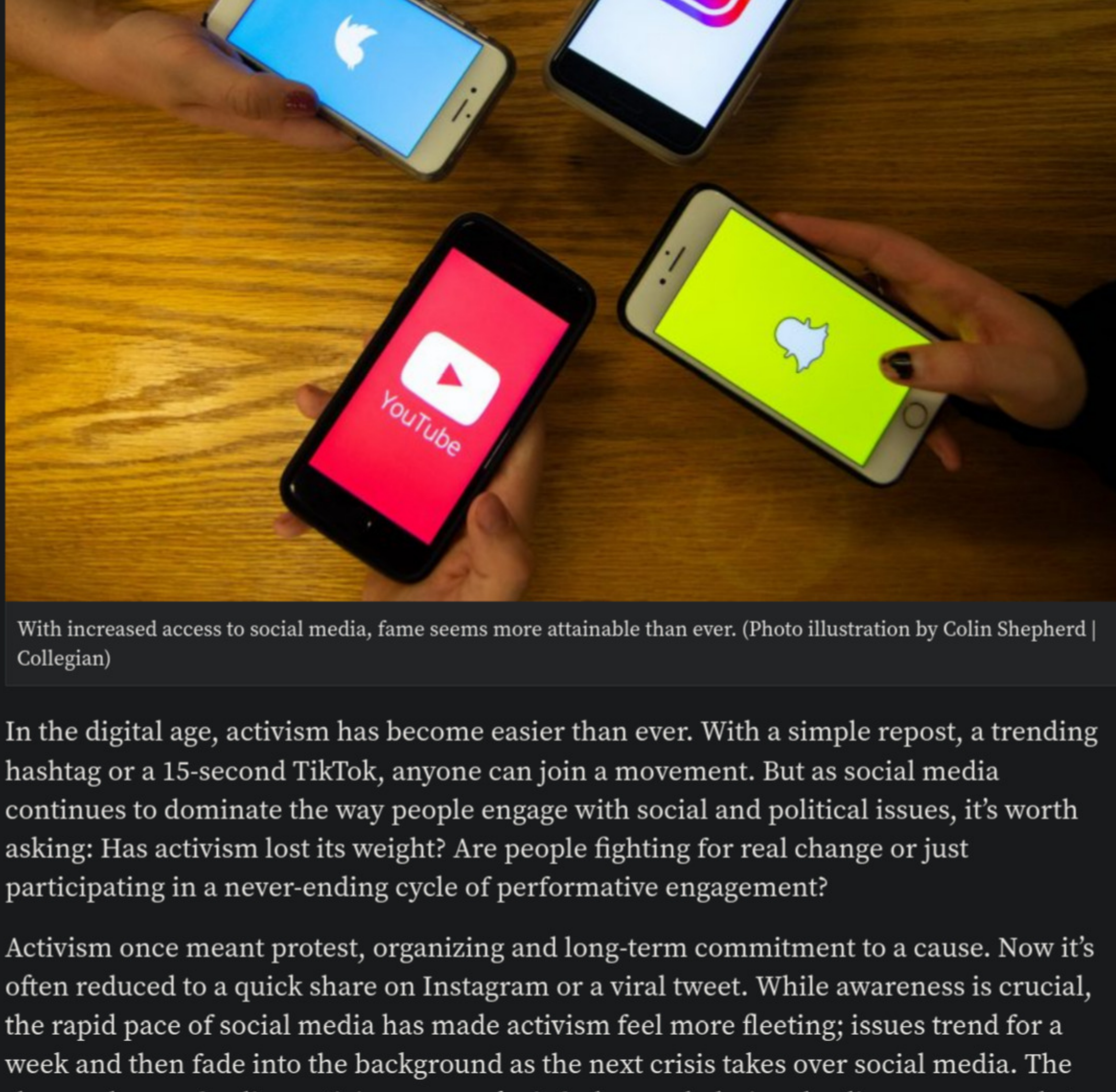




# The rise of online activism: How social media is shifting ways people fight for change

Gigi Young, Digital and Social Director  
March 25, 2025



With increased access to social media, fame seems more attainable than ever. (Photo illustration by Colin Shepherd | Collegian)

In the digital age, activism has become easier than ever. With a simple repost, a trending hashtag or a 15-second TikTok, anyone can join a movement. But as social media continues to dominate the way people engage with social and political issues, it's worth asking: Has activism lost its weight? Are people fighting for real change or just participating in a never-ending cycle of performative engagement?

