobilization sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement's protests across the USA in 2020. People from around the world united under the same hashtag, sharing messages of support and hope.[77]

Furthermore, in the contemporary era characterized by the prevalence of fake news, narrative truth, and political misinformation, relying solely on factual information is insufficient. It is crucial to acknowledge that people's beliefs and values strongly influence their opinions, and effective advocacy must align with those underlying values. Paradoxically, attempting to convince individuals that they are wrong can often backfire, reinforcing their existing convictions, particularly when it contradicts deeply held beliefs. This psychological phenomenon, known as "confirmation bias," cautions us that presenting facts alone may not be enough to sway hearts and minds.

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[75] "Amnesty International: The Thrill of Victory • ADS OF THE WORLDTM: Part of the Clio Network," Ads of the WorldTM, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/the-thrill-of-victory.
[76] Thomas Coombes, "Human Rights Strategy: Hope-Based Comms," hope, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.hope-based.com/.
[77] The Black lives matter movement will be examined in more detail in the subchapter 3.2.

Therefore, human rights NGOs have recognized the importance of combining emotional appeals with factual information to effectively advocate for human rights and drive change. By appealing to people's emotions while presenting well-supported facts, there is a greater likelihood of resonating with individuals on both intellectual and emotional levels. This combination enhances the persuasiveness of the argument and increases the potential for meaningful impact. This is where hope-based communication, coupled with the power of storytelling, becomes particularly valuable. However, it is important to note that simply sharing stories may not be enough if they are not carefully presented. Studies have identified a phenomenon called "psychic numbing,"[78] which reveals that as soon as a narrative involves more than one person, the audience may struggle to maintain sympathy for the protagonists. This is why successful movements often begin by highlighting the story of a singular individual who represents a larger struggle. For example, Khaled Said in the Egyptian revolution or George Floyd in the BLM protests, which I examine in the last empirical section in detail, serve as powerful focal points that humanize and contextualize broader issues.

To summarize, it is crucial to delve deeper into the relationship between social media and the efficacy of human rights advocacy in order to enhance our understanding of contemporary human rights advocacy actors. After all, social media platforms have become a vital tool for human rights advocates, enabling them to reach a wider audience at a relatively low cost. This expanded reach is essential for successful human rights campaigns, as it allows advocates to garner support and exert pressure on violators of human rights. Additionally, social media platforms provide a public platform where personal stories can be shared, evoking emotional responses and serving as a foundation for powerful human rights campaigns. However, it is important to acknowledge that social media can also be used as a tool to hinder the abilities of non-state advocacy actors, a factor that is often overlooked. The limitations and challenges posed by social media in the context of human rights advocacy need to be taken into consideration. These platforms can impose constraints on the dissemination of information, manipulate algorithms, and amplify misinformation, all of which can impact the effectiveness of advocacy efforts. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of the link between social media and human rights advocacy must engage seriously both the opportunities and limitations presented by these platforms. After all, only by understanding the potential and drawbacks of social media, human rights advocates can better navigate and leverage these tools to effectively promote human rights and bring about meaningful change.

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[78] Psychic Numbing," The Arithmetic of Compassion, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.arithmeticofcompassion.org/psychic-numbing#:~:text=Psychic%20numbing%20is%20a%20psychological,an%20illustration%20of%20psy

## 2 REVIEWING ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE PROLIFERATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR DIGITAL HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

As a response to the increasing digitization of society and the widespread adoption of internet-enabled devices, a new form of advocacy has emerged, known as digital advocacy. This form of activism harnesses the power of digital technologies and online platforms to promote and advance specific causes, issues, or ideologies. The main purpose of digital advocacy is to mobilize individuals, raise awareness, and create meaningful change through online campaigns, social media engagement, and digital storytelling.[79] One of the key advantages of digital advocacy is its ability to reach a global audience quickly and cost-effectively. Activists can connect, collaborate, and amplify their voices on a large scale, providing a platform for marginalized communities and grassroots organizations to be heard. It facilitates civic engagement and participation, empowering individuals to contribute to the causes they care about. However, digital advocacy also faces challenges and criticisms. It can be susceptible to misinformation, as well as the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, which limit exposure to diverse perspectives, and exactly these issues will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter, exploring the impact of social media on human rights advocacy.

When considering specific platforms, it is important to recognize their affordances help with providing them with unique roles in the mobilization of social movements and organization of human rights protest.[80] Facebook, for example, serves as an ideal platform for forming both covert and overt groups, allowing individuals to connect based on shared ideologies and beliefs.[81] Twitter, on the other hand, excels in real-time organization and fast news dissemination, enabling users to bypass mainstream media and directly interact with live updates through keyword searches and hashtags. YouTube, meanwhile, is valuable for providing instant evidence of human rights violations through video documentation. It is therefore important, to understand distinct functions of each social media platform helps human rights advocates utilize them strategically, maximizing

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[79] Suay Melisa Ozkula, "What Is Digital Activism Anyway?," Journal of Digital Social Research 3, no. 3 (2021): 60–84, https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v3i3.44.

[80] Lee, F. L. F., Liang, H., Cheng, E. W., Tang, G. K. Y., & Yuen, S. (2022). Affordances, movement dynamics, and a centralized digital communication platform in a networked movement. Information, Communication & Society, 25(12), 1699–1716. Literat, I., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2019). Youth collective political expression on social media: The role of affordances and memetic dimensions for voicing political views. New Media and Society, 21(9), 1988–2009. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819837571 Boyd, D. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. V A networked self (str. 47–66). Routledge.

[81] Lora Helvie-Mason, "Facebook, 'Friending,' and Faculty–Student Communication," Cutting-Edge Technologies in Higher Education, 2011, 61–87, https://doi.org/10.1108/s2044-9968(2011)0000003007.

their impact and effectively leveraging social media for advocacy purposes. In addition, newer platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are missing. also, nowadays play important role in militating masses, for the good and for the bad.[82] as these new online spaces and platforms can also be full of hate speech. After all, both platforms, TikTok and Instagram are particularly popular between the young tech savvy generation, and for that reason represent also the nests of collective political expression as "communications expressing a specific opinion on current events or political processes or disseminating information relevant to the interpretation of those events or processes,"[83] while also "deliberately connecting to an assumed like-minded audience with similar beliefs through the use of shared symbolic resources".[84]

Furthermore, the rise of digital advocacy has transformed the landscape of news and journalism. Scholars argue that social media has empowered every citizen to become a potential journalist, capable of collecting and disseminating information easily. This phenomenon has given birth to the concept of "citizen journalists" that is defined as "[t]he act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information."[85] Social media platforms provide citizen journalists with the necessary tools to perform these tasks, including writing, uploading photos or videos, and sharing content with a wide audience at the click of a button. Citizen journalism holds immense value, particularly in situations where mainstream media faces challenges such as censorship, restrictions, or logistical constraints. It allows for grassroots documentation of events and atrocities that might otherwise go unreported. Projects like Syria Tracker and various organizations focused on newsgathering have enabled extensive real-time collection and archival of human rights violations in conflict zones like Syria.[86] The archive of social media footage documenting these violations has become a vital resource for human rights prosecutions and videos or eyewitness media as some scholar

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[82] Darsana Vijay and Alex Gekker, "Playing Politics: How Sabarimala Played out on TikTok," American Behavioral Scientist 65, no. 5 (2021): 712–34, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764221989769.
[83] Alcides Velasquez and Hernando Rojas, "Political Expression on Social Media: The Role of Communication Competence and Expected Outcomes," Social Media + Society 3, no. 1 (2017): 205630511769652, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117696521..
[84] Ioana Literat and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, "Youth Collective Political Expression on Social Media: The Role of Affordances and Memetic Dimensions for Voicing Political Views," New Media &amp;amp; Society 21, no. 9 (2019): 1988–2009, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819837571.
[85] https://ict4peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/we_media.pdf
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[86] Sam Gregory, "Cameras Everywhere Revisited: How Digital Technologies and Social Media Aid and Inhibit Human Rights Documentation and Advocacy," Journal of Human Rights Practice 11, no. 2 (2019): 373–92, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huz022.

describe them,[87] collected by citizen journalists, have been used as evidence by institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the United Nations for investigative purposes.[88]

The archival activity of this social media footage involves two key actors. On one hand, there are individual human rights defenders who witness and record events, and on the other hand, there are human rights collectives, CSOs and NGOs dedicated to collecting and archiving this material. These archives serve as valuable resources for investigators, journalists, activists, and lawyers seeking accountability and solidarity. For example, Syria Archive, a Berlin-based human rights collective, focuses on open-source human rights investigations in Syria. Some NGOs also collaborate in the creation of such archives, although it may not be their primary focus, similar to Syria Archive and other human rights collectives.[89] The work of both citizen journalists and human rights organizations, however, is generally closely connected in collecting of the footage and tends to significantly impact to shaping the direction of the investigations of human rights violation.

However, it is important to recognize that the balance upon which citizen journalism is based is fragile. While it has the unmatched power to spread information, both visual and otherwise, it can also be a double-edged sword, leading to the dangerous dissemination of misinformation. Examples of fake news and the emergence of deep fakes raise concerns on political, cultural, and journalistic levels.[90] Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we turn to analysis of social media's positive and negative impact on human rights advocacy, which will be analyzed through the analysis of four specific rising topics, identified by scholars in different disciplines of social sciences: social mobilization, hacktivism, surveillance, and propaganda.

## 2.1 Positive effects of social media on human rights advocacy

Scholars specializing in Communicology, Media Studies and International Relations have slowly began to explore the significant role of social media platforms in advancing human rights advocacy efforts.[91] These platforms serve as powerful communication tools, allowing individuals and groups

[87] Sandra Ristovska, "Human Rights Collectives as Visual Experts: The Case of Syrian Archive," Visual Communication 18, no. 3 (2019): 333–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357219851728.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] "Deepfake Poses a Threat to Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East," Gulf Centre for Human Rights, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.gc4hr.org/deepfake-poses-a-threat-to-human-rights-defenders-in-the-middle-east/.
[91] [91] Steven Livingston, "Digital Affordances and Human Rights Advocacy," essay, in SFB 700 Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood  (Berlin, Germany: Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 700, n.d.), 3–4.
[91] Hall, N. (2019). When do refugees matter? The importance of issue salience for digital advocacy organizations. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, *8*(3), 333-355. Hall, N., Schmitz, H. P., & Dedmon, J. M. (2020). Transnational advocacy and NGOs in the digital era: New forms of networked power. *International Studies Quarterly*, *64*(1), 159-167. Hall, N. (2019). Norm contestation in the digital era: campaigning for refugee rights. International Affairs, 95(3), 575-595. Dennis, J., & Hall,

to express their views and share information on a global scale. This capacity enables marginalized communities and human rights activists to reach a wider audience and generate awareness about various human rights issues around the world, ultimately fostering increased support and solidarity. Social media has also revolutionized the speed at which information is disseminated. Activists can now instantly share relevant information, exposing human rights abuses and atrocities in real-time. Additionally, these platforms provide a means for activists to share live visual evidence of human rights violations, further highlighting the urgency and gravity of such violations.

