

Digital Activism and the Individual: A Utilitarian Perspective

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Abstract : Digital Activism or Cyber Activism uses digital media as a means to disseminate information and mobilize masses towards a specific goal. When digital activism was first born in the early 1990s, it was primarily used by groups of organized political activists. However, with the advent of social media, online activism has filtered down to the individual- one who does not necessarily belong to or identify with an agenda, group, or political party. A large part of digital activism today stems from the individual's notion of what is right and wrong. This gives rise to a discourse around descriptive ethics and the implications of the independent digital activist. Although digital activism has paved the way for and bolstered support for causes like the MeToo Movement and Black Lives Matter, the lack of a unified, organized body has led to counterintuitive progressions and suspicions regarding the movements. The paper introduces the ideas of 'clout' culture, click baits, and clicktivism (the phenomenon where activism is reduced to a blind following of the online trends), to discuss the impacts of exclusive digital activism. By using Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian approach to ethics, that places emphasis on the best possible outcome for a society, the paper will show how individual online activism reaching for a larger, more common end can sometimes lead to an undermining of that end, not only in the online space but also how it manifests in the real world.

Keywords : digital activism, ethics, independent digital activist, utilitarianism

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