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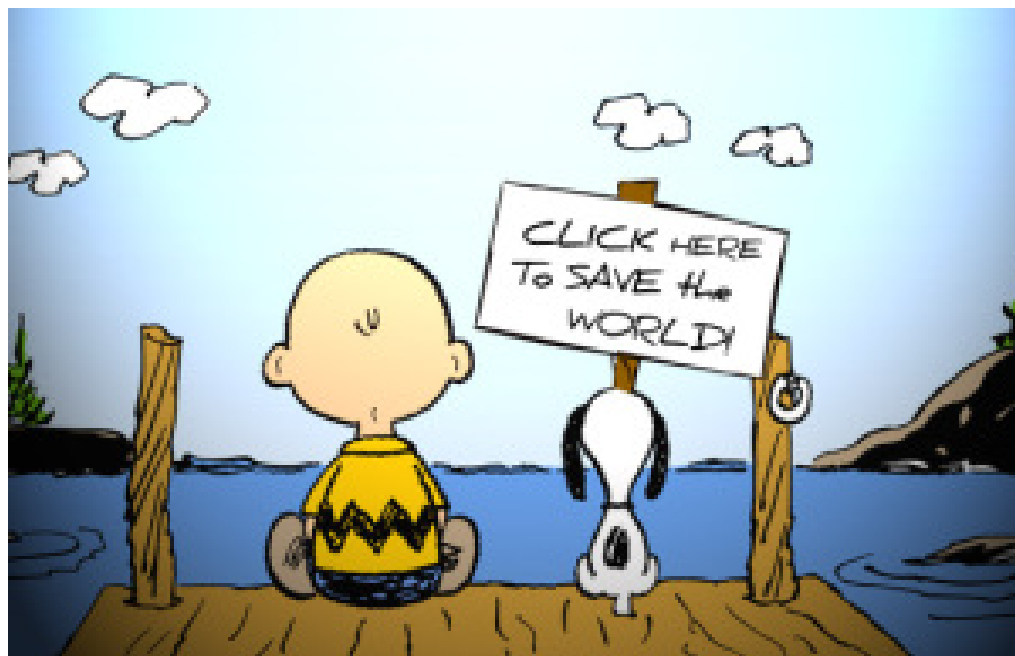
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**‘I cannot donate all the money to charity...but I can “Like” them’:
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE ACCOUNTS OF MODERN
STUDENTS’ OFFLINE AND ONLINE VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES**

**by
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CONTENTS

Page

Title Page	1
Contents	2
Abstract	4
Acknowledgements	5
Permission to consult	6
	7
Introduction	
Chapter 1: Literature Review	9
The Internet as an object of social research	9
The Old Wide Web	11
The Web 2.0	14
Social Network Sites in social research	16
SNS: home for ‘slacktivists’?	17
Research questions	19
Chapter 2	23
Methods	23
Sampling strategy	24
Research procedures	25
Offline focus group	25
Online focus group	26
Approach	27
Analysis	28
Chapter 3: Findings and Discussion	30
Voluntary activities as unpaid activities	31
Voluntary activity as a selfless act	32
Voluntary activities as work	32
Limitations of online volunteering	33
Lack of mediation	34
Enthusiasm regarding Facebook’s potential	36
Facebook appropriateness and efficiency for volunteering	37
Time and space, manufactured uncertainty and slacktivists	41
General apathy as a motive for slacktivism	42
Friends versus networks: who causes slacktivism?	43
Concluding thoughts	45

Bibliography	47
Appendices	53
1 Structure of the sample	53
2 Consent Form	54
3 Plain Language Statement	55
4 Offline focus group transcript	57
5 Online focus group transcript	66
6 Letter of Ethical Approval	73

ABSTRACT

This dissertation broadens the debate on the ability of social networking sites to mobilise support and encourage participation by looking at the phenomenon of “slacktivism” as a gap between the online intentions and real life behaviour in the context of voluntary activities. The applied methodology continues the qualitative research tradition of Daniel Miller (2010) using both online and offline methods of data collection. The data gathered from two focus group discussions with nineteen participants provided insights into the possible motives of the slacktivist behaviour among modern students. The findings suggest the need for further investigation of the general apathy among young Internet users in terms of their overall activity. As a direction for the explanations of the causes of slacktivism the concepts of strong and weak ties as well as time and space compression are proposed.

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PERMISSION TO CONSULT

This dissertation is made available to anyone who knows of its existence and wishes to consult it.

INTRODUCTION

The total number of Internet users in 2012 accounted for almost one third of the world's population. The 'www society' and the continuing process of 'digitization' creates many opportunities, broadens horizons, improves global interaction, provides new platforms for engagement and substantially affects people's everyday lives both in positive and negative ways (Bimber, 2001; Bakardjieva, 2011). The significance of the Internet can hardly be underestimated, which explains the inclusion of the World Wide Web as a contemporary phenomenon into the social research agenda. However, the Internet as an object of social examination is relatively new (Castells, 2000: 36). Therefore, every attempt to provide additional insight in this field constitutes great value for academics with many topics yet to be covered.

The structure of this paper is determined by the qualitative and inductive approach of the research. The first chapter is a literature review. The main purpose of it is to examine the literature on the relevant topics in order to form the research questions. The main idea introduced in the literature review will suggest the changing nature of the Internet per se and, consequently, Internet studies. Thus, social networking sites as online communication platforms represent a new, distinctive object of social research, bringing the issues of online participation and activism into the academic agenda. This research will be based around the topic of social networking sites and their influence on the modern students' everyday activism. What needs to be discovered is why modern students claim to be very active online, but in real life these intentions remain unrealised. The study will scrutinise the newly emerged concept of slacktivism in the context of voluntary activities. This focus appears to distinguish this research from previous research on political engagement and protest movements. In addition, the investigation will not seek to reach universal conclusions but focuses on the young people, students, as the most active group of the population.

The second chapter will fully explain the approach, methods used for the data collection and the procedures for their analysis. Through the focus group discussions with the students who have experience in online volunteering and those who have defined themselves as 'slacktivists' the popular themes will be identified, suggesting explanations of the motives for students not continuing their online activism in real life actions.

The final chapter consists of the findings' representation and their discussion with some concluding remarks. The qualitative accounts obtained throughout the study shall be seen as a provisional and valuable basis for the future investigations of the problem. Thus, the findings will provide some ideas for the theoretical concepts to be applied to the explanations of the causes of slacktivism.

In terms of the benefits and contributions this research aims to bring, firstly, the fulfillment of the gap in the existing literature can be achieved. Secondly, if the motives for the offline disengagement in voluntary activities (as contrary to online analogues) are to be found, this information may be useful for the charity sector in organising their work and the creation of tools for encouraging volunteers on social networking sites could be developed from the research findings. Finally, this research will test online focus group discussion as relatively innovative method of data collection.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter seeks to classify the existing dimensions of Internet studies into the related categories in order to identify an interesting gap to suggest future research. The chapter begins with a short overview of the Internet as a social phenomenon and a new medium of communication to provide the context. Secondly, the distinction is made between different generations in Internet studies. Thus, two paradigms will be evaluated; representing the different focuses of social research influenced by the development and the increased popularity of the new media as well as the changing nature of the Net. Initially, the older perspective will be introduced, discussing and forecasting the global effects of the World Wide Web in social, political and economic spheres. Then the current trends in 'online' social research will be summarized illustrating the shift of the social research focus towards the micro-levels of the Internet effects. This examines individuals, their social relationships, communication and everyday life. Finally, the literature review will consider social networking sites as a recent object of study, particularly emphasizing their role in the context of social activism. Finally, justification for the chosen research topic will be given. The concluding paragraphs will present the argument for the research questions.

THE INTERNET AS AN OBJECT OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

The development of the Net from its origins as a tool for the military purposes, through its academic stage to mass market use have been widely discussed in the literature (Castells, 2000; Slevin, 2000; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002). The history of the Internet began in 1969, although the first network of computers was called ARPANET after the research centre where it was created - Advanced Research Project Agency (Castells, 2000: 45). On the other hand, the history of Internet research is more of a recent phenomenon, which, according to Wellman, began in the last decade of the Twentieth Century (2011: 17). However, little significant literature in the field of social sciences and sociology has been written on new media, predicting the future of the Net. Before reviewing this literature, it is important to demonstrate why computer-mediated technologies attract sociological attention.

The Internet is widely referred to as a new medium of communication. In this context the 'novelty' not so much concerns the technological characteristics, but the

significant cultural features which the Internet embraces. From the historical standpoint, the Net is the 'media of the third degree'. Thus, an example of the first degree would be speech, art and any form of creativity that enables people to 'articulate their understanding of reality' (Jensen, 2011: 45). Subsequently, the second degree involves mass distribution of this mediated reality (press, radio and TV). Finally, the third level is represented by 'metamedium' - combining the functions and abilities of the first two levels (Kay and Goldberg (1977). Undoubtedly, currently the medium is the Internet - the most advanced platform for communication, which fundamentally changed its character (Castells, 2000: 356).

The first change may be observed in the ways communication may be directed through the Internet or in its infrastructure. The infrastructural features involve the technological side (the integration of sound, picture, text and audio; the global reach and so on) and more practical context (simplicity of design and use). The second innovation brought by the Internet is interactivity. McMillan (2002) argued that the concept of 'interactivity' resists easy definitions, as it may be understood in at least three dimensions. The first one - 'user-to-user interaction' - is probably the most straightforward, denoting the different ways Internet users may interact with each other. Thus, the World Wide Web allows not only one-to-one communication, but makes mass discussions possible as well. Moreover, the dialogue can also be performed between the 'impersonalized' actors including different social institutions and organizations. This interaction also has social and symbolic meaning, which explains the existence of online communities and groups, making the Internet 'most widely shared cultural forum' (Jensen, 2011: 46). The social significance of the Web means that not only is the information on the Internet widely distributed and shared by the individuals with different social and cultural backgrounds, but the Internet is a primary source of a common knowledge. Therefore, the concept of Internet interactivity also has 'user-to-documents' and 'user-to-system' dimensions (McMillan, 2002: 169-72). Every participant of the global cultural forum (the Internet) has access to almost unlimited amount of content and information, which is consumed, produced and interpreted by those users. The way people interact with what they see, read or hear on the Internet helps to construct meanings and shapes their social reality. The interaction between the user and the system is usually anonymous, providing more opportunities for self-representation. Thus, the person does not have to be serious and always honest online, making the Internet reality

'virtual'. Thus, the World Wide Web may be viewed as a certain social system, with its own rules, values, rituals and routine.

The final distinctive feature of the Internet is the ubiquity of this phenomenon. Not necessarily should the person be online or even having access to the World Wide Web, to realize its global impact. The infrastructure and interactivity of the Internet, together with its attributes of the global cultural forum make it a very engaging object of social study. Consequently, the focus of the academic research on the Internet always concerns either 'the particular ways [it is] both the instrument and the product of "social shaping" or "particular social consequences" caused by the new medium (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002: 8). The following section will examine the directions and the research themes in more details, emphasizing the dynamics and the trends in Internet studies.

THE OLD WIDE WEB

Overall, it is possible to claim that writings about the Internet have their roots in the literature concerning information society and can be divided into three waves: 1960s-1970s represents the 'American phase', because the US was the first country to raise the issue; late 1970s-early 1980s – 'modernisation phase', when the analysis included all the developed countries who started using innovative technologies and their application in the various social spheres ; and the last 'Internet phase' is dated from mid-1990s until now, being characterised by the spread of the Internet and the related prospectus (Mays, 2002: 4). However, in this paper classification will be slightly different, distinguishing the two generations of the Internet research. As a turning point for such periodization the increased popularity of the social networking sites (SNS) is taken, because the assumption is SNS significantly changed the focus of the social research on the Internet and the Internet per se (Bakardjieva, 2011). Therefore, the first period covers 1970s until 2005 (the year when the visitors of the SNS web pages outnumbered the users of the search engines). Subsequently, the second period lasts ever since.

The 'Old Wide Web' generation of research involved four main issues. The earliest literature concerned the problems, prospects and challenges the world and social system would face with the emergence of the new media. Undoubtedly, such classic works as Toffler deserve attention in the context of early social theories of the Internet. The author introduced the term 'third wave' to denote the revolutionary transformations caused by

technology, that are similarly significant as those brought by agricultural and industrial revolutions (Toffler, 1980). Among these radical cultural, economic and social changes, 'de-massification' and personalisation of consumption patterns and developed individualism may be stated as the most significant (Toffler, 1980: 14). Another representative of this stage is Daniel Bell (1974) and his concept of the 'post-industrial society', encompassing similar features. Overall, such literature may be generalised under the concept of 'postmodernism' or 'late modernity' - a period in social research with a rather sceptical tone of writings on cultural and social changes. It covered the pre-emergence of the Internet and, forecast many of the possible consequences of the more technologically developed society.

Contrary to such radical views of the 'third wave' writers, the following (more recent) academics considered these global transformations from a different standpoint, criticizing the previous theorists for their technological determinism and the exaggeration of the importance and implications of the modern technologies for social change (Preston, 2001). Christopher May, argued that the paradigms of the 'new age' with the ideas of social revolution, transformation of the communities and new political practices which were vastly mentioned in 1980s were slightly overstated claims, because the substance of the social world did not change with the development of the new forms of activities (2002: 3). In support, Preston concluded that many of these changes did not survive the empirical verification through the long-scale research (2001: 36).

