



# UpRising

A report into how social action  
has changed in the last  
decade (2010 - 2020)

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## Contents

Contents	<b>1</b>
Executive summary	<b>2</b>
Report purpose	<b>3</b>
Social action and leadership definitions and framework	<b>4</b>
What has happened in the last decade (2010 - 2020) in the social action landscape?	<b>4</b>
Benefits	4
Risks and Challenges	6
What has happened in UpRising since the COVID-19 pandemic?	<b>7</b>
What type of social action have UpRising programmes and curriculum generated?	<b>11</b>
Findings	<b>13</b>
Recommendations	<b>15</b>
Conclusion	<b>16</b>
Bibliography	<b>17</b>

## Executive summary

- What did youth led action look like when young people across the world were confined to their bedrooms? UpRising is proud to be sharing this report examining the way in which social action campaigning has changed over the past decade, significantly in the light of COVID-19.
- The following chapters shed light on what youth led change looks like in a digital world, proposing 10 recommendations for training providers and youth empowerment organisations to adopt moving forward to better support young people to effect meaningful action, through online activism.
- UpRising exists because our decision-makers don't reflect the society they serve. Our mission is therefore to open up pathways to power for a diverse pool of young people who have talent, but lack opportunity. For more than a decade now, we have equipped under-represented young people with the knowledge, networks, skills and confidence to fulfil their leadership potential, find new opportunities and transform the world around them through social action. In doing so, we open up their pathways to positions of influence in their career and their community and their career. Over the past decade we've supported nearly 4,000 young people in total, of whom 65% identified as Black, Asian or coming from a minority ethnic background, 55% are the first in their family to university; 59% of our alumni identify as women.
- Since 2016:
  - Over 400 young people in London, Manchester, Cardiff, Bedfordshire and Birmingham take part in one or more of our programmes
  - Over 1,300 UpRising participants have created 149 social action campaigns in and around their communities
  - Our Environmental Leadership Programme (launched in 2016) has created a platform for future green leaders, with 452 young people graduating; over 34% found employment in the environmental sector.
  - Prior to COVID-19, 519 young people had completed our Fastlaners employability programme. 64% of participants had secured employment within 6 months, and 77% progressed on to volunteering and further training. For more information, see our website at <http://uprising.org.uk/who-we-are>
- This report utilises a combination of primary research including interviews with UpRising's Programmes Team and a comparison on recent UpRising campaigns led by young people, alongside in depth secondary research, to draw out the following findings:

- In 2021, building communities online is crucial to both empowering young people to take action, and in effecting meaningful change, but it needs to be resources properly, and must not be tokenistic;
- Passion and authenticity is key to enable the confidence, self-esteem and communication necessary for young people to translate their lived experiences into calls to action;
- There are some stark differences in the skills necessary for successful digital campaigning compared to successful on-the-ground campaigning;
- Young people today are digital natives and they have natural skill but need guidance to avoid confusing generating noise with driving real change;
- Despite operating in a virtual world, there are a number of very real risks facing young digital activists
- Drawing on these findings, UpRising concludes this report by proposing 10 recommendations. These recommendations will be shared with and dispersed across the many fantastic organisations empowering and championing youth led change in the UK. We hope they support other organisations to maximise the potential of diverse groups of young individuals to find their voices in a noisy online world, speak truth to power, mobilise communities and effect real youth-led social action.

## 1. Report purpose

The following report explores what has happened in the world of social action in the past decade, with a view of understanding how social action is practiced using digital tools and social media. More specifically, it pays attention to more recent developments and how the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures imposed by it have changed social action to be delivered mostly in online environments.

- The report makes an initial overview of what has happened in general in the social action world in the past decade, exploring the benefits of online campaigning using practical examples, as well as reviewing some of the challenges and risks posed by digital social action.
- The focus then shifts to explore what has happened in the space of UpRising social action since the organisation moved to a fully online delivery model at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring what this meant for digital campaigns and the learning process. The report examines examples of digital social action campaigns produced by young people within UpRising, seeking to understand what campaign models worked best in an exclusively online space.

