Use of Effective Information Design Principles to Encourage Social Media Activism

Designing a Website for Social Issues to Enlist Change and Avoid Slacktivism

A Master's Thesis Project

Presented to

School of Arts and Science

State University of New York

Polytechnic Institute

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Master of Science Degree

By:

BeLynn League 2018

SUNY POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND HUMANITIES

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Information Design and Technology

_____

DATE

_____

Ryan Lizardi, PhD

First Reader

_____

Russel Kahn, PhD

Second Reader

ABSTRACT

The scope of this paper examines the inherent issues that exist within the current constructs of social media activism, with the intent to better understand how to encourage proactive activism in participants and discourage '*Slacktivism*.' The research herein explores the answer to whether or not effective principles of design theory can incite change and influence people to proactively participate in activism both online and in the real world environment, doing so at times, synonymously.

The focus of this paper provides an overview of the research conducted, the challenges and obstacles that exist in social media activism, possible resolution, as well as examines the production of the website design element. The design process employed and described herein, is meant to effectively illustrate the 'Universal Principles of Design,' by creating a website that aims to promote social media activism (proactive participation). The objective of the website design process is meant to circumvent one of the dilemmas frequently faced in social media today, slacktivism ('armchair/passive activism'), which has been explored and supported with the accompanying literature paper related to social media affordances and effective design that encourages active participation.

Using a combined culmination of experience and education garnered to date in the M.S. IDT program, I have created a website prototype, adding infographics and visuals to ensure that the aforementioned project details would come to fruition by ensuring that elements of storytelling, color theory, grid layout and all theories learned to date are applied to the end goal. The project challenges, questions, limitations and future direction of the website design will be addressed within the content of this paper.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of all the people that have touched my life in an immeasurable way, and that I have loved and lost far sooner than ever anticipated – especially, my grandfather, who recently passed and was unable to see all of his dreams come to fruition. He truly was, always will be, in my heart, and was such a beautiful spirit that was filled with love and compassion—always seeking to do for others and forego his own needs.

Moreover, I would like to honor my grandmother who has been so brave during her struggle with breast cancer and with the loss of the love of her life, my grandfather. No matter what pain she must endure, she tirelessly shows me love and supports my dreams and tries to minimalize anything that adverse she may be experiencing. Furthermore, my fiancé is, without a shadow of a doubt, my heart, soul, breathe and my everything. I appreciate him immensely; everything that we have encountered and shared in our journey together; more than words can ever express!

Lastly, but certainly not least, I dedicate this to all the beauty that I know exists in the Universe. My hope is to be a voice that can incite change for global issues that impact people around the world and to make a difference for our people and environment. I hope my voice can make a difference for all the extraordinary animals in need of love, shelter, and being protected/respected, all the people in poverty and facing homelessness or are homeless, those who have been marginalized, people facing adversity for any reason (for racial inequality or sexual identity, women's rights, LGBTQ), and so much more! This is dedicated to LOVE and hopefully seeing a lot more of it, along with acceptance and compassion! ~PEACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the assistance and patience of Professor Ryan Lizardi, PhD, who was always willing to meet and assist with any concerns that arose during the thesis process and Professor Russel Kahn, PhD, for his input into this arduous process. Additionally, I would like to thank everyone who has been instrumental in my life, thank you for your patience, kindness and love! Most of all, I am eternally grateful for the experiences I have had, and the beauty and opportunity to live LIFE! Thank you, Universe, for all your majesty, mystery, enigma and mystique!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Questions

1. Can effective Information Design discourage 'Slacktivism' and encourage end users to be proactive participants in social media platforms again?

2. How can we solve the problem of disengaged participants across social media platforms and encourage proactive participation?

3. What is 'Slacktivism,' and how do we combat the issues associated with passive activism or lack of participation?

4. What affordances does social media provide, and how can we use it to our collective advantage to assist with social issues in our global community at large?

5. Identify how Information Design can prove beneficial in successfully developing a website.

6. How can design encourage people to be proactive, take-part and participate in global social issues?

7. Should website design incorporate elements that pose possible incentivized rewards and recognition for active participation – encouraging people to participate and spread game results?

Social Media Activism Challenges and Impact

Enlisting proactive participation via social media platforms is no easy feat, and this paper addresses some key elements and challenges that play a role in possibly influencing the end user to go beyond passive participation (Slacktivism), and make use of SNS (Social Networking Sites), to combine online efforts via social media platforms, with real world activism. By incorporating effective information design (*Universal Principles of Design Theory*) to create powerful websites, blogs, and social media platforms that seek to engage the end user, along with the use of incentive based reward programs to encourage participants to 'take part,' is it possible to make an impact on the issues that plague the current epidemic that exists with what's referred to as 'Slacktivism?'

The journal articles researched examine some of the assorted challenges and obstacles behind the utilization of social media and the ability to effectively use social media platforms to make an impact. As noted in one research article, '*Social Media: Usage and Impact*,' the author states: "Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, Flickr, and others, have been growing at a tremendous rate and the adoption rate of such media has been skyrocketing which, in turn, has delivered astronomical numbers of users in the last 10 years." (Noor and Hendricks, et al., pg.7, 2011)

"As a consequence of this astounding phenomenon involving both the rapid emergence of this cutting-edge technology and its adoption, social media has become an integral part of the contemporary classroom, of advertising and public relation industries, political campaigning, and of numerous other aspects of our daily existence. The incorporation of this massive media upsurge brings with it challenges and opportunities that need to be analyzed through scholarly research." (Noor and Hendricks, et al., pg.7, 2011)