While the macro-effects of the information society were still relevant to social research, theorising about the impact of the Internet on people's lives came into play. Castells pointed to the unpredictable and risky environment created by the new media (2000). Here the author meant the existence of the massive flows of information no longer controlled in terms of time and space. Castells talks about time and space compression, meaning that transformation is caused by modern technology:

Space and Time, the material foundations of human experience, have been transformed, as the space of flows dominates the space of places, and timeless time supersedes clock time of the industrial era (2000:1)

The notion of time is somehow neglected because it used to take weeks for the message (a letter) to be delivered, while modern electronic mail allows the same operation in just seconds. On the other hand, the notion of space has also changed, because the

possibility to deliver information faster erases the actual distance between people and companies. As far as the time and space dichotomy is concerned, Giddens described the emergence of contemporary state of the 'manufactured uncertainty' as the result of the impact of the technologies that made it possible to ignore the geographical and time boundaries. This state may be conceptualised as the one facing artificially created threats, risks and anxieties (1994: 4). In other words, digital technology helped humans intervene into the normal social order, so the future consequences of today's actions are no more easier to predict. To some extent, the risky character of modern lives is reinforced by another significant change brought by the virtual technologies - the developments in knowledge production. Sceptical views (e.g. Bugeja 2005) suggested that the new media technologies substantially lack authenticity and what people see or read on the Web is not necessarily the truth. The Internet has made it more difficult to distinguish reality from fiction. All of these create the culture of consumerism promoted online, the loss of the sense of community and other social problems, such as 'the social gap that develops when individuals misperceive reality because of media over consumption and misinterpret others because of technology overuse' (2005: ix).

Meanwhile the quality of the Internet content is omitted; the problem of access still remains influential, because the Internet appears to be the main news source and the most advanced communication medium. This was the third most widely discussed topic by the first generation scholars (McNutt, 1998; Slevin, 2000; Katz et al., 2001; Rice, 2002). Slevin discussed the Internet users' statistics emphasizing the gap in the access opportunities for the different countries. To illustrate the point, in the final decade of 1990s Western European, North America and Japan represented almost the whole population of the Internet users, except for one per-cent (2000: 40). The problem with this numbers, (McNutt 1998) is not just its limitations, but the inequality of opportunities for the people who cannot be online. When the Internet is considered as a source for enriching human capital, education and cultural enlightenment, its limited access excludes certain people from the global forum. Rice (2002: 106-8) reviewed the different angles of the problem through pessimistic and optimistic perspectives, and noted the differences in salaries for the workers who used computers and the Internet in comparison to those who did not. This economic inequality is complemented by the unequal power relations, as information in the contemporary world has outstanding value and may even be seen as property (e.g.

intellectual property). A rather more positive perspective suggests that while the access options remain different, certain improvements can be observed in race and age structures of the 'Internet population' (Katz et al., 2001). Findings from this long-scale survey suggested increased access to the Web for African-American population (from 7.2% to 10.5% within 5 years) and slight increases in the proportions of users above and below 40 years old. The empirical data on the men and women Internet access opportunities also changed. Whilst in 1990s the Internet was predominantly used by men in 2000 this situation stabilised with most recent statistics representing women as a majority of Internet users (Ono and Zavodny, 2003; Pew Internet Research, 2013).

This raises other popular research themes on the 'Old Wide Web'. The questions of 'who is online' and 'what they do there' were often raised by academics. The Pew Research Centre, for example, annually publishes reports on the demographics of the users¹. In terms of examining the different activities people engage in online, Daniel Miller should be mentioned (Miller and Slater, 2000). The author is well-known for his anthropological and ethnographical research on the Internet, when through participant observations in Trinidad he learned the ways in which modern technologies are understood and adapted in people's lives; the Internet may be used for educational and business purposes, as a tool of entering the market and selling products and as a platform for gaining contacts and connections (2000: 44). Miller's work illustrated the shift from the static and quantitative methodologies to the interpretive and qualitative accounts, which changed the nature of Internet studies. Importantly, the research that will be presented here continues Miller's tradition, combining online and offline methods of research and using interpretative paradigms based on participants' perception and stories. In addition, 'digital anthropology' perspective is also applied in terms of studying global Internet phenomena on the basis of individual users' experience.

THE WEB 2.0

Second generation of the Internet research begins with the emergence of social networking sites (SNS) allowing people not just access but content creation, making every user an independent medium through their social media account or profile. SNSs such as

¹ The Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press. Available at: <http://www.people-press.org/>

MySpace and Facebook added new meaning to those communication platforms. Specifically, they did not simply transform, but rather extended the real life connections into the virtual networks, making it increasingly difficult to separate the online and offline networks (Baym, 2011: 386). The idea of inseparable virtual and real worlds demonstrated by SNS is something that took the social research to the next level and received the label 'Web 2.0'. This indicates the development on the social side and the meaning of the Internet and refers to:

a new (i.e. second) phase of the evolving and extending the Internet. [...] which has a social dimension built around communities and social networks, is based on user-generated and control of content, emphasizes providing and remixing of data from multiple sources, uses increased simplicity in design (Wigand, 2012: 2).

Of course, the biggest changes can be observed in technological improvements, such as the possibility to create, share and combine different forms of content. Meanwhile, substantial change has also been brought to the social side of the developments. Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008: n.p) distinguished the next key features of the Web 2.0: the importance of the user as a main entity in the Internet system; the opportunities for creating connections between users, such as friendships, relationships, statuses and group membership; the possibility to have profile page; the use of comments; and certain controls over privacy. Thus, if previously users were only able to read the Internet, now their role was more influential, because they form and maintain the new Web.

As a result, the Web 2.0 social research agenda includes the issues of self-representation and online-identity on the Internet (Jones-Shoeman, 2009; Mallan, 2009); personal traits and their influence on the use of social networking sites (Orr, 2009). Other research has focused on the motives and causes of peoples` participation in Internet communities (Bishop, 2007). In addition, Kendall (2011) examined the concept of online community. The researcher examined the notion of community in comparison with the 'networked individualism' and concluded that contemporary reality somehow abates the bonds between people, making the online communities 'weaker' than their real prototypes. A similar conclusion was used by the author of the term – Barry Wellman (2002) - who scrutinized the changes in the community structures towards the networks where the individual forms the central node.

SOCIAL NETWORK SITES IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

It is possible to suggest that social network sites represent an independent object of studies. Boyd and Ellison define SNS as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (2007: n.p).

Baym (2011: 386) claims this definition to be too formalised because, whilst such websites as YouTube, Vine or Pinterest meet the above mentioned criteria, Internet users would more consider them to be a video- or image sharing platforms than a 'classical' social network site. Currently, among the most popular and widely accepted examples of the SNS are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and LinkedIn, which are relatively new. In comparison, Facebook originated in 2005, while the first SNS (SixDegrees.com) was created in 1997 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). However, academics suggest everything 'before Facebook' did not provide the same value for the sociologists, as early social networking sites simply represented the transformation of the 'real' social networks into their online analogues (boyd and Ellison, 2007; Baym, 2011; Miller, 2011). The first SNS's users were 'adding' their real life contact into the 'online address book'; meanwhile the modern social network help to create new communities, make new friends and connect with people they might never meet in reality. An anecdotal illustration of this idea can be found in Miller's (2011) anthropological study *Tales from Facebook*. One of the 'tales' regards the personal relationships of a couple, where the husband's Facebook communication with different women resulted in divorce.

Importantly, the term 'social network' is not that novel for sociology, although, the primary understanding of the social networks involved the changes in the social and community structures. For the first time the term was introduced by Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) to denote the difference between a 'society' (as more generalised form of connection between people) and 'community' or the social network (the closest circles of interaction, such as family and friends) (cited in Kendall, 2011). In the 1950s the notion of the social network acquired its modern meaning through the works of Batt and Barnes (cited in Baym, 2011: 385). Probably the best well-known experiment to expand upon the idea of 'social network' is the one conducted by Stanley Milgram who examined the size of

the average social network, concluding that a person is connected to any other person through no more than six other people (Travers and Milgram, 1969). Mark Granovetter (1973), as another usually cited author in this context, discussed the idea of strong and weak ties as two different forms of people's associations in terms of interpersonal relations. The paradoxical conclusion of the author suggests that weak ties are more useful for organising social networks, while strong ones often lead to the fragmentation of the networked community (1973: 1378).

The concept of the strong and weak ties brought the primary issues of the Internet access and participation to a new level. Academics started evaluating the ability of the SNS to mobilise the users and increase participation online. Kavanaugh (2002: 19-22) examined the influence of the Internet on civic engagement in Virginia and concluded that online networks reinforce the real ones, encouraging communication and strengthening the trust among the participants which leads to increased participation. Earlier Putnam (2000) expressed concerns towards the future online substitution of traditional forms of political participation as the price of effectiveness. Not surprisingly, the first attempts focused on this problem in the political context as political actors decided to use SNS for election campaigns and political purposes (Polat, 2005). Christensen (2012:18) argued the evidence of the Internet to injure democratic engagement is rather weak. Finally, positive impact in terms of active use of SNSs during the 2008 US elections was observed in the Pew Research Report².

SNS: HOME FOR 'SLACKTIVISTS'?

Overall, the power of the SNS in changing the world was quite promising at the beginning. However, lately the positive tone of writings on the SNS's ability to mobilize, increase civic and political engagement and 'make a difference' have been interrupted. Such sceptical discussions were triggered by the social protests and movements in countries such as Syria, Turkey and the US. On the one hand, case studies emphasizing positive impacts of the use of SNS for mobilizing support may be found, for instance, in Postill (2011). The author provided an analysis of the protest movements in Malaysia and Spain,

² Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press (2008). Available at: <http://www.people-press.org/2008/01/11/internets-broader-role-in-campaign-2008/>

showing the major role the online communication platforms played in the generation and support of the activists. Moreover, the positive impacts of the 'sharing', 'liking' and 'tweeting' were discussed by Harlow and Harp (2012) who found that online activism in the US and Latin America equally resulted into the offline actions; while Zoonen, Vis and Mihelj (2010) noticed that video contact on the SNS YouTube can also be seen as a mobilization tool.

The positive tone of the academic literature was interrupted by Evgeny Morozov (2011), who is known for providing a detailed critique of the Internet and SNS in terms of their helpfulness for offline activism. When illustrating this point, Morozov examined the Facebook community 'Saving the Children of Africa' with their 1.7 million members and concluded that:

it does look impressive [...] until you discover that they have raised about \$12,000 (less than one-hundredth of a penny per person). [...] Thus, for many such campaigns, the supposed gains of digital activism are nothing but illusory. [...] Facebook may have made finding volunteers easier, but only at the cost of having to spend more time getting those volunteers to do any work. (Morozov, 2011: 190-4).

This claim has become an issue for a considerable debate resulting into the creation of a phenomenon 'slacktivism'. Probably, the merit of popularization of this neologism belongs to the journalist Malcolm Gladwell (2010) who scrutinized the range of the social protest movements worldwide and demonstrated that social media did not play any major role in it. The term is coined from the combination of the words 'slacker' and 'activism', describing the situation when the Internet users are actively showing their online support through signing petitions, sharing slogans, liking the protest community pages, while all of this activism stays declared and has no continuation beyond the Facebook (or any other SNS) page (Christensen, 2011: n.p). Another synonym of the phenomenon is 'clicktivism'.

To what extent has the issue of 'slacktivism' been researched? Whilst this paper aims at increasing understanding the phenomenon through empirical investigation, theoretical approaches have also been applied to this issue. Specifically, sociological thought accounts for a number of distinctive theories, which are relatively helpful in this context. For example, Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'habitus' (as a set of dispositions, values and practices acquired through social roles and statuses, constituting a certain lifestyle). Papacharissi and Easton (2012) coined the concept of 'social media habitus' conditioned by the new realities and practices of the digital world, which, in regards to the

current study, may explain causes of slacktivism (as certain online etiquette of non-activism). Theorizing about the motives may also reference Goffman's concepts of the 'front- and backstage' (1991). The assumption here could be that a Facebook page or any other social media profile is considered by its users and everyone else as a front stage, where the role of the 'good Samaritan' or 'very conscious citizen' should be played (Marichal, 2010).

In terms of empirical studies, in her meta-analysis of the relevant literature, Boulianne (2009) concluded that there has been little evidence of the Internet and SNS causing decline in participation and activism and, therefore, provoking slacktivism. On the other hand, Vitak et al. (2011) examined college students' participation in the political activities on Facebook and concluded that 'slacktivism' does take place in this context. Thus, although students were active in political campaigns, the activities they participated in tended to be the least time and resource consuming. Moreover, the low rates of response to online petition signings and email campaigns were also demonstrated empirically (Shulman, 2009). Secondly, scholars investigated 'clicktivism' in different forms of activism (apart from political) to see whether the issue of participation matters (Earl et al., 2010). Thirdly, the research even suggested the different levels of impact on online activism among different SNS (Youmans and York, 2012). Finally, the issue of 'slacktivism' was examined through an original lens, suggesting that it actually encourages offline activism by raising awareness (Lee and Hsieh, 2013) or motivating the advocacy groups (Karpf, 2010). Therefore, the following section will reflect on the unexamined dimensions of the problem.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Having reviewed the literature on the Internet studies of the two generations and particularly on the SNS, the gap has identified in the field of research concerning the social engagement and activism facilitated by the Web. As concluded earlier, the previous studies debated the positive and negative impacts of the new media on face-to-face communication, offline interaction between individuals, and particularly, online activism. The academics, focusing on the sceptical side of the discussion, coined the term 'slacktivism' which seems to be an interesting phenomenon to examine. The current

research does not seek to verify the existence of the phenomenon as it has been done by a number of authors (Schulman, 2009; Morozov, 2011; Vitak et al., 2011). Furthermore, it does not seek to evaluate whether this notion should be considered as positive or negative (Karpf, 2010; Lee and Hsieh, 2013). The aim is to provide a qualitative explanation of the reasons 'slacktivists' do what they do. In other words, the assumption is that people do engage in 'feel-good online activism', but why?

