

The Say Yes Campaign

(Equality Campaign)

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Introduction

Human rights are defined as *'the inherent value of each person, regardless of background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe'* (Australian Human Rights Commission (2013)).

Between September 12, and November 7, 2017, Australians participated in the Marriage Law Postal Survey. Accumulating a total of 61.6% of 'yes' votes, the national survey paved the way for marriage equality. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2018) considered that fundamental human rights include the civil marriage of two individuals regardless of sexual and gender identity. The following report highlights marriage equality as a new power and an act of public good in relation to connective and collective action. In obtaining a majority of 'yes' votes, different campaigns were used to gain positive responses and support from the Australian population. The report also reveals the public's reaction to the campaign's success.

Relevant Literature

Non-governmental organisation hyperlink networks are institutionalised connective public goods (Fu and Shumante, 2016). NGOs are defined as 'private non-profit groups whose aim is to influence a form of social change' (Sanjeev et al., 2002, as cited in Fu and Shumante, 2016). The Australian Marriage Equality was supported by 289 non profit organisations (Australian Marriage Equality, 2020). They are conceptualized as a type of information public good resulting from collective action (Fu and Shumante, 2016). With hyperlinks, two-way endorsement of the organisations occur, directing the public to recognize other members and enhance the collective visibility of the network's goals (Ackland and O'Neil, 2011; Shumante and Dewitt, 2008 as cited in Fu and Shumante, 2016). Through joint efforts, connective and collective action seek to achieve a better outcome or some type of social change (Lundgaard and Razmerite, 2016).

In the words of Pecorino (2014), a pure public good is both non-rival and non-excludable. In the legalisation of marriage equality in Australia, the two defining terms of public good come into effect. It is non-rival as it does not dwindle in use; more people consume them and it is non-excludable, as it is available to a larger population (Fernando, 2020).

According to Medina (2007), a simple layperson's theory without any analytical justification of the collective theory is summarized in the statement "When individuals can achieve beneficial

results by coordinating in a group, they are likely to coordinate". In the case of the Campaign, the passing of the law for marriage equality is the gain of the participants, especially for people who identify themselves as LGBTQ+. The equality; choice to marry regardless of gender and sexual identity leads the way to an act of public good.

Nishimura and Shinora (2013) claim that there is no coercive power for participation in a public good provision. During the process of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey (AMLPS), there was no threat or order made - it was voluntary. Lee and Burdney (2009) examine how perceived benefits and costs of volunteering affect an individual's participation. The finding claims that participation level decreases as the opportunity cost of voluntary activity increases (Lee and Brudney, 2009). As the AMLPS costs a person nothing to vote, participation increases as people perceive themselves as 'free' and more embedded with their community (Lee and Brudney, 2009). Voluntary participation in public good is a simple yet effective mechanism to avoid deadlocks of mutual dispute and to promote cooperative behaviour (Szabo and Hauert, 2002).

Relevant Theory

1 New Power

The success of passing the right to marry is the emergence of new power. Heimans and Timms describe old power as jealousy guarded, it is held by a few like currency (Heimans and Timms, 2018). Old news is closed and inaccessible. In contrast, new power is said to operate like a current - it is open, participatory and peer-driven, indicating inclusion (Heimans and Timms, 2018). The triumph of the campaign allows people diminished by sexual proclivities the right to human rights through marriage equality. New power is enabled by the activity of the crowd - without them, there would be empty vessels (Heimans and Timms, 2018). People voted in favour of marriage equality through a postal survey and passed legislation of same-sex marriage that attest to Heiman and Timms' interpretation of new power; it channels the power of many and overthrows traditional figures. The objective of new power isn't to accumulate but to channel (Heimans and Timms, 2018).

