manual for young online activists

BRINGING INTO PLAY

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WHAT IS ACTIVISM

An activist is a person who campaigns for some kind of social change. When you participate in a march protesting the closing of a neighborhood library, you're an activist.

Someone who's actively involved in a protest or a political or social cause can be called an activist. Demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins are all ways that an activist might work toward the change she believes in. The root word of activist is the Latin actus, "a doing, a driving force, or an impulse." Someone who acts on what she believes is an activist.[1] We all recognize the protestors among us: neighbors who circulate petitions for clean-air bills, animal-rights groups in the subway harassing elderly women in fur coats, students calling for peace. We often share their convictions, but voice them in a whisper. So what distinguishes the demonstrators from the do-nothings?

The fact is, activists choose to take up causes for a wide variety of reasons, some not as straightforward as they might seem. Those who find personal meaning in current events are inclined to speak out for a cause. Individuals are more likely to feel a personal connection if they see themselves as part of the community affected by an issue. Millions of women embraced this sense of collective identity during the women's rights movement, for example. Some psychologists say that most acts of altruism, defined as devotion to the interests of others actually spring from a desire to help oneself. Actively speaking out for others can generate feeling of empathy.

Whatever the reasons, or the motivation, activists are among us, and now, in the second decade of the 2000's, we are more and more talking about the online activists. We live in the age when a blog can start a revolution.

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1 Source http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/activist

WHAT IS ONLINE ACTIVISM?

Rudimentary online activism started already in the early 90ies of the last century, with mass emailing campaigns, but it really took its stronghold recently during the last decade. The Internet has become the catalyst for protests such as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring as those involved have increasingly relied on social media to organize and stay connected.
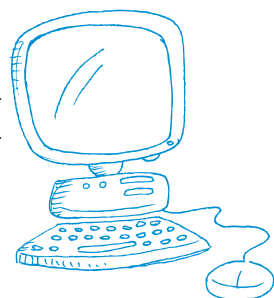
Scholars are divided as to whether the Internet will increase or decrease political participation, including online activism. Those who suggest political participation will increase believe the Internet can be used to recruit and communicate with more users, and offers lower-costs modes of participation for those who lack the time or motivation to engage otherwise. Those concerned that the Internet will decrease activism argue that the Internet occupies free time that can no longer be spent getting involved in activist groups, or that Internet activism will replace more substantial, effortful forms of in-person activism. We also have to be aware that 60% of the world population is not online, and that some of the virtual revolutions are passing undetected by them. Can their life be changed through the online revolution?

Whether "people from the Internet" can really change the world is a question that still stands. We would argue "yes" since it has been proven in many instances and recent movements that started of as the online actions, or calls for actions. It can also be recognized by the fact that there are many bloggers who are serving jail sentences for their online activism against the respective governments (e.g. Zone 9 bloggers from Ethiopia, online youth activists from Azerbaijan, etc).

There are various types of online activism:

Online petitions. Websites such as Change.org and MoveOn.org are hubs of online activism, where people can communicate with others worldwide regarding their cause.

Social networks. Sites with high usage numbers such as Facebook and YouTube have proven beneficial in spreading a message, garnering support, shining information on a subject that might otherwise be overlooked by mainstream media. Protests in 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt against their respective governments were in part organized and promoted via Facebook.

Hashtag activism is the act of fighting for or supporting a cause that people are advocating through social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other networking websites. This is the kind of activism that does not require any action from the person other than sharing or "liking" a post or "retweeting" tweets on Twitter. The term gets its name from the liberal use of hashtags (#) that are often used to spread the word about a cause over Twitter.

Blogs. Essentially a form of journalism for the masses, blogs provide an effective means of non-filtered communication with an audience about any topic and have been used in numerous online campaigns.

Micro-blogging sites such as Twitter are used to help spread awareness of an issue or activist event. The Chinese equivalent to Twitter, Weibo is subject to scrupulous government censorship however people circumvent this blockade by using code words when writing about issues that might be government-sensitive.

Mobile phones. Controversy surrounding the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya led to the introduction of Ushahidi Inc., a company which developed a piece of software that allowed people to send texts and pictures of violence following the elections which were plotted geographically on a Google map. The software has since been used to plot activity in disaster zones following earthquakes in Haiti and New Zealand and flooding in Australia

and the USA. With the arrival of smarter than smart phones, this type of activism is becoming prominent. Applications such as Whatsapp, Viber, Skype, have hundreds of millions users worldwide.