Moreover, social media platforms serve as vital networking tools, facilitating the connection and collaboration between different actors within the realm of human rights advocacy. Information sharing and collaboration become seamless, enabling more effective collective efforts. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1, social media platforms play a pivotal role in bridging cultural and geographical gaps. The ease of connecting communities across the globe has reduced the perceived distance between individuals. This closeness, facilitated by social media, fosters solidarity and empathy among people from different parts of the world, allowing them to engage with issues that may be geographically distant but remain relevant to their shared commitment to human rights. It also empowers individuals to contribute to human rights causes even from afar, making their efforts impactful and meaningful.

While scholars have identified a number of relevant positive effects of social media scholars during the past decade, in the following paragraph, this thesis critically examines the key identified positive effects of social media that have been proven as important for strategies of the three key groups human rights advocacy non-state actors, NGOs, Civil societies and human rights activists. In turn, it examines the beneficial effects of social media in provides in regard to social mobilizations, which is related to social movement and civil society organizations, that mobilize for human rights causes, and a new type of unregular political activism: hacktivism, that human rights defenders have been known to partake in with the intent of supporting human rights movement around the world spread their message.

N. (2020). Innovation and adaptation in advocacy organizations throughout the digital eras. Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 17(2), 79-86. Bloodgood, E., Bruno-van Vijfeijken, T., Hall, N., Mitchell, G. E., Pallas, C., & Schmitz, H. P. (2019). The future of transnational NGO advocacy. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Hall, N. (2020) Transnational Advocacy in the Digital Era, Oxford: Oxford University Press

### 2.1.1 Social media platforms fostering the growth of social movements

Social media has become an integral part of people's lives, transforming the way we communicate, find news, and pursue personal interests.[92] Platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have revolutionized social interaction, and their potential to promote civic engagement and participation cannot be overlooked. Scholars emphasize that social media empowers activists and individuals by allowing them to document instances of abuse, confront those in authority, amplify their voices, and protect their rights. It provides a platform for marginalized communities to be included in conversations and decision-making processes, which were previously inaccessible to them.[93]

As mentioned earlier, social media has played a significant role in facilitating greater participation, documenting evidence, and increasing news coverage through citizen journalism. It has given individuals and social movements the tools to take control and drive change in their own hands. The globalization effect of social media brings local issues to a global stage, attracting attention and generating pressure on specific topics. The instantaneous nature of social media enables immediate communication with large audiences, making it easier for participants in social movements to synchronize opinions and shape the discourse surrounding their cause. It becomes a powerful tool for orchestrating collective actions and mobilizing support.[94] The evolution in the use of social media as a tool for spreading information makes perfect sense, if we consider the nature of the social media platform, which due to nature of the online sphere enables immediate communicating with large masses. This in turn makes incredibly easier for participants of social movements to synchronize opinions, move the discourse and "choreography of assembly."[95]

The concept of "choreography of assembly" has gained popularity in the past decade, as it describes how human rights activists and social movement participants construct symbolic public spaces with the goal of emotional "scene setting."[96] Within choreography, social media of course first

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[92] It is important to address that even while the term general public might be commonly used in these discussions, digital inequality is still a relevant element to take into consideration, especially when examining mobilization among those groups most affected and marginalized. ( William H. Dutton and Bianca C. Reisdorf, "Cultural Divides and Digital Inequalities: Attitudes Shaping Internet and Social Media Divides," Information, Communication &amp;amp; Society 22, no. 1 (2017): 18–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2017.1353640. )

[93] Gregory, "Cameras Everywhere Revisited: How Digital Technologies and Social Media Aid and Inhibit Human Rights Documentation and Advocacy,"

[94] Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, Collective Action in Organizations, 2012, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511978777.

[95] Paolo Gerbaudo, Tweets and the Streets, 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012),Perlego, https://www.perlego.com/book/665169/tweets-and-the-streets-social-media-and-contemporary-activism-pdf.

[96] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," Social Performance, 2006, 29–90, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511616839.002.

serves as a tool to direct the masses towards specific locations or events, coordinating actions such as sit-ins with strong symbolic and visual sentiments, like wearing specific colors or chanting specific songs. However, social media platforms have evolved to serve multiple purposes, acting as newspapers, manifestos for organizations and movements, direct contact channels, and newsletters to promote action. Whereby the ability to reach a wide and diverse audience for social movements represents one of the key advantages of social media in human rights advocacy. This is because social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable advocates to disseminate information, raise awareness, and mobilize support for various human rights causes. Moreover, the interactive nature of social media helps movements fosters direct engagement with individuals, creating a sense of personal connection and involvement. It can for this reason be concluded that social media has revolutionized the generation of social movements by providing a personalized and interconnected platform for engagement and exposure. It empowers individual members to become more active, and amplifies voices of key leaders of social movements, in this way helping facilitate the formation of global movement networks and collectives. While challenges certainly exist in this link, the role of social media in generating and sustaining social movements within the field of human rights advocacy certainly cannot be overlooked, especially as it continues to shape the way we advocate for justice, equality, and dignity for all.

### 2.1.2 Hacktivism and defending human rights online

Hacktivism in the context of social media and human rights advocacy has emerged as a dynamic and influential force in the digital landscape. The convergence of hacktivism and social media platforms has transformed the way human rights violations are exposed, addressed, and ultimately catalyzed into action. This powerful combination harnesses the technical expertise of hacktivists and the widespread reach of social media to raise awareness, amplify marginalized voices, and mobilize global movements for positive change.[97]

The impact of hacktivism in the realm of human rights advocacy is significant. By leveraging the technical skills and knowledge of computer systems, hacktivists have the ability to penetrate digital boundaries, uncover hidden truths, and bring attention to human rights abuses that often go unnoticed. The viral nature of social media ensures that their messages spread rapidly, captivating

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[97] Mary Joyce, Digital Activism Decoded the New Mechanics of Change (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2010).

global audiences and forcing societies to confront uncomfortable realities.[98] Through the strategic dissemination of compelling content, vivid visuals, and leaked information, hacktivists ignite public consciousness, spark conversations, and mobilize individuals to take action.

Digital direct action is a defining characteristic of hacktivism. By employing techniques such as distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, website defacements, and the exposure of sensitive information, hacktivists disrupt the operations of institutions perpetuating human rights violations.[99] These actions not only serve as acts of resistance but also create visibility and demand accountability. By exposing vulnerabilities and shining a light on the dark underbelly of oppressive systems, hacktivists force governments, corporations, and organizations to answer for their actions, ensuring that human rights abuses are not swept under the rug.

Furthermore, hacktivism on social media transcends geographical boundaries, they often act as individual huma rights defenders that sometimes work in bigger canalizations, from this point of view social media has the role of connecting activists across the globe and catalyzing impactful global movements for human rights. Social media platforms provide a virtual meeting ground where human rights activists from diverse backgrounds unite, who are driven by a shared commitment to justice and equality.[100] Through digital campaigns, online petitions, and powerful hashtag movements, hacktivists mobilize international support, harnessing the collective power of global social media networks. The ability to rapidly disseminate information, coordinate efforts, and share resources on a global scale amplifies the impact of human rights advocacy, leading to policy reform, challenging societal norms, and ultimately effecting tangible change in communities worldwide.

While hacktivism in the context of social media and human rights advocacy is undeniably powerful, it is not without its challenges and ethical considerations. The boundary between activism and criminal behavior can be blurred, and hacktivists must navigate complex legal and ethical landscapes. Striking a balance between challenging oppressive systems and ensuring the protection of privacy rights can be a delicate task. Additionally, the diversity of causes and perspectives within the hacktivist community may lead to conflicts of interest or ethical dilemmas.[101] Responsible and thoughtful engagement is crucial to maintain the integrity and

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[98] Michael Potvin, "Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous," Transnational Social Review 5, no. 3 (2015): 349–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/21931674.2015.1082780.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Joyce, Digital Activism Decoded the New Mechanics of Change

[101] "Collaborative Social Activism and Hacktivism," Collaborative Society, 2020, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11587.003.0007.

effectiveness of hacktivism as a force for positive change. Although groups dedicated to perform hacktivism exist,[102] hacktivism still is a mainly individual based activity, in which single tech savvy activists act, usually in autonomy to shed light on human rights violations.

This was most clearly visible in the  the case of Edward Snowden, who is one of the most well-known National Security Agency Whistleblowers, fighting for protection of basic human rights such as the right to privacy and freedom of expression.[103] Snowden's revelations shed light on the vast scale of surveillance conducted by intelligence agencies like the US National Security Agency and the UK's Government Communications Headquarters behind the back of millions of internet users and citizens. Such type of surveillance, as will be explained in more detail in chapter 2.2.1, however, can lead to the stigmatization of individuals and hinder their ability to engage in whistle-blowing or democratic activism.[104]

In conclusion, hacktivism in the context of social media and human rights advocacy represents a transformative and dynamic approach to tackling human rights challenges in the digital age. By leveraging their technical expertise and utilizing the reach of social media platforms, hacktivists have the ability to increase awareness, amplify the voices of marginalized communities, and mobilize global movements for positive change. However, it is important to navigate ethical considerations and legal boundaries while engaging in hacktivist activities. Despite these challenges, hacktivism continues to reshape the human rights advocacy landscape, propelling us towards a more equitable, inclusive, and rights-respecting world.

## 2.2 Negative effects of social media on human rights advocacy

So far, this thesis has explored the positive impact of social media on human rights advocacy as identified by scholars. However, it is important to acknowledge that social media is a tool that can be used for both positive and negative purposes. Former U.S. Vice President Hillary Clinton captured this dual nature of global communication technology well in her speech, where she highlighted the potential of social media for both empowerment and harm, as she argued:

> "Amid this unprecedented surge in connectivity, we must also recognize that these technologies are not an unmitigated blessing. These tools are also being exploited to

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[102] i.e. Anonymous, an hacktivist collective and decentralized international movement recognized for its engagement in a range of cyberattacks targeting governments, government institutions, government agencies, corporations, and even the Church of Scientology. Their actions are often driven by a desire to challenge and disrupt established power structures, drawing attention to perceived injustices and promoting transparency and accountability.

[103] Iain Munro, "An Interview with Snowden's Lawyer: Robert Tibbo on Whistleblowing, Mass Surveillance and Human Rights Activism," Organization 25, no. 1 (2017): 106–22, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417726548..

