WHY BEING "WOKE" IS NOT ENOUGH

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From pride month to the black lives matter, with every revolutionary event that takes place, social media takes it to rage. With twitter hashtags trending, and Instagram stories being flooded, activism has taken a whole new magnitude with social media. It has been the genesis of so many important movements like the #metoo movement, which undoubtedly brought an entirely nuanced wave of feminism into the spotlight. Or for that matter, the #kashmirilivesmatter, in lieu of the abrogation of article 370. Social media has given activists around the world the platform, to share their perspectives, stories, and most importantly to stand for what’s right. But in this modern breakthrough, we came across a different species of activism as well.

Performative activism or what kids call the “woke culture” is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as,  “ A pejorative term referring to activism done to increase one's social capital rather than because of one's devotion to a cause”. Performative activism in the simplest terms regards to riding the bandwagon of being so- called “woke” in order to fit in. However, on the other hand, this specific woke-ness only limits to walls of social media and is absent in real-life implementation or support.

The power of social media and the momentum it can provide for an issue to be brought to light is immense and undeniable, but harnessing it to become substantive cultural and legislative change is hampered by the existence of performative activism or performative allyship. This is due to the fact that social media is an echo chamber and while posting and spreading information regarding an issue does go a long way, there is usually surface-level information at best regarding the issues posted about and furthermore, the information presented isn’t enacted or utilised in real life. This exists due to the ease of being able to hide behind a technological platform and the idealisation of the basic act of being aware of prevalent issues.

Case in point: the very terms “performative activism” and “performative allyship” gained mass popularity during the insurgence of social media activism after the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin and it was seen that the non- marginalised and privileged group posted regarding how shocked and baffled they are by an issue which concealed awareness about the existence of institutionalised racism and the wide-ranging history of oppression of POC persists till date in the form of microaggressions or in certain cases, outright racism and neo- nazism by attempting to portray the incidents as isolated acts.   There exists two levels of performative activism, one on a corporate level and one on a personal level.

On a corporate level, Brands co-opt a cause for their own profit and it is nothing but low-cost tokenism or false depiction of political correctness. Brands need to be held to a higher standard than simply posting on social media to be deemed praiseworthy. On a personal level. acts that further indicate performative activism are not signing multiple petitions, not criticising or calling out discriminatory behaviour when witnessed and expecting to be educated by the oppressed regarding their struggles instead of simply utilising the resources they possess to educate themselves.  As George Orwell in his political masterpiece “why I write” said, “The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it.” When we refuse to implement our education and perspectives on important matters like racism, feminism, capitalism, and so on to real-life environments and just constrain it to social media, then we are actually not being supportive. Performative activism undoubtedly has an adverse impact on society and if this article has managed to trigger the awareness of your own privilege in any manner, It is time to review your own actions and perhaps begin the process of bringing about change within yourself. Maybe that's what the concept of being “woke” truly should mean?