- The final chapter of the report makes some key recommendations for campaigning in an online world based on the experiences in UpRising and what has happened in the social action landscape in the past decade.
- For the production of this report, UpRising has conducted desk research and looked for reliable resources online, as well as carrying out interviews with senior members of UpRising's programmes team, who have significant experience of the charity's curriculum and delivery, both fully online and pre-pandemic in-person. We too include a comparative analysis between UpRising social action campaigns produced in the past two years (2019 – 2021).

## 2. Social action and leadership definitions and framework

The report will work with the following definition for youth social action, as in the Plugged In (Hewes, 2010, p. 14)<sup>1</sup> report:

*'Young people empowered to inspire and mobilise themselves and others towards a common purpose, in response to personal and/or social issues and challenges, to effect positive change.'*

## 3. What has happened in the last decade (2010 - 2020) in the social action landscape?

### 3.1. Benefits

3.1.1. The past decade has seen a significant increase in digital tools used for social campaigning, with social media and digital technologies facilitating action both online and offline. We have witnessed the growth of global, national and local hashtag movements which have led to significant changes, from increased awareness of social issues, to legislation changes, and mass protests across the world. Examples include the #MeToo movement<sup>2</sup>, Fridays for the Future and more recently #BlackLivesMatter<sup>3</sup> on a global scale.

3.1.2. With digital tools freely available for anyone with access to technology and the internet across the world, it is now possible for digital activism to emerge from anywhere, eliminating traditional barriers such as geographical location, age, social, economic or cultural factors. For example, in the UK we have seen campaigns gaining traction online which have been created and led by young people with lived experiences of social issues. Examples include Amika George's

<sup>1</sup> Hewes, S. et al (2010), "Plugged in, untapped", *The Young Foundation*, page. 14

<sup>2</sup> North, A. (2019) "7 positive changes that have come from the #MeToo movement", *Vox.com*

<sup>3</sup> Francis, P. (2021) "Black Lives Matter: how the UK movement struggled to be heard in the 2010s", *The Conversation*

(aged 17 when started campaigning) Free Periods movement<sup>4</sup> which led to free period products in UK secondary schools, and Gina Martin's (aged 24 at the start of campaigning) criminalisation of 'upskirting' movement. Moreover, recent months have seen established figures in the world of arts and sports use their online platforms and lived experience to raise awareness and create change, as Marcus Rashford (aged 22) did by leading the campaign for free school meals<sup>5</sup>.

3.1.3. Digital technologies have also enabled marginalised and isolated individuals who have traditionally been excluded from public debates to voice their opinions, raise awareness of social issues relevant to their daily lifestyles and create change. For example, Mimi Butlin (aged 25), who could rarely leave the house due to a chronic condition and felt a lack of community, created a virtual community (cantgoout\_imsick) gaining 20,000 followers and raising awareness about conditions such as fibromyalgia.

3.1.4. Digital technologies have enabled young people to connect with individuals across the UK and globally on social issues relevant to their own lifestyles, values and identities, increasing civic engagement, but also changing the type. As per the *Plugged In* (2010) report<sup>6</sup>, the Dutiful Citizen type of engagement - involving participation in centralised activities organised by central and local government - is informed by mass-media about issues and government. Such individuals find ultimate political expression in democratic voting within party systems, and among young people - through digital tools - are shifting to an Actualising Citizen, defined by a higher sense of individual purpose, getting informed through selective and tailored peer based information sources, and finding political expression in peer organised community volunteering or transnational activism.

3.1.5. Online social action has been aided by increased numbers of participants sustaining causes from all across the world, increasing civic engagement. One of the main strengths of campaigning online has been the ability to capture the imagination of numerous individuals who are interested in social issues but are not actively campaigning. Social media has enabled a "core-periphery" dynamic, with a handful of activists organising Calls-To-Actions both online (creating online petitions, raising awareness of social issues on digital platforms) and offline (organising protests, taking photos of events, etc.) which in turn has attracted interested but inactive people to sustain the cause (e.g. #BlackOutTuesday). This has particularly helped raise awareness of social issues<sup>7</sup>.

