

Social Mania: The Virality of Peace

In the age of the Internet, the capabilities of local, regional, national, and even global politics and diplomacy have been expanded considerably. With Internet availability present in nearly every country around the world, now it is easier than ever to learn, to grow, to expand, and to agree. Social media, which is but a small part of the Internet, is a powerful agent of peace and understanding, as it can both encourage social movements and increase negotiation abilities. The worldwide connection that social media offers can also help users spread awareness about crucial issues concerning the global society in an engaging and relatable way, as it did during the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge sensation of 2014, which saw the public pouring ice water on their own heads to spread awareness and raise donations for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gherig's disease. Social media allows for even the smallest of voices to have the biggest of impacts, and change the course of history forever.

Social media is nonconfrontational, through and through. The real world and the digital world possess individual overlaps in each user, but apart from that, the events that occur on social media happen independently from that which occurs in real life. Only through tracing someone's device and linking that device to an individual can someone be identified with their online persona, and even then, the connection is flimsy. While some consider this aspect to be an issue, in terms of the lack of accountability for people who use the Internet for heinous acts, the amicability present on social media provides a medium through which proxy negotiations can take place. An example of a specifically "proxy" negotiation that is used to foster peace and justice is the premise of the television show *To Catch a Predator*, hosted by Dateline NBC's Chris Hansen. In every episode, a team pretends to be a young person on social media in order to

lure potential sex offenders and abusers into the law's grasp by having the "young person" invite them to their house, and Chris Hansen confronting them about their potentially, and sometimes actually illegal activity, before law enforcement apprehends them. The *To Catch a Predator* false identity team uses the nonconfrontationality of the Internet to their advantage, and helps the public by stopping potential criminals and child abusers; the *To Catch a Predator* team is making the world safer, one pedophile apprehension at a time.

If the French had social media on their side, Robespierre would have deposed King Louis XVI. Social media is virtually boundless when it comes to the speed at which social movements diffuse through it, and cause unrest and change at unprecedented speeds. Various anti-establishment protests, from the Occupy Wall Street movement to the ongoing WGA writer's strike, became or are becoming more popular due to the awareness that people create through social media. A considerable contributor to a social movement's success is how trendable it and all of the aspects associated with it become, most of which depends on the hashtag it possesses. When an artist comes out with a new album, people only remember the most catchy and repetitive songs, due largely in part to the chemical makeup and organization of the human brain, and its recognition of patterns and sequences. Hashtags, or repurposed "pound" symbols are a quick and simple tactic employed by movements to make them more memorable, and the more succinct and catchy the hashtag, the more progress the movement achieves. "#MeToo" and "#BLM" are both small, and yet powerful hashtags due to how memorable they are, and the change they achieved proves it; The MeToo movement got several prolific directors, producers, and actors who were essentially extorting women into staying silent fired and blacklisted from the movie industry, and the Black Lives Matter movement caused sweeping legislation to be passed, and even heavily influenced the creation of the United States' most

recent national holiday, Juneteenth. Social movements, which inspire peace and change, are allowed to succeed on social media because of hashtags, and how they create a memorable “brand” for a movement.

Do you prefer hamburgers over pizza? Pizza over hamburgers? Have you never eaten neither a slice of pizza nor a single hamburger? On social media, likeminded people, such as those who prefer pizza, hamburgers, or neither, can gather, and promote an environment where all views are tolerated. For almost every conflict present on Earth, both adversaries have a platform on the Internet, and no one can forbid them from spreading their truth over social media, unlike how speech is inhibited in real life. On the Internet, all are allowed to speak to their beliefs, whether it be something as mundane as pro- or anti-government or religion to something as controversial as pro- or anti-olive or pickle. This freedom, like all freedom, unfortunately comes with a downfall, as it allows hate and intolerance disguised as opposition to manifest and swell, often leading critics of social media to prematurely deem it dangerous and hateful. Those who spread hatred on the Internet do not represent the entire population, as most see the Internet as a place where people of all beliefs can gather and not be restricted.

Social media grants an unbelievably vast expanse of freedom and peace to each of its users, through the nonconfrontationality, the growth attitude, and the tolerance that the Internet provides. With a belief system present on social media, other realms, such as real life, may be inspired to become more accepting and future-minded, so that the future of humanity may be better than it is today.