[104] "Edward Snowden: The Whistleblower behind the NSA Surveillance Revelations," The Guardian, June 11, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-surveillance.

undermine human progress and political rights. Just as steel can be used to build hospitals or machine guns, or nuclear power can either energize a city or destroy it, modern information networks and the technologies they support can be harnessed for good or for ill. The same networks that help organize movements for freedom also enable al-Qaida to spew hatred and incite violence against the innocent. And technologies with the potential to open up access to government and promote transparency can also be hijacked by governments to crush dissent and deny human rights."[105]

For this reason, it is crucial not to overlook the negative impact of social media in modern society. In the following paragraphs we therefore focus on two key aspects: the transformation of social media into a tool of control and surveillance by governments, and the role of social media in enabling the rise of populism and the spread of disinformation. Firstly, because social media has been used by governments as a means of control and surveillance, who are actively aiming to identify and restrict the activities of human rights defenders, both individuals and human rights organizations and movements. Governments leverage social media platforms to monitor and impede the actions of those who challenge their authority, ultimately limiting their ability to advocate for human rights and hold those in power accountable. Secondly, because the lack of regulation on social media has contributed to the rise of populism, which will be examined in this thesis primarily as a communication phenomenon rather than a political affiliation. This is because populist communication strategies disseminated through social media platforms have been effective in spreading disinformation, undermining human rights, and damaging the reputation of civil societies and human rights defenders. Consequently, social media also provides a fertile ground for the growth of harmful organizations that further perpetuate these negative influences. By addressing these negative aspects of social media, it is important to highlight the potential risks and challenges associated with its use of social media platforms in the context of human rights advocacy.

### 2.2.1   Social media as a tool of control and surveillance

Social media platforms have evolved into environments where control and surveillance can be exerted over human rights advocates and have, due to lack of regulation, given rise to extensive and elaborate surveillance systems capable of tracking and recording details about internet users, essentially stripping away the protective shield of privacy.[106]  It is a known fact that social media providers

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[105] Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks on Internet Freedom," (presentation, Washington D.C., January 21, 2010).
[106]"The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom," Choice Reviews Online 48, no. 12 (2011), https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.48-7161..

collect and analyze user data to create profiles that can be used to deliver targeted advertisements.[107] However, especially after the scandal that followed the leak of Facebook users information, which was caused by private company named Cambridge Analytica, users of social media and public in general is much more aware of the possible harmful usage of the collected data, after all this case represented not "just" a breach of privacy or trust of users of Facebook but most importantly a breach of users' rights to freedom of thought and opinion and assembly and association, which were put at great risk by allowing private information of users to be used against them in an effort to influence their political opinions.[108] This aspect of social media usage has been largely discussed among public and scholars as it has potential treats for the functioning of democracy. Especially, due to the fact that the vast amount of personal information, willingly shared by users, can be exploited to monitor and manipulate behaviors as well as political and other preferences. Governments, corporations, and other actors utilize sophisticated surveillance techniques to track the activities and interactions of human rights advocates, impinging upon their privacy and potentially inhibiting their advocacy efforts.

As scholars have been increasingly turning their attention to the negative effects of the popularization of social media for human rights, it is thus not surprising that a study[109] recently published, for example, highlights many different ways in which social media platforms can become breeding grounds for cyberbullying, hate speech, and the dissemination of harmful content, infringing upon individuals' rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and dignity. Most importantly social media platforms, due to often being unregulated and allowing for anonymity of user, importantly contribute to enabling the rapid spread of harmful behaviors that can and increasingly are targeted directly towards human rights advocates.[110]

The control and surveillance mechanisms prevalent on social media platforms have profound implications for human rights advocacy. Human rights advocates rely on the free flow of information and the ability to engage in open dialogue to mobilize support and effect change, especially when in autocratic and controlling regime where the publicly open dialogue is a danger option. [111]Moreover, the fear of surveillance and potential repercussions can lead to self-censorship and the suppression of

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[107] Ian Brown, "Social Media Surveillance," The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society, 2014, 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118767771.wbiedcs122.
[108] Lorna McGregor Director, "Cambridge Analytica Is More than a Data Breach – It's a Human Rights Problem," The Conversation, June 8, 2023, https://theconversation.com/cambridge-analytica-is-more-than-a-data-breach-its-a-human-rights-problem-96601.
[109] The University of South Africa's study on the "Violation of Human Rights on Social Media"
[110] Marcus Michaelsen, "Exit and Voice in a Digital Age: Iran's Exiled Activists and the Authoritarian State," Globalizations 15, no. 2 (2016): 248–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1263078.
[111] S. Hankey and D. O Clunaigh, "Rethinking Risk and Security of Human Rights Defenders in the Digital Age," Journal of Human Rights Practice 5, no. 3 (2013): 535–47, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/hut023.

dissent. This chilling effect inhibits individuals from expressing their opinions freely, limiting the diversity of perspectives and hindering the human rights discourse. Furthermore, social media surveillance jeopardizes the safety and security of human rights advocates. Researchers[112] have highlighted how governments and authoritarian regimes exploit social media platforms to monitor activists, curbing their freedom of expression and subjecting them to harassment, persecution, or even legal action. Surveillance practices can be used to identify and target individuals engaged in human rights advocacy, impeding their ability to operate effectively and compromising their personal well-being.[113]

To address the issues of control and surveillance on social media, there now exist several collaborative efforts among civil society organizations, tech companies, and policymakers that work towards creating policy proposals that could help make crucial steps towards providing a safer online space. Their research emphasizes that there exists a great need for governments to enact legislation that safeguards the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, establishing clear boundaries for surveillance practices. These proposals ask for social media platforms to prioritize user privacy, transparency, and accountability, while also implementing robust content moderation policies to combat the dissemination of harmful and abusive content. This is particularly relevant doth in the case of democratic states, such as the USA, as well as the regimes with authoritarian tendencies, such as in China.[114]

In the example of People's Republic of China (China), who is not new to the application of form of digital surveillance, observers note that over the year their censorship and surveillance programs have become more sophisticated. Researchers have argued that, the goal of Chinese surveillance activities, has not been to simply halt digitally-based political dialogue, but to actively search for signs of collective action potential, clip social ties, and therefore disrupt or mitigate the impact of these budding social movements.[115] Recently this was made visible also in the case of social media surveillance related to the protests that were happening in Hong Kong between 2019 and 2020, where members of the public started to take over the discourse of user privacy on social media. While the protest consisted in largely peaceful massive protests around the city and was organized mostly by

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[112] Adrian Shahbaz and Allie Funk, "Social Media Surveillance," Freedom House, accessed July 14, 2023, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media/social-media-surveillance.

[113] "Social Media Surveillance and Its Threat to Freedom: Insights from 'Freedom on the Net 2019 Key Finding'".

[114] Kalliopi Kyriakopoulou, "Authoritarian States and Internet Social Media: Instruments of Democratisation or Instruments of Control?," Human Affairs 21, no. 1 (2011): 18–26, https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-011-0003-y.)

[115] GARY KING, JENNIFER PAN, and MARGARET E. ROBERTS, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," American Political Science Review 107, no. 2 (2013): 326–43, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055413000014.

students, started to take its shaped around 2019, when Hong Kong authorities put on the agenda legal revisions allowing Hong Kong's criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China, where rights are routinely violated.

This proposal, of course, did not resonate well with Chinese authorities and social protests began to turn violent, as demands of the public remained ignored, and police authorities began using excessive force, as well as put in place new restrictions on expression and assembly. The activist and protesters largely used social media and were openly relaying on the social media platforms as s tool to plan, organize and execute actions around the city. Most famously they even used social media as launch pad to spread the call to action for international support. China who has always been an attempt observer of citizen's usage of internet and social media took notices of this activities. Moreover, as has been recently revealed by Yu Yintao, the leader of the engineering team in the U.S. for ByteDance, the parent company of the social platform TikTok in 2023, during the hearing for an alleged wrongful dismissal lawsuit, the ruling Chinese Communist Party also used the data, collected by the social media company, to identify and locate protesters in Hong Kong. While these allegations are still being investigated, this example shows that social media can be a huge threat for privacy and freedom of human rights advocates. Such activities, which go far beyond that just China, in which states and companies participate, represent an enormous breach of trust between the user and the social media platforms that allowed a party, with private political interests, to have "superuser credential" — also known as a "god credential"[116].

However, it is important to acknowledge that surveillance of human rights activists and organizations is not limited to authoritarian regimes. Even in countries with democratic systems, surveillance activities have been carried out by governments. As previously mentioned in the context of hacktivism, both the U.S. and UK governments have engaged in data collection and monitoring without the explicit consent of the individuals involved. Additionally, during the Black Lives Matter protests, U.S. law enforcement authorities attempted to collect and analyze social media content to identify and prosecute activists, even for perceived offenses such as looting.[117] Moreover, Europe is not exempt from this issue either. For instance, the lower house of the Polish parliament is currently considering a draft electronic communications law that could potentially grant authorities easier access to citizens' emails and social media messages, thereby facilitating electronic surveillance.[118]

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[116] Chad de Guzman, "Bytedance Accused of Helping China Spy on Hong Kong Activists," Time, June 7, 2023, https://time.com/6285368/bytedance-tiktok-china-hong-kong-activists/.

[117] The case will be more specifically analyze in chapter 3.

[118] Bartosz Sieniawski, "Polish Government Working on Controversial Surveillance Bill," www.euractiv.com, January 20, 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/polish-government-working-on-controversial-surveillance-bill/.

These examples therefore demonstrate that while social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for human rights advocacy, they have also become tools of control and surveillance. Privacy violations, the spread of harmful content, and the targeting of human rights advocates on these platforms' present significant challenges to the effectiveness of human rights advocacy. As a result, advocates are faced with the need to navigate the complex landscape of social media surveillance while striving to advance the cause of human rights.

### 2.2.2 *The rise of populism, propaganda and fake news*

Although populism has been a prominent force in the Western world for several decades, its influence has reached new heights in recent years. Populist parties and personalities have gained traction, winning elections across Europe. Multiple scholars[119] have offered various explanations for this phenomenon, such as economic insecurity and anti-migration sentiment within the European Union (EU). While these factors are significant, it is essential to recognize the role that social media and online communication play in supporting populist causes, which often harbor anti-human rights sentiments, including elements of xenophobia and homophobia, and mask themselves under conservative Catholic beliefs. Populist parties and politicians have discovered that social media platforms provide the ideal communication tool for their agenda.[120] These platforms offer low-cost and highly personalized content, allowing them to tailor their messages to specific target audiences. This level of customization contributes to the effectiveness of their communication strategies and helps mobilize support for their populist causes.