3.1.6. The most effective online campaigns have been those organised by individuals with lived experiences of their respective issues, and who are therefore more likely to campaign for action and create real impact and change for their communities. However, this is not to diminish the importance of

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<sup>4</sup> Gilchrist-Miller, A. (2019) "5 Teen Activists In The UK Who Are Changing The World", *Global Citizen*

<sup>5</sup> Adams, T. (2021) "Marcus Rashford: the making of a food superhero", *The Guardian*

<sup>6</sup> Hewes, S. et al (2010), "Plugged in, untapped", *The Young Foundation*

<sup>7</sup> Groetzinger, K. (2015) "Slacktivism is having a powerful real-world impact, new research shows", *QUARTZ*

campaign followers who are sustaining the cause for a sense of 'doing good moral work' as their minimal contribution (signing a petition, re-sharing a post) can contribute to the numbers necessary for a campaign to gain traction and attention in the digital sphere<sup>8</sup>.

3.1.7. Throughout the pandemic, pre-conceptions about online campaigning have been diminished since most of our activities have shifted online; movements happening throughout the pandemic have shown that digital campaigning is possible and can create real change<sup>9</sup>.

3.1.8. With social action becoming easier to access and less time consuming, more people have had the time to engage with social campaigning via online platforms. In turn, information has become more easily accessible and is explained using more familiar language, further increasing the appeal to diverse audiences.

## 3.2. Risks and Challenges

3.2.1. One of the major risks of online activism has been the rise of abuse and the creation of the so-called 'cancel culture', where online activists are abused, often by anonymous accounts, for saying something in the online space which is perceived to be offensive. This sometimes can lead to reputational damage and cause mental health issues for young people<sup>10</sup>.

3.2.2. While online tools can be very positive tools for enacting social change and calls to action online and offline, there is a risk that social activism gets stuck in virtual spaces without having an impact in the real world. This can lead to increased awareness of various topics, but without any call to action in either online or offline spaces, therefore not creating real change. This has also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it very difficult to combine online action with offline activities and events, especially impacting grassroots and small-scale activism<sup>11,12</sup>.

3.2.3. There is a risk that online activism can lead to homophily - the tendency for individuals to seek out those displaying similar behaviour - which in turn creates echo-chambers of like-minded only individuals. This behaviour is further amplified by social media algorithms and can lead to increased polarisation and a cycle of reinforcing biases.

3.2.4. The rise of infographics, statistics and news sources shared within the online activism space can lead to disinformation, (re)distribution of poorly researched information and conspiracy theories. This can also lead to the replacement of

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<sup>8</sup> Wilkin, M. and Rosino, M. (2021) "Interview with Professor Michael Rosino", *The Sociology Show*

<sup>9</sup> *Nesta* (2021) "Using digital technology to get people involved in social action"

<sup>10</sup> Kean, H. (2021) "I Became Wrapped Up In My Online Identity", *Bustle*

<sup>11</sup> Rivel, L. (2021) "New wave of "social media activism" flawed but well-intentioned", *Inklings News*

<sup>12</sup> RW8817. (2019) "Social Media Activists...", *Voices of Youth, Unicef*

traditional forms of information such as books or trusted media institutions, further eroding trust in traditional forms of civic engagement<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. What has happened in UpRising since the COVID-19 pandemic?

**The below chapter explores the insights of three members of UpRising's Programmes Team. These individuals were interviewed separately, questioned on the activities, successes and challenges of working with young people and social action prior to, during and following COVID-19. Like so many other organisations, these insights show that in response to the pandemic, all UpRising programmes work moved fully online, with social action campaigning being no exception.**

4.1. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the UpRising curriculum was delivered in person, with a focus on regional engagement with specific community groups who had a geographical location – e.g. student group at university, local neighbourhood in Birmingham. This was designed to be a space for participants to practice organising a social action campaign and develop the necessary skills to create and deliver one. There was an element of online campaigning, where participants were encouraged to share their campaign on social media platforms.

*Some of the campaigns had targeted very localised community groups that either they were aware of from where they live geographically or where they were studying at university. And that had been the trend with the previous campaign groups that I had been part of since 2016. They would often tend to centralise their activity around a particular community or faith group or geographical group or university group, etc., that they had access to, and that would be their primary audience. (Rukaiya, Senior Programmes Development Officer)*

4.2. During 2020, like many organisations, UpRising transitioned to deliver its programmes online. This period straddled programmes where participants had been engaged in person and where lockdown prevented delivery of social action face-to-face. UpRising provided extra training from a specialist organisation to cater for online campaigning to mitigate the difficulties of switching to fully online delivery.

