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THE SOCIAL NETWORK?: THE USE AND EFFICACY OF FACEBOOK AND TWITTER TO EXPAND NONPROFIT REACH AND USER ENGAGEMENT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Abstract

The political application of social media, particularly social networking sites, has drawn a lot of recent popular and scholarly attention. While scholars have focused on the applications of these media to campaigns, less research has focused on the use of social media by organized groups to mobilize people and resources. Recently there has been a lot of growth in the literature studying how nonprofit groups use social media. Yet, little is known about how groups employ these media to meet organization or advocacy goals. This study seeks to add to the literature on nonprofits and the literature on political application of social media. Focusing on Facebook and Twitter, the two largest social networking sties, this study uses data gathered from gun rights and gun control nonprofit groups to address the following three questions: (1) do nonprofits communicate on Facebook and Twitter in the same way?; (2) how do organizational factors and social media use affect nonprofit groups online reach?; and (3) how does nonprofit social media use affect follower engagement? The findings of this study suggest that platform matters for both nonprofit groups and their stakeholders. Nonprofit groups communicate differently on Facebook and Twitter both in terms of what they say and how they say it. Additionally, this study finds that the impact of organizational factors and nonprofit group social media use differs between these two platforms. Finally, this study finds that users respond differently to group communications on Facebook and Twitter.

This study contributes to the scholarly understanding of how nonprofit groups use social media.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The nonprofit sector has exploded in scope and number since the 1960s. Over the last decade alone, this sector has seen a nine percent growth (nearly 125,000 groups) (Number of Nonprofit Organizations in the United States, 2003 - 2013. (n.d.)). These organizations serve a variety of functions but nonprofit work, at its heart, is about citizen participation. These groups often seek nongovernmental solutions to societal problems, advocate for favorable policy outcomes, and work with the government to provide services to the public.[1] As the number of nonprofits has increased, understanding how and why groups use different means to inform, engage, and mobilize people has received an increasing amount of attention from both scholars and practitioners. Yet, this is a difficult problem, how and why people participate is an unwieldily question—a question that only grows more complicated when one considers how nonprofit groups can capitalize on the public's willingness to participate in advocacy.

Largely, nonprofits have relied on traditional media and group dynamics to achieve their organizations' goals. Groups have relied on word of mouth, incentives, and news coverage to expand reach, engage the public, and serve organizational missions. But during the past two decades, new technologies have emerged that have altered communication strategies, collective action dynamics, and stakeholder mobilization. While research on nonprofits has

[1] Steuerle and Hodgkinson (2006) found that government agencies have come to increasingly rely on nonprofits to serve constituencies through contracting services out

begun to examine the way that these groups seek to incorporate new and social media into their work, very little research looks at the content of messages shared on social media and even less looks at how these factors may impact online reach and user engagement. In this study, I will examine nonprofit social media communication and user engagement, in order to determine how nonprofit groups use social media and how users respond.

The Nonprofit Sector

This study uses nonprofits as a case through which to examine the use of social media and its impact on stakeholders. It would be helpful, therefore, to begin with a definition of nonprofit organizations. However, this is not a simple task. A simple but broad definition is that nonprofit groups are corporations that do not focus on the bottom line (i.e., profit). However, this does not convey the many Americans associate with nonprofit organizations. Usually, when people talk about nonprofit groups, there is some expectation that these groups work for the public good. However, what most people think of as the exclusionary category of charitable organizations is not the entirety of the nonprofit sector. In fact, most nonprofit corporations are not charitable organizations. This highlights the discord between this broad definition and what most people mean by the term nonprofits. To address this, many scholars look to the tax code for help.

There are two ways of thinking about nonprofits, both of which center on the 501(c) section of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC). The first, broad,

definition classifies all tax-exempt organizations that file under this code as nonprofits. This definition runs into many of the same problems of the one discussed above. While it may be tempting to use the 501(c) tax-exempt status as a definition of nonprofit, such a definition is too broad. The 501(c) tax code includes 29 subcategories, many of which do not convey what most citizens or scholars mean by the term nonprofit. (Table A1 in Appendix 1 shows an overview of all 29 501(c) tax categories.) The 501(c) tax code includes categories for organizations like federal credit unions (501(c)(1)) and cemetery companies (501(c)(13)) (Internal Revenue Service 2015). This is not to mention groups like labor unions, political parties, and trade associations all of which are encompassed in this section of the tax code.

While such a broad definition can be, and sometimes is, used, it is so broad as to nearly be unhelpful. The second method is to limit the discussion of nonprofit groups to those that file under the 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) tax codes. These are organizations with focuses on the public good through means such as religion, charity, or civic associations. Nonprofit organizations like these are mechanisms of public good acquisition and distribution, arms of government service, and collective advocacy.

Nonprofit groups have a long history of providing for the poor, providing workers compensation and life insurance, and providing for orphaned children and widows, among many other services. These groups seek to provide apparently nongovernmental solutions to problems that would later be

associated with the welfare state. Indeed, some scholars contend that this strong sector in American politics is one of the reasons that the United States has not developed an expansive social welfare state like those that emerged in Europe in the mid-20th century (Hall 2006). These organizations have often been subsidized by the federal government to help provide for the general welfare. Such causes and provisions of goods are most often what Americans imagine when they think of nonprofit groups. Nonprofit groups have long been advocates for many segments of American society.

Some might recoil at the idea of nonprofit groups engaged in advocacy, but these organizations have a long history of such activities in the United States. From the earliest days of the Union, the public has had a tense relationship with the idea of citizen associations engaged in public advocacy. While such groups abounded in the late 18th century, they were viewed with suspicion and, by many Americans, as inimical to the ends of democratic government (Hall 2006). This is not without reason. Many associational groups were used by elites for political gain (Davis 1917). For this reason, state statutory regulation of nonprofit organizations was stringent and severely limited their growth in most states (Schnider 1996). Instead, much of the work associated with modern nonprofits was undertaken by religious groups, groups that had found new freedom and grew in number after the passage of the First Amendment (Hall 1987). This is not to say that large-scale citizen advocacy did

not occur. Tocqueville marveled at a large temperance movement working for the outlaw of “spiritous liquors”. He wrote,

> As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another out, they combine. From that moment they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions serve for an example and whose language is listened to. The first time I heard in the United States that a hundred thousand men had bound themselves publicly to abstain from spirituous liquors, it appeared to me more like a joke than a serious engagement, and I did not at once perceive why these temperate citizens could not content themselves with drinking water by their own firesides. I at last understood that these hundred thousand Americans, alarmed by the progress of drunkenness around them, had made up their minds to patronize temperance (Tocqueville 2003).

While such occurrences did happen, their occurrence was much rarer than is often realized. Instead, the wary view of most citizens and strict laws of most states inhibited nonprofit organization’s activities and donation receipts until the era of Reconstruction.

In the post-Civil War era, nonprofit organizations began seeking to ease life in an era of rapid industrialization, began to promote arts, and began to serve veterans and war widows (Hall 2006). While sometimes engaged in advocacy, the primary purpose of nonprofit organizations was to promote collective goods. It was not until the years after World War II that advocacy became a primary goal of *most* nonprofit organizations (Hall 1987).

The increased advocacy by nonprofit groups was driven by two major changes. First, an activist Court adopted the doctrine of incorporation, which

used the 14th Amendment to require states to respect the rights of citizens enshrined in the Bill of Rights (Hall 1987). This opened the door to many of the key civil rights cases around which nonprofits like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People rallied and advocated other groups saw their success and imitated them. The second change was one in the federal rules of civil procedure. This change allowed unorganized groups to present their cause with standing as though they were a single organization. Today one would call such cases class-action suits (Hall 1987; Friedman 2002). These two changes provided an environment in which nonprofit groups could use litigation to advocate for causes as diverse as civil rights, the environment, and child abuse. In the wake of these changes nonprofits successfully advocated for civil rights legislation, the dismantling of state-run mental institutions, increased consumer safety protections, clean air and water legislation, and many other issues.

It was not just these two changes that provided for increased nonprofit advocacy. Increased attention to campaign finance regulation in the later half of the 20th and the early 21st century open the door to using nonprofits as key tools in political advocacy. The efforts of the Federal Election Campaign Act, the first broad scale attempt to regulate campaign finance, focused largely on hard money. This led to the increased use of Political Action Committees (PACs), civil societies (predecessors to 501(c)(4)s), and the “soft” 527s to continue to funnel money into the political arena (Chand 2013). After the

creation of the explicit 501(c)(4) tax category in the mid-1990s, these groups were much less attractive for political donations because the IRC limited the amount of time these organizations could spend on political activity. However, later adaptation of the tax code to account for the explicit politicization of 527s in the 2004 election resulted in increased disclosure requirements for 527s making 501(c)(4) groups much more politically attractive (Chand 2013). This was about to intensify even further with the decisions handed down in by the Supreme Court in *Citizens United v. the Federal Election Commission* (2010) and by the DC Court of Appeals in *Speechnow.org v. the Federal Election Commission* (2010).

Prior to 2010, using funds from their general treasury, 501(c)(4) groups could create issue advertisements but were prohibited from taking part in electioneering communications—communications that explicitly advocate for or against a candidate for public office. If groups wanted to participate directly in electioneering, these groups had to create PACs. Many groups chose to create PACs, but donations to and from these arms of nonprofits were limited by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. However, after *Citizens United*, these groups could now create independent expenditures to participate in electioneering. *Speechnow* excluded groups that only produced independent expenditures from the requirements registering them as a PAC and many of the disclosure requirements associated with such a classification. The result is that 501(c)(4)s, as long as such group only produces independent

expenditures, can raise money without limit and avoid many of the disclosure requirements most other political groups are subject to. However, one important limitation still exists, 501(c)(4)s' primary purpose cannot be political lobbying activity (Internal Revenue Service 2015). These groups' primary purpose must be pursuing the public good.

Regardless of this limitation, the potential power available to 501(c)(4)s is not available to 501(c)(3) groups, which under the IRC may not engage in political activity ("The Restriction of Political Campaign Intervention by Section 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Organizations" 2015). This has led many social service and educational groups that would have traditionally filed under the 501(c)(3) category to opt to maintain organizations under both tax codes (Chand 2013). Groups can use 501(c)(3) for meeting organization of needs, fundraising, and provision of goods while delegating lobbying activity to its 501(c)(4). This is done while all the while maintaining a single face to the public.

In order for nonprofit groups to achieve their missional goals, these organizations need public support—the larger and more dedicated their constituency the better equipped these groups are to collect money and mobilize people for either provision of goods or advocacy. Social media are a potentially powerful tool for both of these ends. Understanding how nonprofit groups use these media and how their constituency responds to that use is important. In order to understand how social media affect the efforts of

nonprofits, one must first understand when and why citizens chose to participate in the system and how social media might affect that decision.

Understanding Participation

Many factors have been found to influence traditional political participation (e.g., party identification, socio-economic status, demographics, interpersonal networks, the media, et cetera). When examining the impact of social media on the decision of an individual to participate politically, there are many mechanisms at play. Scholars have found strong evidence suggesting social forces such as friends, family, and socioeconomic status have a direct impact on the decision whether and for whom to vote (e.g., Berelson Lazarfeld, and McPhee1954). Further research suggests these findings may transfer to online social networking communities (e.g., Kwak, Lee and Moon 2010). By embedding themselves in such communities, nonprofit groups can potentially capitalize on these forces. Additionally, the strong presence of traditional media outlets, through nonprofit groups sharing links to news stories within the online community, may provide a mechanism for media effects to play a role in the decision to follow, engage with, and advocate for nonprofit organizations. Examining the impact of these social forces will provide insight into why nonprofit groups want to use social media for advocacy and engagement.

Interpersonal Networks

There is extensive research into what factors affect individual political participation. Such studies, while most readily connected to voting, are not

limited to that single aspect of political participation. Work examining the decision to participate politically also includes examinations of protests (e.g., Gamson 1995), advocacy (e.g., Fishkin 2009), volunteerism (e.g., Bussell and Forbes 2002), campaign activity (e.g., Roker, Player, and Coleman 1999) and many others. Among the earliest work on this subject, the Columbia study, contends that social ties and group identify are a fundamental part of the decision to participate (e.g., Lazarsfeld 1944 and Berelson, Lazarfeld and McPhee 1954). However, the behavioral revolution that followed World War II swept in a powerful social-psychological model that challenged many the tenets of the Columbia study. In the decades since this debate, scholars have continued to examine the impact of a variety of demographic characteristics on political participation. Among the characteristics that usually draw a lot of scholarly attention are education, wealth, race/ethnicity, gender, and the interaction among these indicators.[2] The impacts of such demographic characteristics are widely accepted among mainstream political science. The power of descriptive features such as these cannot be denied. These traits are powerful predictors of participation and thus important for the understanding of when and why citizens choose to participate. Despite their undisputed

[2] Some examples include the demographic and socio-economic status by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995; the impact of socio-eocnomic status on participation in congressional elections by Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko, 1985; the impact of socio-economic status, partisanship, and "black group consciousness" on the decision to participate by Verba and Nie, 1972; and when and how blacks participate in Danigelis, 1977 and 1978).

importance, identity traits only tell part of the story. Other factors also contribute to an individual's decision to participate in the political system.

Much of what political scientists know about the impact of traditional interpersonal networks has its roots in the sociological school of political behavioralism that emerged at Columbia University in the 1940s. The sociological school of behavioralism emphasizes the role of personal relationships such as family, peer groups, religion, and economic class on political behavior. The impact of interpersonal networks was subsequently eclipsed by the introduction of psychological school of behavioralism, which views voters as unsophisticated and vote choice largely a function of party identification and candidate presences (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960) or as individuals who operate rationally within an environment of limited information (e.g., Key 1966 or Popkin 1991). However, the impact of interpersonal networks has begun to reemerge in the literature.[3] [4]

This stream of literature still has its roots in the initial theory that emerged in 1940s. Scholars posit that people filter political information and

[3] While research on social networks never completely vanished from the study of political science, it did fall from prominence, particularly between the 1970s and 1990s. The recent resurgence of this stream of literature has been attributed to two factors: the focus on social capital in the wake of Putnam's "Bowling Alone" essay and subsequent book or the reemergence of the small world problem (Lazer 2011).

[4] Examples include the creation of social capital through interpersonal networks by La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; the emergence and survival of political disagreement within interpersonal networks by Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprauge, 2004; that people construct interpersonal networks that reinforce their political beliefs by Huckfeldt and Sprauge 1987; the impact of interpersonal networks on a variety of social decision including the decision to vote Jackson, 2008.

stimuli through their day-to-day experiences—a theory pithily summed up by Paul Lazarfeld who observed “a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially” (Lazarfeld, 1944, p. 27). In other words, instead of filtering information and stimuli through a partisan lens, sociological behavioralism contends that political information is filtered through people’s social groups made up of family, friends, co-workers, and other people with whom voters interact on a regular basis (i.e., their interpersonal networks). Many of the key observations about the impact of interpersonal networks on political participation were initially put forth by Paul Lazarfeld in 1944 and have been reaffirmed through more recent scholarship.

People are much more likely to participate if their friends do so. This assertion follows from two observations. First, there is a great deal of social pressure from politically interested friends, family, and co-workers to be politically engaged. The rewards for succumbing to social pressure are immediate and personal, encouraging people to behave like the members of their social groups do (Lazarfeld, 1944). Second, people like their political perceptions and views to be reinforced by their interpersonal networks (Lazarfeld, 1944; Berelson, Lazarfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Beck, Dalton, Green, and Huckfeldt, 2002; Mutz, 2002). Thus, they tend to surround themselves with people who think in similar ways about the political world.

These observations have strong implications about the impact of personal relationships on political participation, but the impact of interpersonal

networks goes even further. Not only do people tend to participate if their friends and family do but are also more likely to act in similar ways to their friends (Lazarfeld, 1944; Beck, Dalton, Green and Huckfeldt, 2002). There are two interpretations this finding. The more traditional interpretation is that people "who work or live or play together" tend to share similar demographic characteristics and are thus interested in the same issues, programs, candidates, and groups (Lazarfeld, 1944, p. 137). The second way deals is a spatial interpretation that considers proximity. Individuals who live and operate within a "common social space" will, by the nature of this proximity, have an impact on one another's political opinions, choices, and behavior (Lazarfeld, 1944). The impact of all members of a social network on a potential political actor is not necessarily equal. People have a tendency to identify members of their social groups who are more engaged in and knowledgeable about politics. These individuals tend to have a greater influence on the political behavior of less politically engaged network members. Ultimately, regardless of stimuli, it is people that move people (Lazarfeld 1944).

For nonprofit groups, the fact that people can drive others to participate is important because it provides a mechanism of increasing reach by using existing interpersonal networks of supporters. Nonprofit groups can rely on those interpersonal effects to spread awareness of the group from friend to friend or coworker to coworker. Traditionally, this has been a key component of group growth. However, such growth can be slow. As a result, traditionally,

nonprofit groups have relied on the media—newspapers, radio, and television—to reach more people and help amplify the effects of these interpersonal networks (Wuthrow 1998). This is important because using traditional media is not as easy as it once was. In an environment where most people watch and read the news, such coverage might prove powerful. Nonprofit groups have traditionally relied on news stories (or earned media) to help raise awareness and increase reach into the broader public. But the media environment has changed. Fewer people watch or read conventional news outlets now than did in the past. With the advent and spread of cable media, traditional broadcast news media have had to compete for viewers' attention—not just with each other and cable news, but with non-news shows as well. Understanding these changes create an additional incentive for nonprofit groups to engage new media strategies to reach and engage citizens.

The Impact of a Changing Media Environment

Over the past 20 years, the media evolved. In political science, such changes were initially, relatively understudied. Few authors within political science examined the effects of media evolution on political interest and participation. To understand these changes, it would be helpful to briefly review this evolution. The early days of audio-visual news was one that relied on a captive audience. Before the television era, political information was cheap because when citizens attended movies, they would learn about politics and world events as a by-product of pre-movie newsreels (Prior, 2007). In the early

stages of the television era, when there were few broadcast television channels, individuals often spent at least some time at night watching the news due to lack of entertainment options (Prior, 2007).

Technology subsequently changed the way Americans received information and entertainment. The rise of cable news and the Internet has given citizens more avenues to obtain information, but it has also created more choices (Prior, 2007; Stroud 2011). Scholars found that when individuals were given a choice between watching the news and watching entertainment, most choose entertainment (Prior, 2007).

The traditional mechanisms of mobilization and nonprofit advocacy through the media have, therefore, been weakened with these changes. This affects how groups choose and hope to use these media for a handful of reasons. First, running advertisements is expensive and the return on that investment has changed, and arguably dropped, in a highly fragmented media environment. Second, new media have emerged that are more cost effective and have a broader reach. The Internet and related wireless new media provide a new means for groups to reach beyond their existing networks.

Beyond the potential for increased cost efficiency and reach, new media have the ability to foster discussion among potentially larger communities than traditional media can facilitate. An important and reasonably powerful change, as a fundamental part of political participation, especially meaningful participation, is fostering discussion. The Internet has done this in a way that

no other advancement in media technology has. Previous developments of media technology have only really expanded the ability of elites to communicate with the masses. Newspapers, radio, and television all changed how elites generate content and the public consumes it. In the past, access to the "marketplace of ideas" was heavily gated by elites, especially to markets that have a wide consumer base. Sure anybody could stand on a soapbox on the street corner and shout ideas at passerbys, anybody could print a pamphlet or flier and hand it out on that same street corner but the audience for these actions was limited. The messages behind such acts only reached a larger audience if elites transferred them to different mediums. The Internet, on the other hand, is the first medium that allows members of the public to actively participate in the generation of content that has the potential to reach millions of people. The Supreme Court described the situation as one in which

> Through the use of chat rooms, any person with a phone line can become a town crier with a voice that resonates farther than it could from any soapbox. Through the use of Web pages, mail exploders, and newsgroups, the same individual can become a pamphleteer (Reno v. ACLU 1997).

In other words, the Internet, more than any other medium, seems to foster political discussion and avenues for citizenship creating a strong incentive for nonprofit groups to use this medium to amplify their voices.

Yet, despite the clear importance the Internet over the past two decades, the impact of the Internet failed to garner the attention of mainstream political science scholars until recently. In the past ten to 15 years, scholars

have only begun to research the effect of the Internet on political participation; however, very little of this research is published in political science journals.[5] Additionally, the results of such studies, taken as a whole, are inconclusive. There are a number of reasons that early Internet research was not particularly fruitful. First, initial research into the impact of the Internet on politics was hindered by conceptualizing the Internet as a cohesive media outlet (e.g., Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; Dulio, Goff, and Thurber, 1999). Such studies usually focused on whether Internet access impacted political participation but the impact of the internet is not determined merely in terms of access (or lack of access). Attempt to operationalize the internet in this way left much of the early literature on political participation and the Internet underspecified as the Internet is anything but cohesive. The way that individuals *use* the Internet also affects the impact of access to the internet. As the internet evolved, political science literature was slow to adapt. Treating social networking sites as generic webpages misunderstands the structure and the impact the Internet. Second, until recently, political science scholars largely ignored the changes in the Internet. The development of new programs and communities went

[5] Examples of some of the initial research that examined the Internet include:Internet and the 2008 Obama campaign by Baumgartner and Morris 2010; how social networking sites engage people in the political process by Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, and Bichard, 2010; the impact of the resources on Internet use and political participation by Sylvester and McGlynn, 2010; the factors that participate in online participation by Best and Krueger, 2005; digital citizenship by, Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; the mobilizing capacity, and the socio-economic limits of that capacity, of the Internet Weber, Loumakis, and Bergman, 2003; and types of participation encouraged by the Internet Bimber, 2001.

unacknowledged by political science scholars. By missing the changes that Internet technologies underwent, scholars characterized the Internet as primarily a "must seek to find" information source. This remains partially true, but the ability of information to move from user-to-users has grown dramatically with social media. The clear political applications of new social media mean that the Internet has garnered more academic attention in recent years.

While the Internet has received more scholarly attention, there has been little conclusive evidence on how the Internet impacts political participation. Academic discussion of the Internet has begun to acknowledge, however, that many people consistently rely on the Internet for information about news, politicians, groups, and events. According to a 2012 PEW study, 39 percent of respondents got their news online, with 17 percent of respondents getting their news from their mobile phones (Kohut, Doherty, Dimock, & Keeter 2012).[6] Furthermore, the Internet may provide access to traditionally unengaged demographics as a growing percentage of young, voting-age adults rely on the Internet as their primary source of news. However, despite the electorate's increased reliance on the Internet for political news, studies have shown increased Internet usage has not led to broader political mobilization (e.g., Best

[6] This same study ask people who read their news only online where they got their news: 19 percent of respondents said that they got their news only from online newspapers while 72 percent said they also got news from somewhere else. The survey did not focus on what these other sources might be. The survey did ask if users read news on social networking sites, particularly Twitter. The results show that 47 percent of users saw news on social media and that 83 percent of recalled seeing news on Twitter at some point (26 percent saying they saw news on Twitter yesterday).

and Kruger 2005; Kruger 2005; Bimber 2001) Traditionally, this have been due, at least in part, to unequal access.

Despite massive growth in availability, in-home Internet access is still dependent on socio-economic status. Those with higher incomes are not only able to afford to have Internet in their homes; they are also those with better Internet skills. Those who are already predisposed to be better informed about and more involved in politics are those that have the most access to new media that may engage the previously unengaged (Kruger 2006). This is important because Internet skills and civic skills are highly correlated with one another and are similarly distributed across various demographic groups. As a result, even though the Internet provides new means of political access, the people with the resources to politically participate via conventional means are those with the most access to the resources needed to participate online (Kruger 2006).

While this has been mitigated some with respect to dial-up in the past decade, changing technologies keep access costly. In other words, broadband Internet is expensive. In 2013, only 42 percent of people with incomes of less than $10,000/year have access to broadband in the home. Merely moving to $20,000-29,999/year, an income bracket that straddles the property line, increases the percentage of homes with broadband to 64 percent, with an additional 15 percent having regular access outside the home (Rainie 2013). However, the relationship between access to the Internet, Internet skills, and

socio-economic status is gradually changing in one important way: smartphones.

The availability of smartphones with Internet access is weakening the digital divide. Nearly half of Americans own smartphones, the potential effects of this technology are far-reaching (Smith 2012). The mobile Internet platforms also help the effects of social media bridge the digital divide. More and more individuals, who are traditionally considered to be on the wrong side of the digital divide, not only own smartphones but also use them as their primary means of accessing the Internet (Zikhur and Smith 2012; Lopez, Gonzales-Barrera, and Patten 2013).[7]

As mobile apps continue to develop and become increasingly easy to use the effects of these media could likewise continue to expand. The hand-held component provides an additional way to get the attention of young individuals as nearly 40 percent of teens own smartphones—and a quarter of all teens (three-quarters of smartphone users) primarily access the Internet via their smartphones (Duggan and Smith 2013). As Internet usage continues to spread and the relationship between Internet skills and socio-economic status

[7] While there may be concern that the patterns of social networking site usage will also reflect the digital divide, studies of high school students social networking site usage does not reflect socio-economic status of their parents (Ahn 2011). This is not the best reassurance that the digital divide is not replicated on social networking sites. However, studies examining this relationship among adults are rare and often focus on single a demographic sector. For exam in a study of Latino internet usage, PEW found that an equal percent, 46 percent, of respondents making less than 30,000 dollars a year used social networking sites as did not (Lopez, Gonzales-Barrera, and Patten 2013).

fades, the Internet holds the potential to mobilize larger and broader segments of the population than more traditional methods of mobilization (Best and Kruger 2005). The Internet has opened the door for many people to gain political knowledge and information as well as presenting them with new opportunities for political participation.

The impact of traditional Internet sites is still limited by user motivation. People who use the Internet to seek out the political information are likely to be more politically knowledgeable and engaged already. The Internet lowers communication cost allowing users increased access to political elites. However, the impact of traditional Internet sites (e.g., newyorktimes.com, drudge.com, or nonprofit group websites et cetera) may be limited in this respect. Because contact from politicians and campaigns or even news sites disseminating updates requires users to submit contact information, the capacity of the Internet to inform the unformed still requires some sort of initial motivation from users (Swalan, Abdulla, and Lin 2005).

Internet users who are not motivated to seek out political news and information are increasingly able to use the Internet to tune out political news altogether. The expansion of the content available on the Internet presents users with a wide array of media choices. This high choice environment allows viewers and users to determine more of what they watch or read (Prior 2005). Such an environment allows individual who are interested in politics or campaigns access to an immense amount of information and a wide variety of

viewpoints. Yet, equally, a high-choice media environment also allows those users with a preference for entertainment, as opposed to news, to completely tune out politics (Prior 2005). Because users can control so much of what they see and read, getting into their online environments is more important than ever before, particularly for those seeking votes, donations, or advocacy.

Development of Social Media

Despite its limitations, the Internet has clearly become an important tool in the campaign process, a means of advocacy, a source of information, and, for some, a tool of citizenship. One of the more interesting developments in the evolution of the Internet as a campaign tool is social media. Social media have, in many ways, changed the dynamic and impact of the Internet in any political calculus. The development of social media has changed the way that the individuals receive information online, the way that individuals interact with politicians, campaigns and activist groups, and the way Internet stimulates political activity.

TABLE 1.1: TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA, THEIR USE, AND EXAMPLES

Social Medium	Use	Examples
Blog	Formerly called weblogs, this medium allows for long form posts often embedded into communities with a section for reader comments.	Blogspot, Wordpress, Blogger
Discussion Boards and Forums, Message Boards	Allow users to create and respond to posts from other users on a variety of topics.	Craigslist, Usenet, Grouply
Documents/Content Sharing	Allow users to share and collborate on content via the Internet and applications.	Google Docs, Wordie, Dropbox
Event Sharing	Allow users to create and promote events.	Upcoming, Splash, MyEvent
Image Sharing	Allow users to upload photographs to share with other users, friends, and family.	Flickr, Instagram, Imgur, Snapchat
Live Streaming	Allow users to stream live video to other users.	Kyte, UStream
Location Sharing	Websites and applications that allow users to share their location with other users and friends.	Foursquare, Gowalla, Brightkite
Music Sharing	Allow users to steam, share, and comment on music.	Pandora, Spotify, Ping
Social Networking Site	Allow users to create public or semi-public profiles to create content and interact with others content.	Twitter, Facebook, Tubmlr
Video Sharing	Allow users to stream and share video content that is either user or elite created.	Hulu, YouTube, Vimeo
Wiki	Allow users to collaborate to edit the structure and content of websites	Wikipedia, Wikia, Creative Commons

The term social media, however, is often misused. Broadly, social media includes everything from wikis to Facebook (see Table 1.1). Social media represent a major paradigm shift in both how the Internet operates and how individuals use the web. Social media in many ways characterize the break between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Web 1.0 was an environment where content was relatively static, and publication was dependent upon technical knowledge. The ability of the general public to produce content was possible, but limited, and the ability of other users to interact with published content was virtually non-existent. Web 2.0 does not refer to any specific update of the Internet and there is no formal distinction between these two technologies. Web 2.0 simply refers to the sum total of incremental changes and evolution of the Internet. What makes the changes of Web 2.0 so empowering and full of political potential is that where Web 1.0 is characterized by traditional content publishing (things such as personal websites, formal encyclopedias, et cetera), Web 2.0 is characterized by user-generated content (blogs, wikis, et cetera).

Web 2.0 is the world of social media. Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow users to share content that they have generated. The most obvious examples of social media are social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, or YouTube). These sites allow the users to both generate and exchange content within open or semi-open platforms (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). As a result, what a user is exposed to on the Internet is no longer simply

a result what they search for. Users may be exposed to news, campaign information, politicians, events, and political causes in the course of their normal social activities online. As a result, the limited impact of the Internet, as it is traditionally conceived, may be overcome by social media and social networking sites. The evolution of social media changes the way that data moves. The movement toward online social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr provides a different media environment in which individuals and activist groups can work. These sites provide for two key changes. First, social networking sites can provide avenues for individuals who, normally uninterested in politics and do not seek out such information, to receive political information in the context of their day-to-day Internet activity.[8] The fact that such information comes from friends or followers may increase

[8] While "unfriending"/"unfollowing" someone or "hiding"/"muting" all of another's posts is both possible and simple, the actions that lead to those dissociative actions generally focus on obnoxious or inappropriate behavior (Sibona and Walczak 2011). Too many polarizing posts were also a factor in these dissociative behaviors but polarizing posts suggested to respondents were extreme political or religious views (Sibona and Walczak 2011; Sibona 2014). Similarly, when examining the friend types that were most likely to subjected to these dissociative behaviors, high school friends were more likely to be unfriended for polarizing posts than coworkers. The author of that study argue that polarizing posts result in dissociative behaviors when the post contradicted the user's own beliefs or preferences (Sibona 2014). Yet, political posts could be overcome if the poster was "socially attractive"—that is a user's perception of a poster's "friendliness, whether they fit into ones group of friends, and over all quality of social interaction" (Peña and Brody 2014). Therefore, users might be likely to remove or hide the posts from an associate who they disagree with politically, the impact of these such an associate would be limited anyway. The impact of an associate who posts infrequent polarizing posts, or political posts a user agrees with, may still increase news exposure for users who are otherwise disinclined to get watch or read the news. For nonprofit groups, this means that posts about a nonprofit from a user with a similar political disposition may also provide exposure to a sympathetic audience.

the likelihood that individuals are going to participate politically. This allows political actors to tap into these networks and increase the ease with which information about their causes, goals, and advocacy travels through the interpersonal networks of their supporters. Second, social networking sites may give political actors some capacity, at least initially, to control their message. These sites, particularly open sites like Twitter, allow for actors to disseminate images and videos before the news cameras show up at events. These technologies also allow actors to provide real-time updates of event and/or actions, and the capacity to instantly communicate with all of their members, followers, and other interested third parties. It gives actors who may not receive media attention the chance to disseminate their cause and platform. Such media can, therefore, speedup the impacts of interpersonal networks and provide an unfiltered and less costly megaphone.

As a result of this, online social networking sites may result in connections that may not otherwise have been made—they activate latent ties (boyd and Ellison, 2008). Older Internet technologies allowed groups to be particularly adept at reinforcing existing networks but did not give actors the ability to dramatically expand groups. However, social networking sites not only continue this ability to reinforce existing networks through constant communication but also raise the chances of adding new members or supporters by increasing visibility through these broader networked sites. This allows political actors to reinforce the momentum, generate excitement, post

videos, share photos, et cetera. These technologies also facilitate political activity across formal political boundaries facilitating cross-state, international, and transnational activism.

The mobilizing capacity of this technology is important because nonprofits aim to move users to sympathy, awareness, and action. The Internet combines the effects of interpersonal networks and the media by providing information and social cues in the same environment. Social media sites allow people to experience politics in a communal way through their computer. On one site people can get their friend's take on politics, campaigns and current events while simultaneously being introduced to traditional elite takes on these same factors.[9] Social networking sites allow friends and followers to share links to news stories but it also allows traditional media outlets to insert themselves in these environments through the creation of their own profiles. In other words, taken together these features mean that social networking sites allow people to get information from elites and information from their friends in a single setting. One result of this evolution in communication through social networking sites is that these sites and their widespread popularity dramatically

[9] While this exposure has the potential to increase exposure for some users, it also has the potential to further fragment and polarize political information. People form interpersonal networks that reflect their themselves, particularly their values and beliefs (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Additionally, much of the discussion on Facebook has been found to be an echo chamber wherein most posters express support for the initial post and a much smaller proportion of posts expressing disagreement with the post (Kushin and Kitchener 2009). However, these features can still be used by nonprofit groups to meet missional goals, raise awareness, and push for mobilization.

changed the way that the Internet affects an individual's decision to participate politically in a number of ways.

First, social networking sites potentially allow for more participatory relationship between political elites and citizens than other more traditional political tools (Williams and Gulati 2007). By "friending" or "following" a candidate on a social networking site, users have direct access to campaign and candidate information. The use of social networking sites has increased the potential and ability of political actors to get exposure while lowering the cost of such exposure. These sites can provide a forum for nonprofit groups to actively engage users making causes seem more personal, accessible, and authentic. Furthermore, these sites give political actors a means to reach out to the public for not only contributions but also for the recruiting volunteers (Williams and Gulati 2007; Gueorguieva 2007). The ability of political elites to interact with users, or just make users feel as though they are interacting, can directly impact the decision of an individual to participate politically.