Before diving further into the way social media in connected to supporting the populist agenda and why this is a problem for human rights advocacy, however, let us briefly discuss what is the meaning used behind the deeply contested term populism. Definition of populism operationalized in this thesis, due to focus of this analysis, understands populism as a communication style that is distinctly anti-elitist and claims to work in the interest of the "ordinary man" head of the family and religious observer.[121] Thus, populism pits ordinary citizens themselves against "the corrupted elites" that they identify in the traditional parties ( in the recants cases used a synonymous of the

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[119] Yotam Margalit, "Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered," Journal of Economic Perspectives 33, no. 4 (2019): 152–70, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.4.152.

[120] MAX SCHAUB and DAVIDE MORISI, "Voter Mobilisation in the Echo Chamber: Broadband Internet and the Rise of Populism in Europe," European Journal of Political Research 59, no. 4 (2020): 752–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12373.

[121] 1. JAN JAGERS and STEFAAN WALGRAVE, "Populism as Political Communication Style: An Empirical Study of Political Parties' Discourse in Belgium," European Journal of Political Research 46, no. 3 (2007): 319–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x..

left wing parties) and often digs in the fears and worries that the populist propaganda is responsible in seeding in the first place. This is often the case of when populist politician has shared false numbers regarding welcoming of immigrant in their national territory.[122] This kind of conceptualization, thus, emphasizes the link between populism and its communication strategy, in relation to relation to mobilizing the supporters.[123]

In this vein of research, scholars have identified three key reasons why social media represent the turning point in success of populism.[124] Firstly, populists often make for an untraditional political parties and for this reason they often need to circumvent gatekeepers in the mainstream media, especially in countries where tabloid media outlets are weak or unsupportive.[125] Secondly, part of their main essence is being anti-elitist and people-centric, and this essence calls for a direct connection to "the people" which social media guarantees. Lastly, populist famously tend to rely on borderline truths and forged content that would never be easily covered and spread by the majority of the mainstream media, which differently from social media platforms are more regulated by national laws and want to maintain their reputation as believable sources of information.

Researchers emphasize also that populist parties tend to base their campaign on the personality of one candidate over the overall party and this gives the chance for the politician to build something similar to a fanbase over than a political support. This is also mirrored by the interaction that this personality has with their "fan". Representatives of populist party do not shy from addressing their supporter as fan. It is not a case that all the populist personality always interacts with people through their personal profiles and never a institutionalize one, this makes them appear as more real and direct. In this sense social media allows populist personality to connect with people like any other instrument would never allow. This concept of fanbase and personality is strictly correlated to use of social media by this politician that use their personal page to publicly paint

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[122] "Why Europe's New Populists Tell so Many Lies – and Do It so Shamelessly | Catherine Fieschi," The Guardian, September 30, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/30/europe-populist-lie-shamelessly-salvini-johnson.

[123] Moreover, this relations is so crucial to the concept that some scholars have even defined populism as a "communication phenomenon" in which the media channel used to spread the message is as important as the message itself . De Vreese, C.H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C. & Stanyer, J. (2018). Populism as an expression of political communication content and style: A new perspective. International Journal of Press/Politics 23(4): 423–438.

[124] MAX SCHAUB and DAVIDE MORISI, "Voter Mobilisation in the Echo Chamber: Broadband Internet and the Rise of Populism in Europe," European Journal of Political Research 59, no. 4 (2020): 752–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12373.

[125] However, this does not mean that traditional media are always against the populist movement. This is the case for example of tabloid such The daily Mail or The Sun that had a big role in the pro-Brexit campaign. ("Did the Mail and Sun Help Swing the UK towards Brexit?," The Guardian, June 24, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jun/24/mail-sun-uk-brexit-newspapers.)

themselves as the "ordinary man" who watches the football matches of his favorite team and share cute pictures of kittens on their profile.[126] The type of content that the typical populist personality share, that often delicately balances on a thin line between unverified and outrightly forged. This is an extremely relevant factor in the overall negative impact of social media especially since false information appear to spread on social media "farther, fasted, deeper and more broadly than the truth."[127]

The use of the infamous "fake news" by populist politicians and organizations is not a new phenomenon and it has been broadly discussed in literature and for this reason the goal here is not to focus on the phenomena of fake news, but to highlight/make visible how social media that is structurally designed to amplify sensationalist content with little to none fact-checking[128] and in that way represent a fertile field for the spread of dangerous and falsely based propaganda that is often characterized by a file rouge of anti-immigration discourse that does opposite to the principle of universality of human rights. This sentiment got particularly heated during the waves of the European immigration crisis when anti-migrants and refugees narrative was being pushed all over Europe proving how dangerous the far-right populist propaganda was becoming in inciting the people against human rights. For example, in 2015, Salvini, prominent far right party representative in Italy who famously employs populist communication managed to triple his personal following on Facebook by capitalizing on the refugee crisis[129]. In particularly he shared fake information in his posts that claimed Italy was 'welcoming' much more migrants than it actually was. Man of the Salvini's followers, however, were thus tricked into believing migrants represent 30 % of the Italian population, when, migrants only account for the 9 %. Moreover, the fake statistical information importantly contributed to the spread of hate crimes across the country that were largely targeted towards black people regardless of their status as immigrants.[130]

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[126] Jason Horowitz, "Matteo Salvini Likes Nutella and Kittens. It's All Part of a Social Media Strategy.," The New York Times, January 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/04/world/europe/matteo-salvini-italy-social-media-nutella-barilla.html.

[127] Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, "The Spread of True and False News Online," Science 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1146–51, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559.

[128] The fact-checking ability if both Facebook and Twitter (the two main platform for populist propaganda) have been openly critizied for being bias due to their left-wing preconception by both their respective owner reason why are not well perceived and dismissed by the populist politics that have an excuse to ignore them( OpIndia Staff, "Facebook and Twitter, Now Both Agree That so-Called 'fact-Checkers' Are Biased and Useless," OpIndia, June 15, 2023, https://www.opindia.com/2023/06/twitter-elon-musk-fact-checkers-biased-huge-liars-facebook-agreed-2021/. )

[129] Theodora Serena Petropoulos, "Breaking Point: How Migrant Crises Have Influenced the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Italy, Germany, and the UK," Senior Theses International Studies, Fordham University, Spring 5-22-2021. https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=international_senior

[130] Annalisa Camilli, "C'è Un Aumento Degli Attacchi Razzisti in Italia?," Internazionale, February 27, 2019, https://www.internazionale.it/bloc-notes/annalisa-camilli/2019/02/27/attacchi-razzisti-italia.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that social media platforms utilize filtering algorithms that direct emotionally charged and potentially misleading content to users who are likely to resonate with it, thus amplifying the phenomenon known as the "echo chamber."[131] This concept is closely related to the idea of the "social media bubble" or "filter bubble," which is the result of how the "for you" pages on social media are curated. These pages are designed to show users content that aligns with their personal interests, creating a tailored experience. However, when taken to the extreme, this can lead users to exist solely within a bubble where they are exposed only to viewpoints that align with their own and content that reinforces their beliefs, thereby creating an echo chamber effect. This phenomenon is particularly evident on platforms like Twitter, where the so-called "Twitter bubble" has become so pronounced that even mainstream news outlets have taken notice and addressed it. Journalists, such as Chris Cillizza from CNN, have highlighted the disparities between the dominant narratives emerging on Twitter and traditional opinion polls, illustrating how extreme voices thriving on the platform may be distorting political discourse and steering political parties away from reality.[132]

It is important to note that the findings discussed in the previous paragraphs do not necessarily apply to mainstream political parties. Scholars emphasize that established parties typically maintain stronger relationships with the mainstream press and, therefore, do not need to circumvent them. Furthermore, these parties are generally committed to operating on the basis of factual information, as relying on false information would undermine their credibility. Moreover, the levels of social media engagement between populist leaders/parties and mainstream political leaders are significantly different. Analyzing the social media communication of populist leaders and parties, researchers have observed that populist posts generate nearly 3,000 more reactions and 500 more shares and comments compared to publications from mainstream political leaders on platforms such as Facebook.[133]

By now, it is undeniable that social media has played a significant role in empowering politicians who have skillfully utilized these platforms for their populist agendas. Former U.S. President Donald Trump, who famously relied on Twitter to fuel his campaign filled with anti-migration

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[131] Andrew Bennett and Didem Seyis, "The Online Market's Invisible Hand: Internet Media and Rising Populism," Political Studies, 2021, 003232172110332, https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217211033230.

[132] Kalev Leetaru, "The Social Media Filter Bubble's Corrosive Impact on Democracy and the Press," Forbes, July 20, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2019/07/20/the-social-media-filter-bubbles-corrosive-impact-on-democracy-and-the-press/.

[133]"Press Release," DEMOS, accessed July 14, 2023, https://demos-h2020.eu/en/populist-leaders-thrive-on-social-media#citizens%20reactions.

rhetoric and controversial statements, once even admitted to this, when he said: "Maybe I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Twitter."[134]

This propaganda-like use of social media is not limited to politicians but is also adopted by organizations that align with the ideologies of populist parties, typically right-wing or far-right groups. One example can be found in the United States, where abortion and reproductive rights have been at the center of heated debates. With the active ban of abortion in 14 U.S. states, people are increasingly turning to the internet and social media to seek information and form opinions on the topic.[135] [136] Moreover, as journalistic research[137] has revealed, online information related to abortion tends to be false and misleading, often containing disinformation that aims to misinform and hinder abortion access. Anti-choice organizations regularly publish intentionally misleading or false content about abortion, presenting it as objective information while disregarding scientific evidence. Furthermore, this type of content like for populist leaders and parties' communication is being pushed forward by social media company over the evidence-based ones.

Moreover, social media platforms are owned by private companies that rely on advertising revenue, sometimes accepting funds from fraudulent sources. The Center for Countering Digital Hate reported that between January 2020 and September 2021, Facebook alone accepted between $115,400 and $140,667 for 92 ads promoting the concept of "abortion pill reversal,"[138]— despite its dangerousness to patients. Although Facebook has acknowledged these mistakes, little has been done to address the problem of spreading false narratives and misinformation on their platforms. This information not only poses risks to individual users who come across it while researching but also contributes to the larger narrative that stigmatizes and taboos abortion, particularly in religiously influenced cultures. In conclusion, it can therefore be argued that social media has helped foster the populist agenda, both to its parties and supporters, with significant leverage and an incredible degree of influence over democratic processes, ultimately shaping public perceptions that contradict key social norms of human rights. Where establishing and enforcing transparent

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[134] "Trump Heaps Praise on Twitter and Denies Using It to Spread Falsehoods," The Guardian, March 16, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/15/donald-trump-twitter-fox-news-interview-wiretapping.

[135] The New York Times, "Tracking the States Where Abortion Is Banned," The New York Times, May 24, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html.