However, before directly addressing the issue, the target audience for the research should be defined. First, among the variety of different social networking sites, Facebook was chosen as a main platform for the investigation. This was done because online engagement may take different forms (petition signing, post sharing, 'Liking', distributing of audio, visual and video materials, creating communities by interest etc.); and Facebook provides its users with all these options (Miller, 2011). Moreover, the interface of this SNS facilitates discussion, allowing comments on other people`s ideas and even donating money (Vitak et al., 2008: 108). Facebook remains the most popular network among similar websites with approximately 750 million unique visitors per month³. Secondly, according to the latest report of the Pew Internet Research Centre (2013), 67% of users are young 18-29 years old women (ibid.). This feature is also relevant to the SNS users in general, because young people are the major consumers of the new media. Livingstone argues that young adults are of significant interest for the social media research as they represent a distinctive group who quicker adopt and adapt to the new digital technologies (2002: 3-4). Moreover, young people, especially students, represent a distinctive subculture (counterculture even) as their identities are very much influenced in the process of the interaction with peers and through social media influence (Livingstone, 2002: 4)

In terms of social activism, young people were historically in the centre of social movements (e.g. 1960s) creating well-known hippie communities, opposing politicians, liberating women, defending human rights and forcing social change (Flanagan and Syvertsen, 2006: 12-7). Therefore, 'Facebook active' students will be the research focus. One possible suggestion may be that Facebook slacktivism taps into a long line of counter-cultural movements, representing a new form of activism. On the other hand, Putnam

³ as for July 2013. Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites. Available at: <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites>

(1995) observed the general tendency of young people becoming less socially active and involved in different organisations and unions, so ‘clicktivism’ may be also seen as an evidence of continuation of the trend. Another relevant finding follows from Konrath’s (2012) study of students’ activism from 1970s to 2010, suggesting the noticeable decline in empathy among young people and increased social disconnection as a possible result of narcissism promoted online.

The following research questions address the reasons for the gap in the online and offline engagement of students in voluntary activities. Importantly, the research does not impose any definition of the term ‘voluntary activities’ allowing meanings to be generated by participants. Thus, the first question is directed to investigate the perception of ‘voluntary activities’ (both on Facebook and offline). Moreover, because the majority of the literature on slacktivism involves politics and charity, this will help contextualise the research applying the phenomenon in a broader context.

RQ 1: How do modern students understand and perceive the term ‘voluntary activities’?

With regards to the second question the activities mentioned by the participants as examples would be regarded as the most frequent for the SNS which may add to the discussion on the appropriateness of the use of Facebook for political purposes, mobilization, support and fund raising (Morozov, 2010; Youmans and York, 2012).

RQ 2: Can voluntary activities have an online dimension or is it something that is only perceived as a ‘real-life’ activity?

Thirdly, before moving to the causes of ‘slacktivist’ behaviour, it is important to identify whether the students admit the existence of the phenomenon.

RQ 3: In what ways does activity on Facebook influence students’ online and offline participation in voluntary activities?

RQ 4: How do students perceive the phenomenon of ‘slacktivism’ with regards to their online and offline voluntary engagement?

Thus, while previous studies claimed the term to denote ‘feel-good participation’ in socially and politically significant events, the research should examine how this category is constructed in students’ discourse and if any other dimensions could be applied. Finally, after understanding of the object under the investigation is gained, the research will be able

to operate with the key term in order to explain the students' perception of the causes of the phenomenon.

RQ 5: What are the general (common) motives behind 'slacktivist' behaviour?

The overall approach chosen for this study is inductive. Therefore, no assumptions are made and no hypotheses are tested. The following empirical investigation will aim to explain the causes and reasons of 'slacktivism', giving the research participants the power to articulate meanings in their own words. Thus, the next chapter explains the methodology, methods and research procedures in detail.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter provides a description of the research methodology. Initially, the strategy chosen for the study will be introduced and the appropriateness of the project design will be explained. Subsequently, the focus of the chapter will be shifted to the methods of data collection. Later on, the issues of the population and sampling frame will be considered and the description of proposed instrumentation will be given. This includes the detailed explanation of every stage of the data collection and the reflection on the research ethics. Finally, the discussion will move on to address how the data will be analysed.

Examples of the investigations into ‘slacktivist’ behaviour are to be found in Christensen (2011) and Krueger (2002). Overall, previous studies aimed to test the existence of the phenomenon either using quantitative methods such as surveys (Vitak et al., 2011) or through case-studies (Tacchi, 2013; Postill, 2013). However, the present research focuses on the exploration of the motivations behind slacktivist behaviour and aims to fill the gap in the existing literature on this issue. Therefore, a qualitative approach seems to be the most appropriate. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3), qualitative research ‘attempts to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them’. To be more specific, this research assumes there are no ‘obvious’ explanations for the slacktivist behaviour, so the discourse around the topic is the most valuable data. This allows the distinguishing of certain themes and provides useful findings for future theorising. The two distinctive features of the qualitative research ‘emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their socialworld’ and ‘a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individual’s creation’, additionally account for the justification of the chosen strategy (Bryman, 2012: 36).

METHODS

With regards to the methods of data collection, online and offline focus groups were used. The purpose of the focus groups was to generate discussion on the given topic as it

was assumed that the presence of more than one respondent would stimulate emotional and spontaneous answers and raise valuable issues and critical opinions (Sarantakos, 2013: 207). In this case, the reflection of the research participants on each other's opinions provided an additional insight. Two focus groups were conducted as digital qualitative methods are becoming increasingly popular in modern sociology and their effectiveness was proven to be as high as that of the traditional methods (Miller, 2011; Miller and Slater 2000). In addition, the selection of the two groups of participants (both for online and offline purposes) was directed by the research focus. As the phenomenon of 'slacktivism' illustrates the gap between 'online' intentions and 'offline' behaviour it seemed appropriate to replicate this condition in the research design. Therefore, the online focus group was followed by the 'real-life' focus group, allowing comment on the degree of willingness of the respondents to participate in online and offline research in comparison.

SAMPLING STRATEGY

The sampling strategy was guided by the principle discussed in Deacon et al. (2010: 57), who considered sample making in the qualitative research to be a matter of creativity which depends on the resources available to researchers and does not usually follow standard protocols and procedures. Consequently, the sample aimed to capture the individual and social constructions of meanings associated with the phenomenon under investigation. As the study focused on the elaboration of the perceptions and collectively constructed interpretations, the sample had to reflect the variety of such perceptions.

First, all participants had to be students; secondly, they had to be active Facebook users. In fact, the population of students was used because of the assumption that this category of people tends to be the most active social media users. Later on, this claim was justified by statistical data provided by the Pew Research Centre Report (2012) and by previous studies (boyd, 2007 and Hargittai, 2007). More details and justification of the chosen demographics may be found in the previous chapter. Other than that, the idea was to create two groups whose members had strong and contrasting thoughts regarding the issue – one group included the people who addressed themselves as 'slacktivists', while the other involved participants who represented the opposite side of the debate – those who have tried to recruit volunteers online for a 'real-life purpose'. As a result, theoretical sampling

was used to represent the cases that could significantly contribute to the theoretical development of the research problem (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, this distinction between the members of the two groups sought to minimize the bias when the researcher took one of the sides and judged the opposing views. Therefore, the offline focus group was conducted with the 'slacktivists' (which was quite ironic considering their traditional unwillingness to participate in social activities); while the online group involved 'Facebook activists' who had experience in creating online communities and finding volunteers online.

Participants for the traditional focus groups were recruited through posters on the campus of the University of Glasgow and the relevant announcements on web pages of the communities such as 'Glasgow International Society' and 'Gilchrist Postgraduate Club'. Online focus group members were recruited through various Facebook pages representing socially active communities. Administrators of the Facebook communities were told about the online focus group and encouraged people to take part. The choice of the Facebook pages was influenced by students who took part in the pilot study. Moreover, the list of pages consisted of the communities to which the researcher had unrestricted access (such as the University of Glasgow Facebook page) or those that are generally known to be involved in the voluntary sector (e.g. British Red Cross). Finally, some participants were recommended by the people who had taken part in the offline focus group, but all of them had to meet the criteria of 'having any kind of administrating experience with online communities'. For example, one of the suggested participants managed the website for a band and its social media accounts, whilst another organized charity events on Facebook.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Offline focus group

Having discussed the overall methodology and methods of data collection, the specification of the procedures and techniques used will be given. The offline focus group took place in a seminar room equipped with all of the necessary technologies, creating a professional atmosphere. One of the advantages of the traditional focus group method was the low possibility of a sudden refusal to participate, which was quite likely to happen on the Internet when the respondent lost interest in the research. Thus, from ten people invited to take part in the offline focus group, nine showed up on the day of the research, while

with the online case, from sixteen participants initially invited to take part, only ten continued with their participation. The focus-group lasted approximately 1.5 hours and was audio-taped and transcribed later; the permission for this was gained from every participant by signing of the consent form.

The review of the literature presented in the previous chapter identified the questions to be asked. The effectiveness and the wording of the questions were tested using a mini pilot study with five students. This was a necessary pre-requisite given the complexity of online focus group design, the nature of the issue and the fact that English is not the native tongue of the researcher.

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Regarding the ethical issues, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and similarly as for the online focus group, ethical approval was obtained from School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Committee. The pseudonyms were created by the participants. In order to make this procedure as objective as possible, every member of the focus group received a card with a letter distributed in alphabetic order, so the pseudonym would start with the given letter.

Online focus group

The 'online' focus group was conducted to supplement the data and provide a point of comparison with the offline one. The rates of response to online group discussions are claimed to be lower than with traditional focus groups (Stewart and Williams, 2005). To overcome this weakness, an asynchronous type of online group discussion was chosen. As Deacon et al. (2010: 68) put it: 'asynchronous online interviewing involves the interviewer dispatching questions to [...] group members and then experiencing a time lag before receiving responses'. Thus, the time delay that occurs in the interaction between the researcher and the participants allows for more qualitative answers (ibid.). Moreover, the

longer period given for the participants to respond helped to collect the required amount of data faster.

Among the general arguments in favour of this method are lack of major expense and flexibility in terms of the time, duration and number of participants. In addition, a web-located focus group did not require transcription, because the answers were given in writing, which greatly facilitated the work of the researcher. However, the weaknesses of this method involved the increased duration of the focus group interviews and the difficulties with the engagement of the participants as the researcher had to encourage the discussion on every question. In addition, the lack of the mediation from the researcher sometimes shifted the focus of discussion to wider or irrelevant issues. However, those two limitations were overcome through the double-posting of the least answered questions or those that were not discussed to the required depth.

The online focus group was performed on the Social Networking Site 'Facebook', where a special event page was created to become a platform for discussion⁴. The invitation to the page was sent to the participants only and access was closed to the general public. Every participant was able to leave comments on any question for a period of twenty days. Overall, ten students took part in the online focus group. With regard to the ethical requirements, every member of the Facebook page was asked to sign the consent form. However, because of the distant participation and the 'digital form' of the discussion, the participants were asked to 'Like' the message with the consent form which would count as 'online signature'. If a participant refused to like the message he or she could not proceed to answering the focus group questions.

APPROACH

Using both methods the final sample consisted of nineteen participants; six women and thirteen men. The age of participants varied from 20 to 26. More details on the structure of the sample can be found in the Appendix 1. The data was analysed in the following way. First, because of the quite innovative character of the research when both online and offline methods were integrated, none of the traditional methods of analysis could be applied without any modifications. However, all qualitative research can be

⁴ Web address of the research Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/events/157951471063242/162253837299672/?notif_t=plan_mall_activity

regarded as one of the four analytic models. Thus, the one used in this case was the flexible model. According to Sarantikos (2013: 369) this model combines the elements of iterative (when analysis is conducted during collection of data) and fixed (when analysis takes place after data collection) models. In other words, depending on the research requirements the researcher may analyse the information obtained during and after its collection, in order to broaden the quality of data or fill the gaps that occurred after the primary research procedure was carried out. In this particular case, after the end of the offline focus group the data was immediately transcribed and analysed in order to improve the process and the future findings of the online focus group. After the online stage of the research was carried out, the second stage of the analysis sought to compare and contrast the results of both focus groups so that final conclusions could be made.

Analysis

The method of the analysis used can be defined as a combination of the thematic analysis and analytic induction. Thematic analysis, as Sarantikos puts it, is: ‘a method employed to analyse data focusing on themes, identified my means of coding’ (2013: 379). To illustrate, the themes, as sets of categories with the similar meanings, were used to denote different motives of slacktivists’ behaviour (Sarantikos, 2013: 379). Importantly, themes are not given or stable units, because they are constructed through the analysis. The search for themes was guided by the procedure of coding. Thus, the transcripts of the focus groups were marked in order to identify repetitions, metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences in the respondents` answers (Bryman, 2011: 580).

Secondly, analytic induction was applied, which refers to a certain type of research logic and is defined in Smelser and Batles (2011:1) as: ‘causal explanation, a specification of the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the emergence of some part of social life’. This helped to combine the coded categories into the broader themes (Sarantikos, 2013: 380). The themes were than compared with the theoretical findings from the reviewed literature in order to formulate the new concepts and redefine the older theories. The key condition of the analysis was objectivism. The researcher had to stay as unbiased as possible, so as not to influence the research results. This condition was satisfied

through the application of the different theoretical lenses and the use of induction strategy with no desire to test any previously made assumptions.