In agreement with the authors' statement, indeed, innovative ways of using social media effectively, is a challenge that needs to be addressed and further analyzed in-depth, in order for participants to make a difference with the current issues that plague our global society. In a similar fashion to the aforementioned article's findings, author of '*Tweet and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*,' supports a similar ideology by stating, "the emancipatory power of communication technologies (i.e. Facebook, Twitter), has not been much help in understanding how exactly the use of media reshapes the *repertoire of communication* of contemporary movements and affects the experience of participants. One danger when

8

approaching the introduction field of social media is the possibility of being overwhelmed by the sheer abundance and diversity of the communicative practices they channel. To understand the social significance of media practices and of social media in particular it is helpful to historicize things, contrasting contemporary forms of communication with past ones. In a way, modern media have always constituted a channel through which social movements not only communicate but also organize their actions and mobilize their constituencies." (Gerbaudo and Mattoni, et al., pp.1-4, 2012)

Digital technology (social media platforms specifically), possesses inherent flaws and within the current constructs that exist (not enough in-depth research or answers as to how to universally make change effective), to illustrate how people might utilize the technology more effectively, all areas of social media suffer as a result: i.e. activism constructs, learning models, advertising, politics, marketing and many other avenues.

Understanding topics such as 'Social Media Activism,' and how to effectively engage participants to make use of SNS (Social Networking Sites) platforms, to tackle global issues (i.e. Climate Change, Global Activism, Slacktivism), can be a daunting challenge that proves to be difficult. In support of the vast challenges and inherent obstacles that exist, in the article 'Global Activism, Global Media,' the author notes: "In order to understand the potentialities of global and local activism and the relation of such activism to various forms of media, our contributors address, explicitly or implicitly, a range of issues that are central to analyzing the world today. They cluster in two broad areas: the nature and extent of contemporary social change and the nature of media and the mediation of activism." (Stammers, Shaw and Jong, et al., pp.4-6, 2005)

Throughout the extensive literature research, assorted articles examine an overview of the issues that exist within *Social Media Activism* and the ways in which there's a dire need for combatting the current state of affairs, with some citing various arguments for how best the problem might be resolved; however, there is lacking evidence and not enough supporting research as to how one might discourage, for example, **'***Slacktivism*' (passive activism, a relatively new terminology theory), and proactively engage participants to use social media activism in tandem with real world activism.

As it was so eloquently stated in '*Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*,' the author writes "Debates about the social consequences of rapid technological change frequently oscillate between utopian optimism and obdurate skepticism, both of which tend to fare poorly against the tests of time and empirical evidence. In *Digitally Enabled Social Change*, Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport investigate the consequences of internet technology, specifically the web—for social movement mobilization. The novelty of web-mediated protest depends on how well activists leverage the web's distinct affordances, including its ability to reduce the costs of mobilization and to enable asynchronous participation without the need for physical co-presence." (Earl and Kimport, et al., pp.1-4, 2011)

In summary of the aforementioned research findings, the obvious stance should be to encourage and educate people on the topic through a combination of effective information design and an incentive based reward system, transparency in data; which could prove to be beneficial tools to help bridge the gap in understanding complex topics like 'Climate Change,' via social media platforms. It is essential to use a multitude of modalities to encourage active participation,

garner audience participation and interest to take what is an otherwise arduous task, vast and complex topic, *social media activism in a digital era* and find ways to apply theory to principal and experiment with new forms of action to see if the prevailing result is successful.

I feel strongly that social media platforms, websites and blogs, provide a fun, immersive, and interactive way to introduce broad topics like 'Climate Change', in a well-designed setting, that offers infographics, participation challenges, storytelling elements, videos/art, etcetera; connecting participant with data/research materials, all the while encouraging active participation in the process.

Understanding the Ideology behind Slacktivism

Data results from research articles all emphasize the assorted challenges and obstacles associated with social media activism and 'slacktivism,' citing statements such as: problems with legitimacy, transparency, accuracy, #hashtag activism being all bark and no bite, too easy and convenient for participant to feel compelled to go beyond the act of clicking, liking, and following a cause; because the same overall psychological feeling of doing an act of good is achieved without acting further, outside of social media platforms.

In support of the aforementioned synopsis, as noted in the article *'Activism or Slacktivism? The potential and pitfalls of social media in contemporary society*,' the author states "embedded in these online activities are instances of lackluster support hidden under the guise of simple "shares," "likes," and "favorites." Can online displays of support equate to activism or should they be seen as "slacktivism? The author then makes reference to an article written by Malcolm Gladwell, within his journal article, which states: Malcolm Gladwell (2010) delivered a

scathing critique of Internet activism in "Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted." Within his piece, he argued social media does very little to produce tangible social change and is becoming a substitute for in-person activism." (Cabrera, Matias and Montoya, et al., pp.1-16, 2017)

The ideology behind social media activism and slacktivism can be complex in nature to fully comprehend and one of the best explanations located, was summarized in the authors notes, "Slacktivism has been divided into five subcategories: clicktivism, sympathy, political, charity (direct), and charity (by-product of consumption), and the term tends to be pejorative (Christensen, 2011; Morozov, 2009; Vie, 2014). Christensen further argued that slacktivism is not a new phenomenon. For example, the term was actually created in 1995 as a synonym for "armchair activism"; however, contemporarily slacktivism has become equated with politically ineffective, online actions (Morozov, 2009). Furthermore, delineating between activism and slacktivism is conceptually difficult to operationalize because the line is very blurry (e.g., Christensen, 2011; Jones, 2015; Hu, 2014; Y.-H. Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Obar, 2014; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Šteˇka & Mazák, 2014). Each is a descriptor of behavior where the same individual can sometimes engage in activism, other times slacktivism, and sometimes participating in slacktivism is a precursor to involvement in more meaningful social protest (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013)." (Cabrera, Matias and Montoya, et al., pp.1-16, 2017)

