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## Contemporary youth social movements: The interdependency of digital affordances and youth agency

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## Abstract

This chapter analyses recent youth-led social movements. Specifically, the ways these social movements make use of the affordances of digital platforms and social media sites are examined in the context of March for Our Lives, a national anti-gun protest movement led by young people. The purpose of this analysis is to derive implications that inform the work of civics and citizenship educators. The analysis of March for Our Lives is grounded within the wider ecosystem of youth-led social movements and begins by examining the scale and temporality of this movement. It also suggests that part of its effectiveness as a movement was related to the interdependence of digital affordances and youth agency. It critiques the need for this movement to be both inclusive and participatory and uses resource mobilisation theory to consider how digital affordances might be effectively deployed. It also considers the ongoing nature of inequality in these social movements, often described as the 'digital divide.' Finally, the chapter concludes with three implications for civics and citizenship educators: the need to study how digital tools are being used, in addition to who is using them; the interdependence of online and offline activism and the requirements to educate for both of these; and a shift in emphasis from educating young people to be active citizens to an increased emphasis on strengthening the capacity of youth activists to educate adults to be more active citizens.

## Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to describe and discuss what implications the rise of contemporary youth social movements and their heavy use of digital platforms have for citizenship education. We first dispel the widely made claim that the rise of recent youth social movements has come about largely because of the expansion of digital platforms. Indeed, there has been a long history of youth-led social movements that pre-dates digital technologies. This means that analysing contemporary youth social movements requires focusing as much on the affordances offered by digital technologies as on the skills, capabilities, and attributes of young people themselves. There are three broad implications for contemporary, or future directions in, citizenship education. Firstly, even more emphasis should be placed on analysing the specificities of digital platforms as they are used for social movement building. Secondly, more emphasis should be placed on understanding the interplay between, or interdependence of, online and offline youth activism. Finally, there should be less emphasis on educating young people to be more active citizens, and more emphasis on strengthening the capacity of youth activists to educate adults to be more active citizens. Indeed, one of the lessons of social media activism is that youth are not the ones that need to be taught what active citizenship means; rather, it is adults.

People of all ages are discovering new ways—or adapting old ways—to organize via social media, to build awareness, to encourage action, and to call for change. In some cases, these approaches simply make use of the affordances of new technology to increase the scope and scale of what had previously been done before. For example, using technologies like email to share the links to online petition sites enables something that previously was time-intensive and geographically localised to become something that can have a national, or even global scale. Alternatively, there are new forms of organising ever-developing—flash mobs and online crowdfunding, for example—that make use of the affordances provided by social media

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and mobile technology to mobilise and encourage action in entirely new or different ways (Tufekci, 2017).

While in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was much enthusiasm for ‘Twitter Revolutions’ such as the Arab Spring, Morozov (2011) was critical about the efficacy of these revolutions and the wider role of social media in encouraging successful action. Morozov is mistrusting of for-profit companies like Twitter and their involvement with governments, and rightly points out that social media tools can be used to oppress as easily as they can be used to galvanise revolution. More recently, protest movements like *The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong*, *March for our Lives* and *FridaysforFuture* have provided scholars with valuable sources of information to examine the intersection of online and offline movements and its nexus with a digitally active and capable youth. A crucial and developing facet of these movements is that the oft-cited division between online and offline activism is increasingly becoming a less than useful tool for exploring the way that modern social movements engage (Jurgenson, 2012).

### **Rejecting technological determinism and recognising a history of youth-led social movements**

It is true that young people are leading various contemporary social movements. Mei (2021), for instance, observes that the Hong Kong democracy movement provides a recent example of youth-led activism. She goes on to describe how:

Social media was the key to mobilize youth to participate in protests which intensified the impact of the Umbrella Movement. During the 79-day protest, WhatsApp and Facebook were the main social media platforms and became fundamental to the movement (Wang 2017). WhatsApp was used to share information among personal social networks. Ordinary citizens could directly participate in the protests through their own devices by creating and distributing their personal narratives. Meanwhile, Facebook was used for widespread posts (e.g. public statements and event announcements). (Mei, 2021, p. 148)

At a descriptive level, Whatsapp and Facebook offered affordances that youth activists before the era of social media did not have. It is more expensive and time-consuming to produce and disseminate paper pamphlets than upload accounts and narratives on social media platforms. This is not to mention how much easier and cheaper it is, via social media, to share still and moving images, let alone to move beyond one-to-many broadcast and type to-many dialogical communication channels. But it is a misleading and simplistic technology-determinist analysis to suggest that young people are exercising leadership more so than in the past because of these affordances. We do not agree when Clark et al. (2020) assert that:

Emerging studies suggest a necessary rethinking of traditional notions of citizenship and political participation, particularly in light of alternative and creative avenues offered online (e.g. Bennett, 2008; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Kahne, Middaugh & Allen, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2016).