Finally, after explaining the analytical instruments and techniques, it is worth mentioning that the researcher understands the limitation of the research conducted, because of the small sample size and its specialised nature. Thus, the following findings should not be taken as being appropriate when applied to the entire population. On the contrary, the analysis provided some starting points for generating wider discussions of the motives of the 'slacktivist' behaviour among young people and in the general population.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Both online and offline focus groups were aimed at identifying perceptions and making meanings of respondents' opinions. All the questions asked during the focus group discussions reflect the five research questions outlined in the Literature Review. Therefore, findings presented in this chapter are grouped into five main sections. The chapter begins with conceptualization of the term 'voluntary activities' as perceived by participants. Secondly, online dimension of voluntary activities is evaluated in terms of opportunities for performing volunteering on the Internet. Thirdly, the analysis addresses the research questions about what kind of role social networking sites, such as Facebook, play in students' participation of voluntary activities (both online and offline). Later on, the concept of 'slacktivism' in respondents' understanding is assessed with the main argument being that 'slacktivism' may represent a new form of activism. Finally, the popular motives of slacktivist' behaviour (as ascertained during the research) are explained with theoretical perspectives applied.

The following discussion and conclusions were driven by all the materials gathered during the research; in particular, as a result of identifying key themes and patterns in the participants' answers. It should be stated that many more themes were identified than are actually presented in the chapter. The choice of topics to be covered was driven by three features: significance, innovative character and relevance to the research focus. Thus, less valuable findings will not be discussed in this paper.

RQ 1: How do modern students understand and perceive the term 'voluntary activities'?

In the questions list for both focus groups, there were two questions:

How would you define the term 'voluntary activities'?

Can you give any examples of 'voluntary activities'?

As no definitions were imposed, the first question allows the opportunity to set a context for investigation of slacktivism in relation to voluntary activities as articulated by participants. Thus, three themes emerged in this relation. Interestingly, the first two themes were more typical for the online focus group responses, while the last one was only

represented in the answers from offline focus group. The following paragraphs will explore each of the themes in more detail providing possible explanation for such contrasting perceptions.

Voluntary activities as unpaid activities

This first theme emerged not only in the participant's definitions of the term, but more positively in the examples they have provided. This included descriptions of their own experiences or those they have heard about. When defining the term the following phrases were used such as: 'unpaid real movements', 'without constraint or expectation of reward' and 'does not involve financial benefits'. The 'unpaid activity' theme was emphasized by providing examples of the volunteering, or events that involved giving and not receiving money, such as donations, charity and fund raising.

As far as financial issues are concerned, interviewees differed in their perspectives on whether voluntary activities and charity are synonymic notions. In contrast, a number of respondents pointed out that volunteering does not necessarily involve helping people in need ('This all seems very welfare focused, while I don't think it necessarily has to be', - Emma); but the activity should be mass organized and aim at making a difference ('personal donation are not included', - Craig).

Overall, the analysis of the first theme strongly suggested that the concept of 'voluntary activities' is very useful for an understanding of the phenomenon of slacktivism. First, participants' perceptions of the term as unpaid activity links back to the reviewed literature on slacktivism in the context of mobilizing support (Postill, 2001; Gladwell, 2010; Boulianne, 2009). This suggests that motives other than financial benefits can trigger participation; thus SNS as a free platform may be considered as a tool of increased participation. Secondly, associating voluntary activities with charity also provides a good justification for the use of this concept when researching slacktivism. Thus, Morozov (2010), who is often mentioned as the author of the term slacktivism, explains the notion with the use of charity and donations. This first theme demonstrates that the phenomenon of slacktivism can also be studied in the broader context of voluntary activities.

Voluntary activity as a selfless act

Whilst the first theme suggests a more definitive explanation of the term, the notion of voluntary activities as selfless acts provides more explanations of its meaning and value. The second theme was developed from repeated phrases such as: ‘doing good without expecting anything in return’ and ‘doing a good deed without getting any kind of benefit out of it’. With such claims, participants highlighted the differences between simply unpaid activities, and those that do not seek to achieve any kind of reward. This idea is particularly well positioned in the following.

Iain: [...] want one more time to emphasise the altruistic character of voluntary activities. There can be unpaid activities (internship in the bank, for example), that hardly can be defined as voluntary activities, because it serves for subjective purposes of that person.

The importance of such interpretation lies in its the potential applications to the question of the motives behind slacktivist behaviour, as it shall be argued that altruism and selflessness (as philosophical categories and rather ‘serious’ notions) is not something that can be performed on Facebook as SNS for entertainment. A similar meaning for the research findings provided the final identified theme.

Voluntary activities as work

This theme is probably the least obvious and somehow ironic, because it is derived mainly from the focus group discussion with people who to some extent viewed themselves as ‘slacktivists’. In contrast to the perception of voluntary activities as an altruistic act or the one not requiring payment, this last concept claims that this ‘for-free’ basis does not automatically suggest a correspondingly lack of effort in terms of performance. The Oxford Dictionary suggests the meaning of the word ‘work’ to be an activity involving physical or mental efforts in order to achieve certain results. Therefore, the participant’s view of voluntary activities as requiring some kind of efforts, skills or investments was classified under the ‘work’ theme. What was significant is the value attributed to the time as the main investment. Examples given bellow quite clearly illustrate the point:

Kevin: Voluntary activities are...you take time out of your day...to do something that does not require payment.

Michael: [...] sort of connected to giving your time, but also there is actually some form...em...investment of your effort, you know, some decent action behind it...

The consideration of voluntary activity as a time-consuming act will be further evaluated to provide some possible explanations for the causes of the investigated behaviour. Meanwhile, this theme also suggests that all work requires some kind of encouragement. Among the possible benefits of participating in the voluntary activities interviewees named 'experience', 'pleasure' and even 'reap(ing) some rewards in karma or status'; therefore, expectation of benefit from involvement in voluntary activities may be seen as a possible prerequisite for 'slacktivist' behaviour.

RQ2: Can voluntary activities have an online dimension or is it something that is only perceived as a 'real-life' activity?

Previous studies on the Internet and SNS as tools for mobilization suggested the high potential of these tools for gathering people (Kavanaugh, 2002; Polat, 2005; Earl et al., 2010). Therefore, the second research question sought to test whether such 'mobilizing' power also applies to voluntary activities. In order to do so participants were asked to reflect on the possibility of the voluntary acts being performed online and illustrate their points. Generally, participants were positive about the opportunities Internet gives for volunteering. However, it may also be argued that despite the ubiquity of the Internet and its common use in everyday life, the sphere of voluntary activism has not been yet fully discovered by Web users. Thus, whilst explaining the concept of voluntary activities the idea of cheering people up (e.g. those who have serious illness) was mentioned and also examples of volunteering to gain experience; in terms of online alternatives participants' examples were rather limited. This finding formed the first theme.

Limitations of online volunteering

On the one hand, the participants in online focus groups (those who had experience in organizing voluntary activities) were expected to be more aware of different forms of Internet volunteering. The examples provided varied from the maintenance of websites and

e-government as ‘ability of citizens to request formal information about government activities, budget issues [...] used by many activists to fight corruption’ (Iain) to ‘helplines in a form of a chat’ (Jane). Overall, these examples may be connected under the concepts of ‘online organization’ and ‘online participation’ - quite common forms of Internet activism (Earl et al. 2010: 440). The authors also suggested those forms to be empirically under-investigated. On the other hand, the current research demonstrates those forms as not being popular enough, meaning that the people who are aware of such examples of online activism are usually their organizers. To illustrate, participants of offline focus groups suggested the use of online volunteering for awareness raising purposes only. Earl et al. (2010: 440) also distinguished between the two forms of such activism – ‘brochure-ware’ and ‘online facilitation of offline activity’. In the perception of the offline focus group members these were worded as shown below.

Lars: It was for some research that yes, you can do it online. That is for charity, or something like...I am not sure...I think you would find out what they would like you...well, how they would like you to spend money.

Adam: It depends on the activity [...] if this is about creating an awareness or about raising the fact. This is possible, it can be done online.

Moreover, Earl et al. (2010) argues that online facilitation of offline activity, as providing information in this case, has shown little efficiency for general activism and mobilization purposes. What this finding possibly suggests is that students who are not themselves involved in administrating or maintaining platforms for online volunteering are more likely to participate in the forms of activities which are the least time and resource consuming. Secondly, this finding expands Vitak et al’s (2011) conclusion regarding the rather superficial online participation of young voters in the broader context of voluntary activities. Thirdly, the idea of online volunteering only in terms of information seeking, allows speculation about the motives of slacktivist behaviour. However, before evaluating this claim another theme emerged in accordance with the second research question and should be analysed.

Lack of mediation

One possible explanation for the limited use of the Internet for the engagement in voluntary activities may be found in this theme. In participants’ narratives about the nature

of online volunteering a clear distinction between online and offline dimensions could be observed. In other words, a number of authors writing about Web 2.0 emphasized the somewhat erased boundaries between the virtual and real lives (Baym, 2011; Wigand, 2012). However, the interviewees often stressed the importance of physical presence for voluntary activities as a main reason for the limitation of the online alternative. This was observed through repetitions such as: ‘require physical appearance’; ‘need someone to have a real physical move to make a difference’ and ‘requires energy, like physical energy’.

Interestingly, for those people who viewed voluntary activities as a selfless act of altruism, the lack of physical contact or mediation on the Internet may provide quite a reasonable motive for slacktivism. Although slacktivism is usually defined as ‘feel-good participation’ (Morozov, 2010; Christensen, 2011), in the case of someone looking to commit a selfless act, online voluntarism may be considered as a ‘not feel good enough’ alternative. Therefore, the Internet would be seen only as a source of providing information about the ‘real life events’. In contrast, as far as Cornelissen et al. (2013) are concerned, the explanations may vary. The concept of ‘moral licensing’ described in the research suggests that symbolic acts performed online (e.g. clicking ‘Like button’) substantially decreases the possibility of such intentions to be transformed into the real life behaviour. Overall, in both cases the emphasis of selflessness and altruism in voluntary activities has rather negative consequences for their online analogues.

On the other hand, lack of physical presence or mediation also adds to the idea of possible online facilitation of the offline volunteering. Participants often used the metaphor of the Internet or SNS sites being a first step in the volunteering campaign, although often being the only step. As a result, the power of the Internet in mediating conversations may be great; however, the ability to mediate actions seems to be insignificant.

RQ 3: In what ways does activity on Facebook generally influence online and offline participation in voluntary activities?

Having examined the possibility of online engagement in voluntary activities in general, research scrutinized online volunteering in the context of Facebook. Questions asked of both focus groups were directed towards evaluating the wider role this social

networking site plays in terms of students' activism. Two themes are presented here as revealed in the analysis.

Enthusiasm regarding Facebook's potential

The main issue demonstrating the positive tone in talking about the influence of Facebook in voluntary activism was interface or design of the SNS. In the perception of the students in the sample, increased interactivity, connectivity, simplicity and 'openness' of Facebook provide opportunities for young people to be more active nowadays. With regard to connectivity and good metaphor to illustrate the point was made by Helen saying that information on Facebook spreads 'just like a snowball getting bigger which makes people aware'. Interestingly, the popular discourse of 'modern students wasting their lives online' was interpreted by one of the participants in quite a witty way, suggesting the positive implications of 'Facebook addiction'.

Steve (25): I think Facebook made people less active in general, but as long as people are going to be glued to it for hours, you might as well pass some useful information down the road. Also, I don't even know if it's really true that it wastes people's lives because people were always lazy and found ways to do nothing. It's just that a hundred years ago the thing to do was to sit on your porch and spit into a jar, now it's sitting on your phone and liking people's dinners.

At the same time, Facebook interface was discussed in terms of more technical advantages for online volunteering. For example, existence of 'news feed'; 'Like' and 'Share' buttons; opportunity for 'creating events' such as sending invitations to real-life meetings through Facebook; popularity of Facebook communities and groups. Another interesting example of the use of Facebook from a technical standpoint regarded 'Facebook coins' as a novel tool making 'monetary value of social networking, so if that money is diverted to charities that would be like social network application of volunteering' (Kevin). All of these technicalities were almost certainly created to facilitate communication and activism and to minimize the online/offline division. However, the simplicity of Facebook design can also be interpreted as a possible cause of slacktivist behaviour. Thus, as concluded in the first research question section, voluntary activities can be perceived by a number of interviewed students as work, i.e. a very time and effort consuming practice. Accordingly, if Facebook offers 'in-one-click' alternative to the 'real' volunteering, it

seems likely for people wanting to feel good about themselves or hoping to ‘make a difference’ to choose this alternative.

Facebook appropriateness and efficiency for volunteering

An alternative theme involved participants’ assessment of the appropriateness of the use of Facebook for various volunteering purposes. Interviewees differed in their perspectives on this issue in two key respects. First, members of the online focus group were mainly positive in this context (which is rather obvious, taking into the consideration the nature of this sample). However, when the participants were asked to reflect on their personal experience of sharing important information with their ‘Friends’ (as apart from professional experience), the question of appropriateness was hampered with by reflecting on the success of such experience. Certain inconsistency occurred in stories and anecdotes with a negative flavour. Moreover, the positive examples were not those involving actual experience but rather stories ‘about a friend who knows a friend’. Typical examples of this idea are: ‘I haven’t really, but my friend did’ (Jane); ‘I heard a lot of stories that confirm the efficiency of FB [Facebook]’ (Nancy).

On the other hand, participants of the real life focus group expressed even more critical opinions, suggesting that majority of people perceive Facebook as a place (network) for many other purposes, but not volunteering:

Kevin: Is Facebook really a place to be active? Is this a place where you should be raising money? People ask themselves these questions. I would not donate to Red Cross on Facebook, but maybe if I got the letter in a mail or if there was a crisis that needed certain donation, than I would maybe consider it. Maybe people judge by themselves as if Facebook is a place to go for this.

Researcher: Can you, please, expand more on this idea? Would you suggest Facebook is a wrong place to do it?

Kevin: No, Facebook is where you create yourself; we don't really do the things. It is more like this is my alter ego, my personality, this is what I believe in, this is who I am - go look it up. But...to do work on Facebook is something people should not await for.

Researcher: And what about another SNSs, like Twitter or Google+? Would you say social networking sites in general are not really appropriate in this context, or just Facebook?

Kevin: Yeah, I think that people in general don't really like posts that I am trying to make them more socially aware. Like current issue...um....but they tend to like things that are more like not serious, you know...

Interestingly, not only Facebook may be seen as an inappropriate place for volunteering, but as a platform encouraging slacktivism. Thus, one of the participants of the offline focus group suggested an interesting metaphor:

do you know this theory of like the Panopticum? The prison that was designed in a way so the prisoners would always think they are being watched, it was designed in a circular way. But this idea that, they did not really...but they wanted to have people think they are always being watched. So this is like this paranoia... in a sense that when we post something, we know that people are like watching us, but they don't really (Alex).

If Facebook is perceived as a place where everyone is being watched several interpretations in the context of slacktivism and online participation can be given. For instance, this may bring an idea of conventional behavior into the play, meaning that users are quite likely to follow the patterns produced by their online friends. On the one hand, this might trigger 'feel-good' forms of activism if this is something popular among the online community. Whilst on the other, may be considered as a possible tool for 'fighting' slacktivism. Accordingly, the idea of Panopticum as Foucault's (1995) theory of surveillance may propose that because on Facebook everyone can observe other users' behavior, anyone can exercise power. Subsequently, if the issue or a person who starts online activism is seen as powerful or authoritative enough, potential volunteers may be more likely to participate knowing they are being watched. Another interpretation of this idea can be made through Goffman's (1959) concept of front and back stages. As far as issues of self-representation are involved, such those mentioned by the participants in the abstract provided above, Facebook may be seen as a digital front stage where slacktivism takes place, because those who engage in it, aim to look better in the eyes of their audience. Both paradigms seem interesting and useful in the context of investigated phenomenon, therefore, more research in this area is needed.

In addition, participants of both focus groups agreed on the 'non-serious' nature of Facebook, because in their experience people were more likely to respond to their pictures of 'cats and puppies' as opposed to posts requiring consideration and even help. Similarly, Vitak et al. (2011) suggested that students felt positive about stating political views on

Facebook, while agitation, persuasion and similar forms of political activism were considered as inappropriate for the SNS. Findings from the current research assume rather entertaining nature of Facebook as interviewees even opposed Facebook to more serious 'professional pages'. Therefore, claims on things like Facebook being a 'home for slacktivism' may be regarded as slightly over-stated (Morozov, 2010; Gladwell, 2010). In particular, Morozov's (2010) example about donations to Facebook community 'Saving the Children of Africa' contradicts with participants' opinions such as:

When money come into play, people would not give money, I mean it is almost impossible. [...] I think if [...] receiving a mail to your post box, people will certainly become aware...and more likely donate (Baba).

Considering the findings of the current and similar studies, Facebook seems to be a rather unnatural environment for at least certain groups of activists. Moreover, Morozov's (2010) conclusion about the relationship between the number of Likes and the amount of money donated can also be seen as arguable. For instance, participants in the current study suggested at least two motives for Liking charities' Facebook pages (to receive information about internships; to see the news of an organization in their informational feed) which although quite positive, have no intention of offering financial support. To conclude, Youmans and York (2012) case studies of YouTube and Facebook proposed some tools arising from design of these SNS for activists' benefits. However, more research is needed to 1) classify different forms of activities in terms of being more or less appropriate to perform on Facebook (and other SNS); and 2) investigate the 'nature', symbolic meaning and use of 'Like' button.

RQ 4: How do students perceive the phenomenon of 'slacktivism' with regards to their online and offline voluntary engagement?

Thematic analysis of the focus groups' answers (as fully explained in the earlier section) with regards to this research questions suggests two main findings. First, overall participants' impression on the investigated phenomenon demonstrated acceptance of its existence. The idea is given credence both by general assumptions and more anecdotal:

Perhaps social media has created a state where we feel connected to a cause by viewing it online and that's enough. We've taken the time to participate by

showing a slight interest in it but now it's time to go back to watching people fall over on YouTube (Frank).

Whilst agreeing on the prevalence of slacktivism, participants rather rejected the negative connotations of the term, proposing to substitute it with more neutral 'clicktivism' or 'keyboard activism' (Craig). Moreover, the assumption from the findings is that slacktivism should be considered as a new form of online activism, taking into consideration the power of raising awareness. This statement coincides with Lee and Hsieh (2013) about the positive implications of slacktivism. The connection here may be found in the theme on the 'potential of Facebook' for voluntary activism practices. However, as the research did not seek to evaluate the character of the phenomenon, it may only be suggested that students' perception of 'liking' and 'sharing' as a good form of online volunteering provides a starting point for the discussion about motivations of slacktivist behaviour; even though participants' opinions on whether 'Like' is a form of voluntary activity or its facilitation were not definite. Thus, more research would be useful in this direction.

In terms of evaluating participants' rejection of 'slacker' - even somehow offensive - it might be argued that finding positive dimensions of the phenomenon is a way of justifying such behaviour. Nonetheless, another theme emerged from the analysis of focus group transcripts provides an interesting counter-argument. This theme may be formulated as 'slacktivism as an opportunity'. In other words, interviewees' examples often included cases of people who engage in slacktivist behaviour (e.g. liking a page or changing their profile pictures) because they have no opportunities for performing more 'real' activities.

Doe: I was just gonna say something about the gay marriage [...] when the US court was discussing that, every friend of mine in America used that profile pictures and yeah, it got me wondering why they used that picture? [...] especially if they are overseas, that is the only thing they can do to show the support. So obviously, it is a profile picture, so whenever they post any stuff, they have that statement that 'I support gay marriage'

On the other hand, the question of opportunities may relate to the question of access. As discussed in the Literature Review, at the beginning of the new millennium researchers observed certain inequalities in access for different countries, although making positive prognosis (Slevin, 2000; Katz et al., 2001). Participants of the current research articulated concerns regarding access to the Internet and subsequent volunteering for the developing

world population. The point can be illustrated by the following quote from a Pakistani student:

It depends on what their background is, I suppose the Third World people...they have Facebook account...and not that much source [to donate money] (Kevin)

Subsequently, the issue of slacktivism versus access to 'offline' volunteering has to be further researched and examined. At this point, the chapter will summarise all findings from the current study in order to answer the main research question.

RQ 5: What are the general (common) motives behind 'slacktivist' behaviour?

Data collected in this study (including specific questions on explanations of the causes of slacktivism and overall reflection on the 'bigger picture' of research) suggest three themes for the potential motives of modern students' engagement in slacktivism. The following paragraphs discuss all of them in the context of the relevant literature and theoretical concepts, starting from macro perspectives and moving to the more specific.

Time and space, manufactured uncertainty and slacktivists

In the section defining 'voluntary activities' as perceived by the research participants, one theme suggested the term to mean time and resource consuming practices. Interestingly, concepts of time and space as a major storyline could be traced throughout the whole research. To be more specific, participants of both focus groups suggested the significant value of time, among other issues, (in forms of 'time is money', 'investing time' metaphors). With regards to slacktivism, not only does this suppose people are more likely to volunteer online through the least time-consuming options (e.g. clicking 'Like'); but suggests the satisfaction from good-doing (in fact, slacktivism) is doubled by the feeling of relief. To illustrate:

Michael: Time is sort of the biggest concern...everyone is fast, everything is connected, everything makes pressure on people. There is a lot of actual complexity. So I think people want stuff made easy for them. [...] It takes less than a second to click, so there is this instantaneous factor.

One way of interpreting this would be that engagement in slacktivist forms of online volunteering makes a ‘person who clicks’ feels good about the idea of showing support as well as the idea of not wasting their time. Similarly, it is possible to suggest the motive behind slacktivism to be the evaluation of the cost of the ‘time donation’. This also suggests special Internet platforms for money donations with interfaces allowing minimization of time expenses may be more successful.

On the other hand, the feature of ‘instantaneous’ when pressing the ‘Like’ may be interpreted as a desire for split-second results. Thus, if after ‘liking’ nothing substantially changes, students tend to stop their engagement. This assumption may be reinforced by participants’ suggestions about the higher probability of response to issues such as showing support to a movement with a profile picture, rather than more long-term ‘save the world – recycle’. Castells’ (2000) and Giddens’ (1994) writings on time and space compression may be applied here; for instance, future theorizing may involve evaluating positive and negative consequences of such compression in the context of volunteering and the Internet. The questions that need to be answered include ‘to what extent does SNS (the Internet) erase geographical boundaries?’; i.e. how likely are people to volunteer on the global scale as opposed to the local initiatives? Moreover, as far as concept of ‘manufactured uncertainty’ is applied to the phenomenon of ‘slacktivism’, it may be argued that unpredictability and invisibility of results and consequences of online volunteering as opposed to real life events, limit the power of the Internet analogue. In contrast, the awareness of possible consequences of real life voluntary activism may be a possible motivator of slacktivism: – ‘online is a lot easier than taking to the streets, plus you're unlikely to get in trouble!’ (Frank)

General apathy as a motive for slacktivism

The most prominent assumption of the causes of slacktivism, which emerged from both focus groups, is the general apathy of modern young people in regards to activism – the second motive highlighted in this study. This opinion was expressed both directly (‘I rather see it as some kind of omnipresent apathy. I think the problem here is that people generally don't really care’, - Emma) and indirectly through emphasis on related issues. Among similar problems ‘laziness’ can be blamed: ‘there is some sort of general

assumption... like I am a designer, so when I design some sort of the interfaces, I always assume that people are lazy (Michael). Interestingly, the apathy of modern students with regard to not only voluntary activities or socially important concerns, but even spheres of entertainment, such as declaring intention on SNS to go on a concert or meet with friends, but not realising it.

On the other hand when assessing explanations of such overall apathy several engaging themes were raised. Cynicism is one of them ('I find myself quite cynical', 'the fact is people are selfish'). Reference here may be given to Konrath's (2012) study of young Americans' levels of activism, where the assumption of declined empathy was made. According to this research, it is not clear whether SNS are to blame for this phenomenon, but changes in psychological portraits of youth towards narcissism and self-obsession are noticeable. At the same time, the current study suggests one possible cause is certain distrust followed by scepticism regarding the Internet.

Helen: There are so many people asking you to share it, however, it could be a frauds or tricks.

Craig: I experienced people made up false (but persuasive) information about the issues and post it on the internet, many people believed it and shared the post. This case is usually intended misleading by groups that can benefit with the issue, however, there are cases some non-related personals create fake stories [...] like "they never told you that" or "that's what 'they' want you to believe", it is pretty easy for people to believe the story without further fact checking.

Useful in this context is Burgeja's (2005) criticism of the Web as an authoritative source of context and the misconception of reality by modern 'digital consumers'. Thus, people who have had negative experience with fake information online could apply their 'distrust' to a real life issues.

Another explanation of apathy could be a levelling of sense of responsibility. Participants' discourse in this context was connected both to 'lack of mediation' on the Internet (where words' translation into actions is not monitored) and overall 'people often don't feel responsibility for their words' (Nancy). For this theme to be further interpreted context specific examination is needed.

Friends versus networks: who causes slacktivism?

The final theme is worth special attention because it represents two explanations of slacktivism emerging from one theoretical concept. Before introducing this concept the theme needs detailisation. Both focus groups raised the question of personal experience in sharing important information on personal Facebook pages with participants concluding that their friends were the most likely to respond to such activities. For instance, it was supposed that any form of supporting online activity depends on people who are aware of such activity. On the other hand, usually the informed people are represented by friends, colleagues or relatives who would support the 'organiser' in spite of online/offline nature of request. Support may sometimes be shown as 'past favour return':

Doe: people tend to 'Like' and share another people's posts, and it depends on whether they have 'Liked' or shared their stuff before. [...] Cause I always got four friends who constantly Like my stuff, and whenever they post something I just...yeah...I 'Like' back. [...] when not really friends post something and I find it really-really interesting, but I just don't click Like, because we have never really talk...i don't know...it is just weird.

Therefore, the concept of strong and weak ties is helpfully applicable here. Kendall's (2011) conclusion on the weaker bonds inside online community members correlates with the current findings. In addition, Katz et al. (2001:441) remark on the sense of collective identity that is unlikely 'to emerge when an action takes only five minutes and carries little risk' may provide some valuable insights for the future explanations of slacktivism. In contrast, the idea of the power of weak ties in context of slacktivism also requires more examination (Granovetters, 1973), because the idea of SNS only reinforcing real-life networks excludes the possibility of organised mass volunteering and interaction between people who are not acquaintance in a real life.

Consequently a second way of applying the strong and weak ties concept is suggested. This interpretation emerged from both focus groups giving example of successful offline extension of online voluntary activity. Importantly, all examples such as students protesting against the rise in tuition fees, involved very influential issues for the participants. Therefore, it may be suggested that with some issues people have 'stronger ties', which motivate them to care and/or act. This seems a reasonable explanation for the success of certain campaigns and movements. In contrast, if the ties between a

person/user/potential activist and a problem are weak, the activism tends to transform into clicktivism.

Camilla: If it is violating your own rights, and getting you really angry, for example, like....taking over the Wall Street or a month ago protest in Turkey. That all was on social media, so people just got out to the streets and just...I think it is just something different than just saving the Earth or saving water, or save a child. [...] yeah, 'cause like 'save the Earth' - it is the Earth, it has been there forever, what I can do about it? This is about something that can really get you.

To conclude, to further study this interpretation of the concept, it is necessary to establish a relationship between the nature of an issue and the consequences of caused activism; for instance, through case studies.

