

Furthermore, Kate Minter²² stated in the interview that ‘Unions NSW opposed the legislation as it could pose the risk of impinging on the implied freedom of political expression derived from the Australian Constitution. Unions NSW does not believe the NSW Government has demonstrated the need for such a significant shift in legislation concerning protests, and the proposed amendments do not provide an appropriate balance between ensuring social cohesion and the right to protest.’ These findings demonstrate the attitudes towards the anti-democratic laws, and the value placed by society on the ability to protest. The similarities highlight the value held over the freedom to peacefully assemble and the shared opposition to the new laws that undermine the components of liberal democracy. Nevertheless, the Baird Government’s plan to manage political dissent by controlling physical protesting will not completely limit activists’ capabilities, as social media is increasingly being employed by the activist community, to counteract the restricting effects of the anti-protest laws.

The above restrictions on physical protesting have led way to an online forum whereby thousands of individuals are thoroughly engaging in virtual activism. The pervasiveness of social media and the development of technology have provided unprecedented and unique opportunities for persons to drive change, through the organisational capabilities of social media. Social media the tools that allow revolutionary groups to lower the costs of participation, organization, recruitment, and training,²³ whilst enabling activists to challenge the dominant views held by powerful groups at the macro level of society, with the click of a button. Social media can be used as a forum to promote ideology and begin conversation²⁴ through the use of a variety of digital mediums to get a message out, including the internet, phones, blogs, online petitioners and social media.²⁵ For example, virtual activism enabled

²² Kate Minter is a research officer at ‘Unions NSW’ and advocates for working people in NSW.

²³ Papic Mamko, Noonan Sean. “Social Media as a Tool for Protest.” 03/02/2011. Australianpolitics.com

²⁴ Robertson Charlotte, Slacktivism: *The Downfall of Millennial’s*, The Huffington Post, October 14 2014.

²⁵ Questionnaire respondent from Generation Z: “social media platforms can foster the creation of significant movements which in turn have lasting impacts”

protestors to globally coordinate a large response through the use of social media during the Arab Spring to effectively coordinate demonstrations.²⁶ The new forms of political engagement have become more popular than the traditional actions,²⁷ evident in 71% of the questionnaire respondents who had never physically protested, but engaged in online activism.²⁸ This highlights the changing nature of activism over time as social media has allowed for widespread access to all ages, social classes, races, and ethnicities as well as those who are geographically restrained. “It reaches a vast audience and allows people a voice, (especially those who otherwise wouldn’t have one)”,²⁹ and it extends to “a wide scope and can easily mobilise people locally and globally”³⁰ as borders do not restrict the extent to which a message over social media may be shared. Twitter co-founder, Biz Stone, assents to this, in saying ‘social media lowers the barrier for activism³¹. Hence, social media is an authentic platform for information sharing³² which is independent of the mainstream media.³³ It acts as an international and intergenerational forum for groups in society to exercise their right to political dissent and amplify their concerns on a global scale, from the comfort of their home and at little to no cost. For these reasons, individuals and groups in society are continually utilising social media to exercise their right to dissent.

²⁶ Sliwinski Michael, “*The evolution of Activism: From the streets to Social media*”, Law Street, January 21, 2016.

²⁷ Content analysis finding: “Clicktivism and online engagements are legitimate forms of political participation. These new forms of clicktivism are legitimate. They help form political communities”. It is different to the more traditional, conventional ways of engagement we’ve seen with the baby boomers who are used to protest and social movements”. O’Neill Margot, “*Young online activists more politically engaged than many older Australians, research shows*”, ABC News, August 19 2014.

²⁸ Questionnaire finding. See appendix A for a summary of the questionnaire results

²⁹ Questionnaire respondent from Generation X

³⁰ Questionnaire respondent from the Baby Boomer Generation.

³¹ Sheedy Caroline, *Social media for Social Change: A case study of Social Media use in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution*, 2011.

³² Questionnaire respondent: “Social media allows for the sharing of non-mainstream information i.e. attacks in middle eastern countries, from non-major current affair medias i.e. not Fairfax”.

³³ Khan-Ibarra Sabina, *The case for Social Media and Hashtag Activism*, The Huffington Post, November 25 2014.

Furthermore, the analysis of the questionnaire reveals the anticipated trends of social media users, where it was discovered that the youth employ social media to a greater extent than older generations.³⁴ For the simplicity of this research, ‘youth activists’ are activists up to the age of 30 years, comprising of individuals from Generation Y and Generation Z.³⁵ The youth prefer forms of online activism to engage in politics, such as joining online advocacy groups, as suggested by the ABS.³⁶ This concurs with the 64% of respondents from generation Z who validated that they use social media outlets to voice their opinions on social justice issues as compared to only 11% of respondents from the Baby Boomer Generation. (The decreased use of social media by the older generations may be attributed to the difficulties associated with using technology). The youth’s use of social media is indicative of the characteristics of Generation Z, and may be a result of their high exposure to technology, being born in the Internet era.³⁷

The interdependence between social media use and the political participation of the youth validates the change in activism over time. Ariadne Vromen from Sydney University suggests, “The percentage of young people who actively post and comment about politics online is about 40%. So what’s happening is a kind of shift in the way politics is discussed”.³⁸ An article supports this³⁹ inferring online engagement may contribute to a greater participatory democracy, especially for the youth. Furthermore, it maintains online engagement through social media is just as effective as the traditional forms

³⁴ “It is no coincidence that the majority of these new digital activists are in their 20s – internet natives, brought up in the online age, versed in the politics of revolution” Day Elizabeth, *#BlackLivesMatter: the birth of a new civil rights movement*, The Guardian, July 19 2015.

³⁵ The youth are “defined by an Internet and media landscape that permeates nearly every facet of their daily lives”. Dookho Sasha, How Millennial’s Engage in Social Media Activism: A Uses and Gratifications Approach, University of Central Florida, 2015.

³⁶ No cited author, *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014*. Australian Bureau of Statistics. June 29 2015.

³⁷ Questionnaire respondent from Generation Z: “social media is how I got involved with activism. We can spread knowledge and information from across the world”.

³⁸ O’Neill Margot, “Young online activists more politically engaged than many older Australians, research shows”, ABC News, August 19 2014.

³⁹ Ibid