We do, however, agree with Literata et al’s (2018) nuanced analysis of the specificities of youth digital participation. Examples of specificities include: Is the program institutionally-driven, top-down, and instrumentalist? Is there much space for youth ‘voices’ to be heard? To what extent are young people enabled to ‘own’ the process of creating their own digital products? Who participates, how, and with what ends?

The main point we want to make is that youth-led social movements are not new phenomena that have come about as a result of digital affordances. Young people exercised leadership in

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social movements addressing global issues, such as war and military conflict, apartheid, civil rights, burgeoning consumerism, sex and contraceptives, authoritarian education, and environmental deterioration. For example, Murphy (2018, p. 257) describes the role that high school students played in the US civil rights movement. One notable example is Lowery who is:

best known as the youngest participant to have completed the three-day voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.... This was a long-term strategy that involved scores of high school students participating in daily voting rights protests, with wave after wave being arrested until the jails were full.

Stone (2021) draws our attention to large-scale youth participation in the global anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s. The role of the *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee* (SNCC) established in 1960, offers an example of an organized group of youth lending leadership to a movement. Indeed, ‘Martin Luther King, Jr. and others had hoped that SNCC would serve as the youth wing of the *Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (SCLC), but the students remained fiercely independent of King and SCLC, generating their own projects and strategies’ (Stanford University, 2022) Inspired by the student anti-war movement, Denis Hayes, a young activist organised campus teach-ins to raise awareness about air and water pollution. Hayes was not a one-off participant; with a broad coalition, his initiatives developed into a US nation-wide campaign and, in 1970, the first *Earth Day* event was launched. Going back further, youth movements in Germany, before the Nazis banned them, illustrate another example of young people leading movement-wide efforts to bring about big-picture change. They ‘were inspired by a desire to provide young people with alternative, some might say complementary, educational opportunities to those offered by schools and families’ (Flowers, 2005, p. 112). They criticised what they perceived as a growing materialism and a politics of authoritarianism they saw having deep roots in traditional family structures and schooling. One well-known German youth movement was the *Wandervogel*. Students organised forest expeditions for young people with idealised goals of carving out spaces where not only young people could vote, but build an ideal ‘new world’ for young people.

### **Case study of a contemporary youth-led social movement: *March for our Lives (MFOL)***

In order to ground the themes of this chapter we sketch one contemporary case study. *March For Our Lives (MFOL)* is a significant youth-led movement, not just because of its scale and success, but because, to paraphrase Salamon’s (2020) words, it awakens the spirit of the student activism of the 1960s civil rights and progressive education movements. The organisers of *MFOL* are quick to point out that they have drawn inspiration from the American Civil Rights Movement. The *MFOL* organisers held a similar tour to the Freedom Riders of the 1960s, called ‘The Road to Change’ where they ‘met with family members, community leaders, and survivors of gun violence across the country’ (March for Our Lives, 2020). *MFOL* also inspired the global youth-led *FridaysforFuture* movement.

March for Our Lives (MFOL) is the activist movement initiated by Parkland Florida teenagers that has a direct link, her own inspiration, for Thunberg. Reported in the *Time* account, in May 2018, ‘[she] suggested ... [to Swedish climate activists that] they emulate the ... [the Parkland students] who had recently organized school strikes to protest gun violence in the U.S.’ (Atler, Haynes, and Worland 2019, 58). Significantly they did not follow up but Thunberg did in her own Friday strikes. (Stone 2021, p. 252).