Proxy servers. As a means of circumventing government intervention when it comes to online protesting, many people employ proxy servers, which act as intermediaries between a user and a site, thus essentially circumventing national restrictions on any site. In 2009, student protesters in Iran took to social media to voice their concern over the contentious re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This led to a cat and mouse game of the government trying to identify which media were being used by the protesters to communicate (social networks and then eventually proxy servers) and shutting them down.[2]

2 Source http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iran-sentences-eight-facebook-activists-to-total-of-127-years-in-prison-for-criticising-government-9605284.html

WHAT IS ONLINE ACTIVISM?

WHO IS AN ONLINE ACTIVIST?

YOU ARE THE MEDIA! That is one of the first postulates of the online activism. Each and everyone is and can be media. With huge numbers of young people who have 500+ followers, friends and watchers on their online profiles, there is a massive audience and outreach for making potential changes both in the virtual and real worlds. With the revolution of the smart phones, everybody's chance to become even larger, faster and better media has increased immensely. Online activists are the digital tribe, digital natives, who grew up with the internet technologies, who never used "snail" mail, whose language is fast and short and for whom the hash-tagging is the way of communication. This digital jungle can be survived only by knowing the secret pathways and having experienced guides. In this case, young generation are the guides, they know secret paths, codes and rules of the game. There are different types of online activists, and different roles that they can take: cyber-leaders, trend-setters, opinion-makers, followers, arm-chair activists, rehashers, etc. But which ever role they take, they can be a part of a cause and be change makers. They don't necessarily need to go on the street, they don't need to do door-to-door canvassing, they don't need to lay in front of the tank, or burn their bra in order to have they voice heard. Digital bra burning can be an engaged, witty Tweet, or a viral video. Digital age hugely expanded space for activism and creativity, and young people as media are the forerunners of this new world order.
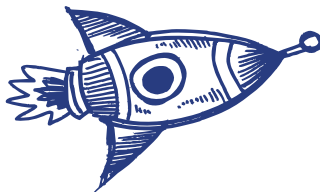
WORKING WITH PEERS

Inspirational stories

"I am Aleksandra. I am an English teacher. People who know me from Twitter, journalists, politicians and the rest of my followers call me an activist. It has all started on the morning of May 16th when I tweeted the first photo of flash floods that hit Obrenovac. Due to lack of information and due to distorted truth information coming from official media, many eyes were on me.

I was aware of what people wanted, so I provided photos, information, people stories during flood and post flood over the next 4 months. I was contacted by many journalists, politicians but I chose who I would talk to. Also many NGOs wanted my help to understand the situation during and post flood in Obrenovac. And many ordinary people offered help to my fellow citizens through me.

Never underestimate the power of social media."

@Aleksandra0809
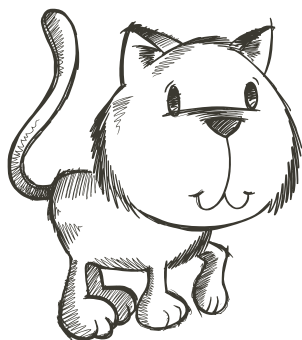
"I've started blogging when I moved to Istanbul, as a way to stay in touch with friends and family. Later on, blog evolved from a travel blog to my personal medium, where I write about stuff I'm interested in. Sometimes it's about technology, quite often about entrepreneurship, but mostly it's about education and activism. Same goes for social networks – Facebook and Twitter are a fantastic way to reach your audience quickly and in a very precise way, if needed. Together, blog and social networks are my way of sending messages I want to send out, been that about the censorship in Serbia, the ridiculous decisions of ministry of education, or analysis of the draft law on social entrepreneurship. This last one I'm particularly proud of, as we managed to stop the draft from entering the procedure and passing in the Parliament and ruin the idea of social entrepreneurship in Serbia.

