

Social Media Virtue Signalling: Changing Nothing, Changes Nothing

By Nick Kossovan
Here's the scene:

While stirring his Starbucks coffee with a plastic stir stick, he scrolls through his Twitter feed. He likes a few Tweets that insult climate change deniers and retweets a Tweet with a link to an article outlining how climate change will significantly raise sea levels by 2050. I hate climate change deniers, he thinks to himself as he tosses his plastic stir stick into the trash and places a plastic lid on his coffee. He then walks to his SUV, running to keep the AC on (it's a sweltering and humid late September day for Toronto), parked in front.

Classic digital engagement of 'Do as I say, not as I do.'

Token display on social media has become so common it's often seen as a platitude. 'Virtue signalling,' a term popularized by James Bartholomew's article Easy Virtue (The Spectator, April 18, 2015), has become part of our lexicon to call out such platitude.

Virtue signalling implies an individual, company, or organization doesn't genuinely believe in the cause they publicly support—their agenda is to look good in others' eyes. It's a form of hypocrisy that has existed since the dawn of civilization—it's part of the social survival tools we use to

get along with others, which requires being accepted.

Social media has made it too easy to voice an opinion about a particular cause without taking to the streets, without taking any personal risks or taking any substantive action. Many people think merely retweeting a hashtag, posting a picture on Instagram wearing a pink shirt (#PinkShirtDay), temporarily adding a rainbow-coloured frame Facebook picture, or adding your name to an online 'Save the Snow Leopards' petition is participating in meaningful social-political activism.

Social media 'virtue signalling' proliferation is due to the belief that expressing, or supporting, opinions that are likely to be acceptable will show you're a good person. I call it 'digital vanity'—making a statement because you reckon it'll garner approval. On more than one occasion, we're all guilty of digital vanity.

The need for social acceptance, recognition, and status is a powerful drug; it's a part of the foundation for human motivation. Yes, you do care what others think of you. Social media is where we seek attention, adoration, digital applause, and reinforcement of our beliefs—which are the reasons for social media's rapid uni-

versal adoption. Social media facilitated virtue signalling achieves this ego feeding in an almost eloquent fashion.

Social media = Look at me! So, is virtue signalling bad or good?

It's complicated. On the one hand, broadcasting ideals and values is good—it creates awareness. On the other hand, virtue signalling morphs into "bad" when such broadcasting becomes a repetitive behaviour pattern. It's said we live in an age of outrage. In itself outrage has never addressed any social issue. #OccupyWallStreet didn't end bad business practices or redistribute wealth.

Tweeting your outrage of homelessness from your iPhone 11, while walking past a homeless person asking for change, as you head to meet friends for drinks at some overpriced currently in vogue watering hole accomplishes nothing other than making you feel good about yourself. That \$20 Apple Martini you're fortunate to be able to purchase could have bought that homeless person you claim to care about a decent meal.

Imagine how different our world would look and feel if a large percentage of people expressing on social media platforms their support for a cause,



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solidarity, or outrage took meaningful action instead. It's easy to be outraged over food insecurity and expect some government level to do something than to go out and purchase \$100 of groceries and deliver it to a local food bank. Offline action is increasingly becoming a rarity. It's expected that our tweets, posts, and rants in comment sections will spur action in others.

Social media is a means, not an end. Whether intentional or not, creating awareness is a strategic tactic, not an end goal.

Social media success is measured in engagement (retweets, likes, and comments). It's all ego-stroking that does nothing meaningful to change the world. For that to happen, you need to sign off from your device and go into the real world to #BeTheChange.

Nick Kossovan is the Customer Service Professionals Network's Director of Social Media (Executive Board Member). Submit your social media questions to nick.kossovan@gmail.com. Follow @NKossovan on Instagram and Twitter.

The Shoreline Tid-Bits

Journal

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Tax Relief for Owners of Hotels, Motels and Inns

On March 12, the Rankin government announced a \$7.3 million program to support Nova Scotia's hotel, motel and inn operators, who have been hard hit by the global pandemic. The Tourism Accommodations Real Property Tax Rebate Program Part 2 provides qualified operators a 50 per cent rebate on payment of the first six months of their 2021-22 commercial property tax.

This one-time payment will help ease some of the pressures experienced by operators resulting from the restrictions of the pandemic. Operators can use the rebate for any aspect of their business, such as hiring staff, paying down debt, paying utilities or ordering supplies.

Operators who received payments under the first Tourism Accommodations Real Property Tax Rebate Program, which provided a 25 per cent rebate on the payment of 2020-21 commercial property taxes, will be automatically eligible. Just over 250 applications were received for the first program at a value of \$6.7 million. Because municipalities issue property tax bills at different times, the program will remain open throughout the year.

Businesses must meet the definition of a roofed accommodation as set out in the Tourist Accommodation Registration Act, be registered as a host under the act, have more than five rooms, not be in arrears of property taxes or property tax installment payments and have experienced a year-over-year revenue loss of at least 30 per cent from April 1 to Oct. 31, 2020.

New operators who were not in business before March 30, 2020, may still be entitled to a rebate if they can demonstrate lower than 50 per cent occupancy rate since opening their business. Program information and eligibility criteria be available at: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/support/#support-for-business>

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Oxford Eliminates CAO Position

By Maurice Rees

For the second time in three years Oxford has let its top administrator go. During a special meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 24, Oxford's town council announced its decision to move from a CAO-led system of government to that of a town clerk, dismissing Rachel Jones who had been Oxford's chief administrative officer since March 2018.

Oxford Mayor Greg Henley

said after the meeting that the decision was a financial one. There is a significance salary difference between a full-time CAO and a deputy clerk. The 2019-20 budget had the CAO salary at \$85,000 while the deputy clerk's was \$41,100.

Jones came to Oxford from Middleton following the dismissal of CAO Darrell White in early 2018. At that time, Linda Cloney was named acting clerk and with Jones' termina-

tion she has again been appointed to the position.

The town has an operating budget of approximately \$2.4 million. Its precarious financial position is neither a secret, nor a new problem. Last year, amid uncertainty with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the town made the controversial decision not to open the hockey arena for the 2020-21 season (although a citizens' committee led by the Lions Club is operating the arena) and cut its recreation director position.

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