HashtagYourChange: Social Media and the Power of Individual Action in Academia

Introduction:

Academia is committed to progress, yet systemic inequalities persist, stifling diverse voices (Karataş-Özkan and Chell, 2015). Discrimination based on gender, race, and class remains prevalent, exacerbating the marginalization of individuals (Dobele, 2022). This issue is evident in the marketing field, as highlighted in the 2021 special issue of the Journal of Marketing Management titled “#MeToo and Beyond: Inequality and Injustice in Marketing Practice and Academia” (Prothero and Tadajewski, 2021). This paper introduces #HashtagYourChange, a social media movement aiming to amplify silenced voices in academia and drive positive change. While holding potential for empowerment, the movement needs to transcend performative activism to achieve lasting transformation.

Keywords: Social media activism, #HashtagYourChange, academia, individual action, collective action, power dynamics, social change

Harnessing Social Media

Social media platforms provide fertile ground for #HashtagYourChange campaigns, leveraging features like virality and audience engagement to share experiences and raise awareness (Subbaraman, 2020). Choosing the right hashtag is crucial, considering its relevance, search volume, and potential to resonate with the target audience. For instance, the #BlackInTheIvory movement (Subbaraman, 2020), highlighted the experiences of Black academics and researchers, fostering solidarity and prompting discussions on racial bias in universities. Similarly, the #MeTooAcademia (Eckert et al., 2022) campaign brought to light the prevalence of sexual harassment and misconduct, empowering survivors to speak out and demanding institutional accountability. These campaigns have demonstrated the power of individual narratives to spark collective action, bypassing traditional gatekeepers and fostering a sense of community among those facing similar challenges.
Beyond Echo Chambers and Silencing Tactics:

#HashtagYourChange encounters limitations inherent in social media dynamics, including echo chambers and algorithms can create filter bubbles that limit the reach of critical messages and reinforce existing power structures (Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023). Additionally, navigating academia’s power dynamics may lead to backlash, career repercussions and silencing tactics against advocates for change. Overcoming these challenges requires building coalitions across diverse groups to ensure the representation of marginalized communities (Settles et al., 2019).

From Likes to Action: Translating Online Buzz into Lasting Change:

Moving from online awareness to concrete action is crucial for #HashtagYourChange’s success. Sustained engagement, akin to building a loyal customer base (Sashi et al., 2019), involves organizing offline events, mobilizing resources, and engaging with institutional leaders for advocacy. Measuring progress, akin to marketing ROI measurement (Kumar & Reinartz, 2012), fosters transparency and motivates continued support. The success of #HashtagYourChange hinges on its ability to bridge the gap between online discourse and offline action, fostering sustained pressure for change within academic institutions.

Conclusion:

#HashtagYourChange represents a significant development in the landscape of academic activism. While recognizing its limitations and navigating the complexities of power within academia, it offers a valuable platform for individual and collective action towards positive change. By harnessing the affordances of social media strategically, building inclusive coalitions, and translating online momentum into concrete action, #HashtagYourChange can empower individuals to become agents of change and contribute to a more equitable and just academic environment.

References:


