

Study challenges 'slacktivism' among young adults

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Young people who share social cause videos may actually be motivated to volunteer in the future, contrary to the popular image of them as "slacktivists."

A new University of Michigan study challenges the notion of slacktivism," which is often used to describe young people's political activity on [social media](#).

"Proponents of the slacktivism narrative argue that by participating in politics in easy ways on social media—such as signing a petition or sharing a video—young people show their network how virtuous they are, thereby excusing themselves from engaging in more difficult offline action like attending a rally or volunteering for a nonprofit," said Dan Lane, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies and the study's lead author.

Lane and co-author Sonya Dal Cin, associate professor of [communication studies](#), asked 178 college students to view three social cause videos and then randomly assigned them to post one of the videos either publicly on their own Facebook timeline or anonymously on a third-party's Facebook timeline.

The participants then indicated their willingness to volunteer, donate or engage in other behaviors to help the social cause whose video they chose to share.

Participants who shared a [video](#) about a social cause publicly were more willing to volunteer than those who shared anonymously. This is initial evidence of a "reverse Slacktivism effect," Lane says, demonstrating that publicly showing support for a social cause through sharing can increase—not decrease— commitment to taking further action.

In addition, the effect of public sharing on young people's willingness to [volunteer](#) was strongest for those who don't normally use social media to engage in social issues. This suggests, Lane says, that sharing social cause videos on social [media](#) might be one pathway to engagement for [young people](#) who don't typically get involved in social causes.

The findings appear in the online journal *Information, Communication & Society*.

More information: Daniel S. Lane et al. Sharing beyond Slacktivism: the effect of socially observable prosocial media sharing on subsequent offline helping behavior, *Information, Communication & Society* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2017.1340496](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1340496)

Provided by University of Michigan

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