**From Summer 2020 onwards, all of UpRising's social action programmes were delivered online, having been adapted to do so with support from CAST/Catalyst and other funders. The following insights from the team suggest this move to digital delivery illuminated a number of previously unexplored strengths for UpRising:**

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<sup>13</sup> McNeill, K. (2019) "Too many powerful forces are driving division...", Global Dashboard



4.3. It has been easier for participants to commit to campaigning for longer periods of time in virtual environments and acquire the skills more easily, possibly due to the convenience provided by digital technologies.

*It does feel that the young people seem more able to commit to them and for a longer period of time. That's [not] across the board, but it seems like people who are doing them ... [find this] easier than perhaps doing face to face. (Alexandra, Head of Programmes)*

4.4. Participants have become more aware of their global citizen status and have started to question things on a wider scale, investigating how national and global affect the local and vice-versa.

*There is an increasing awareness amongst young people of them being global citizens and that actually there is this inequity across not just communities in the UK but across the world, and that climate change does not affect each individual person in the same way because we all face different challenges and we all have a different level of privilege and you have different resources at our disposal. So in some sense, this actually has made them think wider and made them question who is actually responsible? Do I need to get my local area toilet paper, or is there a broader question about companies using plastics on their products full stop? So it will eventually have a local impact. But at the moment they're recognising that the consumer as a group and the organisations need to change and not necessarily litter picking in the local area to save wildlife. (Meghan, Senior Programmes Delivery Officer)*

4.5. UpRising digital social action campaigns have been able to connect with other peers and campaigns across the UK and the world, highlighting the benefits of campaigning through online platforms.

*On the other hand, it does probably mean that they [participants] are thinking slightly more outside their own locale, which is good because ... [it] then allows them to have a much bigger perspective of what's going on. Maybe they might spot similar issues across different locations or different issues for different locations. (Alexandra, Head of Programmes)*

*What we're noticing is that if individuals from across the country are interested in similar topics, they can come together and create something that is perhaps larger and more national in scale to raise awareness about that particular issue. So you may be losing more localised elements of a particular campaign. But you are also gaining potentially a wider audience for that particular issue when it's tackled on a national scale. (Rukaiya, Senior Programmes Development Officer)*

**However, with restrictions coming and going within the same programme cycles at UpRising, the team have voiced too, that the move to digital delivery,**

## **and thus empowering digital youth led social action, wasn't without its drawbacks:**

4.6. With offline action impossible for the duration of the pandemic, the trend in UpRising has changed focus from localised community action to more general awareness raising about a particular issue and the impact this has on wider communities.

*With the rise of digital, what we've seen is a lot more campaigns [which are] looking at awareness raising: bringing an issue to the forefront and raising awareness of an issue through that campaign. We're seeing less of actual action. [More] rallying people behind a cause to take an action to make a change; it's more raising awareness of the issue. And I think that's because we haven't necessarily provided the tool kit in order to help young people to understand how they can create change that's based on action when they're online and they're remote from people. But I also think it's to do with the fact that there are so many campaigns nowadays on social media that are about awareness raising that aren't necessarily action focussed. And it comes from the fact that a lot of those digital campaigns originate in very large and established organisations that ask you to donate money or sign this petition and they have a lot of weight behind them. (Meghan, Senior Programmes Delivery Officer)*

*We've got savvier at helping to point [participants] in the right direction of those who do the action, not just raise awareness, but it's also up to the individual young people. I think digital can be highly effective. It brings [young people] immediately to a larger audience than working in the local area. It tends to open up wider perspectives for the young people straight away because they think beyond their local community or beyond their group of friends and their awareness. And they look at the wider scope of the issue, but they find it more difficult to get off the ground and feel like they've got traction right from the start. (Meghan, Senior Programmes Delivery Officer)*

4.7. Throughout the pandemic, campaigns have moved away from local activities due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, which might mean that campaigns have less knowledge of how a certain issue is affecting an area.