[136] This number is adjust at July 2023

[137] Jenna Sherman, "How Abortion Misinformation and Disinformation Spread Online," Scientific American, June 24, 2022, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-abortion-misinformation-and-disinformation-spread-online/.

[138] "Endangering Women for Profit - Center for Countering Digital Hate: CCDH," Center for Countering Digital Hate | CCDH, May 13, 2022, https://counterhate.com/research/endangering-women-for-profit/.

regulations of media markets and ownership will be essential for democracies to begin loosening the invisible grip that private tech giants have on public communication.[139]


## 2.3 Ambiguous dynamic: The phenomena of "clicktivism" and "slacktivism"

In this section, we will delve into the complex and ambiguous dynamics that shape the effectiveness of social media in the realm of human rights advocacy. While the previous sections have explored both the positive and negative impacts of social media, the focus here is on understanding the nuanced nature of evaluating its effectiveness. It is important to recognize that assessments of social media's effectiveness, whether positive or negative, heavily depend on individual goals and interpretations. In an era characterized by ongoing technological advancements and the constant emergence of new social media platforms, these platforms have the ability to both positively and negatively influence political engagement. One visible and widely observed phenomenon is the emergence of "clicktivism" or, in more critical terms, "slacktivism," which represents a novel form of political engagement facilitated by social media.

From a more cyber-pessimist side towards the spread of social media and technology,[140] scholar such as Morozov, argue that the rise of social media has contributed to "slacktivism" or what he find to be "a feel good activism that has zero political or social impact," which only aims to portrait an imagine of activists as actors that have "a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook group"[141]. This type of activism supposedly, represents promotion and the need of instant visibility a performative art of solidarity and according to the critics it overshadows the need of actual action in the real world. As argues in a similar way Flaherty, who explores the concept of social media empathy,"/e/mpathy can only come from looking someone in the eye and hearing their voice in person, and is something that any progressive or radical movement for change needs"[142] and it is therefore something that "likes"[143] will never be able to top due to the ephemeral nature of social media.

[139] Andrew Bennett and Didem Seyis, "The Online Market's Invisible Hand: Internet Media and Rising Populism,"
[140] Gerbaudo, "Tweets and the Streets"
[141]Evgeny Morozov, "The Brave New World of Slacktivism," Foreign Policy, May 19, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/05/19/the-brave-new-world-of-slacktivism/.
[142] 1. "No More Heroes: Grassroots Challenges to the Savior Mentality," jordan flaherty, accessed July 14, 2023, https://jordanflaherty.org/saviors/.
[143] As in Social media likes thumbs ups

As previously argued this phenomena of slacktivism is also known among lesser pessimists as "clicktivism" and is being attached mostly to the newer younger generation, known as Gen(eration) Z,[144] which is a generation that has being criticized for their approach to activism and social media, in particularly by former president of United Stated Barak Obama, who stated in a speech that he gets "a sense among certain young people on social media that the way of making change is to be as judgmental as possible about other people", and believes that in this way activism would turn into a competition among users on who is the "wokest" person in the room.[145] [146]

That said, all key social movement that took place after the Arab spring until now have at least partly been influenced by the social media megaphone, as shows a plethora of empirical research,[147] that identifies how NGOs, members off social movements, activist, witnesses, and citizens have rushed to social media platforms, such twitter Instagram or TikTok, to spread the word on the injustice they are currently experiencing or witnessing. If the previous subsection of this thesis examined the positive and negative effects that social media has brought to human rights activism however, the impact cannot be seen as either black or white. The case of clicktivism/slacktivism perfectly highlights the dichotomy and ambiguousness of measuring the net effects of social media on human rights advocacy. That ultimately calls for the ambivalent approach, that is approach that "weighs the evidence on balance and recognizes that change is both difficult and possible", where "social media is an unfolding terrain in terms of both the technology it relies upon and the ways that citizens, corporations, and states make use of it."[148]

In fact, not all experts largely regard social media as useless or emphasize negative impact of such kind of activism, while policy experts tend to take up an even more positive stance. For example, AI Spain's mobilization officer, Maribel Tellado claims that "digital activism does not kill or replace the star of the street, but makes it shine brighter."[149] Moreover, as emphasizes García-Estévez, a sociologist specializing in digital activism, having an apologetic view on the topic and

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[144]  born during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

[145] Woke in this context means: aware of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)

[146] "Barack Obama Challenges 'woke' Culture," BBC News, October 30, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50239261.

[147] Rane, H., & Salem, S. (2012). Social media, social movements and the diffusion of ideas in the Arab uprisings. *Journal of international communication*, *18*(1), 97-111.Kidd, D., & McIntosh, K. (2016). Social media and social movements. Sociology Compass, 10(9), 785-794. Mundt, M., Ross, K., & Burnett, C. M. (2018). Scaling social movements through social media: The case of Black Lives Matter. *Social Media+ Society*, *4*(4), 2056305118807911. Cammaerts, B. (2021). The new-new social movements: Are social media changing the ontology of social movements?. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *26*(3), 343-358.

[148] Kidd, D., & McIntosh, K. (2016). Social media and social movements. *Sociology Compass*, *10*(9), 785-794: 785.

[149]Celia Fernández, "Activism or 'Clicktivism'? Solidarity and Posturing on Social Media," EL PAÍS English, January 7, 2022, https://english.elpais.com/usa/2022-01-07/activism-or-clicktivism-solidarity-and-posturing-on-social-media.html.

defines this activism as "low-involvement activism," which causes pressing issues to the mainstream stage and into the public agenda[150]. After all, even though limited in power, "clicktivism" has proved useful in widely spreading nonmainstream notions and ideas that were not widely spread to the public. People who generally were not introduced to specific advocacy topic have the chance to get basic informations that could spark a deeper interest that otherwise would have never started. It is true that a single post on social media or a story available for 24 hours will not change the world on its very own but thousands of them together can spread new ideals.

In this perspective clicktivism can thus serve as a poster to show different pathways to human rights progress to the public.[151] Scholars who criticize "clicktivism" too often assume that social movements fueled by social media are organized by members with "weak ties"—participants who do not know well.[152] However, this assumption is based on the belief that people who connect online are doing things only online, and that the online world is somehow less real than, and disconnected from, the offline one.[153] Exactly the opposite, however, shows a study[154] that found Americans who promote causes using social media by creating posts, joining a group on Facebook or taking other similar actions, actually participate more in offline activist efforts than non-social media promoters. As highlight researchers: "The presumption was that these individuals were replacing more 'meaningful' actions with simple clicks and shares. But what we found is that they're actually supplementing—not replacing— actions like donating, volunteering and planning events."[155]

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that symbolic action online carries its own power, albeit contingent upon the context and cultural backdrop in which it occurs. The act of sharing something on social media can serve as a cultural signal to one's social network, gradually contributing to social change by reshaping cultural norms. This holds particular significance in repressive societies

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[150] Noelia García-Estévez, "Origin, evolution and current status of digital activism and its social commitment. Ciberactivism, hacktivism and slacktivism," in Actas del II Congreso internacional Move. net sobre movimientos sociales y TIC, pp. 139-156 (2018).

[151] 1Deen Freelon, Alice Marwick, and Daniel Kreiss, "False Equivalencies: Online Activism from Left to Right," Science 369, no. 6508 (2020): 1197–1201, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb2428.

[152] Jim Dwyer, "When Official Truth Collides with Cheap Digital Technology," The New York Times, July 30, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/30/nyregion/30about.html.

[153] Tufekci, Zeynep: Twitter and Tear Gas. The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest. New Haven: Yale University Press 2017. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14848.

[154] conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide

[155] Senior Associate Dean and Executive Director of the Center for Social Impact Communication Denise Keyes was quoted in the research report.

where even something as seemingly simple as a tweet can be considered an act of bravery. Considering these factors, it becomes crucial to remain vigilant and attentive when examining how social media impacts the landscape of human rights advocacy. As the following section demonstrates, social media's influence on non-state advocacy actors in critical human rights cases can manifest both positive and negative aspects, underscoring the need for comprehensive analysis.

# 3   EXAMINING NET POSITIVE AND NET NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

In the following paragraphs two cases are taken in consideration to depict on concrete terms what social media has done for human rights advocacy over the years. The case analysis will start by giving a historical background of the events of each case and go into what social media have represented for this human rights movement.

## 3.1 Egypt's digital revolution of 2011

The Arab spring as a whole have represented an important turn of event in the history of human rights and political right in the Arab world. Furthermore, they have forever impacted how most people perceived the utilities of social media outside of the regular usage of it. [156]

The Egypt revolution of 2011 is one of the anti-government protest that spread in the Arab word in the 2010s. This movement of uprising known as Arap Spring began in Tunisia and spread in Egypt as well as Yemen, Libya, Syria Bahrain and more bringing major uprisings and social violence occurred including riots, civil wars, or insurgencies. In this time social media played a significant role facilitating communication, organization and interaction of people taking part to this movement. However, the impact that SM had on this uprising changed per country, while it played a gamechanger role in some country it had close to none impact in country such as Syria and Yemen where social media and in particularly Facebook (a platform that was central of information sharing and impactful for other Arab country) didn't have a lot of national users[157] .

On the other hand, the movement happening in Tunisia and Egypt were affected in different ways and forms but the usage of social media by tech savvy's member of movement organization.

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[156]   Philip   N.   Howard   and   Muzammil   M.   Hussain,   Democracy's   Fourth   Wave?,   2013, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199936953.001.0001.
[157] Ibid.

Egypt in particularly has a long story of hit and miss in the relationship of social media and social movement. When looking at the impact of social media in the Egyptian uprising the mind immediately goes to the events of Tahrir square, but to deeply understand the concept and correlation we need to look at a bigger picture, a larger context that includes the history of online activist in Egypt and how some of them were able to translate online activist into offline protests.

Although, all of the Arab spring have emphasize the smart use of social media for their benefits for reason of focus I have decided to solely focus on the Egypt portion of the movement which has also been remembered with the name "Facebook" or "Twitter revolution".[158]

In analyzing the case it is important to look at the whole build up of the movement and not just focus on the final steps of it. For this reason I dedicate a section to all the previous attempt and the following step they took in redirecting their focus to then reach their goal.

### 3.1.1 The buildup of the protest

In the 2010's Egypt with a population of 81 million was the most populated country of the middle east. In particularly young people (age 15 to 29) made up just over one third of the total population. [159] This information is particularly important when put in the prospect of Nearly three-fifths of the Greater Cairo population (the third largest urbanic area of the Islamic world after Jakarta and Greater Istanbul) is under 30 years old and unemployment rate among the youth in the city of Cairo is higher than the national rate. This makes Egypt a prosper area for the translation of online activism to offline actions according to the concept of "biographical availability" meaning "the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities" [160].