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### ***Background and goals***

*MFOL* was provoked by the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. On February 14, 2018, a former student, Nikolas Cruz, killed 17 current students at the school. It became the most deadly school shooting in US history, surpassing the Columbine shooting in 1999, which caused 15 deaths. This tragedy immediately prompted an outcry and a demand for changes to gun laws in the US. In the recent past, such calls have been led by public figures or parents of victims and have struggled to engender any meaningful response. The government response is a well-worn one, offering ‘thoughts and prayers’ and, it appears, little hope of any real change. However, the response in the case of *MFOL* built on the legacy of 1960s student activism: this time the calls for change were led by the students of the schools themselves, who had seen their classmates killed. Protesters urged a swathe of legislative changes, including raising the age requirements for purchasing guns, establishing waiting periods and mental health checks for gun buyers, and banning the sale of bump stocks (devices which turn semi-automatic weapons into fully automatic ones).

### ***Scale and temporality***

For the purpose of this chapter, we are not measuring *MFOL*’s effectiveness by legislative outcomes. We are focusing on the numbers of people and other resources mobilised and in what period of time. By these measures, *MFOL* has achieved impressive success. After describing the scope and nature of *MFOL*’s success, we discuss to what extent this is because of digital affordances.

Students at the school were quick to link the events taking place with calls for gun reforms - even during the shooting itself. One such student was David Hogg, who later became prominent in *MFOL*: ‘Hogg, 17, took out his phone and started filming and interviewing classmates. He was hiding in a school closet at the time, as the gunman walked the halls’ (Salamon 2018).

In the short digital record Hogg and fellow students describe their immediate circumstances. Initially they talk of feeling isolated within the classroom while the building is being secured, then they begin to realize the terror of the situation they are in because of the active shooter, finally they start to advocate for gun control. Near the end of the 3:47 video segment Hogg calls on ‘legislators of the country to take action and stop [gun violence] from happening’ (Hogg 2018 in Jensen 2020)

It is important to note that Hogg’s film was ‘purposeful and carefully crafted’ (Jensen 2020). He talked about his political views and he disseminated it live. During the shooting, other students used Twitter to broadcast live their anger and fear. The students established a Twitter handle that, in the space of a year, gained 450,000 followers. Another student, Corin, built an Instagram account that has gained over 300,000 followers. Kasky ‘quickly came up with the hashtag #NeverAgain, which he shared on Facebook and Twitter’ (Jones 2018). 19 days after the shooting, *MFOL*’s Facebook account had garnered more than 300,000 followers. The various social media platforms were used to provide information about events.

The pace at which students strategized and organised campaign events was very fast. In the space of four days they ‘hatched plans for a 100-student bus trip to Florida’s State Capitol, to lobby legislators about gun control’ (Jones 2018); a nation-wide bus tour; and a mass rally in Washington, D.C. *USA Today* reported that the rally could be the biggest single-day protest in D.C.’s history (Durando 2018) with some estimates stating more than 800,000 people attended. Now, more than two years later, *MFOL* appears to be continuing to grow in power and influence. Through the formation of local chapters, they have begun campaigning,

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directly targeting politicians who take money from the powerful gun lobby and the *National Rifle Association* (NRA). According to their website, they have successfully mobilized young people around this issue. The 2018 midterm elections saw the youth voter turnout increase by 47%, which was the highest youth voter turnout in US election history. In addition, more than 46 NRA-backed candidates lost their elections.

***Understanding MFOL effectiveness: Interdependence of digital affordances and youth agency (skills and capabilities)***

*MFOL* student-activists rely heavily on social media tools. But to what extent do these digital affordances explain *MFOL*'s successes? Yaffe implies that the digital affordances are central to explaining how *MFOL* student leaders are effective (2018). She refers to them as digital natives and observes this generation grew up learning how to get what they want from the internet. The immediacy of their lives on the internet where information and communication are ever present and only one click away had transmitted itself into their engagement with politics. They were not satisfied with the previously slow timeframe and instead wanted immediate results. And indeed, Corin, one of the *MFOL* co-founders said as much.

The Parkland students have used social media on a daily basis since the shooting. Student organizer Emma González created a Twitter account on Feb. 18 — four days after the Parkland shooting. Now she has 1.2 million followers. She's using Twitter to share messages of solidarity and to ridicule politicians about gun control. "People always say, 'Get off your phones,' but social media is our weapon," says student organizer Jaelyn Corin. "Without it, the movement wouldn't have spread this fast" (Salomon 2018).