*If a [social action] team is online and says "we're interested in youth unemployment, we're going to survey of young people and create a resource pack" then they may not have the same level of in-depth knowledge about how that particular issue affects a group locally because what they've done is slightly one step removed from the people they're working with, unless they're very, very engaged and working with a specific group. And I think the reality is that in the short time they have it's very hard to get down to that specific thing. (Alexandra, Head of Programmes)*

4.8. It is important for the curriculum and learning process to cater for both local and national or wider needs of participants.

*Participants sometimes] reported certainly from smaller locations that they hadn't had speakers who represented their location; who can give those perspectives. That's really important and that's going to happen with the programme as we develop. It's really important we recognise that we do need to meet those local needs as well as national needs. (Alexandra, Head of Programmes)*

4.9. More recent social action campaigns have evolved to create output in the digital space, such as creating a podcast or organising an online event. The programmes team have evolved and adapted the curriculum to cater for this.

*In the most recent cohort, there have been more products: an online tool kit, online events, podcasts and things like that. So they are actual things that are products of their campaigns. But to start with, as we transitioned to online, it wasn't quite that. I think that we're getting savvier at helping to point in the right direction of those who do the action, not just raise awareness, but it's also up to the individual young people. (Meghan, Senior Programmes Delivery Officer)*

4.10 Throughout lockdown, we paid careful attention to the digital access and inclusion needs of participants. In March 2021 we analysed all session feedback - both quantitative and qualitative - to understand the extent to which participants were experiencing barriers to access:

- Most participants reported a positive experience of online delivery, had sufficient technology setup to access Uprising's programmes, and some have even described the new opportunities online delivery has brought. For example, mixing with cohorts nationally and learning how to use new digital tools.
- Almost all young people used Wi-fi for their internet connection (94%), most had access to a laptop (98%) and smartphone (89%) and most (85%) used a laptop to participate. 1 in 4 participants reported an issue with technology at some point during the programmes - in the main wifi connections dropping, or the use of a specific tool (Mural) which we now use rarely. On average, however, those experiencing a problem rated sessions as 7.9 out of 10 - compared to 9.2 out of 10 for those not experiencing an issue.
- Further comment from participants showed that - when given the opportunity- with the right preparation, communication, facilitation, and design, participants felt online delivery can and does work well, and has tangible benefits,

## 5. What type of social action have UpRising programmes and curriculum generated?

Given these insights, we wanted to examine how it was that some of the campaigns of the past 18 months had been successful - in particular, looking at campaigns which had demonstrated beyond and larger impact. We identified a range of different qualities of all the campaigns during the year, and then rated those we felt were most successful against these criteria, to see what they had in common. Our findings were as follows:

### 5.1. Table: Comparing Digital Social Action Campaigns within UpRising

The Social Action Campaigns included in the below table have been anonymised and coded A - H.

5	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	1
Has a geographical focus	4	1	3	1	4	1	4	1	Does not have a geographical focus
Gain traction	1	5	5	5	5	3	5	3	Did not gain traction
Stick to original mission	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	2	Did not stick to original mission
Work at the intersection of campaigners' interest	1	5	5	5	4	2	5	3	Does not work at the intersection of campaigners' interest
Focused on awareness raising	5	5	3	4	4	5	4	3	Not focused on awareness raising
Encourage calls to action	1	3	4	3	4	3	3	2	Does not encourage calls to action
Output focused	2	4	5	4	4	4	4	3	Not focused on output
Informative	4	5	3	5	5	4	4	3	Not informative
Followers engage with content / campaign	1	4	3	4	4	3	3	2	Followers don't engage with content / campaign
Built an online community	1	4	3	4	3	3	3	2	Did not build an online community
Create an impact outside online environments	1	3	4	4	4	3	5	1	Does not create an impact outside online environments

### 5.2. Indicator definitions:

- Geographical focus: This point explores whether the campaign was centred around a particular geographical location (e.g. Birmingham, Greater Manchester, etc.)
- Gain traction: Did the campaign gain traction online and move beyond setting up an account? Worked at the intersection of campaigners' interests: Did the campaign explicitly mention each campaigner's interests

and why they are doing it? Does the content reflect the diversity of interests and opinions?