Young educated unemployed Egyptians with access to internet, powerful ideas and a desire of change, is the group that started the uprisings.

The protests spanned in a timeline from 2004 to 2011 aimed to better life quality for Egypt and most of all the step down of President Hosni Mubarak who by the point of when the protests started had already been in office for twenty-three years. In November 2004 the first of this kind of movement

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[158] Merlyna Lim, "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011," Journal of Communication 62, no. 2 (2012): 231–48, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01628.x.

[159] City Population (2011, May 4). Egypt. Retrieved from http://www.citypopulation.de/ Egypt.html

[160] Doug McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer," American Journal of Sociology 92, no. 1 (1986): 64–90, https://doi.org/10.1086/228463.

was founded. Kefay, which means "enough" in Egyptian Arabic, the unofficial moniker of the Egyptian Movement for Change and first anti-government coalitional movement that completely worked online by using blogs, online forums and websites. The use of their own media made possible for them to not be depended from legacy media that were often censured by the government.[161]

However, Kefay starts its decline when it became evident that regardless of the successful decision of naming its movement with something elusive and abstract it was unable to successfully reach beyond its natural audience, intellectual and experts mostly based in the city of Cairo. Although it focused on issues of interest for the whole population it didn't "speak" to the working class and youth of the country that fell detach from the movement bringing Kefay to a decline in 2007.

Following the steps of Kefay in 2007 a group of young Egyptians of different political orientation formed a new labor movement "The April 6th Youth". This was the very first opposition group that implemented the use of Facebook in their agenda. The movement had the goal of expand the labor protest and turning into a into general prodemocracy movement. This broth the group in 2006 to create a Facebook group called "April 6th Youth Movement" to support the worker of an industrial town that as soon to start a strike on April 6th 2008, from that point on the group evolved into one of the most influential anti-Mubarak movement. [162]

The April 6th movement directly learned from Kefary and applied some of the same strategic such as using blogs an forums to communicate but added on the use of at that time new tools that were popular among the younger Egyptian population by that point: Twitter and Facebook. The latter was particularly significant for the groups and it was the platform where they registered the most growth where they started with 300 users and got to 3000 in the spam of 3 days[163]. After "the" April 6th protest a larger national and international attention stroked the movement making their reach grow up to 70000 members on their Facebook group, an astonishing number when compared to the total Egyptian user of the platform: 900000. The more they exposed themselves the more the movement became popular. It became a "hit" thing to do online to support the group, and its trendy element it was successful in bringing young people closer to the democratic cause. However, it became very obvious how this number of followers wasn't representative of the actual supporter of the movement and how this number did not translate to offline action. Clicking like is easy but show up represented the major difficulty.

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[161] Howard, P. N. (2010). The digital origins of dictatorship and democracy: Information technology and political Islam. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://academic.oup.com/book/5464.

[162] Lim, "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011,"

[163] MIT TechTV (2011, April 29). CIS Starr Forum: Egypt's Revolution [Video webcast]. Cambridge: MIT Center for International Studies. Retrieved from http://techtv.mit.edu/videos/12512-cis-starr-forum-egypts-revolution

### 3.1.2 *From an individual action to a social movement - "We Are All Khaled Said."*

All this past movements, trials and errors created momentum for the 2011 protest of Tahrir square.

This all began when a Wael Ghonim, a 29-year-old Google marketing executive Egyptian who worked in Dubai stumbled across a picture on his Facebook, a picture of the disfigured face of Khaled Said, a 28th years old Egyptian. Soon after Wael Ghonim found out that he was beaten to death in the street by the Egyptian police and decided in that moment to create a Facebook page "Kullena Khaled Said" meaning "We Are All Khaled Said." And immediately explained "Today they killed Khaled. If I don't act for his sake, tomorrow they will kill me.". In that moment without realizing Ghorim gave voice to all the young Egyptians who had been oppressed for a long time, enjoying no rights in their own homeland. The culmination of frustration of the Egyptian online population became evident when the page gained 300 people in three minutes and more than 250000 in three months[164]. The movement grew very fast offline action started immortally, starting from June to August 2010, the group held five "silent stands", sit in involving thousands of protesters occupying public spaces holding pictures of a full of life Khaled Said[165]. Differently from the previous movement Ghorim was able to translate the online support to actual offline action naturally thanks also to the way he "accidentally" decided to communicate his message. As previously stated, people feel more connected to individual stories because of the so called "psychic numbing" and the alarming "juxtaposition of pictures of Said alive and dead'' gave a face to what it meant to live under Mubarak regime[166]. This group, more than any of the previous movement, was successful in collecting a variegated pool of supporters, young, workers, parents, soccer fans (who turned out to be the most organized participants in the Tahrir square, thanks to the expertise and resilience gained over the year as soccer fans[167]).

### 3.1.3 *The tag of war of Tahrir Square*

All this effort and online activism culminated on the "national police day" January 25. On the lead up to the protest, online posters, banners, and viral videos were disseminated all over Facebook and

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[164] Jose Antonio Vargas, "Spring Awakening," The New York Times, February 17, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html.

[165] Lim, "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011,"

[166] Mona Eltahawy, "Generation Mubarak/Generation Facebook," HuffPost, May 25, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/generation-mubarakgenerat_b_625409.

[167] James M. Dorsey, "Soccer Fans Play Key Role in Egyptian Protests," Bleacher Report, October 3, 2017, http://bleacherreport.com/articles/585682-soccer-fans-play-key-role-in-egyptianprotests.

Twitter all connected by the *file rouge* of the hashtag #Jan25th. When We are all Khaled Said's followers received an invite to protest on January 25, more than 50,000 clicked ''yes''[168]. However, how proved by the previous two antigovernment movement this is not enough to ensure a successful protest, and it is here that the movement signficially diverged from its predecessors. Taking a lesson from the "clicktivism" slander, Ghorim understood that Facebook facilitated the expansion of the oppositional movement beyond strong network ties to include individuals with weaker ties to the movement and to each other but to assure to translate this enthusiasm to the actual square in days leading to 25 January, mobilization efforts were geared toward reaching regular Egyptians through text messages and offline means such as flyers, pamphlets, and words of mouth. Waleed Rashed, the co-founder of the April 6th Youth Movement, said that he started ''informing'' taxi drivers about the #Jan25th protest as early as 15 January:  "Every time I was in a cab, I would call Ahmed on my cell phone and talk loudly about planning a big protest in Tahrir Square for January 25th, because I knew that they couldn't stop themselves talking about what they'd overheard. Eventually, on January 23rd, a cabbie asked if I'd heard about this big demonstration that was happening in two days."[169] (MIT TVTech, 2011).

By that point the online activism worked in gathering the international attention and bring the cameras to the square where soon after history would be made, while the offline word of mouth ensured that the most were informed of the existing protest.

On the day of the protest activist leaders and average participants used Twitter, Al Jazeera's social media feeds, and the interactive Websites of CNN and the BBC to reach beyond Tahrir square to a global audience. They globalized the movement and won international support to protect and sustain the uprising. Social media, especially Twitter, and global media allowed a worldwide audience to listen to the voice of the Egyptian opposition rather than to the state's point of view. But just as activists had a longer history of using digital media, the authoritarian regimes had a history of responding to to this digital communication. The government soon started to block down groups and turned off the internet connection.[170] When the government temporarily shut down the Internet, the effect was to ignite even more resistance, domestically and internationally.[171] Soon later President Mubarack unlished when would then be remember as "Battle of the Camels," a sly reference to a seventh-century internecine struggle among Muslims, a horde of man allegedly part of the undercover

[168]Rita Sakr, "Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 40, no. 4 (2013): 479–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2013.853975..

[169] MIT TechTV (2011, April 29). CIS Starr Forum: Egypt's Revolution [Video webcast]. Cambridge: MIT Center for International Studies. Retrieved from http://techtv.mit.edu/videos/12512-cis-starr-forum-egypts-revolution

[170] Lim, "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011,"

[171] Ibid.

agents force of Mubarak's regime attacked the crowd of protest killing a dozen of people[172]. In that moment something ultimately clicked in the mind of the protesters, letting loose thugs on camelback was glaring evidence of how desperate and out-of-touch Mubarak's regime had become. The network and internet shutdown forced the last part of population and worried families, who were unable to call their younger relatives, to rush to Tahrir Square. This last attempts of shutting down the protest from President Mubarak were proof of his inability to understand the energy of the youthful protesters. "Camels and sticks versus satellite phones and Twitter. Seventeenth century, meet twenty-first century"[173]. It was perhaps when president Mubarack shut down the internet connection and consequently the social media platforms that the protest hit the point of not return. A checkmate caused by the final straw of yet another violation of people's freedom.

### 3.1.4   Conclusions

Scholars and opinions have for a long time discussed the meaning of all of this, the leverage social media had or hadn't on making this revolution happen. In the last segment of the revolution and immediately after referring to this events as "Facebook revolution" or "Twitter Revolution" became popular arising more and more skeptic of the actual role this platform could have had on overthrowing a government. On one side there are the "cyber-utopians" who soon started to support the idea that what happen was indeed a direct correlation to the use of social media. On the other side there are the "Cyber-skeptic" that find hard to believe that any of the great accomplishment of people could ever be connected to the use of this tools and keep on understate and devalue the role of social media and technology as communication and organizing tools. In this second group it is particularly loud the voice of Malcom Gladwell who in multiple essays and interview pointed out at the absurdity of thinking that fakebook had something to with the success of this movement, "People protested and brought down governments before Facebook was invented"[174]. Although true, it is irrelevant to the point. Yes, on one hand uprisings in the past happened without social media, buyt on the pther hand scholar argue that freedom and change has spread around the world over the decade by electronic network and invention[175]. In this ottic past uprising had their fair share of help from the tools of their

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[172]  Zeynep Tufekci Twitter and Tear Gas. The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest 2017 https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14848
[173] Ibid.
[174]Malcolm Gladwell, "Does Egypt Need Twitter?," The New Yorker, February 2, 2011, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/does-egypt-need-twitter.
[175]Gerbaudo, "Tweets and the Streets"

era, the American Civil war was supported by the spread of the use of telegraph, while the French revolution was profoundly impacted by the invention of Dr. Joseph Guillotine.

Facebook as is didn't make the revolution happen, and it is clear from the events that lead up to the uprising that the frustration of the people and need and desire for change were the most vital ingredient but this does not mean that social media had nor role. Indeed, Facebook and Twitter provided activist with a vital tool, making possible for them to spread the ideals, information, find support, comfort and coordinate the masses. online is where people saw and shared the haunting videos and photographs that then proceed to inspire them into taking their action offline, online is where they found the logistics of the protest, the where and the when. One of the protesters, Fawaz Rashed, that was present in that days in Tahir square twitted: "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.".