Similarly, the article '*The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action*,' the author states, "We define slacktivism as a willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social

cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change (Davis 2011; Morozov 2009a). A variety of factors, including the dramatic increase in social media presence among charitable organizations and advocacy groups, has made it increasingly easy for consumers to engage in small token acts of support for causes." (Kristofferson, White and Peloza, et al., pp.1149-1166, 2014)

Which brings into question what investigations and in-depth studies have been conducted to offer a solution to the problem? There are a lot of debates and research articles that question and discuss observable factors as noted in the aforementioned findings, explaining why social media activism has issues and contributes to slacktivism; however, there are not enough conclusions and answers drawn; that cite factors about the impact immersion and satisfaction perception of social media activism. The article that provided the most support for addressing the problem and offering possible solutions and avenues of combatting the inherent issues that exist within social media activism constructs and the challenge of slacktivism, was an article titled '*From slacktivism to activism: participatory culture in the age of social media*,' written by a panel of SIG experts, all authors involved seek to explore and answer the very nature of issues, affordances, weaknesses, and possible outcome for change.

As noted by the authors, "This SIG will investigate technology mediated social participation through a critical lens, discussing both the potential positive and negative outcomes that exist in social media activism and the lack of participation. Approaches to designing for increased participation, evaluating effects of participation, and next steps in scientific research

directions will be discussed." (Rotman, Vieweg, Yardi, Chi, Preece, Shneiderman, Pirolli, & Glaisyer, et al., pp.819-822, 2011)

Of particular interest to the scope of this paper, the panel of experts seek to assess "ideas for design, theories, methods, or toolkits to measure and evaluate online social participation and how we might extend evaluations to related practical activism." (Rotman, Vieweg, Yardi, Chi, Preece, Shneiderman, Pirolli, & Glaisyer, et al., pp.819-822, 2011)

As a possible solution, social media activism should employ tactics that offer incentive rewards for 'taking part,' as well as ensure that the platform incorporates an exciting, interactive, and immersive environment where participants feel compelled to get involved and this would require some sophistication in output through visual storytelling components (videography, photography, color theory, et cetera), that stimulate the end user intellectually and emotionally, in order to avoid 'Slacktivism.'

In order to enlist action on the part of the participant, there needs to be elements that focus on emotions and getting to the heart of what motivates people (like competitions and sharing experiences), requiring a sense of constant engagement (showing visual proof of activism/deed and sharing online), and receiving encouragement along the way (incentive scoring based on level of activism) to continue the efforts to want to continually act and contribute and return to the environment (social media platform, blog, website, et cetera).

The whole idea of any social media platform should be to capture the interest of the end user and encourage frequent action/participation, but in order to do so, at times, people require more than effective visually compelling aesthetics and information design principles. For some people, in order to encourage proactive participation, they are in need of motivators and reward systems in order to be compelled to stay in the environment and want to further explore the platform being utilized (i.e. Website, Blogs, Vlogs, SNS). It's not only essential, but imperative to establish a new construct or framework, that incorporates more than effective design elements, thought provoking storytelling, visual and audio elements, we must consider the benefits of the addition of *gamification*.

As noted in the article, '*Studying Gamification: The Effect of Rewards and Incentives on Motivation Gamification:'* the author states, *"*Serious games offer an enjoyable way to solve real-world problems. Gamification is also used as a clever way to promote a business or product. For instance, players can earn badges, discounts, and other rewards for visiting real-world shops and "checking-in" to mobile phone applications such as Foursquare. Some other examples are Epic Win which encourages players to complete daily chores, and websites like Google Power meter that promotes household energy saving through the use of progress bars and collectible badges (Lee & Hammer, 2011)." (Richter, Raban, & Rafaeli, et al., pp.1-27, 2015).

The objective should be that participants are required to show their contributing efforts to social causes through means of video evidence (sharing proof of social action), that encourages other participants to take part in gameplay incentive challenges/reward systems (competing with one another for higher score results), visually prove that said individual performed a task that

leads to a positive social change—sharing the data (proof), with family and friends. Thusly, applying results of an incentive-based scoring/reward system via #hashtag shares, on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. "Gamification attempts to harness the motivational power of games in order to promote participation, persistence and achievements. Prior research on games focused on fun, enjoyment and flow as core components of game play (Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, 2002; Hsu & Lu, 2004; Malone, 1980, 1981; Sweetser & Wyeth, 2005). Yet understanding how to promote motivation by carefully crafted achievements and rewards functions should be revisited especially in light of the current debate." (Richter, Raban, & Rafaeli, et al., pp.1-27, 2015).

Design Theory and Incentive Based Rewards in Social Media Activism

Design theory seeks to provide information in a clear and concise method that's easily visualized and organized into coherent scenarios, using a grid structure, applying color theory and other *Universal Principles of Design Theory*, to ensure that knowledge of content is easily understood and presented in a fashion that factors in that the material is easily comprehended and engaging. Some of the *Universal Principles of Design* factors include: Usability, Aesthetic, Influence, Perception and Appeal. As noted in *Universal principles of design, revised and updated: 125 ways to enhance usability, influence perception, increase appeal, make better design decisions, and teach through design*, Lidwell, notes, 'aesthetic designs look easier to use and have a higher probability of being used, whether or not they are actually easy to use.' (Lidwell, Holder and Butler, et al., pp.1-20, 2010)

If visitors are unaware of your mission, or alternately, their own objective, they will quickly navigate to another source, if the information/purpose is not easily identifiable. The function of any website is to ensure that the intended target audience is aware of what's to be expected (what you offer them, or what's needed of them), in order to successfully achieve its intended purpose. Additionally, are there clearly visible *calls-to-action*, *interactive design* that's engaging and does the website, blog, or social media platform of choice, consider *responsive web design* such as mobile optimization.