2 Collective and Connective Action

The Equality Campaign is a hybrid of connective and collective action. In this connective logic, taking public action or contributing to a common good becomes an act of personal expression (Bennet and Segerberg, 2012). This is achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships (Bennet and Segerberg, 2012). The mission is not only to activate collective engagement from 'yes' voters, it is also to encourage individuals to take connective actions for their family and friends who identify themselves as LGBTQ+. The starting point of connective action takes place on social networking sites including Facebook and Twitter through comments and re-tweets (Bennet and Segerberg, 2012). The hashtag #VoteYes is a connector to gather attention, causing the circulation of the campaign and enables communication. These technologies did not only create online meeting places and start discussion, but also create relationships by establishing a level of transparency, security and interpersonal trust (Bennet and Segerberg, 2012). Through the social technologies used, collective and connective action is exemplified with the gathering of the participants to achieve the common goal.

Campaign

1 Context

Throughout 2004 and 2015, 20 attempts were made to introduce laws to legalise same-sex marriage to no avail (SBS News, 2017). In 2017, the government attempted to restore the plebiscite bill that had been blocked by the Senate, allowing the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey to take place (Karp, 2017).

In the analysis of the 2016 Census of Population and Housing, the number of same-sex couples have quadrupled since 1996. (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). There were 23,700 male same-sex couples and 23,000 female same-sex couples which brings a count of under 46,8000 same-sex couples living together in Australia by 2016 (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

The Australian Capital Territory had the highest proportion compared to any state or territory with an account of 1.4% same-sex couples (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Coincidentally, ACT's Chief Minister at the time of the national survey is Australia's first openly gay head of government, Andrew Barr (Mannheim, 2019).

In 2006, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed laws in 2006 to allow “civil unions” regardless of sex and gender, and tried again in 2013 to create laws for LGBTQ+ to marry which were both repealed (Mannheim, 2019). That is until the Federal Parliament passed marriage equality legislation in late 2017 (Mannheim, 2019).

2 Position

McNair defines political communication as ‘purposeful communication about politics’. The Yes Campaign is purposeful communication as millions engage and spread the hashtag #VoteYes, to achieve the purpose of legalising same-sex marriage. It is also an example of liberal democracy.

The principles of liberal democracy are recognised to arise from the bourgeois critique of autocracy in early modern Europe with the slogan ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity (McNair, 2017). Liberal democracy professes equality amongst persons, freedom of choice and particularly its emphasis on the protection and enforcement of human rights of individuals (Obomanu, n.d).

McNair identifies the defining characteristics of a democratic regime through the following: constitutionality, participation and rational choice (McNair, 2017).

First, constitutionality is the set of procedures given during the voting. Second, the participation in the process must compromise what Italian political sociologist Norberto Bobbio, terms a ‘substantial’ proportion of the people. In this case, the participants of the survey were adults registered on the electoral roll. The third condition of democracy is the availability of choice, that is either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The citizens had the right to disagree and express their views at the ballot box. In this case, it was the use of voting via postal survey. (McNair, 2017).

3 The Campaign

The Yes Campaign, also referred to as the [Equality Campaign](#) worked for equal marriage regardless of a person’s gender and sexuality (Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018). The hashtag #VoteYes propelled Australia to vote for marriage equality by holding the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey in 2017. With a majority of ‘yes’ votes, the Equality Campaign led the ‘YES’ Campaign (Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018). The campaign released TV and radio advertisements with the tagline [“Let’s get this done”](#) (Thomsen, 2017). The 30-second ad shows Australians walking together to the post box to vote ‘yes’, including AFL stars, the Hawthorn

Football Club, Olympic Swimmer Ian Thorpe, Sydney Convicts Rugby Team and a priest (Thomsen, 2017).

1 Digital Advocacy

The use of social media campaigns have become a crucial marketing technique to reach a wider audience (Baker, 2019). Social media advertising is low-cost, impactful and effective (Baker, 2019).



Figure 1. Australian Marriage Equality on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

The hashtag #VoteYes disperse through social media platforms specifically [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). The Australian Marriage Equality page on Facebook surpasses 280, 079 thousand likes and 26.5 thousand on Twitter. A majority of supporters share stories, photos and opinions leading to the circulation of the Equality Campaign. On Instagram, there is over 205 thousand posts with the hashtag #VoteYes. With millions of active users, the growth and participation of people towards a cause will increase immensely.

2 Traditional Protests

Prior to the announcement of the public's votes, a number of protests began to promote 'yes' votes and call for the legalisation of marriage equality.