Second, social networking sites also allow users to pass information to one another. As a result of the increased cross-user information flow, these sites provide a forum for discussion among users and an avenue to encourage passive supporters to become active volunteers (Gueorguieva 2007). Suddenly, the Internet is no longer just a place for interested individuals to seek out information or even chat rooms to discuss politics. It is a place where even politically uninterested individuals may be exposed to political

information, debate, and discussion in the course of the day-to-day Internet activity.[10] Furthermore, the interactive nature of social networking sites may encourage young adults who tend to be "chronically disengaged from politics" to become more politically engaged (Baumgartner and Morris 2010, p. 25). As a result, such individuals may gain increased awareness and even developed a greater interest in political events. Additionally, information is now no longer produced and consumed without a filter. Political information on social networking sites is rarely received without being filtered through friends or followers, potentially further combining the impact of interpersonal networks and the media.

How people interact and move each other to participate has changed over the last decade with the continued growth of the Internet and social networking sites. Social networking sites have the potential to merge the effects of media and interpersonal networks on political participation, such that the impact of individual interpersonal networks are amplified online. Additionally, through smaller and more mobile technology, like cell phones, laptops, and tablets, individuals have the potential to be connected to their online social networks twenty-four hours a day. Access to online social

[10] As discussed in footnote 8, too many polarizing posts might result in users taking dissociative action (Sibona and Walczak 2011; Sibona 2014). Similarly, negative reaction response to a user's post also increases the likelihood of a user taking these dissociative actions (Fix 2013). However, there may still exist the potential of nonprofit groups to, once the get in the online network of a sympathetic user, to expand to other users through network, even if (perhaps especially if) these networks tend to be homogenous.

networks increases the likelihood that individuals will come in contact with political information as a by-product of their connection to online interpersonal networks or political ads on the periphery of their websites. In the end, social networking sites may allow the Internet to impact political participation in a way that combines the impact of traditional predictors, the media, and traditional interpersonal networks.

These changes did not go entirely unnoticed. The mainstream media spent a lot of time and energy covering the use of social media for collective protest activity in 2010 and 2011. Traditional media outlets often portrayed the relationship between social media and mobilization as sudden and revolutionary. However, the impact of social media on group mobilization was not as sudden as the events of 2010 and 2011 suggested. While popular commentators, and even some scholars, portrayed these events as evidence that social media had swiftly and unexpectedly undermined the traditional means of large-scale mobilization. In fact the Internet had been slowly eroding the predictive capacity of traditional frameworks of collective action for over a decade. Communication, sociology, and computer science scholars had been working since the late 1990s to reconceptualize the traditional social movement frameworks in the face of the evolution these media.

Nonprofits and Collective Action

Concerns of collective action, and the ways that social media may be undermining or reshaping them, are important for nonprofit groups. Nonprofits

are by their nature and mission involved collective action and thus mired in the problems that groups traditionally face in this respect. Collective actions are actions taken by two or more people in the pursuit of the same collective good and are typically framed as in terms of some shared public good, generally including both tangible goods and less tangible political goods (Marwell and Oliver, 1993). However, all groups face dilemmas when trying to mobilize people toward collective action. The ability of groups to overcome traditional problems presented by collective action efforts is fundamental to their success.

Traditionally, the collective action discussion centers on two key factors: the "free-rider problem" and the necessity of group organization (Olson, 1965). The free-rider problem is centered on the decision calculus of an individual to participate in a collective action. The free-rider problem is the essence of discrete decisions to contribute time or assets to the creation of collective goods instead of simply taking advantage of goods once they are achieved. Particularly early on in the life of groups, the free rider problem is cumbersome because the cost of participation and membership as high and the benefits of these actions are often very low (Olson, 1965).

One of the primary ways that groups traditionally overcome the free-rider problem is through group organization. Traditionally, hierarchical structures within organizations facilitate group growth, message, and success. One of the major functions of the formal organization of groups centers on locating, contacting, and recruiting appropriate participants. Similarly, formal

organization structures allow groups to keep people motivated despite initial losses, barriers, or complications (McAdam and Tarrow, 2001). Finally, the formal organization and social movement allows for the groups to incur the cost of communication and coordination tasks (Olson, 1965). These two factors present barriers against the use of collection action to attain public goods.

Furthermore, avenues for overcoming collective actions problems are important to nonprofit group success because the success of nonprofit groups is often dependent upon resources, traditionally groups small in number do not often achieve much unless they are resource rich. This means that there is a heavy incentive for nonprofit groups to find ways to overcome the free-rider problem and increase group membership in an effort to expand group resources. The fundamental way the literature posits groups use organization to overcome the free rider problem is to provide what are called selective incentives. Selective incentives are the primary mechanism whereby groups provide material resources for group members. However, incentives are often only offered to group members who are loyal to the group aims, goals, and actions (Olson, 1965). This means that, traditionally, groups are to be characterized by clearly bounded membership. Similarly, groups need a clear hierarchal organization to implement such incentives or punishment for members.

Yet, many of the fundamental traditional ways the groups overcome collective action problems are weakened by the introduction of social media.

Social media allow the boundaries of group membership to blur, create the ability of individuals to "self-start", create opportunities for a horizontal organization, and weaken the lines for selective incentives. While organization is clearly important under the traditional logic of collective action, Sidney Tarrow (2011) argues that groups need both formal centralized structures and autonomous components connected their issue. Yet, he does not explain how groups might get one or both of these components. Similarly, he does not explain how this centralized components and the autonomous components may work together towards the same goals. However, computer science and communication scholars have theorized the ways in which social media may provide for a new conceptualization of collective action.

Reconceptualizing Collective Action

Traditionally, scholars have focused on how groups can manage the free-rider problem and the need for hierarchical organizational structure. New technologies may reshape the way scholars conceptualize collective action by reframing the free–rider problem and the role of formal organizations. Initially, work in this area focused on showing that group mobilization was possible online. More recent work has described the various advantages and disadvantages of online collective action. Bimber et al (2005) argue that new avenues for communication may strain the explanatory capacity of the traditional collective action mechanism, if many of the central tenets are not already directly violated by changes facilitated by new communication

technologies. These authors contend that previous literature conceptualizes the free rider problem such that all contributions to collective action are costly and directly pursue some explicit collective goal or good. However, many recent cases of collective action reliant upon such new technologies are evidence that such a conceptualization is, at the very least, no longer universally true.

New information and communication technologies place a premium on information. Previous work on the impact of the Internet on collective action focused on the good of information sharing, often called “communality” (Fulk et al, 1996). “Communality” is a good derived from sharing information among the members of a specific group. It eliminates the need for people to predict in advance who may benefit from one's knowledge because information is shared among the group as a whole. In traditional systems of “communality”, the threat of free–riding is still viable and important. This system still requires that numerous people participate and be willing to share their information because no one subset of a group can provide all the necessary information. Initially, the Internet clearly required group contribution for the collection of necessary information. However, many newer platforms in communication technology may undercut this “communality” system described by previous authors.

In the current technological environment, individuals can contribute information with no knowledge of other’s intentions and with no intention of contributing or attaining a communal good. Bimber et al. (2005) term this

"second–order" communality. Under this system, information is both easily shared and easily located due to Internet search functions (i.e., Google). The ability of any individual to access information on the Internet means that the public-private dimension is permeable. Individuals outside of the group can often easily access what a member contributes to a group. Additionally, the Internet and other technological advances have decreased the costs of individual contribution and helped insured that contributions occur more frequently even by less motivated members or non-members. Finally, because information is easier to access, new technologies may better facilitate member recruitment (Bonchek, 1995). However, this system is not without problems.

The most fundamental problem is one that all Internet users have encountered, that of credibility. In systems of open source information, such as these, credibility and trust become potentially problematic (Lupia and Sin, 2003). The fact that information is now easily accessed by individuals outside the group in no way ensures that group membership will increase. Every piece of information on the Internet is competing for attention. People, by their very natures, have a limited capacity to absorb this information. However, the information effects literature shows that when people seek out information due to interest they tend to remember. Similarly, if they find a group of people who think in a similar manner as they do, they will want to continue to associate with them even if that association is largely online (Garrett, 2006).

The major contribution of the Internet seems to be that this technology can sustain interpersonal networks independent of common institutions. People can often discover other individuals who share their grievances or interest (Myers 1994). As a result, information communication technologies may be able to foster collective identities, which may help mobilize people along latent ties (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001). Additionally, information communication technologies may facilitate the dissemination of collective identities quicker than more traditional media (Della Porta and Mosca, 2005). The constant contact made possible by information communication technologies means that the logic of collective action often occurs not discreetly but in the context of common, constant, and continual interaction. Decisions are often made by negotiation in communicative and informational online environments. This means the decision to participate can be reconceptualized from previous collective action discussions (Bimber et al, 2005). Information communication technologies can move the decisions of individuals to participate from binary cost-benefit decisions to the decision to participate in the discussion that moves from the private to the public domain.

Well-structured existing groups can adapt to the new media environment relatively easily adopting various aspects of new information communication technologies to their advantage. However, as new nonprofit groups emerge they develop around information communication technologies that may further strain the traditional collective action discussion. Traditional theory posits that

the organizational structures requisite for high-functioning, high-capacity social movements are threefold. First, easily identifiable membership, members must be distinct from non-members to facilitate the selective incentives mechanism. Second, organizational capacity provides a means of communicating that members, on their own, cannot achieve. Third, the nonprofit group organization provides a means of coordinating, integrating, and synchronizing the contributions of disparate members (Walker, 1991). However, the rise of decentralized media and the increased ability for individual, instant personal communication means that less organized, less centralized groups are able to do these things as well. This means the need for identifiable boundaries and rules of leadership are greatly reduced. This also entails a lower level of individual commitment necessary for nonprofit groups to operate effectively. Groups now use information communication technologies in such different ways such that one group often does not look much like the next. Groups are often non-reproducible existing only as long as they are concentrated and lacking any real means of formal hierarchical or an organization (Bimber et al, 2005). However, the benefit of such organizations is that they are quick to mobilize their members and they are easy to coordinate fairly quickly.

The rise of new information communication technologies and decentralized media also has other effects. The rise of decentralized media also means the boundaries between public and private are much more porous than they had been previously portrayed (Bimber et al, 2005). This means that

individuals are required to make less complicated calculations when deciding whether to cross from the public to the private domain. Additionally, decentralized media also allows for nonprofit groups to produce collective action even though the members may be widely dispersed.

The fundamental conclusion of this brief survey of the literature is that the fact that traditional collective action mechanisms cannot fully explain current collective action processes. By reconceptualizing collective action to include those instances when public *attention* is focused on the public good, it provides a broader more thorough understanding of how collective action works in the contemporary media environment. The impact of decentralized media on nonprofit collective action can be summarized by having four fundamental effects: First, social media build horizontal rather than vertical ties and increases the strength of connections among diverse members (Della Porta and Mosca, 2005; Juris 2004; Juris, 2005). Second, these media provide the perfect conditions to facilitate free and open exchange of information (Bennett, 2003; Juris, 2005). Alternative media allows for information exchanges that are at least initially free from intervention (Della Porta and Mosca, 2005; Juris 2005). Third, these media increase cooperation directly through democratic decision-makers (Warkentin, 2001; Juris, 2005). Fourth, and finally, these media allow individuals to self-direct networking paths (Juris, 2005).

Nonprofit Advocacy Online

Taking these two bodies of literature together provides a theoretical framework for looking at the way that social media may affect political participation. This can be further applied to nonprofit advocacy. Most nonprofit organizations have shown a willingness to rely on a variety of methods to achieve their goals—letting the characteristics of the situation dictate the tactic used (Baumgartner and Jones 1998). Social media provide an excellent resource for nonprofit groups. Mobilization at its most basic level requires that people first be aware of the problem and then identify the problem as important such that it leads to action (Waisbord 2001). Social media can provide a forum for citizens to learn about problems and about what other groups and individuals are doing to address these topics. Nonprofit groups also hope the popularity of social media will help them connect not only with the members but also with general supporters and people who have never heard of the organization (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). This may also present an avenue for groups to reach young individuals from age 18 to 24-years-old. Because politicians are so interested in this demographic, groups may be able to channel activity in this age group into effect leverage on politicians (Baumgartner and Morris 2011). Groups may also be able to channel social media support into financial support. While Facebook currently has the market cornered with its donation applications, the ability of other platforms to turnover

“friends” and “followers” to their organizations websites for donation may be a key mechanism for resource mobilization.

Many studies have focused on whether groups used technology and what platforms groups preferred. Obar, Zube, and Lampe (2011)found that most advocacy groups have a social media presence of some sort with larger groups employing individuals to maintain and update this presence and smaller groups relying on volunteers. The Obar, Zube, and Lampe study also found clear patterns of platform preferences. Most advocacy groups rely on Facebook and Twitter more so than other social media platforms (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). Many groups update key sites like Facebook and Twitter more than once a week. Blogs are also very popular but they are used less frequently and other platforms are used to promote the blog. While most organizations recognize the worth of even rough, YouTube cheaply produced videos, is used at most a handful of times each month (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). Whether groups are using this social media at all is an important question, but the fact that few studies have looked at efficacy limits what scholars say about the impact of social media on nonprofit advocacy. Studies examining how effective this technology is at achieving outcomes like informing, mobilizing, and engaging group members are needed. Only a handful of studies have begun to examine whether groups use social media effectively and even fewer on whether the public responds to such efforts.

Organization of this Study

There is an emerging literature on this topic but most studies focus on the prevalence of social media—whether advocacy groups use this technology at all—rather than how the media are being used and to what effect (Guo and Saxton 2013). This narrow focus has left many important and substantive questions about the relationship between social media and nonprofit groups unanswered.

In order to test the impact of nonprofit group social media use on user response, this project looks at the content of Facebook and Twitter posts by nonprofit groups. There are six chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of case selection and data collection, while Chapter 3 classifies and compares social media communications across Facebook and Twitter and Chapters 4 and 5 examine the impact of these communications of nonprofit groups online reach and user engagement. Then, Chapter 6 concludes the study by synthesizing findings and discussing implications for both theory and practitioners. Below is a more expansive overview of each of the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Case Selection and Data Collection

This chapter explains the case selection and data collection processes. This study uses both national and state-level groups working on the issue of gun rights and gun control. Focusing on one issue area and one type of nonprofit groups limits the generalizability. Gun rights and gun control groups

benefit from a constant, rather high level of public and media attention. This is not true for all groups. Thus how these groups use these media may not directly correlate to how groups from other issue area use these media. Additionally, these groups are membership organizations. They have traditionally relied on members and local organizations for grassroots mobilization. Other groups may not be as interested in mobilization toward action. While most nonprofit groups broadly do want to move followers to donate to causes and raise awareness of issues, they may not use social media to mobilize as frequently. However, despite the limitations of the generaliziablity, these groups make an interesting initial probe because it holds constant issue area and introduces the impact of resources. This chapter breaks down the sample, group descriptions, and social media usage. This chapter seeks to establish the foundation for subsequent analysis.

Chapter 3: Classifying Group Communication and Post Type

Of the handful of studies that have explored how nonprofit groups use social media, many rely on a typology proposed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012). This typology examines the communication type and theorizes that how groups communicate affects success and user response. However, the typology was developed by looking only at Twitter. To provide an additional test of this typology, it should be applied to groups preferred, and the world's largest social networking site: Facebook. Chapter 3 applies this typology to the sample

of gun control and gun rights groups social media usage—both Twitter and Facebook—to see if this typology holds.

Studies using the Lovejoy and Saxton typology have consistently found that most social media posts fall into the information category, with the second largest proportion of posts falling into the community category, and the fewest number posts falling into the action category. This chapter test the hypotheses that (1) this breakdown holds true for nonprofit groups for a single issue area on Twitter and (2) that this breakdown, which has never been applied to Facebook, will hold for Facebook as well.

These hypotheses are tested using Twitter and Facebook posts coded for the information-community-action typology. Results confirm the hypothesis that the distribution of posts holds for the Twitter. However, the second hypothesis is not supported as the distribution of posts across the information-community-action typology differs from what previous studies have found. This is an important finding because the authors contend not only that the proportionate breakdown of posts across the typology holds for Facebook, but that they can use Twitter as an effective proxy for Facebook.

Chapter 4: Group Reach

This chapter examines the reach of nonprofit groups on Facebook and Twitter. Using data coded from the information-community-action typology, Form 990 tax data, and organizational website information, this study examines the factors that affect a group's online reach. Online reach is defined

as the number of followers a group has on Facebook and Twitter. This study uses two sets three models (total followers, Facebook followers, and Twitter followers) to test the impact of a link to a social media profile on the group's webpage, group revenue, and either average number of posts per week or average number of post per week from each category of the information-community-action typology.

This section hypothesizes (1) increases in revenue will correspond to a larger reach, (2) increases in average number of posts per week will result in larger reach, and (3) increases in the average number of posts in the action category per week will result in larger reach. With respect to the first hypothesis, it is nor supported for overall reach or Facebook reach. However, the results of this analysis found that revenue has a significant and positive relationship to reach for Twitter only, but the magnitude of this relationship is so small that it is effectively meaningless. The second hypothesis was supported for Facebook but for no other models. Finally, the third hypothesis was supported with respect to group reach on Twitter.

