

Chapter 4

Barriers to Social Media Advocacy: Lessons Learnt From the Project “Tell Them We Are From Here”

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how the latest statistics on social media usage shows Facebook as the biggest social networking site with over a billion users. With all the possibilities of the potential to grow transnational advocacy networks presented by the use of social media, its adoption and usage is not without limitations. A social media led campaign requires resources to ensure its effectiveness and should be used to complement a traditional advocacy campaign. Project Tell Them We are From Here, an anti-xenophobia campaign is used to explore some theories and demonstrate some of the resource challenges and how very few examples of true transnational advocacy can be found. This project is a collaboration of established non-governmental organisations with strong transnational links with a production company seeking to drive a social movement for unity and raising awareness of the daily plight of immigrants. Despite the campaign team’s limited finances and capacity and shortcomings in the implementation of its social media campaign, the project demonstrates the affordances of social media for resource and capacity restrained activists.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to make a case for social media as a tool for civic activism and advocacy. In the context of parliamentarian politics, Uldam and Vestergaards (2015) distinguish between formal participation such as voting and civic engagement (activism, volunteerism, participation in community driven initiatives). Civic engagement refers to “engagement with political and social issues, an engagement expressed in a variety of ways that do not always adhere to traditional perceptions of parliamen-

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tarian politics” (Uldam & Vestergaards, 2015, p. 2). The authors make a case for alternative modes of participation in parliamentary politics that are emerging and how social media facilitates or contains such participatory modes. Camay and Jordan (1998) define advocacy as a process where civil society organisations work with like-minded groups or individuals through sustained effort for systematic and peaceful change to policy or conditions that affect people’s lives. *Tell Them We Are From Here*, a campaign against xenophobia – the hatred of people from other countries. There are many references for people from other countries. These range from legal terminology such as citizens, non- nationals, refugees to commonly used words such as foreign nationals, immigrants and sometimes derogatory terms which hints on levels on intolerance for immigrants. A context of the problem of xenophobia and its manifestations in South Africa is later in the chapter.

This chapter is comprised of the following sections. The introductory section gives an overview of how social media is used in South Africa for advocacy and civic engagement to galvanize support for calls for free education, a stop to women abuse, political campaigning and xenophobia. A context of social networking sites uptake in South Africa is provided to give an indication of how accessible and the potential reach for the targeted audience for the campaign. The campaign critique takes the form of an analysis of the social media campaign for *Tell Them We Are From Here*, specifically its use of social media as tool for advocacy and civic engagement. Akin Omotoso, the founder of the campaign is a film producer and a writer. His call to action to firstly produce the film *Man on Ground*, which is used as a tool to facilitate dialogue and understanding of the plight of immigrants adds another dynamic to the campaign. Constraints of the social media campaign are discussed and how these were navigated by partnering with international actors active in South Africa to give the campaign its transnational legs. With that said, narratives that were emerging of tensions between Germans and Syrian immigrants provided a transnational advocacy opportunity that was missed by the actors. Considering the involvement of the Goethe Institut in the campaign in South Africa, lessons learnt from South Africa would have provided insights on the subject. Social media in this context would have been a tool to enable transnational advocacy and engagement. The conclusion highlights emerging trends and ways to enable and empower individuals and civil society with limited resources and capacity to utilise social media to make their causes visible to the global community.

THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN ADVOCACY

There are many uses of social media that have emerged in the 21st century enabled by digital technologies. Piccinini, Gregory, Kolbe define digital technologies as “the combinations of information, computing, communications and connectivity technologies such as social media, mobile devices, analytics and cloud computing” (2015 p. 1634). Whether it be for personal or business objectives, the uptake and growth in numbers of social networking sites globally is a continuing phenomenon. According to the latest report on the social media landscape in South Africa, social media is an indispensable tool for South African marketers, politicians, artists, activists, reporters and media reporters (World Wide Worx & Ornic South Africa, 2017). Three recent examples of social media campaigns indicate hashtags used for online campaigns against social ills in South Africa indicate the growing trend of advocacy campaigns that are using social media space to call for action and change. The Rhema Bible Church in South Africa recently launched #Notinmyname, a campaign against the abuse and killing of women while #16DaysofActivitism and #ThatsNotOK are examples of 2017 national campaigns that are cur-

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