Effective information design should clearly communicate your intent, through the selection of minimal typeface, ensuring colors are well-balanced (harmonious) and complementary to environment throughout the page and the design is fashioned in a grid style layout. One should have the ability to scroll down the page and easily engage with the content made available. The graphics are interactive and there's an assortment of engaging videos offered, taking into consideration the audiovisual element. (Lidwell, Holder and Butler, et al., pp.1-20, 2010) The use of color photography and ability to watch engaging videos, does wonders for not only conveying emotion and playing on one's sympathy, but keeps the participant actively engaged and intrigued.

Social media platforms (i.e. Facebook), offer the participant immersive environments with endless opportunities to account for creativity, through interactivity and a plethora of ways in which to engage the end user (videos, photos, games, storytelling elements combined with audiovisual components) and an avenue for socialization. "The social aspect is important in games (Ling et al., 2005). Gaming applications integrated into social networking platforms such

as Facebook and Myspace have enjoyed enormous popularity (Hou, 2011). These games serve as a unique setting for socialization in a playful manner, through encouraging social activates like trading, chatting, flirting, cooperation, competition and interaction with friends (Hou, 2011; Jackson, Boonthum, & McNamara, 2009). Games form communities with shared interests in and around gaming environments. In some cases this process is reinforced by offering in-game social interaction and discussion forums (Bleumers et al., 2012)." (Richter, Raban, & Rafaeli, et al., pp.1-27, 2015)

From this point of view, the presence of a well-designed website, for example, could prove to be highly beneficial and serve as a new construct, or framework, to implement a new path that actively engages participants; one in which incorporates *Universal Principles of Design Theory,* along with *gamification* (creation of an incentive-based scoring systems), that promotes intrigue and engagement in the end user, prompting continued proactive participation.

The ability to garner attention and influence participation in people, begins with being inspired to take part and this begins with effective *principles of design* elements, coupled with *intrinsic motivators* like reward based programs. (Rehnen, Bartsch, Kull, and Meyer, et al., pp.305-328, 2017)

In the article '*Exploring the impact of rewarded social media engagement in loyalty programs'* within the abstract, the authors' extensively explores and addresses social media engagement and impact through a series of lab results and field studies and notes, "rewarded engagement positively moderates the impact of intrinsic motivation on loyalty intentions. Offering rewarded engagement in loyalty programs offsets the undermining effect of rewards

practical implications rewarding customers for social media engagement can be a beneficial way of boosting active participation in loyalty programs, but this experience should be enjoyable and self-determined." (Rehnen, Bartsch, Kull, and Meyer, et al., pp.305-328, 2017)

"This study analyzes the effect of rewarded social media engagement on purchase intent in the context of a loyalty program. This was carried out by means of a field study and an experimental design. In the field study, members of the German Railway's loyalty program were rewarded for their engagement in a Facebook community. Afterwards, the authors compared the behavioral intention of the engaged members with that of customers who did not participate in the Facebook group, but who exhibited similar characteristics. All in all, rewarded engagement enhances the attitude toward the program and loyalty intentions. The results of behavioral data support this effect. The field study results show that if companies wish to reward customers for their engagement, they should use monetary rewards."(Rehnen, Bartsch, Kull, and Meyer, et al., pp.305-328, 2017)

In addition to design, you also have to account for psychological factors and know what motivates people to do the things that they designate time for. Strictly from an observational perspective, the majority of people throughout history, seem to be inherently motivated by their competitive spirit (i.e. Olympics, Sports, Cuisines, Retail, et cetera). Infographics, graphical interfaces that incorporates video and audio for navigational purposes in multidimensional spaces are meant to give realism to visualizations and evoke emotion and motivation in the participant. "Motivation to act has been studied in Social Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Organizational Science. These areas focus on motivation in particular types of environments.

We propose to link gamification to these theories. Motivation is demonstrated by an individual's choice to engage in an activity and the intensity of effort or persistence in that activity (Garris et al., 2002). Current approaches concern two dominant clusters that play a role in determining player's motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000a)." (Richter, Raban, & Rafaeli, et al., pg.24, 2015)

If design is effectively illustrated, factors in audience (end user), and what motivates people to willingly provide their attention, such as is the case with the study of gamification, arguably, it is possible to establish a relationship where the participant is eager to return and contribute additional time on a more frequent basis and be proactive. As long as the environment addresses effective information design (clearly communicates information/intent/what's needed and expected of participant), and key objectives that factor in (intrinsic and extrinsic motivators), then people are more apt to be encouraged to participate and further explore said platform. "Gamification combines these two motivations; on one hand using extrinsic rewards such as levels, points, badges to improve engagement while striving to raise feelings of achieving mastery, autonomy, sense of belonging (Muntean, 2011). Notably, the social aspect is important in games (Ling et al., 2005). Competition, social interaction, or cooperation may influence player behavior (Malone, 1981; Sweetser & Wyeth, 2005; Yee, 2006a, 2006b)." (Richter, Raban, & Rafaeli, et al., pg.24, 2015)

In terms of employing effective principles of design, "When the affordance of an object or environment corresponds with its intended function, the design will perform more efficiently and will be easier to use." (Lidwell, Holder and Butler, et al., pg.20, 2010). However, as with any

dilemma in life, there is never any one solution and definitive answer for what enhances the motivational experience for all participants and there are always going to be people that are unique to the majority and no accounting for design, or incentives/reward systems (gamification), will appeal to all people, all of the time, but will certainly appeal and possibly encourage most people through continued advances and scientific research and applied theory.