Chapter 5: User Engagement

The science of why users like or favorite a post has become a big business in the realm of for-profit entities. Nonprofit groups have a similar incentive to understand what factors produce user response. Yet, very few studies have examined what the public responds to on social media. This is a fundamental and often overlooked component of understanding the way that

social media impact nonprofit advocacy. Using the information-community-action typology described in Chapter 3, this chapter uses two types of analysis to test the relationship between communication type and user engagement: OLS regression and group fixed effects models. Additionally, because it matters not just what groups say but how they say it, this analysis also includes post type—text, link, picture, and video. Engagement is measured as a count of user responses. The chapter hypothesizes (1) as posts move up the typology (from information to community to action) the level of engagement will increase and (2) visual posts will receive a higher level of engagement than non-visual posts.

Support for these hypotheses not only differ across engagement type (e.g., likes versus comments versus shares on Facebook). Overall, the results of the analysis show that users do not respond to similar stimuli in the same manner across platforms. With respect to individual posts, what groups say has a greater impact on Facebook while how groups communicate matters more for Twitter. For Facebook the first hypothesis is supported and the second was not. The analysis shows the inverse of this to be true on Twitter. When considering the average number of posts per week, communication type affects engagement on both Facebook and Twitter. For Facebook, visual media positively affects engagement. These differences across platforms again suggest that Facebook and Twitter should not be treated as identical platforms.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the project by tying together findings from the preceding chapters and suggesting avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Case Selection

There are numerous avenues one could pursue in examining how groups use social media. Most studies of nonprofit and social media examine the use of social media by the 100 largest nonprofits in the United States. It is understandable why such an approach would be appealing. Not only does this approach holds constant the impact of resources, other relevant features are also held relatively constant like dedicated social media staff, well-designed websites, and large number of stakeholders. However, resource variation may provide insight into other differences in use, strategy, and user engagement. Large nonprofit groups can afford to hire professional managers and strategy consultants. Focusing on large groups who have large followings, eliminates the ability to observe the impact of resources on online reach. Furthermore, findings extrapolated based on such data do not provide workable information for smaller groups helping to leverage inexpensive media. Additionally, these groups, while similar in size and resources, come from a variety of issue areas, potentially introducing unaccounted for variation. Focusing on groups of all size that work on a single issue allows for control on group issue area ensuring that stimuli on that issue, such as a major new story, affect all groups. It does introduce the problem of resource disparity but that can be better accounted and controlled for than the disparity of issue area.

Issue Selection

There is perhaps no area of advocacy as well-populated as the issue of gun rights. While much of the mainstream media attention focuses on the National Rifle Association (NRA), there are dozens of advocacy groups on both sides of this issue on the national level alone. When added to the numerous groups that aim to raise awareness and lobby state governments, this issue area presents a lot of diversity in group size and resources.

Gun control makes an interesting policy area because though the traditional idea is that this is a policy area where the NRA has a stronghold, which is an incomplete picture. The NRA is more than simply a well-financed nonprofit organization. It is also an extensive grassroots organization that extends beyond its membership rolls. Examining the ways in which this expansive and established group, and by extension those working with and against them, have incorporated social media into their advocacy efforts allows for a more thorough examination of impact of the development of social media on actions of advocacy groups in American politics.

Gun Group Identification

The natural starting place for case identification was groups who lobbied at the national level, as these organizations are the most well-known and frequently discussed in major news outlets. State-level groups were identified through the use of Internet search engines. While not all states have groups active on this issue, some rely on the national organizations of the NRA or the

Brady Campaign Against Gun Violence to pour money into relevant issues on the state legislative agenda, most states had at least one group working on this issue. Initially, 173 guns rights and gun control groups were identified across the state and national level. To ensure that all groups were engaged in advocacy, group websites were examined. Any group that did not list the issue of gun rights or gun control primary cause or display an obvious act of activism on their webpage were eliminated from the working set of groups. Additionally, any groups that were not active during the preceding calendar year were also eliminated. The end result is 109 advocacy organizations.[11]

Group Characteristics

Groups included in the sample work on both the national and state-level to further their cause. Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of groups across the national and state-level. In the sample, there is a good mix of state and national advocacy groups. Additionally, this table shows the breakdown of groups according to their stance on the issue of gun rights. Of the 109 groups included in the analysis, a little more than sixty percent advocated for gun rights. This is not entirely surprising given that gun rights advocates tend to be more vocal, organized, and mobilized than gun control supporters. But that there is a healthy mix of gun rights and gun control is not enough on its own. It is also important for the analysis that groups be working on both sides of the issue on both the national and state-level.

[11] One group, the Pink Pistols of Seattle, does not have a webpage but does maintain an active Facebook page from which they advocate for gun rights.

TABLE 2.1: GROUP LEVEL AND STANCE

	Number	Percent
	Level	
National	34	31.2%
State	75	68.8%
	Stance	
Gun Control	42	38.5%
Gun Rights	67	61.5%
N:109	Source: Group Webpages	

Table 2.2 shows there is a healthy balance of groups working on both sides of the issue on all levels. On the national level, groups were well balanced with an even number of groups on each side of the issue, yet because not every state had groups working on both sides of the issues the ratio of gun control to gun rights groups was not as well balanced with nearly a two to one ratio in favor of gun rights groups. Again, this makes sense given there was a gun rights group in nearly every state. A limiting factor for gun control advocates is that the issue of gun control is incredibly fractured, particularly at the state-level. Some group advocate for a more strenuous form of gun control legislation than other gun control groups would like. This may make groups unwilling to compete for attention and citizens sympathetic to the issue of gun control more difficult to mobilize.

TABLE 2.2: CROSSTABULATION OF ISSUE STANCE AND GROUP LEVEL

	Gun Control	Gun Rights
National	15.5%	15.5%
State	22.9%	45.8%
N:109	Source: Group Webpages	

Groups' Social Media Usage

How have these groups used social media? Descriptive analysis of which platforms groups are using provides insight. To get at this, groups' websites were examined for links to any social media platforms. Additionally, if the social media pages were not linked a Google search was conducted to see if the group had the platforms of interest. Table 2.3 shows the number of groups maintaining social media profiles on a variety of Facebook is the most popular platform, with more groups maintaining profiles on Facebook than any other platform. This supports previous results from a survey of nonprofits asking groups to identify their preferred platforms, most groups regardless of size, preferred Facebook (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). While the study did not fully engage why groups preferred Facebook, that study also asked groups to rank platforms for their usefulness on advocacy. The results show that regardless of size, groups viewed Facebook as the most effective for civic engagement and collective action. Similarly, for this sample, the preference for Facebook remains. This remains true regardless of the level of government on which groups focus their advocacy.

TABLE 2.3: GROUP PRESENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Platform	Total Percent on Platform	Total Percent not on Platform	National Percent on Platform	National Percent not on Platform	State Percent on Platform	State Percent not on Platform
Twitter	63.3%	36.7%	62.5%	37.5%	48.6%	51.4%
Facebook	82.6%	17.4%	90.6%	9.4%	78.4%	21.6%
Tumblr	1.8%	98.2%	3.1%	96.9%	0%	100%
Blog	10.1%	89.9%	15.6%	84.4%	6.8%	93.2%
YouTube	46.8%	53.2%	53.1%	46.9%	34.4%	67.6%
Flickr	3.7%	96.3%	2.7%	97.3%	6.3%	93.7%
LinkedIn	2.7%	97.3%	3.1%	96.9%	1.4%	98.6%
Google+	3.7%	96.3%	6.3%	93.7%	2.7%	97.3%

Toal N:109
National N: 34
State N: 75

Source: Group Webpages; Google

Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Table 2.4 shows the breakdown of groups maintaining Facebook and Twitter profiles across issue stance and level. Nearly 80 percent of state-level groups at least had a Facebook page with most of those pages being actively maintained. At the national level, 90 percent of groups had a Facebook page—again with nearly all of those being actively maintained. This makes examining the reach of these groups on this platform particularly compelling. Facebook is the backbone of nonprofit social media presence. This is interesting because only a handful of studies have examined the way that nonprofit groups use social media (e.g., Saxton and Guo 2013 and Boretree and Seltzer 2007). That

so few studies have done more than examine whether groups use this platform is a major hole in the existing literature.

TABLE 2.4: CROSSTABULATION OF TWITTER AND FACEBOOK WITH GROUP LEVEL AND ISSUE STANCE

	Twitter	Facebook
	Level	
National	19.2%	27.5%
State	33%	55.0%
	Stance	
Gun Rights	29.4%	46.7%
Gun Control	22.9%	36.7%
N:109		Source: Group Webpages

Similarly, as one would expect, Twitter is the second most popular platform. This makes sense for two reasons. First, in January of 2013 Twitter became the fastest growing social media platform, surpassing Facebook for the first time in the growth of unique users posting to the site (McCue 2013). Though growth has since slowed and cannot match Facebook's 30 million plus users, it is still an increasingly popular platform across all demographics. The speed with which content on Twitter updates provides a great forum for groups to engage current events. Second, the findings of Obar, Zube, and Lampe (2011) suggest that advocacy groups recognize the potential of Twitter as it was consistently listed as the second most popular by advocacy groups when surveyed. The response of activity of gun rights and gun control nonprofit groups reflects these findings (See Table 2.4). Nearly half of state-level groups

have Twitter pages, with nearly all of these pages being actively updated. On the national level, 62.5 percent of groups have a Twitter page. One might expect this proportion to be a little higher given the potential advantages of Twitter over Facebook, particularly for national groups.

Twitter gives groups the ability to interact directly with various news outlets on issues concerning the group. Additionally, during the observation period from June 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013, there were several major gun-related national stories. Groups without a Twitter profile missed important opportunities to engage the media and constituents on events such as the Navy Yard Shooting, the anniversary of the Newtown Shooting, the shooting at Los Angeles International Airport, and several others. Missing this opportunity seems particularly limiting for gun control groups who typically have more difficultly getting traction. This may help explain why a greater percentage of national gun control advocacy groups have a Twitter than gun rights advocacy groups.

There are two other platforms of note. First, the use of blogs by gun groups is counter-intuitive. While in Obar, Zube, and Lampe's (2011) study, advocacy group administrators consistently listed blogs as a preferred platform; yet, blogs are rarely employed by gun groups. Only 11 of 109 groups examined had a blog on their website—Table 2.5 shows the breakdown of groups maintaining blogs either on their group website or on a blog sharing website (e.g., Blogger). Blogs can be a powerful tool for advocacy. Blogs are

an unadulterated way for the nonprofit groups to explain their message in a long format that is not often available on other platforms. Furthermore, particularly for Twitter, the use of blogs may provide groups a place for long-form expression that can be linked to via Twitter. Additionally, the use of a comment section can create an interactive discussion to create a dialectic feedback loop between group administration and supporters. Yang and Kang (2009) found that in the for-profit sector blogs create positive associations with the organization and increase the likelihood that followers would spread information about the groups via word of mouth. The neglect of this platform by the groups examined is somewhat puzzling.

TABLE 2.5: CROSSTABULATION OF GROUP LEVEL AND BLOG

	Had A Blog	Did Not Have a Blog
National	17.6%	82.4%
State	6.7%	93.3%
N:109	Source: Group Webpages	

Second, YouTube was the third most frequently used social media platform among gun control and rights advocacy groups. Table 2.6 shows that about 30 percent of state groups have a YouTube page, while just over half of national groups have a YouTube profile. Obar, Zube, and Lampe (2011) found that groups saw value in even crudely produced videos for building community and encouraging advocacy. Nonprofit groups miss an important opportunity because there is some evidence to suggest that visual stimuli may be more

successful at creating a relationship and generating responses. While not all of the videos had high production quality, many groups used the service to engage constituent questions and concerns directly as well as build a sense of community through things like slideshows of events or gun safety or hunting tips. Several of the groups seemed to have tapped into this potential. The type of videos on the YouTube page varied from informational spots and calls to advocacy to gun safety tips and critiques of “gun myths”. Most groups who have a YouTube make fairly regular use of it (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). This not only provides an opportunity for engaging existing group supporters but also provides additional avenues for engage new potential supporters. The tagging and related video structure of YouTube provide access to a nonprofit’s videos even to those who may not have been searching for them. This has led English, Sweetser, and Ancu (2011) to posit that “in some ways, YouTube can be seen as community television, where anyone can broadcast and anyone can watch all content at any time” (p. 735). Furthermore, these authors, in examining the effectiveness of YouTube videos on healthcare in reaching users, found that respondents found videos that appealed to ethos (trustworthiness) were the most credible. Nonprofit groups are missing opportunities to inform and engage by not taking advantage of YouTube.

TABLE 2.6: CROSSTABUATION OF GROUP LEVEL AND YOUTUBE USE

	Had YouTube	Did not Have YouTube
National	50%	50%
State	32%	68%
N:109	Source: Group Webpages	

Linking to Social Media

Before moving on to look at how groups are using social media to communicate with supporters, two more thing must be mentioned. Even the best, most engaging social media profiles do not help the group mobilize people or resources unless group supporters and potential supporters know where to find these profiles. In order to find groups' social media profiles, the first place to start is the group website. Most groups had their social media platforms clearly linked on the home page either by icons, hyperlinks, or embedded video. A handful of groups had links to their social media on their website but these links were not on their homepage making it more difficult to find. Most groups in this category had their social media profiles linked on the "About Us" or "Contact Us" pages. However, several groups did not have a link to their social media profiles anywhere on their website. A Google search was conducted to find any profiles maintained by the organization.[12] Table 2.7

[12] Search term for each platform not linked on groups' websites was "[Platform] [Group Name]". For example, "Twitter National Rifle Association".

shows the breakdown of where social media profile links could be found by level.

TABLE 2.7: CROSSTABULATION OF LINK ON HOMEPAGE BY LEVEL AND ISSUE STANCE

	Clearly Linked	Not Clearly Linked	Not Linked
		Level	
National	65.7%	9.4%	24.9%
State	62.6%	9.3%	28.1%
		Stance	
Gun Rights	60.6%	7.6%	31.8%
Gun Control	65.1%	11.6%	23.3%

N:109 Source: Group Webpages

Group Resources

Finally, because group size and capacity may theoretically have an impact on group reach, revenue data was collected from 990 Tax Forms.[13] Not all groups filed 990s, some because they may be too small for the IRS to require this filing, but some had lost their non-profit status for unspecified reasons. Of the 109 groups in the sample 58 groups had filed a 990 form since 2010. Another complicating factor is that because group size dictates that form groups are required to fill out, not all groups who do have form 990 data have all of the form 990 data that would be of theoretical interesting. For instance, groups that filed the 990-EZ did not have report the number of paid employees

[13] Form 990s are the IRS filing paper work required for all tax-exempt organizations that meet minimum revenue requirements.

or volunteers. Table 2.8 shows the breakdown of groups who had 990 data by both group level and group stance. There are a couple of clear patterns that emerge from this breakdown. First, no national groups filled out the 990-EZ form. This makes sense as groups operating at the national level are going tend to be larger, better funded, and more professional than the average state-level group. The second trend is that gun control groups are more than twice as likely to be required to fill out the full 990 form.

TABLE 2.8: CROSSTABULATION OF REVENUE DATA AND GROUP LEVEL AND ISSUE STANCE

	Form EZ	Full	PAC Data	No Data
		Level		
National	0	17	0	32
State	16	24	6	15
		Stance		
Gun Rights	10	22	5	30
Gun Control	6	19	1	17
N:109	Source: From 990s; State Campaign Disclosure Websites			

Many state-level groups clearly solicited funds and engaged in advocacy but either did not have to file a 990 form or chose to operate as a 501(c)(4). To ensure that the sample was not biased in favor of national level groups, state-level campaign finance data was examined. Not all states make this data available online, but for any group operating in a state where this data was available the most recent yearly revenue was used as proxy for group

capacity if no form 990 data was available.[14] This added six additional state-level cases to the analysis.

Discussion

Social media use by these groups as described above paints an interesting picture of nonprofit group social media usage. The preceding description shows that groups largely rely on Facebook and Twitter for social media communication. This is an understandable approach given that these two platforms are the two largest social media sites currently in use. However, the relative lack of presence on other sites may indicate that groups are missing unique opportunities that other platforms may provide. There are three main areas that highlight these potential missed opportunities. First, while half of national groups and 35 percent of state group have a dedicated YouTube page, this is missed opportunity for groups who are not on this platform. Second, further missed opportunities may come in the form of Instagram. While there are picture capacities on Facebook and Twitter, there are users unique to this platform that may be mobilized by nonprofit groups if they were on this platform.[15] Third, despite the finding of Obar, Zube, and Lampe (2011) that surveyed nonprofits find blogs useful for controlling group image and message, only ten percent of these groups had a blog. This represents another missed

[14] For states that maintained PAC data online, total revenue for state-level groups not filing form 990s was collected. Not all states maintain online access to these records.
[15] A 2015 PEW study found that among respondents who use Instagram 94 percent use Facebook and 52 percent use Twitter (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, and Madden 2015).

opportunity for groups as it is an environment in which long-form posts are not only accepted but expected. Additionally, some practitioners contend that blogging provides another avenue for individuals to find nonprofit groups through Google (Safko 2012). These three platforms represent missed opportunities for the nonprofit groups in the analysis.

However, the fact remains that Facebook and Twitter are the heart of these nonprofits' social media advocacy. Therefore, the analyses in subsequent chapters focus these two platforms. The discussion in this chapter focuses on whether groups are on these social media platforms, but there is more to know about nonprofit social media use. The following chapters look at how nonprofit groups use social media, the factors that affect reach, and how individuals engage nonprofits on social media.