Concluding thoughts

The value of this research lies in its objective to provide qualitative account of modern students' online and offline voluntary activities in the context of the phenomenon of slacktivism. Firstly, boundaries for the discussion were set by demonstrating what can and cannot be defined as voluntary activities. This was a necessary step in terms of providing more specific and applicable conclusions instead of overgeneralised statements. The finding suggested that voluntary activities are defined by the interviewed sample as three separate themes: unpaid activity, selfless act, work. Moreover, the meaning people put into the term may presuppose the subsequent behaviour. Thus, if voluntary activities are considered to be very time and effort consuming, 'clicktivism' as a possible online form becomes a certain justification for its performers, because it constitutes the only 'express way' of good making.

Evaluation of the gap between real world and online volunteering suggested that, despite the Internet's involvement in almost every sphere of people's lives, the use of SNS for the purposes of volunteering has yet to be discovered by modern students. Modern technologies seem to create the opportunities for modern students' voluntary activism, but the appropriateness of Facebook as a tool for increased participation is rather arguable. Thus, one of the reasons this SNS is relatively weak in terms of mobilization is its primary entertainment focus.

The phenomenon of 'slacktivism' is something modern students are aware of; however, its negative connotations should be re-evaluated. As far as the concept of time and space compression is concerned, the fast forms of volunteering, such as sharing information or raising awareness on Facebook do not seem to be the worst alternatives for people who still want to be involved. The issue of access to the Internet and limited resources for certain groups of the population provides additional justification and a possible motive for 'keyboard activism'. The concept of the strong and weak ties both in terms of the connection to other participants of the network and connections with the issue under discussion also needs to be encompassed for more in-depth explanations. Overall, all the findings discussed suggest possible directions for future research. However, it is important to stress its information and recommendation character, rather than claim a statistical significance for its conclusions once the limitations of both sampling volume and nature are considered.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Structure of the sample

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Type of the focus group
1	Adam	22	male	Ghanaian	offline
2	Baba	23	male	Ghanaian	offline
3	Camilla	26	female	Taiwanese	offline
4	Doe	19	female	Chinese	offline
5	Kevin	23	male	Pakistani	offline
6	Michael	23	male	British	offline
7	Lars	23	male	Irish	offline
8	Steve	25	male	American	offline
9	Alex	24	male	Russian	offline
10	Jane	25	female	Polish	online
11	Jack	21	male	Arab	online
12	John	25	male	Pakistani	online
13	Smith	22	male	Ukrainian	online
14	Nancy	21	female	Ukrainian	online
15	Emma	22	female	Czech	online
16	Craig	24	male	Taiwanese	online
17	Frank	24	male	Scottish	online
18	Iain	22	male	Azerbaijani	online
19	Helen	20	female	Taiwanese	online

Appendix 4 Offline focus group transcript

Researcher: How would you define the term 'voluntary activities'? What do you understand by this?

Kevin : voluntary activities - is you take time out of your day to do something that does not require payment...

Researcher: Thank you Kevin, anyone? Don't be shy, guys, just anything you can think of..

Alex: I am not too sure about it. But like what do you mean?

Researcher: I would like you to explain, I don't really mean anything. Just want to hear your opinion.

Michael: I think some association that I have is more to do with more charitable work...and I did some volunteering once at animal center, rescued animals...and so I would say yes, connected sort of, giving your time, but also there is actual some form of...investment of your effort, you know, some decent action behind it, which might be easier than other - cleaning some dog cages, you know.

Researcher: Thank you. Anything else?

Adam: Yes, it is your contribution to society..and you don't require any payment for it.

Doe: Or maybe sometimes you do it for like experiences...

Steve: Like an activity you're not bound to do through a contractual obligation, including the responsibilities at your job that you get payed for...I mean experience, but not paid one..

Researcher: So do you think it is something you can do online? Or is it very different from what you can do in real life?

Steve: Well...yes. Donating money... it is like working a part of your everyday job for charity, which makes a part of your work day a voluntary activity.

Lars: It was for some research that yes, you can do it online. That is for a charity, or something like...I am not sure how...I think you would find out what they would like you...well, how you would like them to spend money. So maybe you will be more willing to give money. So maybe that would work that way. But I think for a lot of charitable work, I think you might kinda like require a person to do stuff.

Adam: It depends on the activity we are talking about here.

Lars: Yeah.

Adam: If this is like about creating an awareness or about raising the fact, this is possible, it can be done online. But, if this requires physical contact sort of, than online would be a starting point, and it has to transfer to a physical point. But...

Baba: I want to add. It is also depends on a kind of service you are providing, cause if it has to do with your expertise in terms of knowledge, you can provide it online. But if requires energy, like physical energy, like Adam said, your presence maybe needed for a longer time.

Camilla: Yes, I think it works online, but it depends on the organization. Activity like web design, as we previous said, is free, so it depends on what kind of the activity.

Michael: This is supposes like accessibility. And it is very easy for you to go behind your laptop and is less easy for you to go to center, you know it requires time. There is probably more opportunity to do work online. But for me, I would not initially, if you say voluntary activities, would not initially think of online voluntary activities.

Researcher: In particular, what do you think of Facebook voluntary activities? Can you name any? Or is it something which you think is quite strange? How would you comment on this?

Kevin: That sounds weird...

Lars: Well, you see people like raising awareness about certain things. But they seem like everybody kind of have it on their news feed for a month or two, see it and then completely forgot about it. While real volunteers are there every time, so I don't know if it can raise some huge awareness.

Baba: I think following the transformation of Facebook, I mean how it transformed throughout the time.. personally, if I hear about voluntary activities on Facebook. I would not like...I mean..I would still think it would be of some worth, because the other voluntary activities which I know of, usually you make your comments, you send like a mail or something and you get a feedback. But the Facebook one create an opportunity for you to interact with other members of the team and...yeah, I think it is kind of pretty dual. Giving that the uni, I mean the students of today would like to spend their time on Facebook, I mean..that's a great opportunity for us.

Kevin: I guess Facebook is being used to...like now we have Facebook coins, like producing a monetary value of social networking, so if that money is divert to charities that would be like social network application of volunteering, I guess in a way, it is not really volunteering it is more like a charity...yeah.

Michael: I guess the couple of things emerging here is to do with how, sort of, the notion of wealth, and what wealth is not, you can kind of direct with currency and monetary value of people's time investment or skill, they might have. I think, in a sense, we all...sort of...undeniably kind of in this shade economy or [...] that Facebook has. That's it, its currency, in a way our data. think there is sort of a way that its whole system is design, in a way that it is encouraging people for more voluntary work - increase the interaction for people, making it easy to share.

Doe: and Facebook is really helpful for creating an event and just invite people...to get involved. Yes, cause everybody is pretty much connected. And maybe you can just create event, then invite people, and actual activity is like not online, but you gather people there.

Researcher: Thank you, guys. And have you ever tried to share anything important to you on your Facebook page, hoping this will get some kind of attention? For example, as I did - I shared information about this focus group. Have you had any similar experience? Did it work? In what way?

Kevin: What kind of post like you mean?

Researcher: well, something that you posted there hoping that it will get any reaction.

Steve: Yeah...I guess, my opinions aren't very popular with the kids these days so I only expect a few people to make note of them anyway.

Baba: I think social network and this sites, there you like have people who are following you. So it really depends on people whom you have in your contacts. I mean within the social reach and things they would like to hear. Like just recently a friend of mine shared another friends' research, she also was doing research somewhere in the US...and she shared it on Facebook, that he wants people who can answer those questions. And I filled it out, and it was not the first time, I have done it a couple of times, you know...so...I mean, it is created opportunity for people who even don't know her to have more people. And with posts, on professional pages, I have also shared things about, I mean on professional pages you post things that affect your professional...like contacts. Or even on the global scale, the issues of US trading market...was..

Doe: ...or gay movement.

Baba: I mean people comment on it. If you post stuff. if you make a point, people around you, you will see their reaction.

Alex: I think it is quite interesting how you have those international friends...like myself. I do...just because you gave an example..

Baba: yeah...there are a lot of them..

Adam: yeah, it depends on the interests. Some people will actually see and appreciate what you share and like it on Facebook, but because they would like it in a real life and agree...

Doe: And I think people tend to Like and share other people's posts. and it depends on whether they have liked or shared their stuff before. Like you have mentioned. Cause I always got like four friends who constantly Like my stuff, and whenever they post something I just ...yeah...I Like back. But some people. who are not really friends, when they post something and i find it really-really interesting, but I just don't click Like, because we have never really talk...i don't know...it is just weird..

Baba: I mean we should like the message that you send across, and I think, it is quite interesting to me. I think on Facebook now, that unlike your posts, where you know who will see them or not, like if it is on a group page. I think - somebody sees it, you know that this person have seen it. You know what I mean? So whether a person Likes it or not on a group pages, you will be able know that maybe five people have seen this, seven people have seen that. And if it is a message in which the person is supposed to know, if the person has got a message, you will Like that. You know how information flows; you don't force people to like.

Michael: There is definitely some sort of social statement people sort of invest by 'ok, I am sharing this'. In return for like gratitude, or likes, or some sort of recognition..

Baba: Yeah, yeah.

Alex: Like...do you know this theory of like the Panopticum? The prison that was designed in a way so the prisoners would always think they are being watched, it was designed in a circular way. But this idea that, they did not really...but they wanted to have people think they are always being watched. So this is like this paranoia... in a sense that when we post something, we know that people are like watching us, but they don't really.

Researcher: So is it like you think that if you post something on your Facebook page, you just assume that everyone sees it, so everyone is observing you?

Michael: yeah..

Doe: Yeah, and there is actually a study and research about it. Actually, with every post you can read, reached more people that you think you have reached. Something like 20% more, so we can reach people. Every person spends like at least 5 minutes on Facebook a day, and it can be that they just don't react..

Lars: I think if you post a lot some people cannot pay attention to it, like when you see twenty pictures of this person a day, you are not gonna look at all of them or at all. But if you put something like more serious, people may respond there..

Kevin: I think it is more complicated with this settings on Facebook, when you only see stuff from people with whom you interact more something, and then you can also selectively add people there. So it becomes very personalized.

Researcher: so can you now be choosing people you want to see your posts as well, like an audience?

Kevin: Yes.

Researcher: In your opinion, why..... When you see people liking, why do you think people do that?

Lars: I think because it makes you feel, like you think, today I did this good thing. But not really, because it is not about what you liked, but it is what you do in real life that defines you actual values...or something.

Researcher: So do you think people do this just because it makes them feel better?

Alex: I guess it is like selecting, or representing yourself on Facebook, so by liking certain thing you show that this are the things that I support ideologically, these are my beliefs and what you do actually achieve them, like it does not really matter what you have to do...you are creating an image.

Doe: Um...I was just gonna say something about the gay marriage, like...during that time when the US court was discussing that, every friend of mine in America used that profile pictures and yeah, it got me wondering why they used that picture? And I think that is because they were showing their support and especially if they are overseas, that is the only thing they can do to show the support. So obviously, it is a profile picture, so whenever they post any stuff, they have that statement that 'I support gay marriage' and I think another thing is, it is about people, public people vs the government of a country. So Facebook is the only place where they can make a statement and...I don't know...

Adam: Posting on Facebook and sharing people's ideas that they support is alright, but for this to translate into some action, it take time. So I think this is where that got this 'I support this idea', but you have to reflect on it for a month or a year before it translates into an action...things like that..

Researcher: The phenomenon we are discussing here in the literature is often referred to as 'slacktivism'. Which was coined to name the gap between the online intentions - 'liking and posting stuff' and what you do in real life.

Michael: So how do you spell it?

Researcher: S-l-a-c-k-t-i-v-s-m, 'slacker' plus activism.

Michael: Okay.

Kevin: Yes, I heard the term before.

Michael: I think there is some sort of general assumption... like I am a designer, so when I design some sort of the interface or...I always assume that people are lazy, so I think that sort of very general assumption is quite true in a lot of cases. Probably more in sort of like Western, more developed civilizations, but I think..em..why people are lazy is because, just because of time. Time is sort of the biggest concern...everyone is fast, everything is connected, everything make pressure on people, there is a lot of actual complexity. So I think people want stuff made easy for them. So I don't know, a way I would like to sum it up is under three thing: it is like 'social aspect', and there is also 'easy' - well, it is easier to Like than to translate that into getting up and putting you physical effort in doing.

Researcher: so you say the explanation is that it is easier to like than to do?

Michael: It takes less than a second to click, so there is this instantaneous factor. But people might like it just for their social sake, sort of build up their character...um...Facebook has...sort of allowed this easiness in access to this novel and sort of unusual and interesting things that other people share. So I think this sort of three things - social, easy and novel - they kind of work in sort of conjunction to each other. Em...yeah, they obviously wanted to make it [Facebook] easy, so that people continue to use it. I think that transition of someone liking to actual somebody donating is obviously quite little, because people need to invest time.

Researcher: A literature example of it would be a Facebook community 'Helping people in Africa' that has more than 100 000 Likes at their page, but when you look at the amount of money they gathered, it demonstrated that one person has donated like 0.001 of a cent. This example aims to show that online intention has no impact on the real like behaviour. Would you agree with this statement?

Steve: I don't think there's a lot of stuff out there that somebody can shed light on that's going to change the way I live my everyday life. If I did see something that would blow my mind, that's not bullshit like margarine is poison, I would probably do something about it. Or if I saw a charity and I had extra money I'd definitely donate something. I can't go out and drink beer with a clear conscience knowing that the last 4 beers could have bought a kid some new shoes. But if there's nothing I can or am willing to do about it I wouldn't even bother reading through it. I don't know how anybody can feel accomplished for liking or sharing something.