- Stick to original mission: Did the campaign shift from its original purpose? (e.g. awareness raising about poverty in Birmingham to raising awareness about climate change)
- Work at the intersection of campaigners' interest: Does the campaign showcase participants' interests? Have they used any of their lived experiences / interests / skills to campaign?
- Focused on raising awareness: Is the campaign focused on raising awareness about certain issues? How much of the campaign is focused on awareness raising vs. other things (e.g. signing petitions, organising events)
- Encourage calls to action: Did the campaign encourage its followers' base or users to take offline or online action? (e.g. sign a petition, change their diets, etc.)
- Output focused: Did the campaign produce physical or digital output? (e.g. podcasts, infographics, books, organising events)
- Informative: Did the campaign inform followers about particular issues? If they encouraged calls to action, did they sustain the call to action with reliable information?
- Followers engage with content / campaign: Did the following base or other online users like, comment or re-share campaign content? The focus isn't on the number of likes or comments, but rather on whether there is consistent activity on the account.
- Built an online community: Is the online platform a space where followers consistently engage with the content of the campaign / come together to discuss topics of interest / become informed on a topic of interest?
- Create an impact outside online environments: While this is very difficult to measure, this point explores whether there is any evidence of offline activity in the campaign (e.g. in person events, collaboration with businesses, charities or other organisations).

### **5.3. Key Insights**

5.3.1. Online social action campaigns which gained traction worked at the intersection of participants' / campaigners' interests. At the start of the campaigns which gained traction, participants introduced themselves and explained why they are campaigning for the cause and how they are contributing to it. Examples include campaigns C and G.

5.3.2. UpRising campaigns seem to have changed the geographical focus they had prior to online delivery and are now mostly focused on causes and movements which are relevant everywhere. What was preserved was the opportunity to organise local events and/or engage with local organisations, businesses. For example, campaign E's purpose is to make plant-based diets

available for everyone – it does not have a geographical focus. However, the campaigners were based in East London and have promoted and engaged with local vegan / vegetarian businesses.

5.3.3. The strongest campaigns have been those which managed to balance awareness raising with calls to action and output production. For example, campaign D combined raising awareness about menstruation via Instagram infographics and posts with output production (a podcast and a book) as well as calls to action such as encouraging its community to buy sustainable period products. This way, the campaign has built an active online community and kept momentum going for the campaign which is still running.

5.3.4. Creating engaging informative content is a combination between aesthetic design and reliable information. For example, campaign B's inclusive and accessible climate content campaign is based on colourful infographics which cite their sources. The campaign gained traction and built an online community while being fully online.

5.3.5. Creating an offline presence and measuring offline impact has been difficult to do during the pandemic. However, campaigns can start online and continue with offline activities. For example, whilst campaign G started the campaign fully online and participants met through UpRising, they did however manage to attend an in-person event in Bedfordshire after restrictions eased.

5.3.6. Online social action campaigns can create online communities which extend beyond the local area and are easier to maintain through digital platforms. For example, campaign D has connected with similar campaigns across the UK and beyond and the campaign is still active long after the programme has finished.

## 6. Findings

**6.1. Community building is as important for digital campaigns as it is for on-the-ground campaigning** - and these community building techniques are best learnt through first-hand digital experience. Building communities online is crucial to both empowering young people to take action, and in effecting meaningful change. It requires the careful consideration of the human beings behind the screen and how they will engage with learning or change making, based on their values and abilities. For trainers, providing a safe, well-connected space and community where young people can explore their passions and interests is critical. UpRising continues to test and explore what this can look like

online, having gained valuable insight from our 2021 programme activities. However, there continue to be questions around how to address the lack of resources and materials to support young people who may share similar interests or passions, but are in very different geographies. We believe more research and testing needs to happen to avoid falling into a trap of thinking that by moving online, we eliminate geographic boundaries entirely.

**6.2. Passion and authenticity is key** to enable the confidence, self-esteem and communication necessary for young people to translate their lived experiences into calls to action. Key to this is creating opportunities for young people to build relationships with staff teams and each other based on mutual respect and value. UpRising has the set up to do this, with its individual style of delivery that is enabled through small teams of diverse people. Post-Covid and in the digital sphere, passion and authenticity continue to be the drivers of successful action. This continues to be the case in a world in which digital campaigning is as much a force as on-the-ground.