I've worked in all 3 sectors, mainly in areas of organisational and people development, CSR, as well as IT, internet and social media. However, I've always considered myself primarily as an activist, and today I'm actively working on forming the 4th sector - Social Entrepreneurship - in Serbia. Along with the development of my online business, I'm also an accredited Human Synergistics consultant for personal, team and organisational development, as well as an accredited Geert Hofstede Institute consultant for organisational culture change. I am a 2 times TEDx speaker and I love experimenting with new learning models and various communication tools.

Motivation to be so active comes from a very simple idea - I'm 34, born in Peć, Kosovo, and my generation lost its best childhood years in that craziness produced by mistakes of our elderly. So, if I'm going to live in Serbia and raise my kids here, then I'll do everything I can to make Serbia at least as boringly perfect as Switzerland. My kids should live in a peaceful, well organised country with a great education system.

*Communication is, I believe, one of the most important tools to achieve such goals."*

@PeckoPivo

"I started gaming long time ago, but gaming is only a part of the "game". I met many amazing people online, heard some incredible stories and expanded my world. Women gamers around the globe are indeed a special kind of people, coming from different spheres of life and cultures, but all of them proving that playing is not only "boys game". Some younger women hide behind male avatars and names fearing that they might be discriminated or offended because of their gender. In the older gaming community, these fears don't exists, people are playing and having fun despite their age, origin or affiliation. Online world offers so many ways to be active and to enrich your life. I am a part of the THE SKATEBOARD MOMS' BLOG community where we share our different stories, interests about life, values and hobbies.

There are so many ways that women online can help each other and fight the isolation, loneliness and empower themselves."

@srebrna
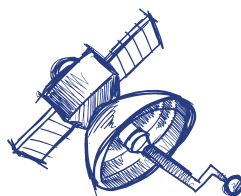
How to train online youth activists for human rights education

Training helps online activists to be effective and understand the campaign's issues, goals, strategy and tools. However, classroom training is expensive and many campaigns/NGOs can't afford it. For many activists traveling to a different region or country isn't an option either. E-learning comes to the rescue as a cheaper, effective and more scalable solution. To train their activists, many organizations simply send documents and manuals and have faith that they'll read and understand them. Generally this is not effective, specially when compared to structured training. E-learning can be the best solution to train online activists because students /participants are often tested with simulations, have clear learning goals and can give continuos feedback to trainers. There are various e-learning platforms that can be used for interactive e-learning, and engaging activist, such as Moodle, A-Tutor and others. What has been a tendency recently is using the social media for e-learning, namely YouTube, Facebook, TED, different podcasts and similar platforms.

Human rights education is **about** human rights, **through** human rights approaches and **for** defending human rights and dignity. As for any other type of training, human rights education can be largely online through e-learning, and through different methods adapted for the online usage. Human rights issues and abuses are very visible online, especially hate speech, cyber-bullying, false identities and freedom of speech. These issues are great motivator for the young people's online engagement and can be done in a non-traditional interactive way. It is obvious now that young people can get "hooked" very easy for some cause, if it is in their virtual horizon. Out task is to make defense of human rights this attractive cause and to develop easy, motivational methods through which we can both inform, train and motivate young people for action.

Motivational training methods

Using e-learning for training and various online tools can and should be complemented with the offline training, where the traditional training methods can be adapted to reflect the online life. This can help the generation of the digital natives to relate better and easier to the learning and grasp new concepts easier. Following are some tips and ideas on how to transfer the online world into the offline world.

Ideas for getting to know each other

Virtual vs. real me

• Participants are provided with flipcharts and markers and asked to make their Facebook profiles (variation to this is to have pre-printed format of the Facebook profile page and to ask participants to fill them in). After the profiles are created, they are put on the walls, like an exhibition, and participants are asked to go around the room and meet their new friends. They can also post "like"s and comments on other people's profiles.

Person behind the face

• Participants are split into the groups of two and asked to research the other person online, with the instructions that they would need to present that person to the whole group afterwards. This exercise has an added value, since it can open the discussion about the information that we share online and how well can people get to know people through their online presence.

Broadcast your self

• Participants are asked to create a YouTube video of maximum 1 minute where they present them selves. This can be done in advance, before the training event and all videos can be uploaded to the dedicated YouTube channel for the event and played on the first day of the training.

Putting "online" into participation

Traditional debate methods such as "fishbowl" or "take a stand" can be used for debating youth participation. Examples of provocative statements that can be used for opening the subject of online participation and activism could be:

– Online participation is not real participation.