While digital affordances enable a shorter temporal dimension for social movement-building, they do not necessarily determine other aspects of effectiveness. It is the specificities of the social media platforms and tools that matter. For example, the architecture of the platforms contribute to whether the communication is top-down and message-driven or dialogical. We write more about such specificities further on. Here, we emphasize the importance of the particular skills and capabilities that young people deploy.

Jensen is a theatre educator and appraises the high level of skill and capability deployed by the *MFOL* student leaders (2018). It is true, as Corin attests, that social media tools are fundamentally important to *MFOL*'s organising work, but equally important are the public speaking, social research, and storytelling skills of the student leaders.

Gonzalez, a Cuban American with nascent organising experience (she was the president of her School's Gay-Straight Alliance), took the stage at the 'March for Our Lives' Rally in Washington D.C before hundreds of thousands of her young peers and other allies' (Jensen, 2020).

*The Washington Post* named her speech as powerful and memorable (Epstein, 2018). Mention has already been made of Hogg's carefully crafted film. Not only is he digitally savvy but articulate in responding to accusations that his film and other digital posts are fake. Jones describes him as a 'policy wonk, who researched each community's demographics and its history of youth voter turnout and mass shootings' (2018). 'Corin, ever the organizer, ran logistics, connecting with youth leaders' (Jones, 2018).

In other words, there is an interdependence between digital affordances and youth agency in *MFOL*. Coburn argues that, while social media and the internet had a relevance, the reason there was so much cut-through was because *MFOL* 'foregrounded the perspectives of students themselves' (2018). However, the real strength of the movement lies in the fact that

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the young leaders are capable of inspiring others to take part in their movement. This wasn't solely restricted to school students. At the *March for Our Lives* event in Washington, there were, according to Coburn, significant numbers of older protestors, as well as many first-time marchers, many of whom brought their own issues and linked the problems of gun violence to issues of racism, sexism and sexual violence.

### ***Digital affordances and challenges for MFOL to be inclusive and participatory***

Stornaiuolo and Thomas take a techno-optimistic view and suggest digital affordances are enabling youth activists to even more effectively disrupt 'dominant notions of civic participation— notions influenced by White, able-bodied, cisgender, and middle-class or wealthy men' (2017, p. 355). The case of *MFOL* provides some confirmation of this thesis. Despite being from a white and affluent part of Florida, the initial *MFOL* leaders have successfully acted in solidarity with African-American and Latino students. Hagopian entitled his paper 'March for Our Lives means black lives too' (2018). But is this success at being inclusive to be explained by the digital affordances or the politics and skills of the student leaders, or an interplay of both? And what does it take for *MFOL* to respond to the 'role of systemic racial inequality in both public and legislative response to mass shootings, police brutality and entrenched social violence' (Mathiason 2019, p. 95). Being inclusive is one thing, but being able to change deeply entrenched racialized inequalities is another. Mathiason argues that, while changing the rules around gun ownership may be important, it will not be enough to change the cultural assumptions around systematic violence. He writes:

Like the '60s, the 2010s are a time of great social change accompanied by a rise in identitarian politics, including American exceptionalism and white masculinity in crisis. As numerous studies have shown, more so than mental illness, religious views, or party affiliations, what most perpetrators have in common is that they are white men (2019, p. 92).

In order to prevent gun violence, Mathiason argues, there is a need to address this form of violent racism. Mathiason then goes on to compare *MFOL* with other movements that are explicitly race-based, such as *#BlackLivesMatter* and the *#MillionHoodies March*. He argues that the voices we should be listening to are the leaders of these movements, whose voices are not being heard as clearly as their peers from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High. There have been reasons advanced for why this might be the case—such as the lack of a clear policy agenda. However, Mathiason dismisses these, instead arguing that the reason why the students from *MFOL* are receiving more media attention is because they are an acceptable face for change—and their lives—those of white children from affluent, suburban Florida—are more valuable than those of black children. This is a significant difference from the Freedom Riders:

Million Hoodies and BLM have garnered significant media attention, but public opinion has been split— much as it was split about the Freedom Riders during the 1960s. And, like the Freedom Riders, the attendees at protests for black lives have faced negative consequences, including mob violence, police brutality, and arrest (Mathiason 2019, p. 93).

