Digital Citizenship

Advocacy for a change and the best tools

Topic 2

What is advocacy?

Advocacy can be generally understood as any act performed for the purpose of supporting, implementing, but recommending actions related to the topic you care about.

The essence of advocacy is also the use of the **collective voice** for the purpose of defense or protection of rights, or to support various initiatives.

It is often linked to various types of **public campaigns**, but it can also be **a small act**, when an individual tries to positively influence own relatives or friends.

Advocacy, which leads to a change in rules or law, is a bit more complicated and it is necessary to learn the basic procedures and steps

Advocacy for policy change

We will talk about advocacy, which aims to influence the decisions of political, economic or social institutions or systems.

This advocacy takes several forms:

a) Media campaign
b) Public presentation
c) Conduct of the survey
d) Publication of research

The main goal of these activities is to gain the interest of decision makers who can either directly or indirectly influence a change in the law.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

It is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of advocacy and lobbying.

The term lobbying often evokes a negative connotation and many people associate it with something negative (for example, lobbying of large industrial companies to relax the environmental regulations). In reality, it is mostly a positive advocacy carried out by direct contact with policy makers.

Steps of Advocating

1.   Name the problem and your goals

The very first step is to identify the problem and determine exactly what the change you are trying to achieve should look like. In order to move on, you need to do a survey and find out the answers to the questions:

• Why is this problem bothering me?
• What exactly should be the result of this change?
• What other people are affected by this problem?

Steps of Advocating

2. Find or obtain the necessary data which I can rely on

You need to dig deeper into the topic and study it thoroughly to properly prepare for the argument. Try to find relevant data and scientific arguments that answer the several questions (*What causes the problem? Where did the problem started? Which parties are involved in the problem and what groups of the population is affected?*)

Here are some of our tips:

- Look at the websites and official documents of recognized international organizations and institutions
- See the website of the Statistical Office of your country
- Browse several databases through which you can access scientific articles. You can use https://scholar.google.com
- Try to think about who is negatively affected by this problem and talk to them. Or interview some experts. Or conduct a questionnaire survey among several respondents.

Steps of Advocating

3. **Come up with a plan to achieve the change**

Creating a plan is preceded by setting several goals. Don't be afraid to be ambitious, you won't fail if you don't achieve some of the goals.

Make sure your goals are SMART, that is, specific, measurable, achievable, result-based, and time-bound.

Look for suitable solutions to meet the goals. Then come up with some activities that you need to do - write it down on paper.

Remember to manage and divide tasks properly between the team if you don't work alone. Take care of risk management - name the challenges you face and the problems that may arise. Set deadlines for each step.

Steps of Advocating

**4.	Make as many people as possible aware of your campaign to express their passive or active support**

The more people join you, the better your chances of success are.

The Internet is the easiest and cheapest way to get your campaign among a large number of people.

In order to get to policy makers in person, you need to have the support of several people or important non-profits/institutions.

Find a key message that you will communicate to others - it must be accurate, engaging with as many people as possible and convincing them of the need to support you.

Create a catchy visualization for the campaign, and before you launch the campaign, test it with a few people and get their feedback on it.

Examples of campaigns

a) Petition - launch an online petition and get as many signatures as possible from the public

b) Social media campaign - use all available social networks and try to get your message among as many people as possible. Don't forget about suitable hashtags, keep in touch and invite the public to actively or passively join you, for example even by sharing a campaign

c) Get the support of influencers for your campaign - getting one or more Instagram well-known faces for the campaign can guarantee a large reach

d) Contact the media - contact the local or national media with a request to disseminate your campaign

e) Organize an event - organize an interesting support event where you present your campaign to the public

Steps of Advocating

5. **Understand who has the power to change a thing and how you can convince them**

A.   You must first properly study the applicable policies and regulations that address your issue.

B.   Find out the nature of the legislation and determine exactly what should change. Such documents should be publicly available on the Internet or it can be requested by the competent authorities.

C.   Find out which office is responsible for the agenda. Is it enough to solve the problem at the local level? In that case, it may be enough to contact local policy makers.

D.   It is also relatively easy to address members of the national parliament, ministers or their secretaries, or members of the European Parliament.

Steps of Advocating

5. **Understand who has the power to change a thing and how you can convince them**

E.   Find out as much as you can about the person and prepare for the interview.

F.   It is important for the policy maker to get interested already during the first email you send. So think about the appropriate wording.

G.   The more people behind you, the greater the chance that he/she will listen to you and try to help you.

H.   You can also address some decision-makers via social networks if they are very active there. Another   form of meeting such people is through the conferences and different public events.

Steps of Advocating

6. **Follow up activities and Evaluating the Effectiveness**

When the official campaign is over and you haven't achieved all the goals, don't give up and create a plan for a new campaign that will be a follow-up. Or just keep spreading awareness among as many people as possible on a given topic.

Finally, for the success of other activities, it is important to evaluate the campaign and find out where you made mistakes and how effective your plan was.

Example of successful youth advocacy campaign

Youth for the Change of Bangladesh against harassment on public transport

Youth for Change organized a very effective campaign to advocate against gender-based violence and sexual harassment of women on public transport in Bangladesh. This activity was a reaction to the rape and murder of a student that took place on a bus in 2017.

It was a media sensation, many people were shocked and the information was spreading through all media channels. This helped a lot to start the campaign. In order to plan and mainly target the campaign, the organization first conducted an online survey via social media and they found that up to 100% of all female respondents had already experienced sexual harassment in public transport.

Based on the data obtained, the group subsequently addressed the President of Child Rights Caucus of the National Parliament and the National Human Rights Commission, as they intended to bring a real change of the whole society and this is possible mostly only with the support of policy makers.

Example of successful youth advocacy campaign

What did the group achieve with its campaign?

It was a very successful initiative, which was later taken on by the Bangladeshi government. This was preceded by dialogue with public transport operators in several cities, one of the results of which was separating the bathroom for women on board of public transport ships. The group also placed stickers with a free helpline in the public transport area. These also spread within the whole country – they appeared in schools, workplaces etc.

Media Advocacy

- Media advocacy is the use of any form of media in the promotion of any campaign for change.

- It's an easy way to get your message to a lot of people.

- Local media are often open to support an interesting project bringing a positive change for the community.

- If it is a nationwide project, there is a good chance that you will be able to gain the interest of the big national medium

- They often have a lot of power and your message can reach policy makers before you address them directly.

Media Advocacy

- You can also use the media to get financial support from organizations that like your idea.

- It is important to be careful not to allow inappropriately chosen media to ruin your campaign by misinterpreting the facts.

- If you are a journalist, always be open to helping a good cause. Remember that you have a power to positively influence the opinions and behavior of the society.

- When you have the opportunity to support an interesting independent project, go for it!