



## Handout: “Slacktivism” or just a different way to take action?

Taking action in one’s community and world has always posed challenges and risks. Some believe that social media are easier, lighter and lower stakes mechanisms for taking action while others argue that such actions are both consequential and potentially risky. These articles offer different perspectives on these issues.

### SMALL CHANGE

*Why the revolution will not be tweeted.*

 By Malcolm Gladwell



(Credit: jason via Shutterstock)

**Slacktivism for everyone: How keyboard activism is affecting social movements**



Online petitions and other innovative methods to mobilize show of support is changing the civil disobedience game

**IMMIGRATION**

### My Activism Resulted in a Right-Wing Campaign for My Deportation

*"Deport Nancy [redacted] shirts had a phone number for Immigration and Customs Enforcement on the back -- and were even available in baby and toddler sizes."*

By Nancy [redacted] / UCLA Labor Center | March 8, 2013, 4:22 PM GMT

  14 COMMENTS

Read each article excerpt below and explore the strengths and challenges of in-person versus online activism using the following graphic organizer to document the authors’ claims.

	Strengths or advantages	Challenges & risks
In-person activism		
Online activism		

## SMALL CHANGE

*Why the revolution will not be tweeted.*



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“Greensboro in the early nineteen-sixties was the kind of place where racial insubordination was routinely met with violence. The four students who first sat down at the lunch counter were terrified. “I suppose if anyone had come up behind me and yelled ‘Boo,’ I think I would have fallen off my seat,” one of them said later. On the first day, the store manager notified the police chief, who immediately sent two officers to the store. On the third day, a gang of white toughs showed up at the lunch counter and stood ostentatiously behind the protesters, ominously muttering epithets such as “burr-head nigger.” A local Ku Klux Klan leader made an appearance. On Saturday, as tensions grew, someone called in a bomb threat, and the entire store had to be evacuated....

So one crucial fact about the four freshmen at the Greensboro lunch counter—David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil—was their relationship with one another. McNeil was a roommate of Blair’s in A. & T.’s Scott Hall dormitory. Richmond roomed with McCain one floor up, and Blair, Richmond, and McCain had all gone to Dudley High School. The four would smuggle beer into the dorm and talk late into the night in Blair and McNeil’s room. They would all have remembered the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott that same year, and the showdown in Little Rock in 1957. It was McNeil who brought up the idea of a sit-in at Woolworth’s. They’d discussed it for nearly a month. Then McNeil came into the dorm room and asked the others if they were ready. There was a pause, and McCain said, in a way that works only with people who talk late into the night with one another, “Are you guys chicken or not?” Ezell Blair worked up the courage the next day to ask for a cup of coffee because he was flanked by his roommate and two good friends from high school.

The kind of activism associated with social media isn’t like this at all. The platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That’s why you can have a thousand “friends” on Facebook, as you never could in real life.

This is in many ways a wonderful thing. There is strength in weak ties, as the sociologist Mark Granovetter has observed. Our acquaintances—not our friends—are our greatest source of new ideas and information. The Internet lets us exploit the power of these kinds of distant connections with marvellous efficiency. It’s terrific at the diffusion of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, seamlessly matching up buyers and sellers, and the logistical functions of the dating world. But weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism.”

The full article can be accessed here:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>

[www.digitalcivicstoolkit.org](http://www.digitalcivicstoolkit.org) © 2018 by the MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics



(Credit: picmov via iStock/Salon)

## **Slacktivism for everyone: How keyboard activism is affecting social movements**

Online petitions and other innovative methods to mobilize show of support is changing the civil disobedience game

“In 2013, an online petition persuaded a national organization representing high school coaches to develop materials to educate coaches about sexual assault and how they could help reduce assaults by their athletes. Online petitions have changed decisions by major corporations (ask Bank of America about its debit card fees) and affected decisions on policies as diverse as those related to survivors of sexual assault and local photography permitting requirements. Organizing and participating in these campaigns has also been personally meaningful to many.

But, a nostalgia for 1960s activism leads many to assume that “real” protest only happens on the street. Critics assume that classic social movement tactics such as rallies and demonstrations represent the only effective model for collectively pressing for change. Putting your body on the line and doing that collectively for decades is viewed as the only way “people power” works. Engaging online in “slacktivism” is a waste, making what cultural commentator Malcolm Gladwell has called “small change.”...

Critics often worry that valuing flash activism will “water down” the meaning of activism. But that misses the point and is counterproductive. The goal of activism is social change, not nostalgia or activism for activism’s sake. Most people who participate in flash activism would not have done more – rather, they would have done nothing at all.”

The full article can be accessed here:

[https://www.salon.com/2016/12/24/slacktivism-how-online-activism-is-affecting-social-movements\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2016/12/24/slacktivism-how-online-activism-is-affecting-social-movements_partner/)

## IMMIGRATION

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"On May 20, 2010, nine brave students sat down in the middle of Wilshire Boulevard in front of the West Los Angeles Federal Building to advocate for passage of the DREAM Act. The Wilshire Nine action took place three days after DREAM Act students staged a sit-in at Senator McCain's office in Arizona. In Los Angeles, immigrant youth came together to take part in a similar non-violent direct action. Direct action disrupts "business as usual" but most importantly, it is an act of sacrifice by individuals who are willing to put themselves at risk in order to push for the greater good....

I was stationed with my laptop computer and cell phone a few blocks away at a coffee shop, conducting media outreach for the action. The coffee shop was our makeshift office, and I sent out press releases with updates and took calls from many reporters. I was identified as the media spokesperson on the press release, and my cell phone number was listed....

As I was conducting an interview for an international cable news show, my phone began to ring repeatedly. I answered a few calls and was attacked and insulted. One caller told me, "You need to understand that illegal is illegal," whereas another voiced that "illegals like you need to be deported back to Mexico." I soon learned that a national campaign had been started by the conservative AM radio talk show to call for my deportation."

The full article can be accessed here:

<https://www.alternet.org/immigration/my-activism-resulted-right-wing-campaign-my-deportation>