Conclusion

Through my research and discovery process, examining and reading through the assorted articles, despite all challenges and obstacles, and inconclusive evidence as to a solution how best to combat the inherent issues that exist within social media activism, I still maintain the belief that employing effective *Universal Principles of Design Theory,* coupled with *intrinsic motivators* like an incentive-based reward (scoring) system, can lead to encouraging proactive participation in end users and discourage the current trend of slacktivism.

Despite any stipulated pros and cons stated by scholars, effective information design and incentive-based rewards, have the ability to serve as a valuable tools in terms of facilitating the delivery of complex information in an interactive and fun way, while also maintaining high levels of motivation and intrigue. Regardless of upheld ideologies currently expressed, there's not enough solutions offered and action taking place; rather, there's a lot of debate about slacktivism and the assorted trials and tribulations that prevail and why social media activism is failing, but no framework in place to examine a new concept.

There's never a one-size-fits-all methodology that applies unanimously to every problem that arises within the constructs of social media activism that would account for how each person

will be motivated to be proactive members of society and go beyond the digital realm, because we are all unique and process information in our own way and have different motivators, morals, values and ethics. All of the current mechanisms that we have in place to address the issue of social media activism and slacktivism are all based on educational philosophies and to some extent, cognitive dissonance and what people uphold to be true that fits in with their belief system.

It is evident to me that there is still a gap in peoples' ability level to apply theory to practice and that we are in desperate need of additional scientific research and a new framework and way of conducting activism, one in which accounts for the problem that currently exists within the realm of social media platforms and the ability to bridge the gap of slacktivism and get participants to take action.

Thus being said, I feel strongly that effective information design techniques and incentive-based rewards can prove to be a launch pad for a new framework that incorporates motivation (incentive rewards) and effective design (video proof/photography/storytelling), to tackle the problem of slacktivism. The creation of strong infographics, websites, blogs, etc., can offer elements of the real world environment through the employment of visual, auditory and interactive means, requiring users to submit proof of social actions and being rewarded via a scoring system based on level of difficulty for their video/photographic submission and shares of content through assorted social media platforms.

Employing information design and incentivized rewards as a methodology could prove to be exponentially beneficial in ways yet discovered. Hopefully, this will be an area that continues

to be examined and studied and in the years ahead we can see social media activism go beyond

slacktivism and flourish. Our modern digital era offers unimaginable opportunities in the way of

innovation and global media platforms, and it is my hope that we can use this priceless resource

for the betterment of society for generations to come. In closing, any action taken online in

tandem with real world activism is better than no action at all. Social media activism provides

knowledge and access to ideas that people would otherwise be unaware of.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

There is so much beauty in our world that includes amazing vistas, exotic travel destinations, oceans, lakes, mountains, flora, wildlife, sunrises and sunsets, the stars and moon, all of nature and humanity; however, our planet faces great unrest and is in peril.

I have been a proactive activist for environmental issues, social causes, animal welfare, recycling and a vast assortment of other social causes for a long time. For me, it's important that social media be utilized for the greater good of humanity. I notice that a lot of people either 'like,' 'share,' or 'follow,' an assortment of environmental causes, social issues and organizations; however, not enough people take an active stance to participate beyond the aforementioned.

There's power in numbers, and if more people took part in activism by contacting politicians, signing petitions, joining in on walks/marches, then we could make a tremendous impact on our world at large. It seems that people are far more prone to share things linked to celebrity gossip, status and self-gratification, as opposed to bringing awareness and showing concern for far more important factors that impact our current society.

Given this context, I set out on a mission to address some of the issues plaguing society and armed with research and an overview of issues that are in need of spotlight, I sought to develop a website that would tackle assorted social issues by offering a different solution to the current status quo. Through a culmination of what I have studied extensively to date in the *Masters of Information Design Technology* program, I wanted to apply theory to principal and

produce a byproduct of combined skills and knowledge, effectively employing the *Universal Principles of Design* into a final product output.

Problem Statement

With an assortment of vast social issues that dominate our global society, it would be a massive undertaking to address all issues in a short duration of time for thesis project completion, so I addressed an overall theme and outline of what my project mission is on the website and began focusing on some design elements and one cause at a time to illustrate my vision. For the sake of having content on the website that employs the *Universal Principles of Design*, I began with creating an infographic (see EXHIBIT 1), which addresses climate change. Due to a continued lack of regard for nature (massive deforestation, oil spills, mining, and water contamination as a result of fracking), climate change is now upon us in ways unanticipated and threatens our very existence! Climate change is real and will inevitably destroy the existence of our planet if actions are not taken!

Due to some of the aforementioned causes cited, the atmosphere faces ozone damage, and with the increase of endangered species going extinct (result of fur trade, canned hunting, commercial-fishing, deforestation, pollution, etc.), we face dire consequences as a result of lack of human regard.

There's a mélange of other catastrophic events that occur as a result of climate change; all combined, it threatens the balance of our species and beautiful planet, EARTH. We must take action and enlist as many individuals as possible to take part and actually care about the dire consequences and set forth to preserve the beauty of our only planet.

Project Description

For my *Website Initial Design Mockup*, I developed a website (see EXHIBIT 2) through the utilization of WordPress.com. The intention behind the website is to play to the emotions of the audience and force one to be compelled to *DO* something; to *take part* and to make change become reality.

My thought process behind my website, is to encourage proactive social media activism, a call to action, and have various media content featured on the website, (i.e. video art pieces, statistical data from websites (Rainforest Alliance, Conservation International, NASA, Etc.), that offer representational information of the current reality of social issues that plague our society (climate change, civil unrest, women's rights, et cetera.)

I added my own infographic, and assorted inspirational photography pieces that incorporated storytelling and blog elements to bond with participants and show the human connection (beauty of moments in everyday LIFE), because the use of audio/visual imagery can be powerful tools to compel an audience to act and take part, when they can relate and share in the experience. I would like others to share their stories and positivity as well—in an effort to elicit interactivity and participation.