**6.3. There are some stark differences in the skills necessary for successful digital campaigning compared to successful on-the-ground campaigning** - empowering youth led change digitally must not be simply about moving the curriculum online. It requires programme and learning designers to go 'back to the drawing board' in many aspects, understanding how young people operate online, and how they can be empowered with skills, knowledge and confidence without that process draining them of their creativity, passion and motivation.

**6.4. Young people today are digital natives** - especially post-Covid, they are well equipped to develop skills and knowledge digitally and to practice this in the online world. However, with the level of digital skill being so high and natural in young people there is a risk of young campaigners confusing generating a lot of noise online with what it takes to drive real change that translates into the offline world.

**6.5. Despite operating in a virtual world, there are a number of very real risks facing young digital activists** - online social action comes with potential harm, such as Twitter storms, 'cancel culture', and trolling. These risks are magnified when encouraging young people to speak about their own lived experiences. Furthermore, whilst moving to digital delivery can include previously isolated young people, it is not universally inclusive and can exclude and further marginalise young people experiencing barrier to digital access.

## 7. Recommendations

**Following the above research and analysis, UpRising recommends the following 10 practices to further the advancement and empowerment of young people across the UK to engage in and lead social action digitally.**

**R1.** Young people should be encouraged to imagine and drive social action that balances not just raising awareness but also includes concrete and specific calls to action.

**R2.** Young people should be encouraged to focus on impact, as such campaigns are most likely to gain momentum, be visible and drive change in the online world.

**R3.** Young people should be encouraged to focus on issues that matter to them, as these campaigns are most impactful.

**R4.** Trainers must prioritise facilitating well-supported spaces where young people can surface issues relating to their own interests and lived experiences.

**R5.** A clear explanation of the challenges and risks when leading change digitally should be prioritised in training, including equipping young people with practical tools to mitigate and respond to unwanted engagement online.

**R6.** Young people should be given the tools to express themselves, their ideas and their stories through creating engaging content - building skills and confidence in creating impactful content for online use should be a priority.

**R7.** The opportunity to make meaningful connections with peers are key to sustaining social action, motivation and passion. Where in-person interactions are limited, facilitating community building and peer networking opportunities online must be a priority.

**R8.** Regional and localised issues must not be overlooked when moving online, instead young people should be encouraged to explore region-specific challenges through a combination of offline and online activity.

**R9.** When empowering young people with knowledge and skills in digital activism, trainers should focus on clear examples of successful grassroots campaigns within the digital world.



**R10.** More exploration into digital social action is necessary, including how to measure impact; how to support young people to surface issues relating to their lived experiences; and how to protect young people who are driving change online.

## 8. Conclusion

- Recent years have brought about significant change for many youth-focused organisations and the young people with whom we work. Whilst the campaigning and youth sectors have faced extraordinary challenges throughout COVID-19 and the related periods of lockdown, there has also been significant opportunity to adapt traditional ways of working, to experiment with new approaches and to adopt the best of them.
- Alongside other organisations dedicated to furthering the empowerment of young people, UpRising has been proactive in the online space, changing our approach to teaching and learning to adapt to the digital world. We've had successes (and failures) along the way but have found new possibilities to connect with young people from new geographies, to reach young people in greater numbers, and to engage with young people online, in the ways they have come to expect, and – for many – prefer.
- Needless to say, there is more work to be done. Further challenges include: how to support social action across disparate geographic groups; how to create rapid pop-up communities online and support young people to explore the issues that matter to them in a productive manner; how to ensure that local and real-life issues continue to be prioritised. By working together and sharing our learning, UpRising hopes that the sector will continue to adapt, and in doing so will begin to unlock some of these challenges to improve provision for young people to lead change online.
- We are so proud of what our young people have achieved during this difficult time. The resilience, dedication and passion demonstrated by individuals and groups working together throughout the pandemic reinforces the importance of our work, and the role and responsibility we have to continue empowering young people to be the change that they want to see. Because of them, we are excited and energised by where this could lead.

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