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Term Paper

Gender Equality: The Effect of Emma Watson and Social Media

Gender equality has been an ongoing “wicked problem” for decades. A wicked problem is a problem that can take a great deal of time to solve and has no clear-cut solution. There have been many campaigns to end the issue of gender equality, which have had some success. The United Nations Women has been one of the leading activist groups to try to put an end to this obstacle. This past July, Emma Watson was appointed to be an ambassador for the United Nations Women. On September 21, 2014 Emma delivered a speech to launch the campaign HeForShe, which aims at creating gender equality focusing on youth and primarily males. I am very passionate about this topic of equality because I think it is an issue that most people know about but are not inspired enough to make an impact for change. In this paper I will examine if the success of this campaign differs from past efforts of the UN Women, the role that social media plays, and if having a celebrity like Emma Watson drove this effort to be successful.

Many people know Emma Watson as the adorable little British girl who started acting at the age of eleven. She broke out onto the scene playing Hermoine Granger in the extremely successful Harry Potter series. Emma has had an incredibly impressive career so far and she is only 24 years old. This brings up a few questions, is Emma Watson qualified to be an ambassador for the Unite Nations Women? Is she credible? After finishing up the Harry Potter series, she enrolled at Brown University in 2009, living with a roommate, and getting the full college freshman experience. After two years, she took a break to film the final installment of the Harry Potter series. She spent her junior year studying abroad at Oxford in England, which actually is home to Emma. She graduated college last spring with a degree in English Literature. The University Herald reports,

During her college years, the 24-year-old actress filmed the final two Harry Potter movies and acted in movies outside the franchise like ‘The Perks of Being a Wallflower,’ ‘This is the End,’ ‘The Bling Ring’ and Darren Aronofsky's Biblical epic ‘Noah’ (University Herald, 1).

She showed an incredible work ethic by achieving a degree all the while filming movies that received very high ratings. Despite what critics may think, Emma’s Ivy League education proves her a credible source to be apart of the UN Women.

In addition to her Ivy League education, Emma has also proclaimed herself to be a humanitarian as well as a feminist. The UN Women’s website provides a biography of Emma; giving insight to what started her journey of becoming a humanitarian. The website states, “Emma has already been involved in the promotion of girls’ education for several years and previously visited Bangladesh and Zambia as part of her humanitarian efforts” (UNwomen.org, 1). Working with other effective organizations such as, UNICEF, has enabled her to get her foot in the door and visit these third world countries to start making a difference. As well as working toward education for girls she also has worked to promote fair trade and organic trade with Camfed International to educate girls in Africa (UNwomen.org, 1). Clearly, Emma has seen first hand the effects that gender inequality has across the world. By having these activist trips on her “resume” she shows her knowledge of this pressing issue and her accompanying Ivy League education make her qualified to take on such a big role as an ambassador. Emma has spoken out about this honor on the UN Women’s website exclaiming,

The chance to make a real difference is not an opportunity that everyone is given and is one I have no intention of taking lightly. Women’s rights are something so inextricably linked with who I am, so deeply personal and rooted in my life that I can’t imagine an opportunity more exciting. I still have so much to learn, but as I progress I hope to bring more of my individual knowledge, experience and awareness to this role (UNwomen.org, 1).

This quote exemplifies that Emma is not just another celebrity being asked to give back to the world. It also shows that she is not just agreeing to help in order to boost her own reputation. Emma shows with this quote alone that she is ready to tackle this issue and is excited to learn how to create a change.

Moving on to the speech Emma delivered to launch the campaign back in September (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkjW9PZBRfk). There were many layers of this speech that effectively highlight the campaign, which set it up to go viral once it was launched. The video from the United Nations’ YouTube has only 458,495 views. However, there is a different video from YouTube user normaljean2, which has 6,243,504 views and on the video uploaded by HeForShe there are 1,418,431 views. Clearly, this video has been extremely effective in spreading the word for the campaign. The use of social media absolutely helped push this video to become as popular as it was. First off, the use of YouTube allowed a digital platform for the video to be uploaded to. Before YouTube was created many speeches like this had to be broadcast solely on television. In my opinion, YouTube is one of the better forms of social media because it can very much better society. Of course, all forms of social media have their advantages but YouTube creates a space where you can watch impactful speeches like Emma’s and share them with a link on other social media sites. The use of social media, as well as digital media, fascinates me because of how prevalent it has become to making videos go viral and how existent it is in society today.