There's not enough action taking place to protect our planet. There's dire need for people uniting, as one dynamic force, for the greater good and preservation of *all* species! It is within our power to fill the void, be the glue that seals the gap in all the holes that exists within our society. We have the power, NOW, more than ever, to make a dramatic difference in the health and wellbeing of our planet and each other. We simply need to set political differences aside,

reevaluate the meaning of LIFE, foresee change for a better tomorrow and be individual puzzle pieces that fit together collaboratively to form the shape of our planet and lend a hand in friending earth and one another!

I would like to incorporate a video art piece into the website that plays to the emotions of the audience and forces one to be compelled to DO something to take part to make change become reality. My thought is to produce a short call to action, video art piece, which utilizes statistical data from websites (Rainforest Alliance, Conservation International, NASA, etc.), that offer representational information of the current reality of climate change, as but one example of many topics that I wish to address. I also contemplated doing additional infographics or posters, to complete the project; however, the use of audio and imagery can also be powerful tools to compel an audience and there are so many additional elements that I intend to incorporate and want to see come to fruition.

Goals and Objective behind Design Methodology

There are several key reasons why a website was chosen as a solution for addressing Slacktivism and promoting proactive social media activism: its proliferation throughout the world, its ease of access by the masses, and its low production costs (it's a cheap and widespread solution to employ). My goal with the website is to have people want to participate in the environment and stay engaged. Through the incorporation of photography, storytelling elements, an infographic, and adding video components that are visually compelling, this plays a role in getting to the heart of peoples' minds and souls. You have power to ignite change when people

feel that the content is relatable and addresses similar thoughts and concerns participants struggle with.

While I may want people to imagine a world where climate change doesn't exist – where endless animals roam free in their environment without fear, where glaciers are intact, forests are lush, water flows freely to homes (devoid of contamination), inequality ceases to exist, people can identify as they see fit, and where a term like climate change is foreign in concept, I know that's a daunting task and that I do not have the power to undo, or correct all of the world's global social issues and dilemmas; however, I can at least reflect the cause and effect and what could be, through carefully-crafted, well-designed video pieces, infographics, photography and storytelling elements that portray a world that's mending wounds and concerned about a greater tomorrow, inciting others to be proactive, take part, use social media activism for the greater good and share their stories and video proof, to incite change in others and show their competitive spirit in the process and see who comes out on top with the highest score of doing good deeds.

Possible Strategy in the Future Direction

Considering all limitations and that time is of the essence for the interim, it is an arduous task to incorporate all that I envision for this massive undertaking. Additional and extensive research would be required to fully comprehend the breadth of what's involved in tackling all of the assorted global social issues that plague society. Moreover, the website needs to implement additional infographics; an outline and structure for reward system and scoring mechanism; additional identifiers of what's expected of participants; and what participants can expect in

return.   With such an expansive scope, this would require additional research, possible surveys of participants as to motivators, and would also require further development of what to incorporate in addition to incentive-based rewards and video storytelling. All elements within the website need to weigh the hierarchy of importance among all components that is to be included in the final, overall output.

Possible Constraints

The biggest constraint that faces all of us is time. With work schedules, other coursework projects, family matters, time is limited and poses a challenge to completion of major projects. With such a short window in which to complete the thesis design project, and the evaluation of research and relevant resources, there are an assortment of challenges and limitations that anyone undergoing the task of completing a project this massive would experience. In order to properly convey all global social issues that are in dire need of being addressed, a great deal of time, patience and energy will have to be allotted for.

Considering all limitations (restrictions involved with respect to themes/opting to elect to use the free version/logo design vs. premium plan and paid hosting upgrades), and that time is of the essence, the website concept will take a great deal of time to fully come to fruition and incorporate all social media activism issues and an incentive-based scoring/reward system.

I need to ensure that I incorporate an element that requires participants to show visual proof that they took part in a cause through video verification and thusly, receive a score based on level of difficulty of task embarked upon (i.e. donations, marches, signing petitions, making phone calls to politicians, planted a tree, took part in a cultural event that bridges the gap, etc.).

All aspects of the website development involve an obvious learning curve, which elements to include, weighing the hierarchy of importance among all components illustrated on the final output, to date, and what's to be included for the final website design concept to be able to come to fruition.

WEBSITE / INFOGRAPHIC PREPARATION

Website Design Consideration

Some of the themes that I found of interest include: Naturelle theme, Bento theme, Somalite theme, Newfangled theme, Fotografie theme, Ascendant theme, and Milestone lite theme.

I selected the aforementioned themes because they appear to be the most responsive formats for my visual design concept and offer intrigue, clean design and encourage exploration. I am most concerned with information that's clear and concise, doesn't confuse the participant and is easily conveyed and encourages proactive social media activism. I wanted my end design to be visually compelling and encourage the participant to stay on the website and be intrigued to further explore and take action.

Visually compelling videos, photography, infographics and intelligent use of media, is so vitally important and makes the difference in whether a person will choose to commit to sharing your website/participate in your *call-to-action*, or leave altogether and go elsewhere.

As for color scheme, you have the ability to change your current theme via the theme customizer WordPress plugin. I would want to use an earth palette tone throughout with complementary and contrasting colors that bring peace, balance and harmony. The whole idea is to promote harmony and compassion toward the environment and the way humanity interacts. So, I would opt to stay away from dark tones, or palettes that don't support my concept.

Website Hosting and Implementation

For the interim, I elected to use the free website WordPress.com, because I feel that with my given concept, I have a lot to learn along the way and, although there are limitations and restrictions by electing a free format, I wouldn't want to pay hosting fees and commit to WordPress, when it's feasible that I might altogether switch directions in the future, due to expected size of constructs, limitations of website built via WordPress, and minimal creative license to illustrate your own work.