– What happens online, stays online.

– Rehashing is the real participation.

– Nothing real can come out of the online petitions.

– Revolution can start with the blog.

– I never really show up for the events I signed for online.

– They are just the "people from internet".

– Everything written online is truth.

These are just a few examples that can be used for the discussion about the online participation and for opening interactive and interesting debate among the participants. More provocative content of the statements, better discussion. This method can be used for different topics, and in the frame of the human rights education, reference to the violation of human rights online can be stressed.

Online research

Participants can be asked to do online research on various subjects, e.g. LGBT rights, Roma issues, cyber-bulling, etc. and to use online data for debating "pro" and "con" on some issues. They could be split in two groups, one trying to find arguments to support e.g. pro-life and they other group pro-choice, which they can debate about afterwards. This exercise provides an excellent debriefing about the validity and neutrality of date we find online and reservations that people should have regarding certain topics.

Creating mini-campaigns

Participants can be asked to create mini-online campaigns using social media as part of the educational simulation, so they can practice using these tools for their real life causes and campaigns. They should get a task to utilize as many as possible different social media - Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and see which media is the most suitable for their campaign. They should be asked to be creative and aim for the biggest outreach they can get in order to see what would work for their cause and their particular audience/target group. This method has an added value, since these mini-campaigns can be part of the follow up of the educational activity, which is often a problem due to the lack of funds. They can ensure the longer term sustainability of the project.

Tweet wall

Using Tweet wall during the educational activity can enrich the discussions and stir minds. Participants should be encouraged to tweet their thoughts, ideas, feedback and post them using the designated hashtag for the activity. This has been proven as very efficient method for the larger scale events, e.g. conferences, forums and similar.

Daily blog for reflection

Participants can be asked to write their daily reflection blog on a dedicated page. This can give trainers good overview on the state affairs and satisfaction of participants.

Some ideas for evaluation

Hashtagation

• Participants can be asked to evaluate the training by using internet slang (e.g. # @ <3, etc.) Different training elements could be written of various flip-chart papers and put on the floor or the wall, where participants can write their comments using the net-lingo.

"Lajk it"

• Various elements of the programme can be written on the flip-chart and participants are asked to "like" and "dislike" them and put their comments. Little "like" stickers can be printed in advance and comment boxes and given to the participants to use them for this occasion.

• Facebook group dedicated to the training can be created, where participants can write their evaluation and comments. This can help in summing up the data and organizing an adequate follow up of the activity.

BRINGING INTO PLAY

Best practices around the world[3]

To become a real change maker takes courage, "can do" attitude, creativity and persistence. Contemporary tools can help with that. Below are some of the examples of how can an individual really influence the changes and move the from the online sphere into the real life sphere.

Ory Okolloh is a blogger and open-government activist. She runs Mzalendo, a pioneering civic website that tracks the performance of Kenya's Parliament and its Parliamentarians. With a vote tracker, articles and opinion pieces, the site connects Kenyans to their leaders and opens the lid on this powerful and once-secretive body. Okolloh's own blog is called Kenyan Pundit, and it tracks her work with Mzalendo and her other efforts as part of the rebuilding of Kenya, following the post-election violence in late 2007 (she collected a powerful series of diaries of violence, dozens of essays from Kenyans and others — well worth a read). Okolloh is part of a wave of young Africans who are using the power of blogging, SMS and web-enabled openness to push their countries forward and help Africans to truly connect. Tools like Ushahidi help to link a people whose tribal differences, as Okolloh points out again and again, are often cynically exploited by a small group of leaders. Only by connecting Africans can this cycle be broken.

Courtney E. Martin chronicles and encourages the current generation of young activists and feminists. She's an editor at Feministing and the author of "Do It Anyway: The New Generation of Activists." In this book she profiles eight young people doing social justice work. It's a fascinating look at the generation of world-changers who are now stepping up to the plate. And as an editor at Feministing, the most highly read feminist publication in the world, Martin watches an evolving world of a feminism empowered by social media. Feministing is an online community run by and for young feminists. For over a de-

cade, they've been offering sharp, uncompromising feminist analysis of everything from pop culture to politics and inspiring young people to make real-world feminist change, online and off. Diverse collective of writers cover a broad range of intersectional feminist issues–from campus sexual violence to transgender rights to reproductive justice. They serve as a gateway to the feminist movement for young people, giving the readers ways to take concrete action, as well as connecting them with feminist organizations and grassroots activists.