Next, I want to look at the use of twitter. According to EbizMBA, twitter is the second most popular form of social media next to Facebook. There are over 310,000,000 users per month on twitter (EbizMBA 1). This statistic highlights the great power the use of twitter has because huge amounts of people worldwide are using it monthly. To break down twitter further, Emma Watson has 15.4 million followers, the HeForShe official twitter has 120 thousand, and the UN Women’s has 556 thousand. It is evident that Emma has the most influential power on twitter out of the three. However, this is not just because she has millions of people following her but other famous celebrities follow her too. Having other famous celebrities promote the campaign broadens the horizon of just how far it can reach. Emma’s twitter account, since the launch of the campaign, has been constantly filled with retweets from fellow celebrities and various other ways of promoting the campaign. For example, she has retweeted celebrities such as Harry Styles of One Direction, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Yoko Ono, Russel Crowe, Jessica Chastain, the White House’s official twitter, Taylor Swift, and even Prince Harry. These people also have substantial amounts of followers as well as influence of those followers to spread HeForShe. This is extremely interesting for me, personally, because Emma has taken over her twitter account with making a difference for gender equality. It’s common for famous people to be involved with organizations to change a societal issue but I have not seen one person as dedicated and committed as her. Just by scrolling down her feed you can see her passion towards this cause because basically every single tweet is in reference too it. I think that is something very admirable because she is keeping this campaign alive within the boundaries of her twitter account.

Furthermore, I want to examine the reach of these tweets mentioned above. The HeForShe twitter had 3,000 retweets and 2,200 favorites on the initial tweet launching the campaign. This seems like an underwhelming number considering this problem will need to reach millions of people to come together for a change. Emma’s first tweet alerting her followers about the campaign has over 30,000 retweets and over 38,000 favorites. Definitely an improvement from the HeForShe account but with the use of other huge celebrities getting on board the total number of how many retweets and favorites regarding the campaign is hard to say exactly. The use of the hashtag “#HeForShe” allows for a more accurate count of how the campaign is spreading across social media. Hashtags are a way for twitter users to categorize their messages and mark keywords or topics in a tweet that allows for a person to navigate through the site easier (Twitter Help Center, 1). In each one of Emma’s tweets she uses “#HeForShe” to gain more circulation. The hashtag was even painted on the wall of the Twitter Headquarters. On October 8 2014, Emma tweeted an update showing the effectiveness of the campaign a little less than a month into it. She tweeted (EmWatson), “Between 20th Sep & 2nd Oct there were 1.1million [‪#HeForShe](https://twitter.com/hashtag/HeForShe?src=hash) tweets from 750K different users, reaching 1.2 BILLION unique Twitter users.” This is an incredible increase from only 30,000 retweets. It has been noted that the HeForShe Twitter account had an 82% increase in followers within 24 hours of the campaign launch (Garcia, 1). I think the United Nations Women were wise to choose a credible celebrity who shows dedication and passion to the cause. Emma has a fantastic reputation and a huge following across the world enabling her to spread the cause much easier. I also think having twitter played a huge part in creating awareness and allows the progress made to be showcased in a clear, concise way.