And perhaps the best proof that social media did have an important role in supporting Egypt and in general the Arab spring is found in the fact that dictators treated them as such. The months during which the Arab Spring took place had the most national blackouts, network shutdowns, and tool blockages to date[176].

The above analysis has showcased the significance social media as crucial tools in organizing a successful initial protest in Egypt. All that social networking served as a catalyst build up to a movement that lasted for 17 days and ultimately led to the downfall of Mubarak's regime. It acted as a pivotal message to apprehensive Egyptians, who were observing from the sidelines, showing the potential for a triumphant revolution in Egypt and encouraging their involvement in the subsequent protest in Tahrir square. This particular demonstration dealt a severe blow to Mubarak's security forces and most of all highlighted how unprepared was the government to handle the build up of the protests that were happening online. This unpreparedness resulted in clumsy attempts to infiltrate the online activity and surveil the activists[177].

Lastly, it's important to point out how the fleeting sense of accomplishment from the revolution quickly dissipated when Mubarak's oppressive government was merely substituted by the equally repressive successor Muslim Brotherhood, until a military coup ousted them in July 2013[178].

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[176]Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, Democracy's Fourth Wave?,p.65
[177] Sam Kimball, "After Arab Spring, Surveillance in Egypt Intensifies," The Intercept, March 27, 2015, https://theintercept.com/2015/03/09/arab-spring-surveillance-egypt-intensifies/.
[178] "Egypt Five Years on: Was It Ever a 'Social Media Revolution'?," The Guardian, January 25, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/egypt-5-years-on-was-it-ever-a-social-media-revolution.

Eventually, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took over, and under his rule, the state's repression, intimidation, and assaults on press freedom have escalated from a dire state to an even more severe one.[179]

## 3.2 Black Lived Matter movement

The case of Black Lives Matter (BLM) has in itself different aspects the thesis has analyzed previously. it is a shining proof of how digital advocacy and digital advocacy organization can take the lead in mobiltasing social movement on incredibly large scale. The case however has in its element shown the flipside of social media with instance of surveillance, up-rising of opposite movements and it was responsible for the enter into the mainstream vocabulary of the term "clicktivism".

### 3.2.1 The background to the rebirth of BLM

On May 25 2020 during the high of the Covid-19 pandemic people took to the streets in protest after witnessing through the screen of their phone George Floyd, a black man, being choked to death by Derek Chauvin Minneapolis police officer, after being held down by kneeling on his neck and back for over nine minutes. The video, recorded with the smartphone by the then 17-year-old girl named Darnella Frazier, became viral on Facebook in the span of two days, and people quickly started sharing their sentiment under the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.

The events of 2020 had a profound impact on the BLM movement, which originated in 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin, a black 17-year-old, was unarmed and had been returning from a local store after purchasing sweets and iced tea when Zimmerman, claiming Martin appeared suspicious, shot and killed him. In response to this injustice, numerous Twitter users expressed their disappointment and highlighted the undeniable truth that Black Lives Matter. These tweets marked some of the earliest instances of using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which would later gain widespread popularity on November 25, 2014, when a grand jury chose not to indict Darren Wilson in the fatal shooting of Michael Brown,

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[179] Sam Kimball, "After Arab Spring, Surveillance in Egypt Intensifies,"

an unarmed teenager. Online and offline protesters turned to the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag as a means to convey their anger and grief.

As instances of police violence persisted and the fight for racial justice endured, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag became a significant and enduring component of online discussions. Up until April 30, 2021, it had been used in over 25 million original Twitter posts, accumulating a staggering total of approximately 444 billion likes, retweets, comments, or quotes. On average, this translates to roughly 17,000 engagements per post, reflecting the vast reach and impact of the hashtag in sparking conversations and mobilizing support for the movement.[180]

Following Floyd's tragic murder, the momentum of online activism has only gained more speed. In the span of seven days, from May 25, 2020, the day of his death, to June 1, when protesters in Lafayette Square (Washington DC) were attacked by the police, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag generated approximately 3.4 million original posts, resulting in a staggering 69 billion engagements. These figures accounted for roughly 13% of all posts and 15.5% of all engagements on Twitter during that period. Notably, the use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag reached its peak on June 8, with an astounding 1.2 million original posts referencing the hashtag[181].

### 3.2.2 Together behind a hashtag

This remarkable surge in hashtag usage demonstrated a significant increase in awareness and participation. The impact of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag during this period underscored the widespread mobilization and solidarity expressed by individuals across social media platforms, as they amplified the urgent call for racial justice and an end to systemic racism.

The BLM movement not only generated a lot of online traction by people supporting the cause but quickly learned how to use the different platforms to better build up and coordinate its movement especially after the events of 2020 when the hashtag not only took over Twitter, a familiar platform for the group, but moved over to invade Instagram, a platform that till that point was never center of political and social justice discourse, but rather a lifestyle platform, in which five primary social and psychological motives were: "social interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking"[182].

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[180] Tom Wheeler, Michael Trucano, and Cameron F. Kerry, "How George Floyd Changed the Online Conversation around Blm," Brookings, June 17, 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-george-floyd-changed-the-online-conversation-around-black-lives-matter/.
ibid.
[182] Eunji Lee et al., "Pictures Speak Louder than Words: Motivations for Using Instagram," Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking 18, no. 9 (2015): 552–56, https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2015.0157.

Moving their activities to Instagram meant not only having a bigger reach, content generated for this platform is four time more likely to be geotagged than Twitter content, that it's a powerful insight for the movement to understand in which way their words was spreading.

Furthermore, while twitter was more inclined in provided a discourse more like "ambient journalisms"[183], Instagram permitted a more intentional and educational call for action approach that could easily be shared on the platform in the form of visual content[184]. On top of this, the visual modality of the platform helped in generating more engagement through the use of photos and videos. Studies have shown how visual messages are more temporally efficient [185]. Using photos over text forms of content made possible for BLM to expand their political efforts beyond their national sphere[186].

Lastly, social media provided the people with a platform to fill in the blanks of the mainstream media. Many news reports wrote and spoke about how the George Floyd protests descended into riots, with looters and arsonists hijacking the movement and it was in the hand of social media to share threads of videos and pictures and real life stories that showed how police was inciting violence during the peaceful protests they were conducting and therefore redirecting the narrative presented by the media where activist were portrayed as "looters" looking for violent confrontations on the streets[187].

### 3.2.2 The downside of the movement

Although, fairly successful the social media campaign of BLM was not exempt from elements of "clicktivism", providing one of the most popular example of what this phenomena is. In the days leading after the tragic death of George Floyd Instagram got floated by post of black squares with the hashtag #BlackOutTuesday in support of the protests.

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[183] Hermida describes ambient journalism as: "broad, asynchronous, lightweight and always-on communication systems [that] are creating new kinds of interactions around the news, and are enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events around them"

[184] Ho-Chun Herbert Chang, Allissa Richardson, and Emilio Ferrara, "#justiceforgeorgefloyd: How Instagram Facilitated the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests," PLOS ONE, accessed July 14, 2023, https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0277864#pone.0277864.ref040.

[185] Thomas E. Powell et al., "A Clearer Picture: The Contribution of Visuals and Text to Framing Effects," Journal of Communication 65, no. 6 (2015): 997–1017, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12184..

[186] Thomas Olesen, "Global Injustice Symbols," Global Injustice Symbols and Social Movements, 2015, 1–37, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137481177_1

[187] Alice Gawthrop and Charlotte Illingworth, Alice Gawthrop, and Charlotte Illingworth, "The Role of Social Media in Black Lives Matter: Redbrick Life&Style," Redbrick, September 12, 2022, https://www.redbrick.me/the-role-of-social-media-in-black-lives-matter/.

Recently, a study was conducted on the matter and it appeared that through 20 interviews of wellness influencers, that sharing of the square was for maintaining credibility with their following base[188]. By sharing this performative acts of allyships the users made also difficult to access information regarding the protests that were collected under the same hashtag as the black squares.

There's an issue of slacktivism in social movements that are predominantly on social media, such as the Black Lives Matter movement[189] and is furthermore proven by a second survey conducted by The university of San Francisco has shown that around half of individuals are engaged in the movement and the other half only participate on social media[190]. This does not mean that the whole movement is to be considered failed but it is a true reality that can't be ignored.

Furthermore, it was reason of preoccupation by the movement how the social distribution of videos and photos of the protests on social media created a dangerous environment for the activists. Their visibility meant that their chances of being added to police's facial recognition databases or other forms of AI-based cataloguing grew the more they were shared online[191].

As a matter of facts, police station were putting together real manhunt to track down the protesters and mostly identify them thought social media. It was the case of the Dallas Police Department that tweeted asking people to submit videos of "illegal activity" during BLM ralleys. This created the opportunity for young teenager across US to put in practice a form disruptive online activism, proving not all online activism needs to be "for the show". A huge group of K-pop fan, known for their high presence and participation to the online world, took over the mention and platforms dedicated to identify protesters and clog them with "fancam" video of their idols. This fan and to some silly action was in concrete of profound help to the movement and the people participating to the rallies[192].

In conclusion, what did social media did that supported and helped the movement?

[188] Mariah L. Wellman, "Black Squares for Black Lives? Performative Allyship as Credibility Maintenance for Social Media Influencers on Instagram," Social Media + Society 8, no. 1 (2022): 205630512210804, https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221080473

[189] Pradhana, G. A., & Tania, S. (2021). Hyperreality of #BlackLivesMatter movement on social media. Jurnal Komunikasi, Malaysian Journal of Communication, 37(3), 288-303. https://10.17576/JKMJC-2021-3703-17

[190] Dustin Kidd, "Black Lives Matter: Racial Perspectives on Social Media," Social Media Freaks, 2018, 169–91, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429497285-7.

[191] Ho-Chun Herbert Chang, Allissa Richardson, and Emilio Ferrara, "#justiceforgeorgefloyd: How Instagram Facilitated the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests," PLOS ONE, accessed July 14, 2023, https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0277864#pone.0277864.ref040.

[192] Kaitlyn Tiffany, "Why K-Pop Fans Are No Longer Posting about K-Pop," The Atlantic, June 8, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/06/twitter-k-pop-protest-black-lives-matter/612742/.

Furthermore, social media granted the movement a platform to address the gaps and redirect the false narrative that was spreading through mainstream media. It served as a distinct space for the movement and the victims' families, where an extensive collection of resources, petitions, and donation links were gathered. While official news outlets may occasionally provide limited information about such incidents, they often fail to present meaningful solutions. It is possible, especially for white individuals, to inadvertently fall into the trap of hearing these stories on the news and simply thinking, "Oh, that's unfortunate. If only there was some action I could take," before moving on with their day. Social media offers an avenue for people to counteract this tendency. Individuals have utilized their platforms, regardless of their size, to compile lists of petitions, reading materials on anti-racism, organizations to support, and easily understandable explanations of concepts like white privilege or prison abolition. It facilitated the development of a broader discourse on race and provided a safe space for education.[193]

As states, BLM is really clear in point out what they want (social justices in equal treatment and police remorsm) and how they belive such things could be achievable (by defunding the police and by persecuting the "bad apples" of police forces that have use racial targeting in their work).