Michael Anti (Zhao Jing), a key figure in China's new journalism, explores the growing power of the Chinese internet. One morning in 2011, Michael Anti woke up to find himself a nonperson: His Facebook profile, with 1,000+ contacts, had been suspended. Anti, whose given name is Zhao Jing, ran up against Facebook's real-name policy, but he points out that for Chinese bloggers and information activists, the pseudonym is an important protection for the free exchange of information.

Facebook itself is blocked in China (along with Twitter and YouTube), but the country boasts some 500 million netizens--including 200 million microbloggers on sites like Sina Weibo, a freewheeling though monitored platform for text and photo updates that offers, perhaps for the first time, a space for public debate in China. It's not a western-style space, Anti clarifies, but for China it is revolutionary: It's the first national public sphere. Microblogs' role became clear in the wake of the high-speed train crash in Wenzhou in 2011, when Weibo became a locus of activism and complaint and a backchannel that refuted official reports and has continued to play a key role in more recent events.
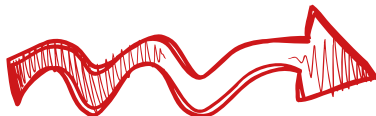
Ideas for actions

There are some proven best practices and success stories around the world which may serve as an inspiration for your own activities. These actions had great outreach, results, and inspired thousands of people to make some changes in their societies. As an incoming generation of change makers, take a look, activate and be that change!

I LOVE PANDA

The Lithuanian national campaign against hate speech is based on the ideas and aims of No Hate Speech Movement, but it took its own approach and turned into I LOVE PANDA Campaign. I LOVE PANDA is the national campaign of joy, which is based upon the values of human rights, positive thinking and active participation of youth. It aims at developing friendly and respectful cyberspace and mutual understanding between young people online. Panda has been chosen to become the symbol and the ambassador of the campaign and is encouraging everybody to build up as much joy and kindness in their everyday lives as possible. The origins of online hate speech are the interactions between humans in real world. Hate speech is the language of unhappy, frustrated individuals, to whom aggressive behavior is an attempt to feel better. Being unhappy themselves they try to spread the feeling and make others miserable. The idea of the Campaign is to promote the joy and positivity instead of anger, hatred and negativity. Panda is attending public places and events spreading the idea of joy and inviting everybody to transform their negative feelings into positive attitude and become the ambassadors of human rights online and offline also, find the joy in oneself and also share the joy with others. Panda organizes its own educational events, discussions, lessons, even parties with famous Lithuanian people, psychologists and human rights experts in order to publicize the issues the society is facing and to inspire to take action and start the change. Here you can read more about the Campaign, watch video and browse through some moments of No Hate Panda's activities: http://www.myliupanda.lt/en/

Change.com

How 1.8 Million Online Activists Helped End the Boy Scouts' Gay Youth Ban

Millions of online activists, signing some 124 different petitions, helped to end the Boy Scouts of America's century-long ban on gay members.

According to online petition platform Change.org, 1,866,000 signatures were collected on petitions advocating the Boy Scouts change its policy. The world's platform for change Change.org has 83,912,803 people taking action. Change.org is an online platform where people can start petitions on the issues they care about. Its stated mission is to "empower anyone, anywhere to start, join, and win campaigns for social change." In addition, "millions of people sign petitions on Change.org each month on thousands of issues, winning campaigns every day to advance change locally and globally."