### **Abiding relevance of Resource Mobilization Theory**

To say that digital affordances should not be seen as the determining cause of youth-led social movements is one assertion; it is another to suggest it is important attention be paid to their specificities. McCarthy and Zald's (1997) resource mobilization theory, developed in the 1990s has abiding relevance. Organizing a social movement, whether with or without

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digital affordances, is time intensive. There are administrative duties that need to be performed. Letters to be written and answered. Posters and leaflets to be designed, created and distributed. Fundraising events to plan and host. Rallies to organise, and other groups to communicate with. There are also educational materials to be created and shared with other like-minded people. And, perhaps most time consuming of all, there is the process of building the movement: seeking out and speaking to potential new members, exhorting them to join the movement and to take action. There are also risks to physical safety, reputational and financial wellbeing to consider, including in cases when a ruling regime deems particular groups illegal, death, injury, imprisonment, the loss of employment opportunities, and vilification in the press. There are also risks to emotional wellbeing that might manifest: for example, being isolated from peer groups and families.

Navigating these challenges takes resources. McCarthy and Zald (1997) categorized social movements in terms of how effectively they mobilized organizing resources such as those described above. In their analysis, which became known as *Resource Mobilisation Theory*, they argued that while the original issue to be addressed—for example, gun violence or climate change—is an important factor for the development of the social movements, its success as a whole is more closely related to how efficiently resources are mobilized.

Social movements have been around for as long as people have gathered in groups and organised to bring about political and social change. And, for as long as activists have been mobilizing popular support for their cause, there is a requirement for organization. In this chapter, we draw attention to the conditions and affordances that contribute to more or less effective social movement organisations. While Earl and Kimport (2011) analyse what they characterize as ‘digitally enabled social change’ they acknowledge that there are social movements who make good use of the affordances of new technologies for their organising purposes, and those who do not. The crucial factor in the success of social movements, according to Earl and Kimport, is not so much the affordances of the technology, but the way these affordances are employed:

We hold that it is the harnessing or leveraging of such differences that can perturb previously well-understood social processes, and lead to changes in both processes and our understanding of them. (2011, p. 33)

### **Digital affordances and digital divides**

Before building on Earl and Kimport’s analysis of how affordances are deployed, we want to challenge the idea that digital affordances necessarily have made organising and social action more participatory and enabled flatter decision-making structures. Bimber, Stohl and Flanagan (2008) suggest that Web 2.0 platforms make it possible for activists to enable many-to-many communication at higher scale and lower cost. Lower costs, in turn, expand the potential for less reliance on paid staff. Theoretically, this means that there can be a flourishing of new types of social movements, run by volunteers. Kimport and Earl (2011) predict that we will see the growth of organizations that are smaller and less formal. They called this organizational fecundity, with a proliferation of structures to support and sustain social movements. Schlozman et al. asserts, furthermore, that as a result of social media:

the *range* of information available has been diversified and ‘democratised;’ and the number of news sites and commenters has multiplied, which in turn has increased the number of different viewpoints available to citizens. (2012, p. 487 in Keating and Melis 2017)

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Ekström and Östmann point to social media affording more opportunities for individuals to be authors, not just passive consumers of web content (2015). There is no real cost in terms of time, money, or other resources in order to do this. And, once one post for an event has been created, it can be shared widely. The affordances of digital technology mean that there is no cost in producing new versions of material and hence it is a simple matter to share advertisements, flyers, films and such widely. Sites like *change.org* are good examples of this. On this site, anyone can set up a petition and then share it widely, via their own social media profiles. The site itself automates the management processes involved in collecting signatures, validating identities, and passing on completed petitions.

The idea that "it costs nothing" to join social media campaigns, however, elides some of the significant work around persisting digital divides. Thorson, Xu and Edgerly (2018) suggest that the same social inequalities that exist offline, exist online in their study of how young people's political views are formed. They find that young people choose on social media 'what to read, watch, "like" or "follow"' (2018, p. 184), less according to digital affordability or accessibility, and more according to how they are socialized at home and school. In other words, young people who grow up in families where politics is discussed around the dinner table and in homes and schools with 'rich' reading resources, are more likely to be politically active and opinionated than young people who grow up in families and schools without much reading material. Keating and Melis assert that an:

important implication of these findings is that these new online tools do not appear to be mobilising a new audience or extending the type of young adults who are politically engaged. Instead, young adults are only using social media for political engagement if they are already interested in politics. (2017, p. 88)