Figure 2. Thousands gather for the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Held in Sydney, Australia 2017.

In Sydney, a crowd of an estimated 30,000 people gathered at the town hall before marching in support of the Yes Campaign (The Guardian, 2017). The rally is believed to have been the largest LGBTIQ+ rights crowd in Australia's history (The Guardian, 2017). Further gatherings took place in Melbourne, Brisbane, Alice Springs, Hobart, Coolangatta, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and Canberra (Calvert, 2017).

3 Campaign Groups

[Blackfulla's for Marriage Equality](#) is a grassroots campaign, aimed to support LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. It is a non-profit organisation led by Tarsha and Edie, two black queer women (SBS TV, 2017). In less than three days of creating a Facebook page, they were astonished with the support of over 1000 followers (SBS TV, 2017). The campaign aims to empower being black and queer in Australia.

4 Media Coverage

On August 9 2017, the government allocated \$122 million to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to pay for the postal survey (Karp, 2017). The final cost was around \$80.5 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

An amount of \$64,000 was spent on the [‘Let’s Get It Done’](#) advertisement. The campaign’s executive director, Tiernan Brady said they were “in it to win it” (Thomsen, 2017). The 30-second advertisement features a group of Australians walking towards a mailbox to post a ‘yes’ vote. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) issued 30 national media releases and media alerts during the survey to deliver important messages and calls to action in accordance with survey operational phases and key dates.

The media team of the Campaign used media releases that contained in-house generated audio and video messages for media outlets (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). It proved to be effective as networks, particularly radio AM and FM, used the ABS audio, which contained key messages leading to draw attention to upcoming milestones (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey advertising marketed through television, radio, press and online (search, digital and social). Media coverage reached an audience of 427, 197, 563 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

5 Public Reaction and Impact

On the day of announcement, Australia celebrated once again, gathering in big crowds not to protest, but to celebrate (Karp, 2017).

In Parliament, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said “*What a day! What a day for love, for equality, for respect. Australia has done it*” (Adaimy and Osborne, 2017). They applauded and bursted into singing ‘*I Am Australian*’ (Adaimy and Osborne, 2017).

In addition, a number of brands and media companies show support by displaying certain symbols to demonstrate unity and pride. For instance, Coca-Cola re-designed cans with the word ‘love’ and a rainbow in the curve of the ‘o’ (Dawson, 2017). On Twitter, an increase of 3,853 tweets per minute were recorded, following the result of the legislation (Dawson, 2017). The passing steered the expression ‘Australia said YES!’.

Following the legalisation of marriage-equality more than 6500 same-sex couples tied to the know in 2018 comprising 2.5% of weddings in Australia (McNab, 2019).

Analysis and Discussion

“When individuals can achieve beneficial results by coordinating in a group, they are likely to coordinate” (Medina, 2007).

In analysing the analytical justification of collective theory as summarized by Medina, a connective logic of recognition and self-validation comes to place (Bennet and Segerber, 2012). The result of the law, being that marriage is allowed regardless of someone’s sexual identity is an example of inclusion and acceptance. It is an act of public good to recognise the rights of people identified as LGBTQ+ to marry. Therefore, having to take part in the postal survey will benefit a greater nation hence the triumph of ‘yes’ votes.

With a majority of ‘yes’ votes, Heimans and Timms’ (2018) definition of new power as open, participatory and peer-driven is implied. The result of a favourable outcome attest to the act that is strengthened by the surge of a much larger current. The use of social media, in addition to connective action leads to the circulation of spreading the hashtag #VoteYes.

The commonality of it all; new power, collective and connection action is for goodness. The act of collective participation and connective engagement lead to new power; marriage equality, for the act of public good.

Conclusion

On December 9 2017, the right to marry was no longer determined by sex or gender in Australia. An update was made to the *Marriage Act 1961* to pave way for marriage equality. After years of trying to recognise same-sex marriage in the country, the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey led the changes to be made. The appeal for equality, as part of human rights, provoked participants and for the population to vote positively. The Equality Campaign allows each individual the right to marriage, leaving the expression ‘Australia said YES!’.

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