



Short Paper 3

Option 1: Social Media
Revolutions

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The internet and social media are a relatively new concept to the world. Although it is new, it is arguably the fastest growing technology that is available to the public on a mass scale. Outlets like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have provided the world with the ability to connect one person to another whether they are 5 or 5,000 miles apart. Information, news, and opinion are being shared every minute by millions of people to millions of people. When this social media falls into the right hands, it has the power of connecting groups of people and inspiring change. In recent years, people and social groups have realized that these platforms can be used as strategic tools to promote a movement or agenda. March For Our Lives is an organization that has arguably become one of the biggest social moments that encourages political activism in young people. The students who March For Our Lives took advantage of using their social media platforms as megaphones to extend their messages of gun reform nationwide.

An important part of today's political scene is regular people who gather together to share concerns about political, social, and economic issues. This is called grassroots activism. Grassroots activism has grown rapidly in the 21st century with the help of technology and social media. Perhaps the beginning of grassroots political activism on social media starts with the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was a political movement that happened in 2011 in Muslim countries like Tunisia and Egypt. The cry for change began in Tunisia when a man lit himself on fire in front of a government building as a sign of protest after allegedly being assaulted by a police officer (NPR, 1). His self-sacrifice inspired protests in other cities. His government's regime stepped down and a month later the president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, left the country (NPR 1). With the help of cellphones and video, the continuing protests that his self-burning created ignited revolutionary protests in neighboring nations. In 2011 on Egypt's National Police

Day, January 25, there was a massive protest in Tahrir Square, Egypt that lasted for 18 days (The Arab Spring in Egypt,1). The protestors gathered in the square demanding the government to consider reform towards democracy. Facebook and Twitter users gathered online creating the Twitter hashtag #Jan25 to connect with each other throughout their process of calling the government to hear their voices (Wilson and Dunn, 1251). This hashtag was crucial to the linking of protestors before the internet was shut down during the two weeks and four-day outcry. On January 28, 2011, the authoritarian regime of Egypt shut down the internet (Cohen, 1). The governments ceasing of the internet limited communication between Egyptian citizens and prevented communication between Egyptians and the rest of the world.

The government's control of internet access across Egypt did not stop the word from spreading. Activists took to the streets and gathered in Tahrir Square. Although people inside the country could no longer contact each other online, they did not stop referring to the websites as an outlet freedom. According to the author of Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism, by author Paolo Gerbaudo, when people took to the streets, street artists used the image of the Facebook logo, along with the word “Twitter” as political graffiti (48). Facebook and Twitter symbolized freedom and democracy to a nation of people. The #jan25 hashtag was used 675,713 times by 106,563 twitter users between January 21 and February 11 (Wilson and Dunn, 1251). After hearing the protests, the then president of 30 years, President Hosni Mubarak, resigned from his position on February 11, 2011 (BBC 1; Wilson and Dunn, 1251). The platforms enabled Egyptians to come together in cyberspace and in the streets to eventually force the Mubarak regime to step down from office. With the help of social media platforms, the people of Egypt were able to take down their over-powered government and begin to implement a democratic society.

In the United States, grassroots organizing is a bit different thanks to our democratic government system, the First Amendment, and our internet rights. Our freedoms and access to information and the internet have made the growth of internet technology faster and more easily. Navigating social media outlets is like second nature to generations like Millennials and Generation Z. Growing up with social media has created a new type of childhood. Due to young people being subject to constant media feed, when it comes to media networking, newer generations have proved that they know what they are doing. On February 14, 2018, there was a mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida. Before all of the students were evacuated, the students were using social media outlets like Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook and iMessage to communicate who was safe and who wasn't, as well as sharing graphic content (Ohlheiser and Epstein, 1). Through the nightmare, the students of this high school have proven their social media savviness for the better. The students used their social media skills to not only check in with peers and loved ones, but they became citizen reporters by updating the world from inside their classrooms with snapchat videos of gunshots and victims (Ohlheiser and Epstein, 1). One student survivor, Demitri Hoth, explained in an interview with The Washington Post his viewpoints on what happened, and shared detail about the social media use during the disaster and after the shooting was over. He explained how once the disaster gained public attention students began "advocating [to end gun-violence] ... Let's make some change.' We have to pay attention, we have to start doing something because stuff like this that you see should never be seen" (Ohlheiser and Epstein, 1). The students continued to showcase their bravery by sharing their stories with the world.