Chapter 3: Classifying Group Communication and Post Type

Since the early days of America, citizens have banded together to leverage their voices and resources collectively to affect change. Modern nonprofits see themselves as the contemporary standard bearers for this type of advocacy. Nonprofits contribute to democratic governance by aiding citizens in amplifying their voices. As a result, the advocacy function of nonprofit organization is key "not only to organizations that engage primarily in external representational activities, but also service providers and other charitable organizations" (Guo and Saxton 2013, p. 59). Nonprofit groups employ a number of strategies to advocate for their cause. Berry (1977) identified and categorized four strategies used to advocate: litigation, embarrassment and confrontation, information, and constituent influence and pressure. Yet, these strategies can be employed through a variety of means.

Broadly, advocacy can be viewed as particular form of marketing communication. Marketing campaigns are usually concerned with selling a product and understanding market forces. Similarly, political advocacy is concerned with many of these same things. When applied specifically to the political market: promoting their service or cause and understanding consumer base for that service or cause. For this political marketing to translate to effective advocacy, groups have to plan, package, and promote their cause effectively (Harris and McGrath 2012). One of the key foundations of marketing is that those with something to sell must have access to potential consumers.

In terms of advocacy, this means that groups must not only have access to legislators but to citizens at large. In the past, groups have largely focused on traditional media to get their message out to the public. However, marketing is particularly effective when it is one-to-one (Harris and McGrath 2012). Scholars theorize that through the cultivation of a feeling of personal relationships, social media can help leverage this one-to-one marketing for nonprofit groups. Current scholarly study of the use of social media by nonprofit groups discusses the reasons why nonprofit groups might want to use these media for advocacy. Little research has been done on *how* groups use these media. In this chapter, I explore how nonprofit groups communicate on social media.

Literature Review

The evolution of new media has affected the way in which nonprofit groups leverage such media to engage followers for support and ultimately advocacy. During the first generation of the Internet (Web 1.0) groups leveraged the new and relatively inexpensive platforms for content publishing. Much of the study on the ways in which groups use new media has focused on the features of Web 1.0. Previous studies have examined how both for-profit and not-for-profit groups have used their websites and cultivated listservs to engage their supporters. There was initially a lot of hopeful discussion about the potential of Web 1.0 to create a dialogue between groups and their stakeholders. However, studies exploring the effectiveness with which groups have been able use this interactive capacity found that nonprofit groups have

been largely unable to effectively leverage the tools of Web 1.0 to create a deeper dialogue with a greater proportion of their stakeholders (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). There are several possible explanations as to why groups have been largely unable to effectively leverage the features of Web 1.0.

First, while these features were more interactive than traditional media, the focus of Web 1.0 was on content publishing. Avenues for response were fairly limited and as such only those who were already highly engaged were moved to participate. Second, this focuses on content publishing rendered websites rather static. Because this medium was slow moving, the ability to shape and engage user response action was similarly limited. Third, groups often hid, intentionally or unintentionally, access to listserv and newsletter sign up, making expanding reach even more difficult.

As the web developed, a new school of technology emerged and expanded. This second wave of technological development focused on the interactive nature features of new media, termed Web 2.0. Web 2.0 technologies broadly refer to the emergence of social media. It is important to be careful here as the term social media conveys more than the limited way in which the term is used in popular discussion. Social media are media that allow for greater interaction between users and creators (or among users). This wave of change is a substantive divergence from the type of platforms available in Web 1.0. As noted in Chapter 1, this is change is usually called Web 2.0. Among the first forms of social media were new interactive platforms

such as comment sections, wikis, and instant messaging. Other media evolutions such as HTML creators made content creation much easier. It is no longer expensive (in time or resources) to start, maintain, or update websites. Content began to change much more quickly.

Social media very swiftly evolved to include social networking sites. Social networking sites are what is generally meant in the popular usage of the term social media. Unlike the first iteration of social media, social networking sites provide groups access to a relatively stable pool of users from which they can draw support from current stakeholders and hope to engage new supporters. Social networking sites are a specific subset of social media that are characterized as online bounded communities in which users create unique profiles (public or semi-public). Within these communities, users can cultivate a list of other users to whom they are connected (or wish to be connected). Users can then view and interact with those connections (and those made by others) (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Individuals that are members of social networking sites differ from broader Internet users as the connections among users focus on common interests, locations, and goals (Chiu, Hsu and Wang 2006). These media present an array of useful opportunities that nonprofit groups can leverage for engagement and advocacy.

The networks maintained and created by new information technologies may help encourage participation because such networks “ease the uncertainty of mobilization” (Mcadam and Paulsen 1993, p. 644). However,

mobilization does not spring forth on its own. Digital networks, like interpersonal networks in the real world, require nurturing in order to produce engagement and mobilization. In the past scholars have contended that network ties can be nurtured through the creation of social capital. Many scholars theorize that social capital is necessary for mobilization and engagement. Robert Putnam (1995) contends that social capital helps produce the desire and willingness to act for mutual benefit.[16] Expanding on this theory social media need to be able to create social capital in order to produce engagement and advocacy. However, there is a significant amount of debate about whether the Internet can facilitate the creation of social capital.

Many scholars contend that the Internet not only fails to create social capital but also diminishes existing social capital (Putnam 2000). Others have followed suit contending that the Internet and other technologies reduce civic engagement (e.g., Whang 2001). The general argument is that technology is isolating. The Internet is consumed individually and used primarily for passive entertainment. The hyper-fragmentation of the Internet can create further divisions between segments of society by isolating groups with common beliefs, interests, and ideologies. However, such a picture misses two key

[16] Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (both the 1995 essay and 2000 book of the same name) contends that social capital, the relational networks among people, allows society and democratic government to function effectively. As is well known, Putnam also contends that social capital is on the decline in the United States as evidenced by a decline in public interactions among citizens through public service, volunteer organizations, and social organizations. Putnam attributes this in large measure to changes in communal history and the isolating effects of modern technology, including the Internet.

things. First, the Internet is a powerful and quick means of getting information out to interested parties for awareness, mobilization, and advocacy. The initial step toward the creation of social capital is awareness of issues and activity. The Internet can be an effective tool in achieving that step. Second, the Internet has evolved both quickly and substantially. To contend that static one-sided content creation-based Internet media of the late 1990s accurately and effectively describes the current world of the Internet is misguided at best. The ability of these media to engage other users and facilitate the creation of social capital is a different story than the older web technologies decried by Putnam and others.

The basic foundation of the theory of social capital is that social networks can produce resources (Coleman 1988 as cited in Warren, Sulaimana, and Jaafar 2015). It would seem that social media have the capacity to facilitate the exchanges within online networks necessary to produce both resources and a willingness for collaboration. As a result, more recent scholarship has argued that the Internet can supplement the creation of social capital (e.g., Lovejoy and Saxton 2012; Warrena, Sulaiman; and Jaafar 2014; Briones Kuch, Liu, and Jin 2010). Social media like Facebook can engage users quickly, connect individuals who share common interests and goals, and allow, even encourage, collaboration (Kaplan and Haenlien 2010). This social capital creation can help facilitate all levels of civic engagement from online discussion to offline protesting. As a result, social capital can be

seen in the expansion and growth of social media for addressing a variety of social problems (Warren, Sulaiman, and Jaafar 2014). Therefore, there are several ways nonprofit groups can leverage social media as a powerful tool for engagement and advocacy.

First, social media can be used to engage current supporters and recruit new ones. Social media give groups the opportunity to gather, combine, and exchange information (Warren, Sulaiman, Jaafar 2015). The interactive nature of this process can help create the feeling a personal relationship such that groups are naturally working to deepen existing relationships (Yang and Kang 2009; Briones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin 2010). The nature of social media have been shown to positively affect factors like trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Kellher and Miller 2006). The primary audiences for these activities are existing supporters including donors, volunteers, the community, and even the traditional media (Briones, Kuch, Liu and Jin 2010). Yet, by spreading awareness in within these online networks nonprofit groups have the potential to recruit new supporters.

But it is not just about making users aware of the nonprofit group and its cause, social media also offer the opportunity for nonprofits to engage stakeholders in a dialectic loop. In other words, social media have the potential to promote two-way conversation between the community and the group (Guo and Saxton 2013). When asked what the value of social media is for their advocacy group, leadership repeatedly emphasized that this media not only

allows but promotes this two-way communication (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). Facebook and Twitter's popularity and reach provide nonprofit groups with the ability to establish a type of communicative interaction that other websites do not facilitate. The comment, share and poll features of Facebook allow followers to respond to group content and groups to gauge reaction, interest, and sentiment of followers. Similarly, the @reply and Retweet functions of Twitter allow for the creation of a dialogue between nonprofit organizations and their community of followers, other organizations, and potential followers. These same set of features that allow groups to get information to followers but they also allow followers to get information to groups. These features allow organizations to create a dialectic loop more effectively than other, more traditional Internet technologies.

Kent and Taylor (1998) have identified five characteristics of an Internet-facilitated dialectic loop: "feedback loop", "utility of information", "conservation, return visits", and "ease of interface". More so than in static traditional Internet media, these principles are easily facilitated by groups on social media. Perhaps one of the most important features of this dialectic loop is that it gives users the opportunity to question the group and, importantly, it gives the group a chance to answer these questions directly, quickly and publicly (Borst 2014). Groups realize the potential of these media. When surveyed, many nonprofits said that they were on social media to communicate and interact with citizens

(Obar, Zube and Lampe 2011). But merely having social media profiles does not necessarily create nor encourage this dialectic loop.

The way in which these profiles are managed and employed can affect the efficacy with which groups are able to engage their supporters. Political scientists and communication scholars have begun to explore how nonprofits are using social media but much of the existing literature focuses on the prevalence of usage and few studies examine how groups use these media. However, the current literature does offer several key findings about why groups chose to employ these media. First, nonprofit organizations that engage in frequent lobbying may benefit from large online reach, this may be especially important as lobbyists consistently cite credibility as their primary concern (Harris and McGrath 2012). Effective use of social media may increase a group's online reach adding credibility to the activities of nonprofit groups. Second, groups have a vested interest in image control and social media may provide a way for nonprofits to have an active and consistent expression and maintenance of their public image (Seo, Kim and Yang 2009). Third, previous groups use social media for information sharing and community creation (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). In aid of this goal is the instantaneous nature of these media. Similarly, this can bring instantaneous awareness of new issues for groups allowing them to mobilize people and resources quickly (Obar, Zube and Lampe 2011). The Red Cross uses Twitter to learn about disasters "before they get the call" to more efficiently campaign for donations

and call for volunteers to react to disaster situations (Briones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin 2010). The quick, reactive potential of social media offer great leverage for nonprofit groups.

Yet, groups often misuse the potential of social media (Guo and Saxton 2013). An examination of post techniques found that the 100 largest nonprofit groups in the United States did not use Facebook to focus on distributing organizational news to followers and when groups did use Facebook to this end they rarely used multimedia or interactive capacity of this platform (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas 2009). The authors of that study similarly conclude "nonprofit organizations recognized the rapid expansion of the social networking phenomenon and they wanted to be on Facebook. However, they were not taking advantage of all the options the site had to offer their relationship cultivation efforts" (Waters, Burnett Lamm and Lucas 2009, p. 105). Yet, the full potential of these media rely on the ability of groups to engage followers online. The problem is that while we know whether groups are using these sites, scholars do not yet have a good sense of *how* organizations are using these media (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012).

While scholars have started to explore the features of social media that nonprofit groups are using, how these features can and are being used to reach and engage supporters is still understudied. Only few studies to date have looked at the content of communications on social media and those that do primarily focus on Twitter. Almost no studies have examined the content of

Facebook messages. Primarily due to the fact that Facebook is much more difficult to scrape that other social media platforms. Message level analysis is, therefore, going to be more costly for researchers in terms of resources and time. Twitter, on the other hand, has seen more analysis of the content of posts. It is much easier to scrape via self-coded application programming interfaces (APIs) or subscription based APIs like Export Tweet.[17] Initial forays into content analysis of posts on Twitter focused on broad usage rather than specific application to group mobilization. These studies have indicated that the potential of Twitter may be limited due to the self-serving nature of the platform (e.g., Naaman et al, 2010 and Java et al 2007). Yet, the findings of these studies are limited by the lack of organizational application (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). This lack of attention does not bode well for the scholarly understanding of the impact of these media on nonprofit support, reach, and engagement. Political marketing, like commercial marketing, requires careful thought about message content. The framing of a position or cause can contribute to group growth or fundamentally hamper group outreach (Harris and McGrath 2012). Therefore, it is important to know and understand which forms of organization communications that are most frequent, most effective, and best serve the organizational mission (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012).

[17] Export Tweet is an online application that allows users to "scrape" or collect the most recent 3,000 Tweets of users who maintain open profiles. This application creates a spreadsheet of these Tweets that collects and organizes the following data: time code, content of the Tweet, link to Tweet, number of Favorites, and number of Retweets.

Two more recent studies probe this question. Most relevant for the study of nonprofit group advocacy is Lovejoy and Saxton (2012). These authors, using the 100 largest nonprofit groups in the US, examined the content of group communications on Twitter. They identified three categories of communications important to advocacy groups: information, community, and action. This study furthers the research on social media and group advocacy in a number of ways. First, this study is among the first broad attempt to look at the content of communications over a given period of time. Second, previous research focused on group interviews, website examination, and theoretical discussion. These studies often frame dialogue between groups and supporters as the ultimate goal of using these media. Lovejoy and Saxton further this discussion by contending that there is actually a goal beyond community creation and dialogue. Many groups see creating attachment and dialogue as means towards their ultimate missional goal of advocacy and engagement. Thus Lovejoy and Saxton add a third, action category, to account for this higher goal. The second study to look at the content of posts on social media takes the Lovejoy and Saxton information-community-action typology and furthers its application (Guo and Saxton 2013).

The Information-Community-Action Typology

The information-community-action typology provides a mechanism for not only looking at the content of group posts but also effectively comparing group activity and post content with previous studies by Lovejoy and Saxton

(2012) and Guo and Saxton (2013). To fully understand the explanatory power of this typology, the categories need to be further explained.

Information

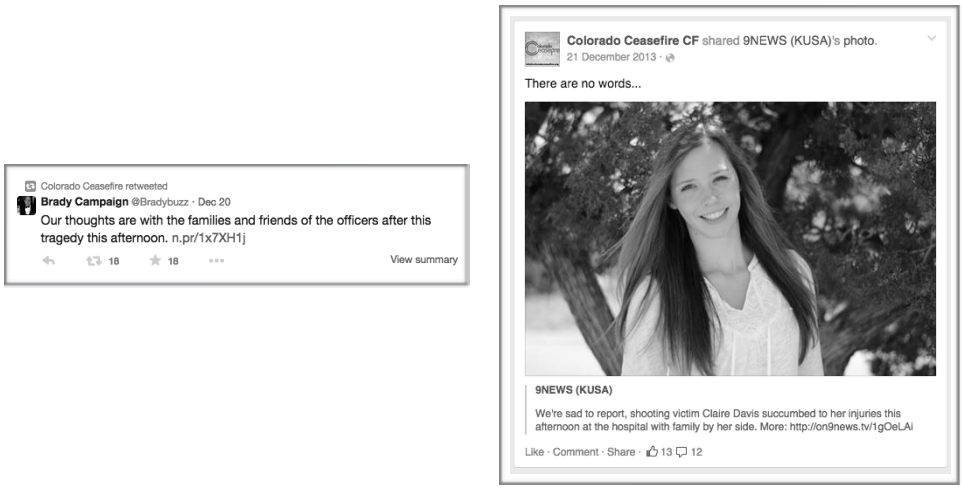
At the most basic level, nonprofit groups join social media because they want to raise awareness of for their groups' cause and actions and better inform with existing supporters. The goal of posts that fall into the information category is to provide followers and other interested parties with information about group activities or anything of political interest to group supporters (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). This information may include recaps from previous events, organizational news, facts about the group or cause, or relevant news stories (Guo and Saxton 2013). In many ways, this category of posts differs least from previous iterations of web-based technologies. Posts at this level tend to focus on one-way communication rather than dialogue. The emphasis of this category of posts is to get information out there rather than spur conversation with or action on the part of online followers. As a result, past studies have disparaged information based posts. However, such a devaluation misses the potential validity of these communications. While information based posts do not fully engage the capacity of social media, posts about history, vision, or objectives can "connect a broad array of stakeholders to its mission and help boost accountability and trust" (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012, p. 353). Similarly, information posts lay the groundwork for further use of the potential of social media for nonprofit advocacy.

Groups may use several means to spread information. First, standard posts may provide information to users through text, graphics or even links to the group webpage or relevant news stories. This is the most straight forward way that groups can use social media to get information out to their users, but it is by no means the only way. Second, groups may also use direct messages or private messages to provide necessary information or communication follow-ups. These are nearly impossible to get at as they are visible only to involved parties. Also, one might argue that these types of communications also serve to better further community rather than information. Third, groups may share followers posts. These can serve a variety of functions. Both Twitter and Facebook have formal mechanisms for sharing group content created by other users.