### **Digital affordances and implications for citizenship education**

Our interest in social movements lies in what they mean for educators working within these fields. If, as we've explained above, the influence of digital and social media has not heralded a change in the way that young people are organized—or organise—social movements, what does that mean for teachers and educators working in schools and other educational institutions? Many governments in Western countries either explicitly or implicitly require the teaching of civics and citizenship as part of the curriculum in compulsory schooling. In England, for example, citizenship is a compulsory subject. In Australia, civics and citizenship features prominently in the Australian Curriculum. Other countries have similar aims and curricular requirements. Central to many of these arguments is the desire for young people to be 'active citizens,' although the precise nature of what that might mean in practice can be vague and the mechanisms to develop this vary greatly from country to country (and, at least in Australia, from state to state). Within Australia, much of the focus of civics and citizenship education (CCE) is on either the history of Australia or the responsibilities of citizens. This is particularly acute in New South Wales, where it is integrated into subjects like History and Geography. One of the criticisms of previous models of CCE is that it conceptualises a limited understanding of what it means to be a citizen—one that is more focused on 'citizens-in-waiting' than 'citizens-in-action.'

***First implication: Study efficacy and specificities of digital platforms as they are used for social action***

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Scholarship about the internet (Kahn & Kellner, 2004) and social media (Fullam, 2017; Murthy, 2018) has tended to focus on who was and was not using digital tools, rather than how the tools were being used. In addition, a sharp distinction was drawn between online spaces and offline spaces. But, this is an arbitrary divide with the idea that what happens in one sphere (i.e. the online space or the physical space) doesn't necessarily translate into action in the other. Indeed, there is much discussion about whether online participation leads to offline participation in social movements (Milošević-Dorđević & Žeželj, 2017). However, we think that it is not productive to study one or the other; rather, it is better to study how they are enmeshed. The online and offline world is indivisibly part of the organizing and social action space. Just as protestors see no meaningful difference between the two, the creation of an arbitrary divide is a longstanding assumption to be much more robustly tested. Already, activists are recognising this and evolving their organizing and training practices to better reflect this unity: for example, *Reveille*, a social movement think tank, specifically runs sessions that focus on *Online to Offline Organising*, and the *Australian Council of Trade Unions* does something similar with its *Digital to Field Organising Program*.

For the purpose of advancing civics and citizenship education, scholarship should closely study specificities of youth digital participation. Youth activists need to know how to deploy digital affordances effectively. Literata et al (2018) use four domains in their empirical research. We paraphrase them below (Table 1). Such analysis can directly inform citizenship education programming.

Aims (of the respective social movement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do they arise from a small or large number of activists?</li> <li>• Are they process- or product-focused?</li> <li>• Are they instrumental or dialogical?</li> </ul>
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do they seek to create community and belonging, or are they inward-focused and self-absorbed?</li> <li>• Do they work exclusively or inclusively?</li> </ul>
Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the campaign institutionally-driven, top-down, and instrumentalist? Is there much space for youth 'voices' to be heard?</li> <li>• Do the online, offline and hybrid spaces have strict hierarchies or are they open-access?</li> <li>• Are young people enabled to 'own' the process of creating their own digital products?</li> <li>• Who participates, how, and with what ends?</li> </ul>
Intensities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are intensities shaped by the affordances of the digital platforms? For example, can young people be the group administrators, or merely participants who mostly read messages and rarely interact with others?</li> <li>• Is participation executory and task-based vs empowering and structuralist?</li> </ul>

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Table 1: Domains of youth digital participation.

Lane, Das and Hiaeshutter-Rice (2019), likewise, research how social media affordances create various types of context and participation.