I lack the relevant experience in developing a website and I have seriously taken into consideration that perhaps I will be in need of a website of my own (that doesn't use WordPress), developed either through learning some basic coding, or possibly having to pay someone for assistance to have such a big concept come to fruition.

Ultimately, I would like to procure the website domain: Life.com; however, I know this is not feasible, as it already exists for 'Time Life,' magazine, and I do not want to be at fault for appearing to be affiliated, or rather, copying the brand, as my idea (concept), is entirely different in scope, nor would I want to tread on intellectual property/copyright issues. Thus being said, I am struggling with an easy to use name for the website that still makes an impact.

Some names that I am still sorting out and considering, are: "Ici" (French for the English word "here"), because we are all here and have a part to do in this LIFE that we have been gifted, or, "IF," as it is within the acronym of the word LIFE, and plays on the concept of IF we take part, the possibilities that could result.

I know that the initial website construction is limited in scope for now, as there is much to be accomplished. Something of this nature will take time to develop, and many trials and errors will result during the development phase and attempting to sort out how to elicit action, incorporate a reward scoring system and illustrate video participation by website visitors. The website has been constructed and launched with limited information upfront, and the goal is to continue to develop the concept through more expansive research, addition of audiovisual elements, and a greater expanse of time free of other requirements and deadlines. So far, I have begun the website with a Homepage, About L.I.F.E. stories tab, Media content, Infographic, Blog and Contact tab.

Website Call-to-Action Construct

*Current State of Affairs***:**

There is so much beauty in our world that includes: amazing vistas, exotic travel destinations, oceans, lakes, mountains, flora, wildlife, sunrises and sunsets, the stars and moon, all of nature and humanity; however, our planet faces great unrest and is in peril.

Due to:

Lack of peace (terrorism, religious conflict), regard for nature (massive deforestation, oil spills, mining, and water contamination as a result of fracking), climate change (due to ozone damage), an increase of endangered/extinct species (result of fur trade, canned hunting, commercial-fishing, deforestation, pollution, etc.), homelessness, and a mélange of other catastrophic events that threaten the balance of our species and beautiful planet, EARTH.

*The Gap***:**

There's not enough action taking place to protect our planet. There's dire need for people uniting, as one dynamic force, for the greater good and preservation of all species! It is within our power to fill the void, be the glue that seals the gap in all the holes that exists within our society. We have the power, NOW, more than ever, to make a dramatic difference in the health and wellbeing of our planet and each other. We simply need to set differences aside, re-evaluate the meaning of life, foresee change for a better tomorrow and be individual puzzle pieces that fit together collaboratively to form the shape of our EARTH!

*Call to Adventure***:**

What could be: imagine a world where conflict doesn't exist (where the notion of violence and civil unrest is something of history books), a world where no one knows hunger, where endless animals roam free in their environment without fear, where glaciers are intact, forests are lush, water flows freely to homes devoid of contamination, and where homelessness is a term foreign in concept.

Our Plight:

What is: destruction, greed, and over-consumption is causing our planet to be in peril.

What could be: mindfulness to the environment, people satisfied with living a comfortable life as opposed to need for status and power, taking part in preservation.

What is: terrorism, senseless killing (genocides) and religious conflict due to fear and lack of proper knowledge, understanding and respect for cultural differences.

What could be: peace, compassion, equality and a mutual respect for differences and a utopian society.

What is: deforestation, GMO's, crop devastation, and bee colonies dying at alarming rates.

What could be: sustainable farming, ban of pesticides, organic food supply for all, thriving bees, lush forests.

Reward (new bliss):

Our reward in this journey is our planet, Earth! Earth is our greatest 'friend,' and without it, we would cease to exist. Earth 'follows' us wherever we are, and Earth is never concerned with our 'status' and updates. Earth prevails with or without us; however, Earth needs us NOW, more than EVER. We need Earth to forgive us and it's about time that we show some gratitude and show our appreciation for all the life that Earth provides.

In Conclusion:

PLEASE, Won't YOU Cross the Threshold WITH ME…? Lend a hand in 'Friending' Earth…. After all, Earth is Life, without it, your status is of no matter. Join me in showing gratitude to all LIFE on Earth. Take part in the action, 'follow,' 'like,' 'love' and celebrate Earth, by doing more than 'sharing' my message. Join me in being a united force for Earth. Help ME, to help YOU, to help EARTH!

Together, we can solve Earth's puzzle and make a beautiful canvas that tells stories to future generations—thanks in part, to our combined efforts and leaving the world a better place, so that there can be a tomorrow in which we leave our legacy.

What are you waiting for? We have work to do…

Infographic Implementation

For the infographic inclusion on my website, I chose to create an illustration using *Piktochart*, and selected climate change, as one of the social media activism issues in need of proactive measures, to focus on. Seeing how 'Climate Change,' deals with a vast sea of information (causes/effects), involves a multitude of statistics and an endless sea of data and research, I knew it was important to narrow down the scope and find one element of such a broad subject that I could illustrate as a final component.

Thus being said, I know that there exists a wealth of infographics as is (IFAW, WWF, Greenpeace), that deal with the theme of 'Global Warming,' and 'Climate Change,' and I wanted to place focus on something that involves the context, but challenges people to actually DO something! One of my pet peeves is when people use social media activism only for the purposes of status, 'likes,' number of 'follows,' and how many 'friends,' they can garner; however, few take the time to actually DO something for a cause. At most, it has been my experience that people merely 'share' content and either select 'like,' or 'love,' or 'angry,' et cetera. Rarely is the case that I actually witness where people are proactive and go beyond the simple click of a button and actively get involved in activism on some level.