Living Library

The Living Library works exactly like a normal library – readers come and borrow a 'book' for a limited period of time. There is only one difference: the Books in the Living Library are human beings, and the Books and readers enter into a personal dialogue. The Books in the Living Library are people representing groups frequently confronted with prejudices and stereotypes, and who are often victims of discrimination, prejudice or social exclusion. In this library, Books can not only speak, but they are also able to reply to the readers' questions, and the Books can even ask questions and learn themselves. Originally invented by a group of young people in Denmark in 2000, the Living Library methodology became part of the Council of Europe's programme in human rights education, contending that human rights cannot be defended by legal texts alone. They need to be protected and fostered by each and every one of us. The Living Library offers an opportunity to citizens for a personal encounter and private conversation with a

person one might not meet easily in everyday life. Hundreds of Living Libraries have been organized all over Europe in the past decade, activating thousands of activists, volunteers and human rights defenders. You can see a short movie from one of the Living Libraries organized in Belgrade here: http://youtu.be/OqiE69nNYkU

Flash mob

A flash mob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time, before quickly dispersing. Flash mobs first emerged in 2003 as a form of participatory performance art, with groups of people using email, blogs, text messages, and Twitter to arrange to meet and perform some kind of playful activity in a public location. More recently, activists have begun to harness the political potential of flash mobs for organizing spontaneous mass actions on short notice.

Flash mobs have recently become a powerful tactic for political protest, particularly under repressive conditions. In the midst of a harsh crackdown on protests in Belarus in 2011, for instance, dissidents calling themselves "Revolution through the Social Network" began organizing impromptu demonstrations where protesters would simply gather in public spaces and clap their hands in unison.The result was the bewildering sight of secret police brutally arresting people for the simple act of clapping their hands — a powerful challenge to the legitimacy of an increasingly irrational regime. The overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt also involved flash-mob-like tactics, with organizers calling for protesters to gather initially in alleys and other protected spaces for safety before moving into the streets in larger and larger numbers.
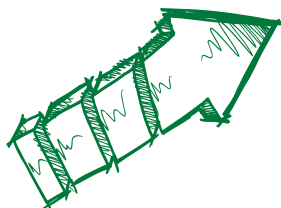
#Unselfie

The selfie becomes a selfless act with the #unselfie. A picture of your face covered by a paper with a donation URL for Typhoon Haiyan survivors. The #unselfie rapidly became a new online trend and an effective social mechanism to call for help. When Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, the devastation was unlike anything the world has seen. People around the world wanted to help, but didn't know how.They needed to spread the urgent call for donations to survivors in a way that was pervasive, cheap and most importantly, fast. SOLUTION: The answer came from the online culture of taking selfies. Group asked people to post a picture of their faces covered by a paper with a donation URL to help survivors or an #unselfie. Within days, US State Secretary John Kerry, Mia Farrow and thousands of people all over the world participated. The #unselfie rapidly became a new social trend and an effective vehicle for good. RESULTS: 14000 unselfies/43000 tweets/131 million impressions. Unsolicited support from global personalities and VIPs.
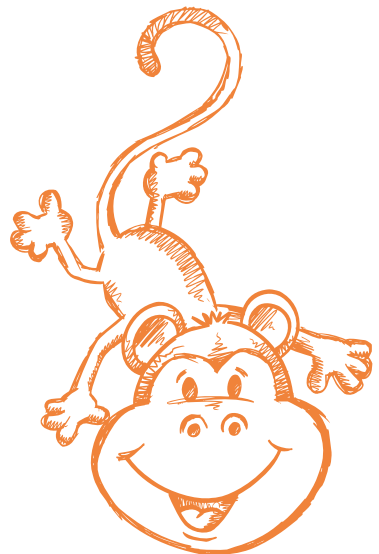
Ice bucket challenge

The Ice Bucket Challenge, sometimes called the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, is an activity involving dumping a bucket of ice water on someone's head to promote awareness of the disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and encourage donations to research. It went viral on social media during July–August 2014. The challenge encourages nominated participants to be filmed having a bucket of ice water poured on their heads and then nominating others to do the same. A common stipulation is that nominated participants have 24 hours to comply or forfeit by way of a charitable financial donation. Though it become controversial in some instances, where certain personalities used it for self-promotion, it increased awareness about ALS for 40-50% and raised large amount of funds for curing the disease.

USEFUL LINKS AND REFERENCES

http://www.virtualfeelsreal.org

https://www.facebook.com/VPSLibero

https://twitter.com/VFR_LIBERO

http://www.meta-activism.org/digital-activism/

http://nohate.ext.coe.int

http://www.nohatespeechmovement.org

http://nohateninja.tumblr.com

http://eycb.coe.int/compass/

http://eycb.coe.int/compasito/default.htm

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/

http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation

https://howto.informationactivism.org/tools

http://www.vice.com/rs/