Activism once meant protest, organizing and long-term commitment to a cause. Now it's often reduced to a quick share on Instagram or a viral tweet. While awareness is crucial, the rapid pace of social media has made activism feel more fleeting; issues trend for a week and then fade into the background as the next crisis takes over social media. The sheer volume of online activism can make it feel overwhelming, leading many people to disengage entirely. When everything feels urgent, nothing feels important.

Beyond that, social media has created a cycle of short-lived outrage. One moment, millions are posting about a global crisis; the next, the same people are back to their regularly scheduled content. This constant turnover can make it seem like activism is more about appearing engaged rather than staying committed to real change. Unlike historical movements that took years of sustained effort, many social media-driven campaigns fizzle out before tangible action can be taken.

We've all seen it: the black squares for #BlackLivesMatter, brands suddenly posting about a social issue when it's trending, influencers sharing politically charged content they may not even understand. Social media allows people to present a curated version of themselves, and activism is no exception. It's easy to post about a cause for social validation rather than genuine belief. And when activism becomes more about aesthetics than action, the actual fight for change takes a backseat.

The danger here is that performative activism can create a false sense of accomplishment. People feel like they've contributed by sharing a post or commenting on a viral video, even if they haven't taken any meaningful steps toward real-world change. Meanwhile, companies and influencers use activism as a marketing tool, capitalizing on movements to boost engagement and sales rather than genuinely supporting the causes they promote.

## The power of influence: Who's really controlling the conversation?

Social media thrives on trends, and activism is no different. But who decides which issues get attention? Algorithms, influencers and engagement metrics shape our feeds, often making certain causes appear trendy and others unimportant. This creates an uneven landscape wherein some movements receive widespread support while equally important issues are left out of the conversation.

Misinformation also spreads easily, influencing opinions based on viral content rather than facts. This makes it easier for people to adopt beliefs without fully understanding them, reinforcing echo chambers in which nuanced discussions rarely happen. The ability for anyone to share unverified claims means that activism can sometimes be based on incomplete or misleading information, weakening the credibility of movements that rely on social media for visibility.

Meta's decision to remove fact-checking on certain political content further exacerbates this issue, making it easier for misinformation to spread. Without fact-checking, people may unknowingly engage with false narratives, shaping their beliefs around misleading or inaccurate information.

The rise of influencer culture has also contributed to a shift in activism. When high-profile influencers share political content, their followers are more likely to engage with it — sometimes without questioning its accuracy or implications. This can create a bandwagon effect, wherein people support causes not because they've researched them but because someone they admire has endorsed them. While influencers can play a powerful role in raising awareness, their involvement also raises concerns about whether activism is becoming just another form of social currency.

## The psychological toll of digital activism

Another often overlooked aspect of social media activism is the mental and emotional toll it takes on users. Doomscrolling through endless crises can create a sense of powerlessness, making people feel like no amount of action is enough. This phenomenon, sometimes called activism fatigue, can lead people to disengage entirely and feel burnt out by the constant stream of global issues.

At the same time, there's pressure to always be engaged. People fear being called out for not posting about an important issue, leading to performative activism rather than genuine commitment. This creates a paradox that makes users feel obligated to speak out on every issue while simultaneously feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility of staying informed and active.

Social media isn't inherently bad for activism. It has given marginalized voices a platform and allowed movements to gain momentum faster than ever. The BLM movement, climate activism and protests in Iran are just a few examples of how digital platforms have mobilized millions and brought attention to crucial issues. The challenge now is ensuring digital activism translates into real-world action.

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### About the Contributor

**Gigi Young, Digital & Social Director**

As digital and social managing editor, Gigi Young's goal is to improve the reach of *The Rocky Mountain Collegian*. Her belief that an informed public is a powerful public, combined with her goal of bettering the lives of her peers and the world at large, led her to this position. Born and raised in Chicago's North Shore, Young came to Colorado curious to experience the Rocky Mountain lifestyle. She is a junior majoring in business administration with concentrations in marketing and international business and minoring in media production. Beyond her academic pursuits, Young is deeply passionate about driving positive change and making a meaningful impact on the world. This passion is reflected in her commitment to telling stories that inspire transformation. She means business. Ambitious to advance the values of *The Collegian*, Young is bringing to this role her diverse skill set and business acumen, which she developed by working as an independent marketing consultant and international marketing development intern. An avid traveler, her international experience lends her the savvy to engage diverse populations through her work. A fan of movies, music and coffee, Young can always be found at The Lyric or an Aggie Theatre show and is a regular at the Alley Cat Coffeehouse. She is excited to work with *The Collegian* to interact with, impact and empower the CSU and Fort Collins community.

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