Kevin: I think, there should be a distinction between liking something for the sake of saying 'I adduce to these ideas', yes but then...is Facebook really a place to be active? Is this a place where you should be raising money? People asks themselves these questions. I would not donate to Red Cross on Facebook, but maybe if I got the letter in a mail or if there was a crisis that needed certain donation, than I would maybe consider it. Maybe people judge by themselves as if Facebook is a place to go for this.

Researcher: Can you, please, expand more on this idea? So is it in a way Facebook 'fault' or is maybe Facebook is a wrong place to do it?

Kevin: No, Facebook is where you create yourself, we don't really do the things. It is more like this is my alter ego, my personality, this is what I believe in, this is who I am - go look it up. But...to do work on Facebook is something people should not await for.

Researcher: And what about another SNS, like Twitter or Google+? Would you say social networking sites in general are not really appropriate in this context, or just Facebook?

Kevin: Yeah, I think that people in general don't really like posts that I am trying to make them more socially aware. Like current issue...um....but they tend to like things that are more like not serious, you know...

Michael: Cats...

Kevin: Yeah, like cats.

Steve: Sure, it's a much more passive form of soliciting than say going around from door to door since it doesn't put any pressure on the potential benefactor.

Baba: It depends on kind of...the question I would ask is who is liking it? And how are the reason defined. Anybody anywhere could like this for various reasons. If there is a Red Cross, somewhere in the part of the world...the British...a...Red Cross society does a post, I mean on a Facebook page. You like to get update on practice, events, you know, this kind of stuff, and not necessarily to contribute, you know. So the Likes will be so much, but in majority it would not get financial gains, so it goes to who is liking and why are they liking it. And so, like he said, I see Facebook for more like information, than getting more like money, when money comes into play. People would not give money, I mean it is almost impossible . If you see that here is this

crisis here, and we are donating money, so people can contribute to this account. I think this is just like having a mail, or receiving a mail to your post box, people will certainly become aware...and more likely donate.

Steve: I think Facebook made people less active in general, but as long as people are going to be glued to it for hours, you might as well pass some useful information down the road. Also...I don't even know...well... if it's really true that it wastes people's lives, like, because people were always lazy and found ways to do nothing. It's just that a hundred years ago the thing to do was...you know...to sit on your porch and spit into a jar or something, now it's sitting on your phone and liking people's dinners.

Researcher: What do you think about those posts when there is a direct invitation to donate money, for example, as you said information about bank account where you can make a donation? Or there is an address where you can donate blood or something. Why they still receive more likes than el actions?

Michael: Because it is just easy. And through social network you cannot donate blood, but you might think in a way you're like help people. Sort of network effect...em..

Camilla: I think like few days, I saw this guy, he posted something like 'yesterday on the street the guy stole my wallet, and here is his face, because I had his picture taken on my phone'. SO he shared the picture of this guy, who robbed him and in a few hours, police found him, because everyone shared this picture. But in this case, it worked...maybe because it did not require to go and look for the guy, but just share his picture.

Kevin: Yeah, possible. This suspect search, when there was like this website, where people could match faces from CCTV camera, like to match the description of suspects. That is how they found them.

Doe: But it took them forever to catch them...

Kevin: Yeah, this is like data mining.

Camilla: So...in terms of people who are really active, as you said before, it really depends on the activity. If it's in the public interest, like I think if it is violating your own rights, and getting you really angry. For example, like...taking over the Wall Street or a months ago a protest in Turkey. That all was on social media, so people just got out to the streets and just...I think it is just something different than just saving the Earth or saving water, or save a child. That's like...it is not..

Doe: you have like to see the results...something you should really believe in or be related to.

Camilla: Um...yeah, cause like 'save the Earth' - it is the Earth, it has been there forever, what can I do about it? This is about something that can really get you.

Michael: I think it has become so much more specialized. As the things opposed to 'save the world' or like this aspect of this small piece of a bigger picture. I think that social networks enabled people to share a lot more and specific ideas. So they can reach those who might be interested in things, so everything is connected.

Baba: This discussion makes me think something...I said my word, I thought you were Chinese earlier...

Doe: What?

Baba: Yeah, I thought you were Chinese.

Doe: I am..

Baba: Ok. So why does Chinese government do not allow them use Facebook?

Doe: That's the thing, um...I was gonna say like...cause we are not allowed to use any social media that are not under the government control.

Baba: Yes, because they know the impact that it can kinda make..

Doe: yeah..

Baba: Like revolution that has started on Facebook, people like - we cannot allow this to happen. Somebody shares this...you know. But, the whole idea, the whole generation of kind of things has been created that can leak...you know. We might not take some issues on Facebook serious, but you know sometimes..

Doe: Yeah...but we are not the only country that allow...like North Korea they don't allow

Michael: Communism rules everything..

Doe: Yeah..

Adam: I guess you have your own social network platform.

Doe: We have, but it is under censor, yeah..

Baba: Yeah, like if you post that they will delete it.

(everybody laughs)

Doe: And if you are like trashing about the government online, the police will find you...actually there is arrested, because people talking about the government on the Internet..

Researcher: **Some of you have mentioned protests as a form of activism that can be forced by social media. There are also a number of cases when those activities took place despite the governmental censorship.**

Camilla: Yeah...but it happens rarely.

(silence)

Researcher: okay, can you think of any other examples of slacktivism?

Kevin: well...firstly, I don't really like the term 'slacktivism'..

Researcher: The similar term would be clicktivism...

Camilla: Yeah, it is bad, like I don't think that Like means that I am not doing anything...I do at least something..

Michael: Yeah, and I heard of this idea that for every view of the video, some company as donating a dollar or something.

Kevin: Yeah, so it may be a good thing to like.

Doe: Well, a lot of my friends..well, some of my friends they invited me to like a page. And I like...actually I did not do anything I just clicked 'Like', but that page just constantly pops up in my news feed, so I see it every day and just...it is not about if I am acting on it, it is more about publicity. It is in my feed, and I know about its existence.

Lars: I think it is sometimes like people asking you to like stuff, and you look at it and you almost don't like it, because I don't care about this at all. But they asked me to do it, and I stood for them, so I would like. So what I did was just Like and nothing else...almost like...i did not want to do it.

Researcher: So do you think people often 'Like' stuff, because they are actually liking it, or without any meaning, just because they like everything?

Lars: I suppose it is just sometimes somebody asked you to share, sometimes you do it because you want to and you think you should raise awareness. I don't really share stuff that I don't care about...but I am sure there is some people who do...like everything.

Michael: There is subjective, very individual...but like individual in a network...like if in that social network was some sort of like hierarchy of people that they are closest to, or people who have shared their stuff before, I think it is very complex. It is difficult to generalize, I think it is always on the individual playing the role.

Baba: Well, maybe it is difficult to generalize or try to understand. I think there will always be a relationship between what people like and if they actually like it. Because sometimes even in real life you do not because you actually want to do it, but because a friend said you should do it..so it will translate. But to suggest that people on Facebook just like everything they see or...you like what you want to follow. So once you like, you can see it in your news feed. Yeah...I've liked because I want to see it more and know why...

Lars: Yeah, it is when you like this group, maybe not because you support their ideas, but because their jokes or something are funny, so you just want to see them all the time on your news feed so you can like...it might be..

Researcher: Thank you for your answers, just one more question - is there anything you would like to add about the motives and causes of the behaviour we talked about today? Or maybe anything else?

Baba: can you redefine what you mean by 'slacktivism'?

Researcher: well, what do other people think?

Steve: I think it always differed from person to person. There were always motivated people that thrived on challenges and loved helping people and slackers that don't care about anybody but themselves but will sit around and talk about how selfless they are.

Camilla: For me, this term is kind of rude, like you say you are slacktivist, meaning you are super lazy. But it is more about people who are super active online and maybe they don't have time to do it in real life. This is how I understand...

Doe: To me it is person active online, but what he is actually doing is just sitting there...liking and clicking and sharing...and never goes and recycle or donate or whatever.

Kevin: Is not a lot of activism based around changing peoples' mindsets? Like you know, not protesting, um...but leaflets or whatever...posters.. So is not that form satisfied by sharing or liking? Is not that satisfied? The other activism would be to recycle and do this things that would be good actions or whatever...

Camilla: So this voluntary activities we talked about are so various...

Lars: I think the things like you might like five charities or whatever, it might work, but you did not spend enough time. This is what happens with social media, when there are so many things there you may be interested in, but just because you clicked on something does not mean you want to help..

Camilla: Yeah, you are showing the support, but you cannot do everything at once...it may seems that we are not enough active.

Michael: I think there would be interesting...cause we have discussed a lot of things, like charitable, causes more related to humans or individuals or music etc. I think, it reminds me if we base it on like two metrics or something - the type of interaction, as everything from like, comment to actually going and interact with a charity in a physical way. And types that require like different degrees of energy, you know, clicking is different from me walking to...right. This is what another line would be, so you might just see some patterns, could be interesting...

Doe: Well, the people that you see...are slacker...slacktivists are actually they are more active that people who are not liking..

Michael: yeah..

Kevin: But than it has to be context specific, you are slacktivist about what, what thing...um...and i think it depends on what their background is, I suppose the third world people they have Facebook account...and not that much sources..

Lars: Context is everything, like we discussed..

Kevin: I cannot donate all the money to charity...,but I can like them..

Researcher: Yeah, thank you, guys, Any other comments?

(silence)

Appendix 5 Online focus group transcript

Question 1: How would you define the term 'voluntary activities'?

Smith: Any type of activity that does not involve any financial benefits

Jack: It is doing some good things to others without expecting something in return.

Craig: I think it used to be some unpaid real movements to make good and benefits the society or community. But these days it applies on digital movements, whether or not it's real world involved.

John: it's doing a good deed for some for free and without getting any kind of benefit out of it

Emma: I'd say it's any activity you do without getting any material benefit for it. It should probably involve helping the society, community or just the greater good but I don't think it necessarily has to.

Frank: I would agree with you Researcher that it's really about any activity you take part in and don't receive any financial benefits from. There's no such thing as a selfless act though in my mind so even if you aren't paid you'll still reap some rewards in karma or status perhaps.

Jane: It would be activities consisting of helping people, animals or working in different charity organizations, willingly and without constraint or expectation of reward.

Helen: Volunteers are willing to take part in certain activities they are interested in without pay or reward ex. sports, concert, charity. There are many forms, such as helping people, cleaning environment, or smooth the process of event. Mostly, they are pleasant of doing it.

Iain: I agree with previous posts, but want one more time to emphasize the altruistic character of voluntary activities. There can be unpaid activities (internship in the bank, for example), that hardly can be defined as voluntary activities, because it serves for subjective purposes of that person.

Nancy: Altruistic activity performed with no practical purposes. The main motivation is generally spiritual.

Question 2: Can you give any examples of 'voluntary activities'?

Smith: Organisation of events, tours. Aid to the homeless, unemployed and so on

Jack: Help people with financial issues, society work, help ill people (serious illness like cancer) and try to make them stay positive, and so on.

Craig: Civil movements, protests, or work in community aids like for Oxfam. But it should be organized activity that personal donation are not included in my point of view.

John: helping people in old homes or doing any kind of social work it could for a NGO, for a country even globally

Emma: This all seems very welfare focused, while I don't think it necessarily has to be. One can e.g. volunteer for an organisation, a political party or even an individual. It doesn't have to help the poor or the homeless for it to be considered a voluntary activity.

Frank: When most people think of volunteering I think the first thing they think of is charity. Any kind of 'do-gooding' could count though.

Jane: Like Charities4Africa.org, helplines

Iain: Cleaning of communal areas (parks, streets), assistance in maintenance of asylum for homeless animals..

Nancy: to raise money for a orphanage

Question 3: Apart from your professional experience, do you think 'voluntary activity' is something you can do online? Why/Why not?

John: it depends on the kind of work your doing some of the things can me administered working online. however, there are some activities which require physical appearance for them to be administered

Craig: Like I say I believe it was some physical activities, however it's changing. I guess it really depends on what you want to achieve, deeds can't be done by themselves by clicking likes, but on creating opinions and spreading the ideas, perhaps yes. There are different forms of 'voluntary activities', doing online is one of them, it's the easiest way (if not the laziest), but the efficiency is arguable.

Emma: Yep, it can definitely be done online. Say doing online research for someone and things like that. Basically anything you do for someone else (in terms of say researching, creating content, analysing content etc) that that person is going to use but you won't benefit from it materially.

Emma: I also disagree with the point that it's the easiest (or perhaps even laziest) activity as these days you don't have to be physically present somewhere to make a difference. It can also be extremely efficient. Efficiency can, after all, be arguable regardless or whether that activity is carried out online or offline.

Craig: My idea of it is no matter how many likes of shares an issue got on the internet, usually it still need someone to have a real physical move to make a difference in real world, although 'email your MP' can be a exception. What I want to say is if 'everything' was done online, usually nothing will be done in real world, even in that Twitter/Arab Spring case, people on the street is still key movement when internet is a tool to achieve it. However, I will never disagree its power of rising awareness to issues, that even a foreign like and share may help the movement in the real world, just if there are someone to do the real world things~

Smith: The main purpose of "voluntary activity" is to help people. According to this, it might be organized in the internet. Depends of the aim.

Frank: The internet can help aid voluntary activity or even some forms of activism. Look at the Arab Spring for example and the way people used social media to help organise rallies. I do think that some people consider 'liking' a status or sharing a video to be a form of voluntary activism. It's a lot easier than taking to the streets, plus you're unlikely to get in trouble! It may be a generalisation but I feel a lot of people are quite apathetic towards any form of activism and although liking a status might be a bit of a cop out in that regard it is a way to remain part of something. People like being part of a movement, Kony 2012 for example.