Just as the physical infrastructure of a neighborhood determines the extent to which neighbors can share stories with each other and engage in their community (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006), the affordances of social media interact to shape the possibilities for political expression. (2019, p. 2180)

They refer to online communication infrastructure. This leads to comparing the affordances of respective social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

***Second implication: The interdependency of offline and online activism***

Debates and theorizing about the merits or otherwise of digital activism, as digital technologies become ever more embedded, are outdated (McCafferty, 2011; Kwak et al, 2018). Morozov (2011) and Gladwell (2010) are prominent early critics of online activism, labelling it as nothing more than ‘slacktivism’ or ‘clicktivism.’ Tufekci (2017) argues that a slower pace of physical organizing—meetings, letter drops, making and distributing print posters—as in the US Civil Rights Movement, has the value of building relationships and enabling careful planning for mass events. She suggests that faster pace of organizing enabled by digital platforms could explain the ephemeral nature of some contemporary social movements. This could be seen as exemplified by ‘flash activism,’ a nod to the idea of flash mobs, indicating the temporary nature of these movements. In a meta-survey of these debates, Max Halupka (2018) is critical of the assumed demarcation between online versus offline activism. In activist practice as well as in working and everyday practices, digital technologies are so ubiquitous that they can only be seen as enmeshed into the DNA of campaigns.

For citizenship education, whether the social action is offline or online, there are foundational skills and capabilities that are important. These include: social research; designing visual and text-based communication strategies; public speaking; preparing written notices of events; negotiating racialized, gendered and classed inequalities; and interpersonal communication. Yes, there are now a larger number of digital affordances for youth activists to work with, but the spheres of online and offline activism are interdependent.

To help illustrate the enmeshed nature of offline and online activism, we focus on photos. In pre-digital times, photos and other types of still images were produced and used to document and communicate for campaigns. Relatively speaking, analog photos had high-production value. They were carefully chosen and curated to maximise their purpose in high-order messaging. Indeed, they were often produced by professional photographers. But in digital times, photos are much less costly and easier to take. They are not necessarily carefully chosen and curated. Instead, many more are taken by both professional and non-professional activists. They are used not only for high-order messaging but also for communicating lower-order and everyday happenings. Digital photos are taken and used by frontline and ordinary campaign participants to tell stories. Instagram is one social media platform that exemplifies this shift, in which posts and stories can only be made when a photo is taken and uploaded.

Nathan Jurgenson (2019) places this shift in the type of affordances presented by the digital photo in:

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Zygmunt Bauman's influential social theory of modernity, built around the metaphor of an increasingly "liquid" world. He argues that nearly everything becomes less solid and heavy and instead lighter, more fluid, porous, agile, and difficult to grasp..... in the past, her argues, the social world was "solid" and meant to last, and today it is increasingly more liquid and impermanent' (Jurgenson, 2019, p. 21).

Digital photos are used to witness, to tell others that they were there and saw that. Think for example of selfies and people taking and uploading photos of their participation in a seminar or protest rally. The theoretical significance of this shift is that 'social photography should be understood not as something removed from the moment but as something deeply immersed in social life, More than documenting moments to archive and preserve them behind glass, social photography often attempts to communicate being' (Jurgenson, 2019, p. 84).

The practical significance of digital photos is that they illustrate how relationship building, messaging, and dialogue, which are all key dimensions of social action, create affordances that contribute directly and simultaneously to both offline and online movement-building.

***Third implication: Less emphasis on educating young people to be more active citizens, and more emphasis on strengthening the capacity of youth activists to educate adults to be more active citizens***

There is a longstanding history of anxiety that 'young people are apathetic, uninterested, or unwilling to participate in civic or political life' and this justifies the investment in a citizenship education project (Stornaiuolo and Thomas 2017). One could say that there is a taken-for-granted assumption that citizenship education is about adults inspiring and educating young people to take more interest in, and have more confidence to, bring about positive social and political change. But, what we highlight in this chapter is a longstanding history of youth-led social movements. The implication here is for the citizenship education project to be re-conceived to be as much, if not more, about youth leaders educating older people, shaping public opinion and planning for positive social and political change. For schools and other formal education providers, this would mean shifting from a deficit to a strengths-based perspective when it comes to designing citizenship education curriculum. A deficit perspective assumes that young people lack knowledge, skills and desirable attributes. A strengths-based perspective assumes that there are stories and accounts of youth-led social movements that can be instructive.

To advance citizenship education and capacity building for youth-led social movements it is not so much a task of romanticising these stories and accounts, but rather to develop a repertoire of tools and frameworks to analyse and learn from them. We acknowledge the expansion of digital platforms and how they have changed the ways people organise and mobilize but we have pointed out that to analyze youth-led social movements still requires paying attention to the foundational aspects of social action that are alluded to in Table 1.

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