Even something as simplistic as signing petitions, sending emails to congress, volunteering time, etc. It seems that often time's people simply share info about 'Climate Change,' in an effort to either feel good about what they have done, or to gain attention. Whatever the cause, the act of selecting share, or 'like,' is not going to save the plight of the

36

planet and nor will it cease to end the dire consequences we face, if more people do not begin to become proactive and instead, choose to wait around for someone else to care and take part.

Thus being said, I knew that it was imperative to utilize a grid system in order to map out the concept and illustrate consistency in visual and textual information. As we have learned over the course of the *Masters of Information Design and Technology* program, the grid allows the designer to focus on relevant information that needs to be addressed and allows the designer to chart out the placement of all elements on the page. While invisible to the end user, I wanted to ensure that my grid structure followed a horizontal and vertical path, so that all the elements that I placed on the infographic, would be conveyed in a cohesive manner and provide flow throughout the page.

In order to ensure that the implementation of my ideas were going to be successful, I knew that regardless of creativity that the overarching theme had to achieve balance and harmony. So, I was sure to think about the way in which this could be accomplished by employing techniques learned from color theory and typography. Visual and textual elements presented on my design concept, utilized only two sans serif fonts (Helvetica and Nanum Gothic) throughout the entire art piece, and I was cautious not to use dramatic colors haphazardly.

Instead, I focused on achieving balance and harmony by carefully selecting cohesive use of imagery that would match the color background (pastel blues/gradients of blue), as well as reflect my choice of representing the Earth, Ocean, and the Zen like quality that comes from the use of blue color palettes.

I am not fond of conveying information in a gory or grotesque manner, and prefer to communicate a message through emotional means; therefore, I chose to illustrate imagery that makes one appreciate the beauty that exists throughout the planet—in an effort to have one care to preserve it.

Additionally, I applied the contrasting color theory process in my use of minimal text utilization. I wanted to use black and white to convey my message in a metaphorical sense… Think Yin and Yang (black and white) to show the lightness and darkness of the content. Climate Change is a dark matter; however, there can be light at the end of the tunnel if we bridge the gap, learn to adapt and make use of our resources already available, continue to plant more trees, recycle, go solar, lose dependence on fossil fuels, etc.

I think that when employed properly, good design allows the end user to better understand the information when things are kept minimal and the imagery is visually compelling and of interest to look at. If you can reach the heart of people and show them what is at stake to lose, or compel someone to appreciate the beauty of what they have, then you are more likely to reach an audience—even if it's just one person. Mind you, I know this is a massive undertaking and perhaps better accomplished through video art that's synced with audio; however, I wanted to focus on a functional art like an infographic, to incorporate with other creative and innovative elements.

My intention was to be aesthetically pleasing, provide visual interest that flowed smoothly throughout the page – with the use of some negative space used in some segments. My end result was a design that I felt demonstrated careful consideration of organization of

information. The overall visual structure, presents the audience participant with a visually

pleasant experience and avoids any confusion, clutter or chaos. I think that the design illustrates

information in a way that's approachable and uses logic that appeals to a mass audience and

serves as a functional art piece.

REFERENCES

Stammers, N., Shaw, M., & Jong, W. d. (2005). *Global Activism, Global Media*. London: Pluto Press. (Pp.1-238)

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism. London: Pluto Press.

Earl, J., & Kimport, K. (2011). Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.

Noor, A. H. S., & Hendricks, J. A. (2011). *Social media: usage and impact*. Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com (pp.1-235)

Business News, P. (2016). Summary: The Art of Social Media: Review and Analysis of Kawasaki and Fitzpatrick's Book. [Place of publication not identified]: Business Book Summaries.

KRISTOFFERSON, K., WHITE, K., & PELOZA, J. (2014). The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action. Journal of Consumer Research, 40(6), 1149-1166. doi:10.1086/674137

Cabrera, N. L., Matias, C. E., & Montoya, R. (2017). Activism or slacktivism? The potential and pitfalls of social media in contemporary student activism. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 10(4), 400-415. Doi: 10.1037/dhe0000061

Rotman, D., Vieweg, S., Yardi, S., Chi, E., Preece, J., Shneiderman, B., Pirolli, P. & Glaisyer, T. (2011). From slacktivism to activism: participatory culture in the age of social media. In D. S. Tan, S. Amershi, B. Begole, W. A. Kellogg & M. Tungare (eds.), *CHI Extended Abstracts* (p./pp. 819-822), : ACM. ISBN: 978-1-4503-0268-5

Lidwell, W., Holden, K., & Butler, J. (2010). *Universal principles of design, revised and updated: 125 ways to enhance usability, influence perception, increase appeal, make better design decisions, and teach through design*. Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Rehnen, L., Bartsch, S., Kull, M., & Meyer, A. (2017). Exploring the impact of rewarded social media engagement in loyalty programs. *Journal of Service Management*, 28(2), 305. doi: 10.1108/JOSM-10-2015-0338

Richter, G., Raban, D. R., & Rafaeli, S. (2015). Studying Gamification: The Effect of Rewards and Incentives on Motivation. Retrieved May 01, 2018, from http://www.meydalle.info/meydalle/ganit/9783319102078-c1.pdf (Pp.1-27)

Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet. (2018). Climate change evidence: How do we know? [online] Available at: http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/ [Accessed 16 Oct. 2016].

BrainyQuote. (2018). Lao Tzu Quotes - BrainyQuote. [online] Available at: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/l/lao_tzu.html [Accessed 1 May 2018].

http://www.piktochart.com

EXHIBIT 1: INFOGRAPHIC

EXHIBIT 2: WEBSITE PROTOTYPE

https://friendinglife.wordpress.com/