Jane: Yes I think it can be done, by different kind of portals which could work like helplines but in a form of chat, also collecting money for different charities can be organized online.

Helen: Yes, for those who are not available doing voluntary activity in person, they can have options. They may donate money online, or do some executive works via computer which is truly not to go to places.

Iain: It depends what do we mean by 'online'? I think here we should distinguish between the Internet in general, on the one hand, and social networks as FB, Twitter etc, on the other..I will give an example of communication with governmental structures: the system of so-called e-government in Western states

(particularly, with regard to ability of citizens to request formal information about government activities, budget issues, tenders) has proven to be quite effective and used by many activists to fight corruption. Thus, every citizen can do it on-line, post, and become voluntary activist without going out from its house. Also, many governmental structures and politicians have their accounts in social networks open to public..Of course, the usefulness of such channels can be debatable in comparison with official request, nevertheless, it allows somehow to make political process more transparent, which is the main aim of many political activists..

Nancy: Yes, I think online voluntary activity is possible. For example, the majority of really useful sites, podcasts and programs are free. Their maintenance can be named voluntary activity since it brings no practical use for their owners, is time and even money consuming and the their most obvious purpose is to serve others.

Jack: of course, because the internet can be used for advertising and organizing for some voluntary work from social networks. people who spend their time trying to benefit other people for free is also considered voluntary acravity

Question 4: Do you think Facebook is an appropriate place to engage in 'voluntary activities'?
Why/Why not?

Emma: I think it's as good an online platform as any, ie. why not? For one, it's extremely easy to connect with people on Facebook and it also makes promoting certain causes or effects much easier than in the offline world. So yes, deffo an appropriate place to engage.

Craig: I think it is, it is very popularly used in almost every places in the world (not China or North Korea tho), it's easier to link to populations as it has an open network framework, it's also easier to know who you are connected with with profile informations in their page. It's better on organizing compares to sites like Twitter that less group options and personal information.

Smith: Many people are using this social networkind website. However, voluntary activity should not be limited by posting something on the internet.

John: Yes it can be like spreading a word for a good cause and may be not as some work needs physical appearance which could not be achieved from facebook

Frank: Facebook and other social media sites are excellent tools for the promotion of voluntary activities. I don't think they're the best place for any form direct activism though. Other sites have appeared to fill that void like change.org the petition site.

Helen: Yes, sure. There are so many events, parades or protest s coming from Facebook. People share the links and comment on the issue, just like a snowball getting bigger which aware people.

Jane: I would say it is as the word on facebook spreads very quickly, information trough people, friends of friends etc...

Iain: It is important as a method of informational campaigns to seek support for such activities, however, it can be also discouraging because of huge amount of information that every user receives every day, and one could say: OK,someone is doing this work already, so they will manage this stuff without my help..so, there are many other factors that influence on requirement of new activists..

Nancy: As a rule the success of the affair depends on the quantity of people engaged in or informed about it. In this respect, Facebook as one of the most efficient informative tool is an appropriate place to start.

Jack: defenitely, because it can be used for organizing and advertising for voluntary works

Question 5: Have you ever tried to share anything very important to you on your Facebook page, hoping this will get people's attention? Did it work? In what way? Remember to tell about your personal experience and the professional one.

John: Yes i did and it really had once i shared a status for a need of blood donor of a specific blood for a person who had an accident and it turned out that a lot of people responded to it

Researcher: Could you please specify in what way people responded? Was it 'Like' of your post, reposting, calling you or texting?

Craig: Yes I did, actually that is really popular in Taiwan for social issues like and shares. However that's why I have the impression of physical need in movements. There are so many people like and share on issues in Taiwan but seldom really do something in the real world. Attention and awareness is huge tho, just the problem is still there, sometimes we call it 'keyboard activist'.

Researcher: So would you say that your post only received likes and shares or was it something more?

Craig: It's the ratio between likes and actual event attend, an issue can sometimes get 100K likes and hot on the internet but when it's about hit the street, number of people is 'significantly' less. I wouldn't say it's helpless to like online, but people needs to be more active on real world things to make better difference.

Emma: I share important stuff all the time but somehow my friends only seem to appreciate posts about puppies...

Emma: So no, I have no recollection of ever actually being able to get people to start caring about something important. That might say more about my choice of friends though than about how significant Facebook can be in a way.

Emma: I was gonna say people like puppies and Ryan Gosling, but I didn't want to kill the discussion, haha:)

John: i gave my number ob fb and started getting calls for blood donation

Frank: I've never tried to share anything important on my facebook. When people do share something I find myself feeling quite cynical about the whole thing, as in, why are you posting that here? This isn't the place for that. Some posts are fine, perhaps its down to posting things that will make people empathise with you. If i don't feel it's important to me then I don't care.

Jane: I haven't really , but my friend have. She wanted to collect money for a sick friend who wanted to go back to her own country and quite big amount of money was needed. She shared information about side where money could be donated and all of us shared it as well. Amount of money she collected was above expectations.

Helen: Not really, I share in the past but not anymore now. There are so many people asking you to share it, however, it could be a frauds or tricks..

Iain: I can't say that I have posted something really important for me,...maybe, only some interesting point of views on political events. However, I have posted once info to help my friend find apartment, but even in thus case you need to write to people directly.. and it was not a global issue to mobilise people for)

Smith: I usually share some funny stuff or some interesting videos/news. I never shared anything really important because personally don't think that it might really help. This could be explained by the fact that people are selfish...

Nancy: personally I didn't try to do this. However I heard a lot of stories that confirm the efficiency of FB as an informer. But personally I think here lays the main of problem - not of FB but of the inadaptability of people's psychology to it. Because ,to inform, is only a good start and as a rule people tend to end up their activity on this stage.

Jack: I left a comment once on one of my cousins updates and it ended up in the news paper the next day. It was about sports, football in particular. it wasnt very important, but it still proves that FB is a very good way to get people's attention

Question 6: People who are active in responding to online invitations (linking, sharing information) are often likely not to continue this engagement offline. For example, a person may like the picture saying 'Let`s recycle our books`, but in real life never do recycle. This phenomenon is called 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism'. How can you comment on this idea? Do you agree/disagree?

Craig: I think it really depends on the real life personality, many people may share some moment just because it's cool to do it, but it is difficult already to change the habit with million dollar campaigns, the efficiency and ability to change of two finger clicks like and share is really debatable. I believe one thing is about the information content, if the shared content is right, it will have better chance to make some real difference in real world, second is the spread of information, even though people who like and share may not really make the move, by letting more people seeing the information can still creat more opportunities to reach people and generate movements generally.

Emma: I think it depends on what kinds of people we're talking here. I don't necessarily agree that more people will like/share something online and then do nothing in real life, I rather see it as some kind of omnipresent apathy. I think the problem here is that people generally don't really care. I mean of course some do, but most people don't try to make a difference offline or online. Although that said, people do like to make their lives look more glamorous and interesting online, and their personalities more likeable, themselves more intelligent etc. so there probably is some truth to this.

Frank: I agree that it exists. Perhaps social media has created a state where we feel connected to a cause by viewing it online and that's enough. We've taken the time to participate by showing a slight interest in it but now it's time to go back to watching people fall over on YouTube. Things like Facebook have created a new way of communicating and along with that a new kind of online etiquette in the way we interact with people. Like when you click 'maybe' attending on a Facebook event but you and everyone else involved knows that means 'no' but you've shown an interest, shown them that you care enough to at least respond but not actually participate.

Jane: People tend like things more online ... i would say they liking the idea more then activity itself. Its easier to press like on facebook then actually get up and do it.

Helen: Yes, I agree. People tend to talk online because it seems there is no responsibility and they don't need to do physical actions.

Iain: It seems that there is such phenomenon, because fb page, for example, and your post is like a declarations of your life position and viewpoints on different issues, but nobody will ask you about your behavior in real life.. so it is kind of virtual , desired ideal imagine that one want to create for himself..however, it really depends from person how big the gap between words and actions..

Smith: Basically, this is everyday life. We don't do everything that is good or everything that we like/share/post on a facebook

Smith: In addition, this also might mean that i personally like recycling as a IDEA, but i'm to lazy to do so....

Nancy: I think this happens pretty often because people don't feel responsibility for their words. However with a tendency of identifying online, and ,real life, identities (use real names, post photos) it should decline. I guess the main motivation to continue online announced activity in real life is an approval or disapproval from online friends who you know in real life as well.

Question 7: Can you think of any other examples of 'slacktivism'? Why do you think this happens?

Craig: Some more extreme cases I experienced is some people made up false (but persuasive) information about the issues and post it on the internet, many people believed it and shared the post. This case is usually intended misleading by groups that can benefit with the issue, however, there are cases some non-related personals create fake stories for the hot topic in order to be cool/be popular/being discussed. Just like dog picture and ryan gosling meme, usually people like it when their post got shared and discussed, it is a similar case here, with informations provided against the common sense and add up something like "they never told you that" or "that's what 'they' want you to believe", it is pretty easy for people to believe the story without further fact checking.

Frank: Perhaps when people don't go out and vote in an election. They might not like any of the candidates or their policies so they're staying home on purpose. They might just see politics as something they don't want to be involved in, be it ignorance or apathy.

Jane: Generally people who are online tend liking more stuff , photos etc, as it easy accessible and they more anonymous so less possibility someone going to judge them about their taste etc.

Emma: Agreed. I think any online activity is in a way slacktivism because I don't think we've got quite far enough to be able to do more online than offline (what I mean is maybe it would be better to just go out there and make difference rather than sit on your computer all day and repost stuff...). That said though, I think that there are definitely cases in which online activity actually helped rather than just induced slacktivism.

Helen: One of my friends said she had supported one event (there were 300 people saying they will go) while there were only 100 people got there. I think when people are truly engaging in the event, they realize they have to be responsible. But on the internet, it just like watching a news, and you click like because you agree. In this way, it is low involvement than going in person, they don't need to bear responsibility.

Nancy: In every day life I noticed that online people often say that they will participate in some events (even enjoyable ones like going to the concerts and parties, not to mention responsible activities) but don't show up there..because they are busy with choosing and ,liking, other events for the future.

Iain: It is because of laziness, but mainly because they pretend to be persons that they not really are, it is just their image (see previous posts)

Smith: Well, easy example would be: "i was invited for a party, clicked 'yes, i'll go' to show my friends that i'm 'cool'. However i'm too lazy to go there"

Question 8: Overall, do u think that things like Facebook made people less active? Or are there any other explanations?

Craig: I actually think that may help, because if one is active he or she will always do things with or without like and share, and by posting on the internet, even if majority of the message approachers are not doing things in the real world, there must be some of them who does, and that is always better to reach the issues to the public but just certain group of activists.

Frank: The potential audience is massive and by reaching out through Facebook you might find some people who care enough to take part in activism online and in real life too. Social media hasn't necessarily made people less active. The nature of activism is perhaps changing, perhaps it is moving online. Look at the 4chan group Anonymous for example. We don't always have to take to the streets to get involved in something. In recent years we have seen that kind of demonstration end in disaster and I think that has contributed to a feeling of apathy among many young people. Look at the tuition fee protests, massive show of people across the country and they still went ahead with the increase in fees regardless. The anti Iraq war protests as well more than 10 years ago. A massive show of people across the globe and we still went to war. Perhaps this is why people don't care anymore than liking a status now. However, the way social media has been used in the middle east to organise movements shows that it is still a powerful tool in helping to mobilise people who care into direct action.

Jane: I don't know whether Facebook has any influence on people being less or more active, I guess people spend a lot of time on it but it's time which they would spend watching TV or something similar.

Emma: I'd say something similar to what I said in my previous comment. I think in many cases actually doing something in the offline world could make a lot more difference, but again there are cases of online activities that caused something pretty big both online and offline so I wouldn't say this is 100% applicable to Facebook. Moreover, I, for example, personally found out about a number of issues just because I read about them on Facebook, so I wouldn't be so harsh on it.)

Helen: I will say people get numb because there are so many similar links asking people to do or support. However, if there is a really big issue, people are still willing to do it.

Nancy: I think it is a question of time for people to learn how to use benefits of online part of their life (which will inevitably grow) as a motivation to act more efficient and active in real life. However now I think FB is a reason of decline of the every day life activity.

Iain: It is quite a complicated question, but generally I think that such a virtual world like Facebook consumes people's time, despite the fact that it also provides access to useful information.

Smith: I would say that Facebook as a social networking website is a different reality, here you can be anyone you want to be.

Last question!!!!: Is there anything else you would like to add about 'why modern students are/are not slacktivists?'

Craig: I think it really depends on what the issue is, although many activities such as third world problems or foreign political issues may just be liked and shared and forgotten, but if it is very related to ourselves, big protests like they had in London against tuition fees and also be seen. I really think it's all about how people package the issue, the tone of message and that, if a story can raise the real awareness, it can make people be active on or off the internet.

Frank: For me it's about striking a chord with the right audience and finding people that care about your message. Those people are out there on Facebook etc, finding them might be difficult though. I don't think social media is the reason people are apathetic generally there are wider reasons.

Emma: I don't think so. I think that generally being online is a good thing and as students we benefit from it a lot more than we would if we weren't online. I know slacktivism is to a certain extent an issue but I don't think it is the reason why young people don't really engage politically etc. it might well be a part of it though!

Emma: *though

Nancy: To start with I think all users are slacktivists at some point. Some of those online slacktivist actions are not harmful (like for example the mention case with recycling) however other situations might have more serious consequences especially those that require real further action in life than the person even was not thinking to perform. Comparing to working people students, on my mind, in general have more intense online life. Proportionally, that increases their slacktivist activity as well. But nowadays I think quantity tends to grow into quality and students' online slacktivist activity turns into real life actions.