Similarly, to the 2011 Egyptian protesters, the students utilized their social media platforms to spark political conversation. This time the conversation was focused on gun

violence and reform. Student survivors from the tragedy used their knowledge of social media to unite their peers on a sensitive topic and in turn into one of the biggest grassroots-student-lead activism marches since the Vietnam War (Lopez, 1). Two of the main student leaders of this movement are David Hogg and Emma González. These students began speaking out about the tragedy, calling for gun reform, and reaching out to political figures before the 24-hour mark after the shooting happened (Collins 1). The students were seen on the news speaking about their experiences and thought process while the disaster was happening. In about a two-month timespan the student activists managed to gain a large enough following to create a National Walkout Day, as well as the March For Our Lives.

The National Walkout Day was constructed by students on social media calling for peers around the country to walk out of school on March 14, 2018 (Deng, 1). The walkout was called by the students of Stoneman Douglas High School to connect with learners and peers around the nation. On the day of the walkout, it is estimated that 2,800 schools across the United States participated in the event (Bacon and Hayes, 1). By using Twitter hashtags, the youth of the United States unified to take a political stance and demanded to be heard. The walkout itself produced 1.3 million social media posts calling out political organizations like @NRA for corruption and @GOP along with the president's twitter account, @realDonaldTrump, for supporting the NRA (Deng, 1). Young learners around the nation left a footprint that told adults that they are here to fight, and they will not give up until their message is to be heard. These countrywide gatherings intensified support for the March For Our Lives. The March For Our Lives took place on March 24, 2018, in Washington D.C. inspiring satellite marches around the nation and around the world (Durando, 1). According to the March For Our Lives official website, there are ten parts to their agenda. Among the initiatives are fund gun violence research,

universal background checks, and high-capacity magazine ban (“How We Save Lives,” 1). The students had nationwide support. They continued to use a hybrid of social media and traditional media to spread the word about their message. More than \$1.7 million was collected on an online fundraising website in three days (Grinberg and Muaddi, 1). Not only were average citizens joining the movement, but the student leaders also gained the attention of Hollywood. They earned \$2 million in private donations from celebrities like George and Amal Clooney, Oprah Winfrey, and Steven Spielberg (Grinberg and Muaddi, 1). The goal of the march was to urge political leaders to not only direct their attention to gun reform but to consider young people’s political opinion. With their political agenda set, and their determination to be heard, the students of Stoneman Douglas took to Twitter and ran with it. On the day of the March for Our Lives, #MarchForOurLives was tweeted almost 4 million times (Deng, 1). The amount of movement and support that the students were able to collect is incredible. According to CBS News, 200,000 people joined the students of Stoneman Douglas High School to march in Washington D.C. with 800 additional marches popping up in cities around the U.S. (1). The activists of Stoneman Douglas created a new political standard for students in the United States and formed a new expectation for political representatives to hear the concerns of young people as they come of age.

The Arab Spring and The March For Our Lives movement are both two critical grassroots organized campaigns in recent history. The Arab spring was one of the first political movements to use Twitter to cause a revolution that forced the government to step down. The March For Our Lives movement used media outlets to connect people around the U.S. to take a stance on injustice. Both movements showed the public the power social media contains and how it can be used as a megaphone to spread a message. Social media will continue to be used as an

important tool in social and political movements around the world. As political tensions increase within the United States and around the world Twitter and Facebook will continue to produce grassroots activist organizations that will take control of how social and political subjects are discussed.

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