**Activism or #slacktivism? Making a difference beyond the computer screen**

4 July, 2017

“The revolution will be tweeted”. This phrase became popular during the Arab Spring1, when social media played a significant role in the organization of protests that rocked the Middle East and Africa. More recently, citizens in South Africa have gone digital to make their voices heard by using hashtags like *#ZumaMustFall* or signing online petitions that call for South Africa’s president to step down.

But is using a hashtag or signing an online petition true activism? Or is it “*slacktivism*” – a word used to describe actions performed via the Internet, in support of a political or social cause, but regarded as requiring little time or involvement? […] Political analysts in South Africa say that while intentions to use social media to voice discontent for the government are noble, the only way to make a real change is to vote.

While digital activism can help shape public opinion, plan a protest, protect activists, share a call to action and allow activists to digitally take action, what’s the next step? With technology permeating2 our lives in so many ways, how can we really use it to make a difference to the causes closest to our heart?

**Going the extra mile to uplift underprivileged communities**

GEM (Going the Extra mile) is a smartphone app […] built on a mobile payment technology called Cyclos. When users download the app […], they are presented with a list of activities hosted by Gem’s 37 NGO3 partners in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Each NGO hosts a regular event, which GEM users can attend, and offer their time and skills. Volunteers are then rewarded with thirty GEMs, which is equivalent to thirty South African Rand. The GEMs can be cashed in for data, airtime, electricity, grocery vouchers and even movie tickets. […]

**Following through with digital activism to make a real difference**

Millenials illustrate just how technology can facilitate so much more than mere slacktivism. They are using the technological tools available to them to make a more significant difference than simply adding a hashtag to their latest social media post. The first step is to ensure young people are empowered with the STEM4 skills needed to use technology for good.

While a hashtag or temporary profile picture usually does little more than allow social media users to jump on the latest bandwagon, there have been times when a hashtag has made a difference. Following the *#IceBucketChallenge* in 2014, the ALS5 association was able to use money raised from the initiative to help scientists discover an important gene contributor of the disease.

Perhaps digital activism, and following through with it, is the first step in nurturing more of the type of thinking we are already starting to see change the world with the help of technology. Whether that change will be realized by starting a revolution, improving education or just making lives somehow easier, it’s about evolving thoughts and words into actions, and using the tools available to make the change as effective and sustainable as possible.

**the Arab Spring** 1 : series of anti-government protests, uprisings, armed rebellions across the Arab World in the early 2010s

**to permeate**2 : to get into

**NGO**3 : Non-Governmental Organization

**STEM**4 : acronym for science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

**ALS**5 : acronym for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Adapted from an article found on <https://news.microsoft.com/en-xm/features/activism-slacktivism-making-difference-beyond-computer-screen/>