Twitter and YouTube were not the only social media platforms to get involved, though. Ogilvy PR, the Public Relations firm that headed the social media effort, knows the success of this campaign should be credited to social media due to the enormous role it played in spreading the word (Garcia, 1). This did not just mean twitter but also Facebook and Instagram, two other extremely popular social media sites used today. According to Tonya Garcia, the official Facebook and Instagram accounts for the campaign gained a 305% increase and 3,500% increase in Instagram followers (Garcia, 1). Ogilvy was aware of the impact that social media now plays in our world and took advantage of this to get the awareness out about this issue. Ogilvy stated to Media Bistro via email, “There has been NO pay-to-play behind the social media campaign – absolutely NO promoted tweets, NO promoted Facebook posts, NO ads. ALL organic, viral momentum” (Garcia, 1). I think that it is an interesting statement for the Public Relations firm to come out with. These days, there are so many misleading advertisements and campaigns that it may be hard for people to see which ones are actually legitimate. We live in a world now where even non-profit organizations need a disclaimer from a PR firm stating there was no bought coverage. On the other hand, it’s fascinating to see that this campaign was based around social media (500 outlets different outlets) thus furthering its success and outreach.

The United Nations Women has put forth many efforts to reduce the gender inequality that is present worldwide. They do not only fight for gender inequality but also various women’s rights, violence against women, and other issues that arise. One of their other highly successful campaigns was called “Auto Complete Truth” which focused on the need to spark conversations globally regarding women’s rights, empowerment, and gender equality (Griner, 1). The series of ads showed pictures of women with the Google auto complete bar over their mouths with sayings about what women “should” and “need to” be. For example, one shows an Asian woman with the auto complete bar saying “women should stay at home, be slaves, be in the kitchen, not speak in church” (Refer to AdWeek article in works cited for pictures). This campaign was so powerful that it went viral almost instantly. It has been shared on Facebook over 116,000 times and has also been featured on numerous blogs and news sites (Griner, 1).

In an article on Adweek the author David Griner interviewed the team who created the ads. When asked about what they hoped the campaign would spark people to try they responded with,

We hope that our work will go some way to help raise awareness of the sexist global attitudes toward women and will enable a dialogue to begin on the topic. We encourage people to join in the debate on Twitter with [#womenshould](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23womenshould&src=typd), or on [the UN Women website](http://www.unwomen.org/). We are so pleased to see others are inspired by our work and witness the creation of their own versions of our campaign, which tackle other social issues. (Griner 1).

The United Nations Women has adjusted to the cultural shift in society and has been able to benefit from that. They are aware of how prevalent social media has become and use this to their advantage to create change in the world. This is one of many other successful campaigns from the UN Women whose prosperity heavily weighed on social media.

There have not been any “unsuccessful” efforts by the UN Women because the creation of the organization was to give the importance of women’s social, political, and economic issues it’s own entity. Of course, some campaigns have been much more effective than others. The UN Women website explains why they were created, “part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women’s empowerment” (UNwomen.org 1). The organization is there for support of governmental bodies and to enhance their own goals. There is a plethora of issues going on in the United Nations that it was necessary for women to have their own place to promote the pressing issues they face globally.

Wicked problems are prevalent in many aspects of society, being that they are issues without any clear-cut solution. Gender equality has been a growing wicked problem that has come up much more now than ever. The United Nations Women has been leading the efforts to get rid of these injustices most recently by launching their HeForShe campaign. They appointed Emma Watson, a qualified humanitarian, feminist, and Ivy League graduate as ambassador for this campaign. As ambassador Emma has used her popularity and credible reputation to spread this campaign through the use of social media. If social media were not a factor, this campaign most likely would have failed. Emma’s speech went viral hours after it had been posted to YouTube and has been spread through other social media platforms as well: predominantly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The UN Women are aware of the severe impact social media has because they use it constantly to promote their campaigns. I think this gives them an advantage as a non-profit organization because they can tailor their efforts to be social media friendly furthering awareness. Social media not only creates more of an awareness for gender equality but also allows for direct action to be taken. All it takes is someone you know sharing why they are passionate about gender equality to inspire you to help change the world too. I think that social media has a bad reputation for being nothing but a distraction, especially to people of my generation. If everyone got rid of this judgment and looked at the success of the United Nations Women and Emma Watson using social media the presumption would shift to seeing social media as a change agent to better society.

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