On Twitter, users can use the formal built-in retweet function that puts into all of the groups followers' timelines an exact visual representation of that follower's tweet (see Figure 3.1). This is very similar to the "share" function on Facebook, which also replicates other users posts in the newsfeeds of group followers. However, one of the key features that the share function this is absent from the retweet function is that groups can add their own additional comment or commentary to the content created by other users. Twitter's informal sharing mechanisms do allow for this but it is a much clunkier. On Twitter, groups can copy and post the tweet content into their own tweet indicated by an RT (short for retweet) or QT (short for quote tweet). Using

these informal mechanisms allows a group to add their own content to the content created by other users. Sharing what a follower has said can create a stronger, deeper relationship between the nonprofit group and the follower who's post they shared. This is because there is a shared understanding that what the follower said was important (Guo and Saxton 2013). However, sharing followers posts can in a broader sense be a means of disseminating information and content generated by users outside of the nonprofit group.

FIGURE 3.1: SHARING CONTENT ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER



On the left is a retweet using the integrated retweet function on Twitter. On the right is content shared on Facebook with group commentary above the content created by other users.

Source: Colorado Ceasefire Twitter Post from December 20, 2013;
Colorado Ceasefire Facebook Post from December 21, 2013

Fourth, hashtags are another means of spreading information on these platforms. While hashtags have longer history on Twitter, they can also be employed on Facebook. Hashtags serve to group information by topic indicated by the pound sign (#) following the topic with no spaces (e.g., #2012Election for the 2012 election, #STOU2015 for the 2015 State of the Union Address, #GRAMMYs2014 for the annual music awards show, et cetera). Clicking on a hashtag opens a dedicated timeline of posts including that tag. These have been used to group posts on abstract topics, meme discussion, television shows, conferences, places, and social and political events. These serve a couple of informational purposes. First, hashtags allow followers and non-followers alike to follow any conversation or group activity that includes these hashtags. Thus, hashtags can be powerful tools in public education and informational campaigns. This serves to not only allow groups to engage social media users, but also keep interested parties easily up to date. The use of hashtags by the group can provide a means of decentralized information campaigns by allowing information to follow through users as well as the group (Guo and Saxton 2013). This allows engagement of followers but also of other users who do not follow the groups but are in the digital social networks of nonprofit group social media followers. Second, hashtags can be particularly important for nonprofit groups because it allows information to be aggregated and disseminated quickly, which may be important during times of crisis or big advocacy pushes.

Community

The fundamental advantage of social media over more traditional Internet technologies is that social media offer the ability for simple but strong communicative relationship building (Guo and Saxton 2013). The goal of the posts that fall into the community category is to provide a source for interaction with the goal of cementing relationships between the group and followers (Guo and Saxton 2013). Community posts serve to not only deepen but also to sustain existing relationships within their networks of supporters. Community creation is important because it makes it easier for nonprofits to maintain a group of social media supporters from which the group can draw information, support, resources, and action.

There are a variety of ways group can see to do this through social media. There are two primary ways that groups can attempt to engage users in this way: community-building and dialogue (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). Community-building posts seek to reinforce ties within the community in an effort to build and strengthen these online networks. Such posts need not come with the expectation of creating conversation. Dialogue posts, on the other hand, hope to create interactive communication between nonprofits and the followers but also among their followers. The idea behind both subcategories is to create, and usually bank, social capital.

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) identify four common ways that groups use social media to create community. The first is giving recognition and thanks.

This type of communication would fall into the community-building subcategory. Here the goal is to acknowledge the contribution of followers on and offline activities. The second type of post is an acknowledgment of current and local events; also a community-building communication. Such posts can be an acknowledgment of things like the Fourth of July or local events like school activities. The goal here is to participate in the broader social discussion. The third type of post to respond to individuals communications to the groups' social media profiles. These posts fall into the dialogue subcategory. The goal here is to engage users individual in conversation. Similarly, the fourth and final type of community post identified by Lovejoy and Saxton is those that attempt to solicit a response. These posts may pose a question or simply ask for a response of some other kind such as a "caption this picture" or "tell us what you think". These, like responding to user posts, also serve a dialectic function.

Action

Nonprofit groups are fundamentally interested in advocacy. The ultimate purpose of putting time and resources into these platforms is so that groups can tap into these networks when trying to serve their broader missional goals. The focus is no longer on creating a dialogue or strictly getting information out there. Here the goal is to turn informed and engaged followers into activists and donors. Posts that fall into action category are trying to get followers to "do something". The mobilization can take the form of online or offline activity so long as groups aim move beyond information and dialectic features of these

media. This can range from attending events, calling one's elected officials, donating money, or even share a post (Guo and Saxton 2013).

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) identified seven broad types of posts that fall into the action category. The first is *donation appeal*. Groups spend time informing the public and building these online communities because they are hoping that they can tap these communities for resources. This does not always come in the form of trying to get followers to donate large sums of money. In fact, by and large, monetary donation solicitation focuses on smaller donations. Yet, the donation appeal can take a broader form as well. Groups may hope to increase funds by getting people to formally join the organization, thus getting their dues or joining fee. Second, and similarly, many groups produce *products* with their logo or interesting captions. Solicitations to buy these products are also forms of donation appeals. Third, posts that promote an *event* also fall into the action category. Despite the advent and increased capacity of digital advocacy, many groups still want strong presences at city council votes, state capitol protests, and conferences hosted by the organization. Posts that seek to encourage the groups' followers on social media to turn out to these events in the real world also fall into the action category. Fourth, groups are often looking for people to *help* manage group activities and events and may consider social media followers a fertile ground for *recruitment*. Posts that seek to recruit volunteers and employees also fall into the action category. Fifth, posts that ask users to *learn how to help* also fall

into the action category. Such posts ask followers to engage in a two-step process: (1) learn how to help by reading news story, blog, or website and(2) take that information and use it to help (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). Sixth, groups may have a vested interest in activity going on other websites. They may want to turn Facebook followers into Twitter followers (or vice versa). Or they may want their followers to participate in an activity on the websites of other organizations—such as vote in a poll, comment on a post, or sign a petition. Seventh, and perhaps most obviously, posts that ask users to do some sort of advocacy or lobbying also fall into the action category. Such posts may ask users to call their congressman or senator, get out and vote, or even share information to help reach a broader audience.

Pyramid of Usage

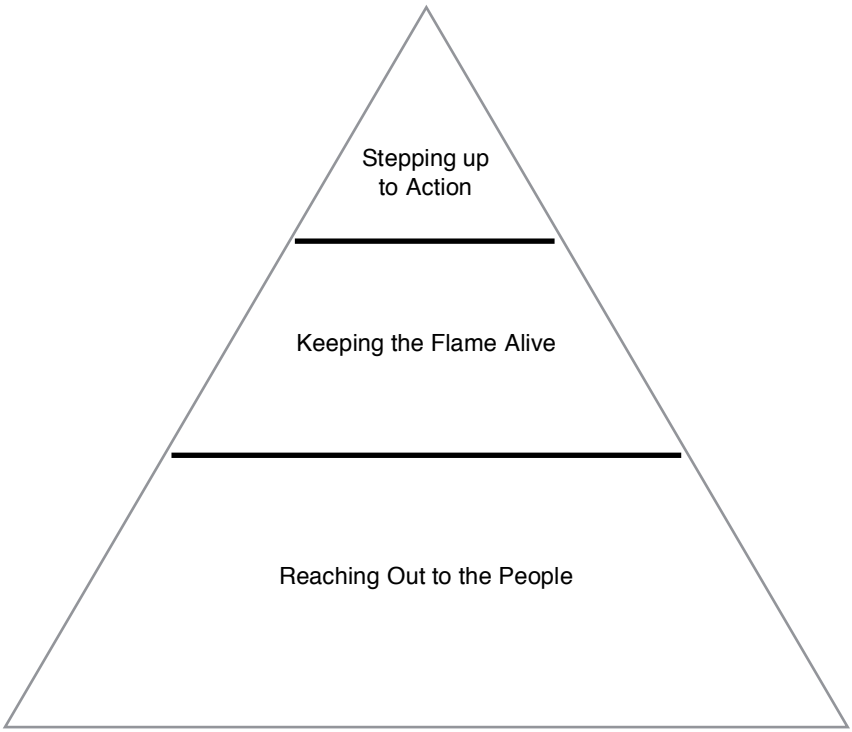
Effective social media advocacy cannot rely on any one of these categories on its own it must rely on posts from all three categories. Actions posts may be less effective if the group has not spent the time showing followers why the cause is important or creating social capital through community building. Despite the fact that advocacy is at the heart of social media goals for nonprofit groups, too many action posts might turn off users. Similarly, trying to build community without first (or also) informing the public may fall flat. Therefore, scholars have contended there is a three stage model for social media advocacy that is reflected in the pyramid of usage based on the information-community-action typology (Guo and Saxton 2013; Lovejoy and

Saxton 2012). Past studies found that groups put the most time into getting information out to the public, followed by community building, with the least amount of time spent on posts that encourage advocacy (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012; Guo and Saxton 2013).

From there, Guo and Saxton contended that this disparity of usage across categories represents a broader model of advocacy. The authors contend that the method of usage reflects a three-stage model of advocacy that can be summarized as "reaching out to people, keeping the flame alive, and stepping up to action" (Guo and Saxton 2013, p. 70). In this model, the first stage represents nonprofit groups attempts to raise awareness about their group and cause. Before nonprofit groups can employ their social media constituency for advocacy, groups need to create that constituency. Once there is a strong online following, nonprofit groups use the interactive features of social media to "keep alive the flame of passion among supporters" (Guo and Saxton 2013, p. 70). This helps lay the ground for future requests. Then when the need arises, nonprofit groups use social media to activate and mobilize that constituency for action. Though these stages are presented as hierarchical, the authors also acknowledge that all three stages may happen simultaneously. The communications categories are used in a fluid manner because groups are constantly looking to expand as well as maintain the engagement of their existing constituency. As a result, the model can be thought of as depicting the relationship with any subgroup of followers at any given time. Given the fact

that number of posts in each category as one moves up stages, social media advocacy can be thought of as a pyramid. Guo and Saxton (2013, p. 14) depict this pictorially (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: A Pyramid Model of Social Media-Based Advocacy



This three-stage model, along with the information-community-action typology, has only ever been applied to Twitter. By focusing only on Twitter, the authors limit the story their data are able to tell for a two reasons. First, when asked groups, identify Facebook as their social networking site of choice. Thus, ignoring Facebook leaves a huge hole in how scholars understand and apply this typology to social media. Second, Twitter may not be as representative of all social media as these authors claim. Facebook and

Twitter, though similar, have key differences that may provide a different mechanism for growth and an engagement within this platform.

Applying the Information-Community-Action Typology

The information-community-action typology provides a good entry into unpacking how groups use social media. However, the two existing studies that use this typology focus on large nonprofit groups with diverse missions, causes, and configurations. This is a good initial foray into the use of the information-community-action typology. However, there are several limitations to approaching the study in this way. First, by focusing on large groups, it eliminates the potential impact of resources but it also includes other potentially influential variance such as the effect of mission or policy focus. Thus, it may miss the differences between the ways in which different types of groups use social media to fulfill their goals. Second, these organizations are large; existing studies do not address whether smaller groups use social media in the same way. Therefore, to account for these limitations this study focuses on one issue area but includes groups of all sizes.

Furthermore, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and Guo and Saxton (2013) both use an observational unit of one-month. This a good observation period for an explanatory probe, but when examining advocacy groups the one-month observation period may miss important stimulus. A one-month period may not include stimuli to which groups may employ social media to react. Therefore, an important piece of the puzzle is missing. Finally, to try and fill out the picture

of how groups use social media, this study expands the application of the information-community-action typology to Facebook. This typology should be applicable to Facebook. First, the authors contend that Twitter is analogous to other social media. Therefore, according to the authors own logic, the information-community-action typology should apply to Facebook. Second, the information-community-action typology would seem to hold leverage for the ways in which groups seek to use Facebook. Ostensibly groups have similar, if not the same, goals: reach out to new supporters, engage existing supporters, and mobilize both groups for action as needed.

Hypotheses

Based on the previous analysis of the information-community-action typology and Twitter, two things will be expected. First H1: the proportion of posts on Twitter in each category of the information-community-action typology will mirror that found by Lovejoy and Saxton and Guo and Saxton. Second, H2: The proportion of posts in each category of the information-community-action typology will also mirror that found in previous studies on Facebook.

Data Collection and Coding

The information-community-action typology is explored by examining the ways in which gun rights and gun control groups used both Facebook and Twitter. Data were collected from June 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013 on both Facebook and Twitter. Facebook posts were collected by hand, while tweets

were collected using the online service Export Tweet.[18] Export Tweet collects the 3,000 most recent tweets from searched organizations. During this time period 40 groups posted to Twitter and 66 groups posted to Facebook. Over this time period, the groups posted to Facebook a combined total of 10,054 times and posted to Twitter a combined total of 14,440 times. These posts were coded using the Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) information-community-action typology.

Table 1.1 from Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), which is in Appendix 2, is representative of the framework used by not only Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) but also Guo and Saxton (2013), Waters and Saxton (2012) and was developed from Waters and Lord (2009). Using this coding process allows this work to speak directly to the findings from the previous literature.

Coding for the information-community-action typology was done by three different coders. Coders were given the table from Lovejoy and Saxton (2012). Coders were walked through the three overarching categories and 12 subcategories in a communal setting. Posts that seem to potentially serve two purposes were coding according to what seemed to be the posts' main purpose, the same system that was used in Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and subsequent studies. Then each coder independently coded the first 100 posts. Where there was discrepancy coders talked out rationale and collectively decided what would be the best code for that post. This was done until there

[18] See previous footnote for explanation of Export Tweet

was 100 percent agreement among all three coders. The next 500 posts were coded by all three coders independently and subjected to inter-coder reliability tests. The Choen's Kappa statistic was 0.83, indicating good reliability among coders. The remaining posts were split even among the three coders and completed independently.

Analysis and Results

Both Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and Guo and Saxton (2013) found that, when broken down along this typology, social media posts were mostly information posts, with the next largest group being community posts, and the small portion of posts falling into the action category.

Table 3.1 shows the breakdown of post by these groups on Twitter. These proportions provide support for the first hypothesis. This table shows that this proportionate breakdown of tweets matches the breakdown found by both previous applications of this typology. Most tweets fell into the information category and the fewest number of tweets fell into the action category. Despite the variety of group sizes and focus on one issue, nonprofit groups use Twitter in a consistent matter. However, the data do not tell the same story for Facebook.

TABLE 3.1: OVERALL INFORMATION COMMUNITY ACTION BREAKDOWN FOR TWITTER

Category	Percent of Total Posts
Information	69.5%
Community	20.4%
Action	10.1%
N: 14,440	Source: Group Twitter Posts

As previously stated, this typology has not been applied to Facebook. Lovejoy and Saxton contend

> "…that the categories are generalizable to other types of social media. For example, though Facebook has a larger range of functionality, Facebook status and tweets are so similar that many users, including several of the organizations in our study, send out the same messages on both outlets simultaneously" (2012, p. 23).

So one would expect, if this contention holds true, that Facebook posts would show a similar distribution over the groups in the information-community-action typology. However, to date this has not been tested.

Table 3.2 shows a breakdown of Facebook posts by nonprofit groups in this study within this typology. There are a couple of other things worth noting about these breakdowns. First, while the dialectic feature is a novel and potentially powerful tool for engagement within these media, it is not the focus of groups' social media strategy. Groups spend much more time informing their followers than engaging them in a dialogue or mobilizing them to do something. This is consistent with what Lovejoy and Saxton and Guo and Saxton contend

in their analyses. This is interesting is interesting because it holds for both Facebook and Twitter and it holds for the groups in this study over an observation period that was six times as long as those used in previous studies. Community posts are used frequently on both platforms. While interactivity is important, especially on Twitter, it may not the focus that previous studies tend to theorize it is. Second, groups, especially on Twitter, may be missing the potential of action posts. These posts can serve not only to get members to advocate on the part of nonprofit groups, as previous studies theorize, but it can also serve to expand group reaching by exposing the groups' followers' followers to group content, cause, and agenda.

TABLE 3.2: OVERALL INFORMATION COMMUNITY ACTION BREAKDOWN FOR FACEBOOK

Category	Percentage
Information	67.1%
Community	14.3%
Action	18.6%
N: 10,054	Source: Group Facebook Posts

This raises an important question about the contentions made in previous research, particularly Guo and Saxton. What does the fact that the Facebook distribution does not reaffirm the distribution within the information-community-action typology found in previous studies mean for the three-stage model of social media advocacy? First, the information-community-action typology seems to be based on both the previous studies and the findings

here, to be a potentially accurate depiction of the decision-making calculus for using Twitter. However, it seems, at least according to the logic of the application of the three-stage model that on Facebook nonprofit groups are less concerned with “keeping the flame alive”. Groups spend much less time building community on Facebook than they do on Twitter. In the sample under study here, groups sent 1,508 more community posts on Twitter than on Facebook. It seems, based on this sample, that the way these groups use Facebook differs substantially from the way they use Twitter at the very least. It may be that groups also think about Facebook much differently than Twitter. While this finding may not be generalizable to all groups, but it does provide empirical evidence that contradicts the broad-based assertions of previous studies.