As BLM has been open in its criticisms of law enforcement and the criminal justice system, a constent group of law enforcement have arisen against the movement. In 2014 police officers in New York City established Blue Lives Matter, a movement with the sole focus of highlight violence committed against law enforcement, support police families, and build public awareness about the needs of police officers. Basically a direct and specular response of what BLM stands for. Members of Blue Lives Matter have called for legislation that identifies violence against a police officer or firefighter as a hate crime, and such laws have been considered or passed in several states, including Georgia, Louisiana, and New York[194]. This proposition have been harshly criticized both by liberal and conservative publications, they manly criticize such laws as unnecessary, attacks against police officers are already subject to strong punishments without any hate-crimes requirements of proving motivated targeting.[195]. The resoning behind Blue Lives Matter lays in two attacks on policemen that took place in New York City and Dallas over the course of protest and that were performed in both cases by black men. For this reason Blue Lives Matter advocates have been actively shaping the

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[193] Alice Gawthrop and Charlotte Illingworth, Alice Gawthrop, and Charlotte Illingworth, "The Role of Social Media in Black Lives Matter: Redbrick Life&Style," Redbrick, September 12, 2022, https://www.redbrick.me/the-role-of-social-media-in-black-lives-matter/.

[194] Scholarly articles on black lives matter: History & more - gale, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.gale.com/open-access/black-lives-matter.

[195] What happens when the green new deal meets the Old Green Laws?, accessed July 14, 2023, https://lawreview.vermontlaw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/03-Ruhl-Salzman.pdf.

narrative of event in order to blame on Black Lives Matter activists for such attacks, by in some case forging the evidence. In fact, despite the claim from Police officers that this "type of violence . . . is growing at exponential rates,"[196] FBI has pointed out how this type of crime as in felonious assaults and fatal killings of police officers have gone up and down in individual years over the past decade regardless of the BLM movement and activity proving that there is no unambiguous correlation between those crime and BLM.

### 3.2.3 Individual activist actions and advocacy style

Social media also played a crucial role in organizing the protests themselves, with multiple accounts being created during that time to coordinate and arrange local protests across different cities in the US. For instance, in Nashville, six teenage girls connected through Twitter and established an Instagram account called "teens.4.equality," which they utilized to plan a Black Lives Matter protest. The profile quickly gained traction, resulting in over 10,000 people attending the protest. Without social media platforms to amplify their voices, mobilizing such a large number of individuals would have been significantly more challenging. [197] The pressure exerted by these protests, combined with the international attention garnered through their presence on social media, had a tangible impact on the situation. Derek Chauvin's charge was escalated to second-degree murder, and the other officers present were charged with aiding and abetting. The videos showcased during the trials shed light on the racism and bigotry inherent in the US criminal justice system.[198]

A clear progression can be observed, from the social media response to the mobilization of protests, and ultimately to legal actions. This progression underscores the undeniable power of social media, both as a news source and as a platform for activism.

Lastly, while observing the movement grow and adapt to the newer wave of protest scholars have noticed an important element that distinguished the BLM discourse from the one of other contemporary movement. BLM supporters have individually and naturally adopted a hope-based

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[196] Julia Craven, "Resisting Arrest Could Possibly Be a Hate Crime in Louisiana," HuffPost, January 23, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/blue-lives-matter-law-lousiana_n_588653dde4b0e3a7356ae3ae.

[197] Alice Gawthrop and Charlotte Illingworth, Alice Gawthrop, and Charlotte Illingworth, "The Role of Social Media in Black Lives Matter: Redbrick Life&Style," Redbrick, September 12, 2022, https://www.redbrick.me/the-role-of-social-media-in-black-lives-matter/.
[198] Cheryl Corley, "How Using Videos at Chauvin Trial and Others Impacts Criminal Justice," NPR, May 7, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/05/07/994507257/how-using-videos-at-chauvin-trial-and-others-impacts-criminal-justice.

approach to communication. Said scholar have notices that "While we identified high levels of anger and disgust across all posts in our dataset, what jumped out at us was the prevalence of positive emotions in posts containing pro-BLM hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #JusticeforFloyd and #NoJusticeNoPeace,"[199]. The research notices how Positive emotions such as hope and optimism were more prevalent in posts with explicitly pro-BLM hashtags than other subsets of the data, which contradicts the stereotype of BLM supporters as promoting anger and outrage. Which was the narrative that both republican party and Blue Lives Matter supporter were supporting.

### 3.2.4 Conclusions

BLM represented a rich case to analyze having social media being a fundamental element of its movement from the very start of this more recent wave. In analyzing the case both negative and positive aspects of social media have arise, ****, but what can be noted from the case is how positive and negative effects are often balance in the sense that were a negative aspect seem to have stricken a nerve of the movement a positive response is put in place an evident case of this was how the stung online support often didn't translate offline but was an important element of building and supporting fundraising for the protests and for the family who were affected by police brutality.

The New York Times reported that fifteen million to twenty-six million Americans participated in demonstrations in support of racial justice in early summer 2020, leading some scholars to call BLM the largest movement in US history.[200] But more sticking was the international support the movement received by individual activist and citizen from all around the globe, this support didn't go unnoticed and broth to a spectacle of mediatic attention that soon generated political pressure in intervening. After the global support for the first time ever a UN country openly criticized the US for the social injustice BLM was bringing up to surface[201]. All this started from an eyewitness who recorded a tragedy happen Infront of her eyes and shared it on social media for the world to see. This perfectly incapsulate the power of social media in giving a platform to who has something to say.

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[199] "Researchers Study Social Media to Understand Roles of Optimism and Hope in the Black Lives Matter Movement," News, March 20, 2023, https://www.cmu.edu/news/stories/archives/2022/october/researchers-study-social-media-to-understand-roles-of-optimism-and-hope-in-the-black-lives-matter.
[200] https://www.gale.com/open-access/black-lives-matter

**CONCLUSIONS**

Social media has become an integral part of modern human rights advocacy, but the question of its advantages and disadvantages continues to generate debate and emotional responses. This master thesis aims to examine the complex landscape of the digital turn in human rights advocacy, particularly the widespread use of social media. It argues that a nuanced and ambivalent approach is necessary when evaluating the effectiveness of social media platforms, considering the existing literature tends to adopt either overly positive or pessimistic perspectives.

The initial chapters of this thesis establish the foundation by identifying key non-state advocacy actors in modern human rights advocacy and discussing the transformative impact of digital platforms on their work and communication strategies. These chapters draw on empirical cases discussed in interdisciplinary studies of human rights, including International Relations, Political Studies, Social Movements, Communicology, Sociology, and New Media studies

However, it is crucial to proceed with caution when evaluating the role of social media in mobilizing social movements and documenting human rights violations, as highlighted in the analysis of specific cases in the third chapter. Events such as revolutions and anti-racist mobilizations carry high stakes for participants, researchers, and activists. The findings of this thesis demonstrate the potential of social media to amplify voices, mobilize communities, and raise awareness. However, they also shed light on the challenges posed by social media, including issues of control, surveillance, populism, and superficial engagement. These complexities must be carefully considered when assessing the impact of social media on human rights advocacy.

Throughout the thesis, it has been established that social media platforms have transformed the way people engage with social, political, and human rights issues in the digital age. These platforms have democratized the dissemination of information, enabling marginalized groups to share their stories, connect with like-minded individuals, and challenge oppressive systems. The accessibility and reach of social media have facilitated the formation of global networks and solidarity movements, transcending geographical and political boundaries. As a result, social media has become a powerful catalyst for social change, organizing protests, documenting human rights abuses, and advocating for policy reforms. However, alongside these advantages, the thesis also highlights the challenges faced by human rights advocates in utilizing social media. Issues such as online censorship, surveillance, disinformation, and superficial engagement pose significant obstacles to creating meaningful impact. The influence of social media algorithms, the spread of propaganda, and the manipulation of public opinion further complicate the landscape of digital advocacy.

By examining the advantages and disadvantages of social media for modern human rights advocacy, this master thesis contributes to the existing body of work that explores the dynamic relationship between technology, activism, and social change. It enhances our understanding of how social media platforms shape the strategies, tactics, and outcomes of advocacy efforts. By acknowledging the limitations and complexities associated with social media, the research provides insights into how advocates can navigate these challenges and maximize the potential of digital platforms for effective and sustainable advocacy. Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics between social media and human rights advocacy, providing an interdisciplinary perspective on the subject matter.

While this research has gathered valuable insights on the impact of social media on modern human rights advocacy, it is important to acknowledge its inherent limitations before drawing conclusions that run at least in two ways. Firstly, the research was conducted within a specific timeframe, which influenced the selection and examination of interdisciplinary human rights research. Due to constraints in space and time, some relevant contributions had to be excluded, which would enable it to have been called a systematic analysis. However, the research process nonetheless involved thorough exploration of a plethora of academic browsing platforms, interdisciplinary journals, and review articles to gather as much relevant information as possible, without being solely limited to disciplinary boundaries and success determinants, such as impact factors, where interdisciplinary research has often a harder time finding home. Secondly, it is crucial to highlight the significance of the timeframe in which this research was conducted. The relationship between advocacy and social media is evolving, and this body of work provides a snapshot of the present but may not fully represent future developments. This is particularly relevant considering upcoming regulations, such as the European Digital Services Act, which will impact social media platforms and their algorithms. Such changes can have significant implications for the future of social media and advocacy.

As we navigate the digital age, it becomes increasingly important to reflect on the possibilities and challenges of future advocacy and how to harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its limitations. By critically analyzing the changing landscape of human rights advocacy, this research lays the foundation for ongoing discussions and advancements in the pursuit of justice and equality in our interconnected world. It is evident that the effects of social media cannot be simplified as solely positive or entirely negative, and a more realistic approach is needed. Both cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic perspectives hold some truth, and it is crucial to move away from binary categorizations. The empirical illustrations in the thesis highlight instances where social media played

a pivotal role in key events such as the Egypt Revolution and the BLM movement, underscoring the opportunities and threats posed by digitalization. As we anticipate the future of social media and digital advocacy, it is indeed challenging. However, similar challenges exist in other fields like biotechnology, weapons technology, and energy production. By employing foresight and proactive research, valuable insights can be gained to navigate the evolving digital landscape effectively.

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