But more than what group are saying may affect the success of nonprofit groups. *How* groups communicate may also affect success. To measure this, posts were coded into four basic categories: *text post, link post, picture post, and video post.* Text posts are those that include only text. Link posts contain a link to an external site. In both platforms links provide a preview of the site that is being linked to. Picture posts include pictures. These may be pictures of the group or its members or memes that the group chooses to share. Video posts are posts that include embedded video. These posts provide interactive media within the platform rather than linking to videos on other sites. It would be expected that the breakdown of post type would differ

across platform type for a couple of reasons. First, Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters creating and incentive to link to other pages to communicate effectively. Second, this 140 character limit constrains users forcing users to maximize their message. A picture post may use up to 22 of these characters ("How to Add Photos, Videos, and Links" 2015). Because pictures use a handful of these limited and valuable characters, users may choose to (or be forced to) avoid pictures. In other words picture posts "cost" more (that is, distract from message more so than a text or link to a longer story or post) on Twitter as they "spend" some of a limited number of characters.

For Facebook, most posts, regardless of communication type, were links (see Table 3.3). This could be links back to the groups websites, links to relevant news stories, or simply links to other miscellaneous sites. Additionally, most groups used links to share information rather than push for action on the part of followers. This is interesting, though not unexpected. This distribution also indicates that groups may not be using Facebook to push followers back to their organization website to build community or facilitate action. Also of note is how few posts were video posts. Obar, Zube, and Lampe (2011) found that groups recognize the value of videos but this does not appear to result in widespread integration on other social media platforms. The analysis in Chapter 2 showed that most groups did not maintain a YouTube page, but the breakdown in Table 3.3 indicates that groups are not making much use of video at all. This may be a missed opportunity for groups.

TABLE 3.3: CROSSTABULATION OF COMMUNICATION TYPE AND POST TYPE FOR FACEBOOK

	Information	Community	Action
Text	7.13%	2.26%	3.38%
Link	53.32%	5.56%	10.49%
Picture	6.39%	3.26%	4.55%
Video	0.30%	0.23%	0.16%

N: 10,054 Source: Group Facebook Posts

Table 3.4 shows a cross-tabulation of communication type and post type for Twitter. This shows a much greater reliance on link posts than Facebook, which again makes sense. Similarly, there seems to be a greater reliance on text posts on Twitter than on Facebook. On Twitter, groups have less space to work with due to character limitations so links are useful ways to push users to long-form posts. It is also worth noting that groups use even fewer pictures and videos than on Facebook. The lack of visual media may be detriment to effective use of Twitter for follower engagement. These differences are interesting but untested here. Later chapters will test the application of these breakdowns on group reach and user engagement.

TABLE 3.4: CROSSTABULATION OF COMMUNICATION TYPE AND POST TYPE FOR TWITTER

	Information	Community	Action
Text	9.43%	9.40%	1.52%
Link	57.18%	35.62%	7.20%
Picture	2.25%	1.27%	1.23%
Video	0.33%	0.33%	0.10%

N: 14,440 Source: Group Twitter Posts

Discussion and Conclusion

The above data suggest a couple of interesting findings. The most fundamental of which is that Facebook and Twitter provide the potential for cross-user pollination. Nonprofit groups tend to favor Facebook over Twitter. It is possible that the different patterns of social media use by nonprofit groups is accidental—that is groups are using these media impulsively without thought to post types or patterns. This, however, seems unlikely. For gun rights and gun control groups, advocacy is the cornerstone of their group's mission. It seems unlikely that such groups would take their mission so lightly as to have put no thought to how to leverage free media with somewhat captive audiences. So why do groups Twitter differently than they use Facebook? There are several potential reasons for these differing patterns of use.

First, information may have to compete differently for user attention on these two mediums. One may raise here the concern about the number of accounts followed by users as a factor in competition attention. However, the

numbers would suggest that groups are more likely to have to compete for attention, based sheerly numbers of accounts followed, on Facebook. The average user follows 102 accounts on Twitter and 338 on Facebook (Roberts 2013; Smith 2014). But this is not the only way in which groups may have to compete for attention. Twitter and Facebook newsfeeds work differently and may cause groups to think differently about these media. Comparatively, the Twitter newsfeed moves much more quickly, in many ways it moves nearly in real time. Twitter newsfeeds move in chronological order making older information harder to access. The “top stories” algorithm used by Facebook as its default news feed management system keeps certain stories in newsfeeds longer as the number of users interacting with that post increases. Groups may feel that one community post goes much further on Facebook than on Twitter.

Second, the community features of Facebook are more innate to the platform than on Twitter. The community is more visible on Facebook in a couple of ways. One, if users go to the group page they cannot only see how many other people follow the group but all view the profiles of those individuals, see how other users interact with other users, with the group, and with information posted by the group. Furthermore, the followers are easier to see and seem more personal on Facebook. These features are not easily replicated on Twitter. Two, viewing comments on group Facebook posts not only simple to do but easy to follow. Sub-conversations are easily segregated within the comments section making the flow much easier to follow. This is not

the case on Twitter. @-replies are difficult to amass together into intelligible conversation. The comment feature of Twitter makes it effective at one-to-one communication, but much harder for the creation and maintenance of a broader community.

Three, community may not need to be nurtured in the same way on Facebook as it does on Twitter because group discussion is not as easily highjacked by non-supportive social media users on Facebook. Twitter's more open nature may make Twitter discussion, especially those using hashtags, more susceptible to negative attention and trolling. The fact that much of the discussion groups wish to facilitate happens on their page may provide a little shielding from the broader Facebook community—like having a public meeting in a private room; people who are interested will see out the community but people who are not as interested have the opportunity to join but may choose not to due to norms of the community. Community building on Facebook may benefit from a type of path dependency. Facebook was originally conceived of as a platform to digitally mirror real world communities. Norms of Facebook usage may have developed so there is an implicit understanding of the nature of community and community building on Facebook. Conversely, Twitter did not develop with a heavy emphasis on community networking. The underlying structure that allows groups to facilitate discussion or community on their page does not have a clear mechanism for creating these subgroups. Twitter does have a lists function that allow users to create lists of profiles related on a given

theme (or merely that they want to single out). Users can thing see sub-feed of posts from only those profiles. This feature does not receive a lot of attention and may not be frequently used. Rather users employ hashtags for conversation. This makes Twitter more akin to having a discussion in a public square. Anyone who happens to pass by may join the conversation—constructively by adding thoughtful comments or disruptively by shouting at participants. As a result of these structural differences, groups using Twitter may need to spend more Tweets building community because community is simply harder to build on Twitter than it is on Facebook.

The fourth way that information faces different obstacles is that individuals in charge of social media and messaging for these groups do not view these platforms as undifferentiated, and possibly do not consider the interactivity and interconnectivity of the platforms when making decisions on the use of these new media platforms on behalf of their organizations.

Third, the number of action posts on Facebook may be larger because groups are more reliant on the action for followers to spread their message from user to user. Both the open nature of and culture of hashtags on Twitter make it easier to information posts to increase group reach, as theorized by Guo and Saxton in their three stage model. However, Facebook does not work in the same way. On Facebook, nonprofit groups are more reliant on sharing to expand the current constituency. As a result, the number of action requests may be larger than the number of community requests. Therefore, it is not

unreasonable to suppose that groups are aware of this and are as a result more likely to ask users to share their posts.

Fourth, the difference between post types on Twitter and Facebook may also contribute to different strategies of use. Facebook allows a much greater variety of post types. Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters. This 140 character limit includes characters that are part of hyperlinks, links to pictures, and to videos. This can be limiting and may alter the way groups choose to employ these platforms. Groups may feel they can built community in fewer posts because groups need fewer posts to say more on Facebook. What might take two or three tweets to get across can be communicated in one post on Facebook. The nature of these platforms ought to change the strategy of using them for more different from previously theorized by existing research.

All of these factors taken together provide a picture of Facebook usage that is starkly different that the usage of Twitter. The calculus of Facebook advocacy differs substantially from the three-stage model proposed by Guo and Saxton. This merits further study.

There is more to the story of social media advocacy than that which has been told in the existing research relying on this typology. There is more to know that whether groups are using social media, a question that has dominated existing research. While Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and Guo and Saxton (2013) take an important next step toward painting a fuller picture of social media advocacy, important pieces of the puzzle are still missing. This

study has aimed to help put together some of the remaining pieces by further examining how groups use social media. This study takes a different cut at the way groups use Twitter by focusing on a narrow policy area, with groups of varying size, and over a longer period of time. But more than that, this study aims to further the story by adding Facebook to the conversation. Despite being treated as similar in the past, this study finds that social media usage varies across these platforms.

It is clear that groups do not use Facebook and Twitter in the same way. From the number of times that Facebook and Twitter are treated as similar, if not the same, in the literature, it is also fairly clear that groups do not think of these media in the same way that scholars do. Counter to previous contentions from existing literature, on Facebook nonprofit groups seem less concerned with keeping existing followers through explicit community building. Given that existing research has focused on Twitter, and that the previous findings hold for the Twitter sample, it may not be that scholars are entirely wrong but rather that Facebook is simply different.

Perhaps these findings suggest that it scholars should be wary of treating social media as a monolithic entity. The fact that groups use these platforms differently seems to indicate that nonprofit groups see different values in the platforms and use different strategies to make the most of these potentially powerful media. There is still room for scholars to build a better understanding of how these media are used if they stop using one platform as

a proxy for the other. The reasons for doing so are superficial but understandable. Twitter is much easier to access and collect. Facebook data, other the other hand, is more time consuming to collect and analyze. But simply because they are both popular social networking sites does not mean that scholars should mistake these platforms as identical. Furthermore, as the scholarly community strives to provide a better understanding of how groups use social media, it may become easier to say more about the impact of these patterns of usage have on other matters of concern such as nonprofit reach on these platforms and how usage affects follower engagement in these online communities.

Chapter 4: Group Reach

Over the past two decades, the Internet has evolved to make content production and interaction much easier. Social media, particularly social networking sites, allow users to interact with and engage one another. These media allowed individuals to not only maintain relationships over space but also create them. It did not take long for these media to be used for activism. Facebook was often used to mobilize campus activism, but its original, extremely closed nature limited its wider impact.[19] Twitter, which emerged in 2006 was used almost immediately for an awareness campaign in response to natural disasters in California (Glaser 2007) and soon spread to activism such as the Iran Twitter Revolution that led to the Iranian government shutting down access to the site (Grossman 2009). Iran served as a model for the potential activist nature of Twitter for several subsequent movements including the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, UKUncut, and Kony 2012 (Apps 2010). In all of these instances, social media was a tool and mechanism for grassroots activism. However, social media also provide leverage for activism from groups that have a more traditional organization scheme and longer term goals.

Nonprofits have shown a willingness to use these media in the past: the Red Cross has used social media to raise awareness and funds for disasters; smaller, more locally focused nonprofits have used these media for collaboration; and nonprofits of all varieties have used these media to recruit

[19] In its original incarnation, Facebook was open only to college students attending participating universities.

new members. Past research on how groups use these media has been largely descriptive in nature. As a result, we know very little about how groups leverage these media.

The ability of nonprofit groups to use social media to generate awareness, raise money, and urge advocacy is largely dependent upon the extent of their reach on these platforms. Yet, there is little in the literature that examines the online reach of nonprofit groups. This chapter addresses the question: how do nonprofit groups broaden their reach on social media?

Literature Review

Before addressing the broader reach question, it is important to establish how previous work have examined the relationship between nonprofits and social media in the past. At the most basic level, groups have shown a willingness to rely on a variety of methods to achieve their goals—letting the characteristics of the situation dictate the tactic used (Baumgartner and Jones 1998).

It is easy to see that for traditional non-profits, social media may provide an excellent resource. There are a number of compelling reasons why nonprofit groups would want to have an active presence on social media, particularly social networking sites. The first obstacle to effective advocacy is engaging those who support their cause. Social media may provide a mechanism for engaging members of the organization. By providing a platform for updates, sharing news stories, and urging advocacy, social media may help

keep supporters actively contributing to the cause of the group. Yet, some scholars have expressed doubt as to whether social media can effectively engage users or whether communications become noise, lost in the sea of newsfeeds. Some studies of computer-mediated communication support this doubt as face-to-face communication may be more effective than the online communication supported by social networking sites. Studies have shown that computer-mediated communications leave room or misinterpretation but more important for the topic at hand it can slow down the creation of relationships (Bordia 1997). But in the face of these concerns, advocacy groups flock to social media to engage users, spread awareness, and stir advocacy. So given these real and valid limitations, what explains the strong presence of nonprofit groups on social media?

The likely answer is straightforward. First, social media are attractive because they provide a level access to the opposition. Previous studies of lobbying organizations concluded that groups have few means of communication across ideological divides within a given policy area. Therefore, such studies conclude that groups may have little idea of what the other side is doing. However, this finding pre-dates massive expansions and advancements of the internet (Djupe and Conger 2011). Active social media presence among advocacy groups helps groups become aware of what opposition groups are doing. Second, despite the potential limitations of computer-mediated communication, groups of all varieties want to be on social media because that

is where the people are. It should follow then, that with appropriate nurturing, social media can be an effective and powerful means of outreach. While face-to-face communication may be more effective, regular use of social media can deepen existing relationships (Birones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin 2010). This is something that groups recognize. When surveyed, advocacy groups have stated that even considering the limitations of computer-mediated communication, social media allow groups to present their organization in such a way that it can continue to excite and engage existing members (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). Groups can do this by thorough the reflexive nature of social media that may offer a low cost dialectic way for members and supporters of nonprofit groups to help identify issues to which they feel groups should give their time or effort, whether or not the mainstream media cover them. Similarly, these dialectic features may allow nonprofit group leadership and supporters to work together on how to effectively advocate for the cause (Guo and Saxton 2013; Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011).

Yet, the cross-user possibilities of these media may make it possible for groups to add new members and supporters to their cause. Advocacy groups also hope the popularity of social media will help them connect not only with the members but also with general supporters and people who have never heard of the organization (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). Attracting the attention of supporters and people who have never heard of the group may provide a mechanism for social media to produce new members of advocacy

groups. Because individuals may come to be aware of advocacy online via friends—real world friendships that are supplemented and reinforced online—it may also be possible to create new relationships online as well though this mechanism.

Social media are connected in the zeitgeist with young individuals. One of the reasons groups are focused on this technology is because of the potential to attract young people to the cause. An active presence on these platforms may provide an avenue for groups to get their message in front of individuals aged from 18 to 24-years-old. This may be particularly useful for advocacy groups because while this demographic is at best generally reluctant to engage in politics via traditional methods, it has shown a greater willingness to engage politically in less traditional ways. Furthermore, because politicians are so interested in this demographic, groups may be able to channel activity in this age group into effectively leverage on politicians (Baumgartner and Morris 2010).

The ability and capacity of these media to engage and mobilize is not a simple by-product of use. Nonprofit groups need to understand that these media require nurturing to be fully effective. How groups perceive the capacity and effectiveness of these media affect their ability to engage and mobilize users. If groups perceive these media as necessary tools in the work of advocacy, that will transfer to their online presence and may cause users to take their profile and communications more seriously. But the question remains

as to whether expanding reach is merely a hope of groups when they engage these media or is this a realistic possibility.

Social media clearly have the capacity, through effective use, to engage new supporters. But the capacity to expand reach may not be identical across platforms. Both Facebook and Twitter provide the potential for cross-user pollination. Nonprofits tend to favor Facebook over Twitter (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). This is an odd contention for several reasons. Facebook provides some interesting features that might lead groups to the conclusion it is the most effective platform for advocacy groups. Facebook's groups profile pages are maintained as open profiles allowing Facebook users to access, follow, and comment on the activities of the group. Additionally, the "share" feature on Facebook allows followers to share group updates with their "friends" on the site, regardless of whether their "friends" are also followers of the group. Finally, Facebook has an in-platform donation application that allows users to donate to the group without leaving the platform. Other social media sites do not currently have any features that match the functionality and ease of Facebook's donate application. These are important features of Facebook that groups may find useful and feel are effective. However, the semi-closed nature of Facebook, the fact that most individual users maintain closed profiles, would seem to limit the potential of social media to increase reach in ways that other platforms do not.

The open nature of Twitter would seem to allow groups to more easily reach users who do not follow the group. The functionality of Twitter may allow groups to reach out to non-followers without relying on followers sharing or retweeting their information. The hashtag feature of Twitter provides functionality for groups that have the potential to attract the attention of users who may be supportive but do not have friends or followers in common with the group. Facebook added a similar hashtag feature after the collection of data used for this study. At the time of writing, hashtags are much less a part of the culture of that platform and is thus used less frequently. Additionally, the trending topics feature of Twitter may provide an additional avenue to awareness of the group or group activities for users who do not follow the group as well as mainstream, traditional media.

Groups perceive the potential of these media. Nonprofit groups consistently rank these platforms as the most useful for civic engagement, which is defined as informing citizens about important issues to the group (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). They also identify Facebook and Twitter as the most useful platforms for informing citizens about dates and events. But most importantly, groups recognize that by using these platforms for the above tasks, Facebook and Twitter have the capacity to mobilize people to advocacy.

Yet, many popular commenters on the relationship between social media and activism claim that it creates a ‘slactivism’ rather than real activism. People are more than willing to pass on messages or like Facebook posts but

when it comes to taking that activism into the real world, this technology is 'unproven' (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011). While the use of these media by social movements such as student protests and the Occupy Wall Street movement has been the focus of the mass media coverage another potential mechanism by which this technology can be useful is by creating avenues for "micromobilization" that is connected to the broader structures of organized groups (Bekkers, Beurders, Edwards, Moody 2011). Micromobilization occurs when "individuals and small groups mobilize other individuals and small groups often using communications networks to achieve the type of political mobilization traditionally owned by organizations" (Bekkers, Beurders, Edwards, Moody 2011). Some scholars, writing in the pre-Internet era, contend that micromobilization would only be successful in connection with organized groups directing and focusing the broader efforts of this action (e.g., McAdam 1988). The evolution of social media and social networking sites allow individuals to self-organize around causes by collaborating with each other (Birones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin 2010). In other words, these media made micromobilization much easier but success has not necessarily come with this expansion. Micromobilization without connecting to broader groups has quickly become unfocused, unable to negotiate with willing parties because there are no organizational leaders, and—in most cases—quickly tapered off. By connecting the micromobilization mechanism of social media to broader group structures, it combines the strengths of social media—the speed and dialectic

nature, for instance, with clear organizational goals and hierarchy. These underlying structures can increase reach.

One final reason that groups may choose to use social media is that it helps level the media playing field. Access to traditional media has been gated by gatekeepers and cost. At a most basic level, social media can allow groups to bypass traditional media altogether. Some organizations feel that social media can provide a public relations campaign that decreases their group's reliance on traditional mass media (Seo, Kim, and Yang 2009). Social media provide an avenue for groups to get their message out to followers without relying on the traditional news. Groups can inform and engage their supporters for no or relatively little cost by employing the tools available through social networking sites. But it would be a mischaracterization to say that these media eliminated the need for traditional media altogether. Traditional media is still, at the very least, a very powerful megaphone that can amplify the impact of social ned (Bekkers, Burdens, Edwards, and Moody 2011). Furthermore, the mass media play in important role by casting the light of legitimacy on a group, particularly in the eyes of those who know nothing or little about a group's cause or action (Hultman and Nordeman 2012).

But social media remain important because they can provide an avenue to coverage by traditional media. By generating attention and activism both within social media platforms and in the offline world, groups may be able to use these free or inexpensive media to leverage their way into mainstream

media coverage. Furthermore, social media can offer groups new ways to develop a relationship with traditional mass media (Birones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin 2010). News organizations have grown accustomed to using social media, particularly Twitter, as a source of information. As these media continue to gain traction within traditional media communities, the potential for groups to use those media to create and maintain relationships with mass media only grows. Additionally, mass media attention may help provide stability to the group and its issue if the social media agenda and the mass media agenda line up (Guo and Saxton 2013).

Yet, simply because groups see the potential of these media as a whole, or even the different advantages of one popular social networking site over another, does not mean that all groups can and do employ these media well or at all. The Obar, Zube, and Lampe survey shows that capacity and resources can impact the decision calculus groups use when employing these media. So what impact does group capacity have on social media presence and usage?

There are two modes of thinking about the relationship between capacity and social media that emerge from even a brief survey of the literature. The dominant mode of thinking about the impact of group capacity is quite simply that traditional resources still matter in the world of social media. There are numerous studies that theorize a strong relationship between technology and group size. Smaller organizations tend to be comparatively

resource-poor making things like computers, email, and websites comparatively more expensive. Smaller advocacy groups, therefore, are thought to be less likely to have the time and resources to required to maintain an effective Facebook or Twitter profile. Social media sites are expected to be updated much more frequently than traditional websites. The time and resource cost of this may be in and of itself a disincentive to adopt social media as a poorly maintained profile may turn off prospective supporters (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas 2009). Even if groups can rely on volunteers rather than paid staff to maintain an active presence on social media platforms, this may open the door to additional problems unique to smaller groups. Many advocacy groups, especially smaller groups, find that it is difficult control the face of their organizations on social media as there may be too many people trying to represent the organization (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011).

Furthermore, just because social media can give the voice of small or grassroots organizations a microphone does not mean that the resulting receptions by social media users do not have to be correct or neutral (Holtman and Nordeman 2012). Some groups have also raised concerns about using new media for public relations because of issues like reliability, message control, and the breadth of audiences (Seo, Kim, and Yang 2009). When asked, some NGOs expressed concern that social media communications could be easily modified and that modifications could easily go viral while attached to their organization's name (Seo, Kim, and Yang 2009). Larger

groups may not only have better resources to combat these complications, but a more professionalized social media staff dedicated to their online presence. Therefore, size and resources may be a key factor in the decision calculus used by groups when choosing to employee social media.

A second and much smaller stream of literature contends that social media are a democratizing force. Nah and Saxton (2012) studied the impact of size on social media usage and found no relationship between group size and a social media presence. The authors thus contend that this finding " . . . suggests there might be something different about social media that has 'freed' nonprofits from some of the capacity and environmental constraints that have hampered them in the past . . ." (p. 22).[20] It is easy to see the logic behind this line of thought. Groups may wish to use this media for no other reason than it is free. To establish a profile on these media, all one needs is an email address and password to have access to potentially millions of users who may support your cause. But this theory is supported in the way that scholars have written about the impact of capacity on social media usage.

Scholars have consistently theorized that organization structure is going to affect a group's voice regardless of the size of the microphone. So while there may be differences between the ways in which large and small groups view and use these media, it does not necessarily follow that large groups are at an advantage. Small groups may be more likely initially adopt these media

[20] The major limitation of this study in particular is that they examined 150 largest groups.

because newer and smaller nonprofits are able and willing to adapt much more quickly than larger groups (Boris and Stuerele 2006). Furthermore, social media may empower new nonprofits to garner supporters and resources more quickly than traditional avenues have in the past.

But more so than any of the above reasons, it may be that groups with a smaller capacity are able to move effectively leverage these media than larger groups for a couple of reasons. First, the smaller size of such groups may allow groups to have a more intimate voice (Boris and Stuerele 2006). This may allow a more effective and efficient use of social media. Social media creates a feeling a personal relationship, this effect may be amplified by giving a megaphone to a small group with an intimate voice. Additionally, smaller and newer nonprofits may have an advantage over groups with a greater capacity because larger groups have large donors whom they need to please. Some nonprofit scholars contend that this may make larger groups less likely to extensively leverage social media's fundraising capacity as large groups may not want to risk turning off large donors by making them feel less special (Herman 2011).

Hypotheses

Nonprofit groups are interested in online reach. But the existing literature does not yet address what factors increase or limit group's online reach. From the above literature, it is clear that awareness of a group's profile is important. One way groups may channel existing supporters to social media

is through linking to their social media profiles on their organizational website homepage. Then casually interested individuals might turn to those profiles by providing both an advertisement for and pathway to their social media profiles. Therefore, *H1: a link to social media profiles on the homepage of the group's organizational website will increase the reach of that group.*

Additionally, the level of a group's online activity may also impact a group's reach. Social media activity is a signal to social media users of seriousness of group intent. Since silent page is an indicator of neglect or disinterest, it follows that the level of activity on a group page would also affect the reach of a group's profile. Therefore, *$H2_A$: as the level of activity on a social media page increases, the greater a group's online reach will be.*

Similarly, as communication type may garner interest it is conceivable that the average number of posts per week of each category from the information-action-community typology may impact reach. Furthermore, Guo and Saxton (2013) contend that the information-community-action typology is a hierarchy of typology. Therefore, for the second group of models, *$H2_B$: as the average number of information posts per week increases, a nonprofit group's online reach will increase.*

Finally, the question of resources must be addressed. The previous literature would caution against thinking of social media as a democratizing force. Therefore, based on this literature *H3: as a group capacity increases so will a group's online reach.*

Operationalizations and Measures

Dependent Variable

Reach is operationalized as the number of followers a group has on social media measured in thousands. Three models were run using total followers, Facebook followers, and Twitter followers. The mean number of followers across both platforms is 64,500 while there is a slight uptick to a mean of 66,150 followers for Facebook. Groups had much smaller reaches on Twitter with a mean of 9,330 followers.

Independent Variables

Homepage is a dichotomous variable where one indicates that a group had their social media profile(s) linked on the homepage of their website. If the profiles were linked elsewhere on the website (e.g., “Contact Us” page, “About Us” page), then this was coded as not present. A total of 39 of the 49 groups in the model had their social media profiles linked on the home page of their website. Similarly, 37 of the 46 groups on Facebook linked to their profiles on their *homepage* while 25 of 28 groups did so. Therefore, for all Twitter models, *homepage* was left out of the model due to a lack of variation.

Average posts per week is a continuous variable wherein the total number of posts by each group over the course entire observation period was divided by 31 (the number of weeks in the observation period). On the whole, groups were much more active on Twitter than on Facebook with a mean average of 10.83 posts a week and standard deviation of 10.50. Similarly,

groups showed a wide range of level of activity with groups on the low end of consistent activity average fewer than one post a week and group on the high end averaging more than 30 posts per week. Activity on Facebook sees a sharp drop with a mean average 4.67 posts per week and standard deviation of 3.46 posts per week. The range in *average number of posts per* week on Facebook was much narrower with some groups posting fewer than one time a week and other more than eight times a week. Across both platforms, however, groups activity see a slight uptick with a mean average of 11.19 posts per week. The disparity in the level of activity across platforms makes sense given the structure of the two platforms. The "Top Posts" feature of Facebook allows groups posts to remain in their followers feeds much longer than on Twitter's newsfeed, which is strictly chronological in nature (excluding of course retweets which show up chronologically based on the time that a given user retweeted the post). This means, in a very practical sense, that groups have to post more in order to increase the chances that their followers will see the post.

To account for the variation in communication type, three separate variables were created. *Average information posts per week* is calculated by taking the total number of information posts by a group and dividing by the number of weeks in the observation period. The same method was used to find the average number of community and action posts per week. On Twitter, groups averaged more information posts per week at a mean of 7.88. Twitter posts in the remaining two categories were much lower with a mean of 2.31 for

the community category and 1.15 for the action category. Again the range was widespread with some groups averaging less than one post per category a week. Though these groups posted less on Twitter overall than other groups. There is a similar pattern on Facebook. Groups posted an average of 2.7 times in the information category, with a mean of 0.96 for community and 0.93 for the action category. The range of these categories was much wider than for *total average posts*. Some groups average fewer than one post a week in each category, but others averaged more than eight posts a category.

Revenue is a continuous variable accounting for both Form 990 data and PAC data.[21] Because group revenues are quite large, revenue is operationalized in thousands. Overall, the mean revenue for the total reach model was 2834.90 thousand dollars. There was a slight uptick to a mean of 3043.82 thousand dollars for Twitter. Finally, the mean revenue for Facebook was 2120.60 thousand dollars.

Level is a dichotomous variable wherein one represents the national level and zero represents the state-level. This variable is included as a control variable to mitigate the impact of the potential size differential between state a national groups. Overall, there were 13 national groups in the total reach model, 12 national groups in the Facebook reach model, and six national groups in the Twitter reach model.

[21] See Chapter 2 at page 58

Notes on Model Specification

The *Revenue* variable presents an issue for model specification. It could be theorized that the impact of revenue would not be linear but instead there would be a ceiling after which the there is a diminishing impact of revenue. To ensure that the this is accounted for, models adding a quadratic term for *revenue* in stepwise regression were run. This included a test for significance of F-statistic change. The F statistic change was not significant for any of the models. Therefore, models were specified using a linear term. Table 4.1 shows the R^2 change and the F-statistic change significance.

TABLE 4.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF F STATISTIC CHANGE

	Linear Term R^2 Change	Quadratic Term R^2 Change	Significance of F Change
Total Followers	0.285	0.024	0.215
Facebook Followers	0.296	0.013	0.270
Twitter Followers	0.875	0.000	0.601

Addressing the Outlier Problem

As is typical in OLS regression analysis, series of test for outliers were run. Three outliers were identified across all three models. However, when tested for influence, only the National Rifle Association and the National Association for Gun Rights, and the Brady Campaign Against Gun Violence flagged as influential outliers. The NRA and the National Association for Gun Rights are the largest, most well-known, and best funded organizations and

are therefore going to have a level of awareness that would make their online reach substantially different from other groups and perhaps exempt it from the normal concerns of the group. Indeed, removing the NRA and the National Association for Gun Rights from the models drastically altered the coefficients for all independent variables. As a result, both cases were dropped from all models. Outlier tests were then rerun with again three groups flagging as outliers. None of these cases flagged as influential outliers and removing these case from the models did not substantially the coefficients. Therefore, these cases were left in all models.

Results and Analysis

The results for all three reach models can be seen in Table 4.2. Three models examining group reach were run: Model 1 examines group reach across platform, Model 2 examines group reach on Facebook, and Model 3 examines group reach on Twitter.

Model 1 looks at the factors that impact a group's overall reach across all platforms. There are a couple of things that should be highlighted about this model. First, the dependent variable examples total followers as a sum of followers on Facebook and Twitter. This may unfairly penalize groups that only have one profile but if anything this should underestimate the relationship between predictor variables and group reach. In this model, there were 49 cases, slightly more than in later models as some groups only had a profile on one of the two platforms.

TABLE 4.2: ONLINE REACH ACROSS PLATFORMS

	Model 1 All followers	**Model 2** Facebook	**Model 3** Twitter
Home Page	-107.131° (-1.874)	-137.466* (-2.304)	————
Average Posts per Week	2.975 (1.482)	15.217* (2.314)	0.080 (1.209)
Revenue	0.015 (1.144)	-0.006 (-1.377)	0.001*** (9.255)
Level	187.818** (3.215)	244.560*** (4.304)	4.231* (2.190)
Constant	62.732 (1.158)	46.055 (0.786)	0.881 (0.960)
Adjusted R^2	0.285	0.296	0.875
N	49	43	28

t values in parentheses
*°p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.010 *** p<0.001*

The *Homepage* variable was statistically significant for the model. However, the directionality is counter to what was predicted in *H1*. Therefore, based on these results, for Model 1 hypothesis 1 was rejected. The *Average Posts Per Week* variable was not statistically significant at the standard level of p<0.05. Therefore, based on these results *H2* is rejected. However, *Average Posts Per Week* was significant at the p<0.10 level. While it would be inappropriate to make inferences from the coefficient as it is currently estimated, the significance level at p<0.10 is suggestive that this variable may impact a group overall reach but it is perhaps inappropriately operationalized. Finally, the *Revenue* variable was not significant. Therefore, based on these

results *H3* is not supported. *Revenue* is not related to a group's overall online reach. Overall, the adjusted R^2 indicates that the model as it is currently specified accounts for about 28% of the variation. This indicates that there may be other factors that impact a group's overall reach online.

Model 2 examines the factors impacting a group's reach on Facebook. Forty-six cases were included in the analysis. The *Homepage* variable was statistically significant for the model. However, the directionality is counter to what was predicted in *H1*. Therefore, based on these results, for Model 2 hypothesis 2 was rejected. The *Average Posts Per Week* variable was statistically significant for the model. The results indicated that for each additional post, groups can expect to see a nearly 14,000 follower increase. This seems like a dramatic increase for a relatively small amount of effort but given that groups averaged a little under five posts a week, an additional post a week represents a 20 percent increase in Facebook activity over a six month period. Finally, the *Revenue* variable was not significant. Therefore, based on these results *H3* is rejected. Capacity is not related to a group's Facebook reach. Overall, the adjusted R^2 indicates that the model as it is currently specified accounts for about 32% of the variation. This indicates that there may be other factors that impact a group's overall reach online.

Model 3 examines the factors that impact a group's reach on Twitter. Twenty-Seven cases were included in the analysis. The *Homepage* variable was not included in the analysis due to a lack of variation on this variable and

therefore the relevant hypothesis cannot be addressed. Therefore, based on these results, for Model 3 hypothesis 2 was rejected. The *Average Posts Per Week* variable was not statistically significant at the standard level of $p<0.05$. Therefore, based on these results *H2* is rejected. However, *Average Posts Per Week* was significant at the $p<0.10$ level. While it would be inappropriate to make inferences from the coefficient as it is currently estimated, the significance level at $p<0.10$ is suggestive that this variable may impact a groups' overall reach but it is perhaps inappropriately operationalized. It is difficult to create a measure that appropriately measure a group's online activity due to some groups not having profiles on both platforms and some groups forwarding posts from one platform to another. The former has the potential to underestimate the impact of a post across both platforms. The latter has the potential to overestimate the impact of a post on both platforms. Finally, the *Revenue* variable was significant. However, the magnitude of this finding is so small that it is, in a practical sense, insignificant. These results indicate that for every one thousand dollar increase in a nonprofit's revenue, they could expect to see a one person increase in reach. While the relationship is statistically significant, this small degree of magnitude makes that significance less impactful. Therefore, based on these results *H3* is rejected. *Revenue* is not related to a group's Twitter reach. Overall, the adjusted R^2 indicates that the model as it is currently specified accounts for about 87% of

the variation. This indicates that there may be other factors that impact a group's overall reach online.

TABLE 4.3: AVG. NUMBER OF COMMUNICATION TYPE POSTS PER WEEK

	Model 4 Facebook	**Model 5** Twitter
Home Page	-143.685* (-2.310)	———
Average Information Posts per Week	15.336° (1.750)	-0.029 (-0.327)
Average Community Posts per Week	9.852 (0.200)	0.171 (0.674)
Average Action Posts per Week	25.651 (1.008)	1.070° (1.931)
Revenue	-0.005 (-1.235)	0.001*** (9.729)
Level	246.598*** (4.242)	3.277 (1.600)
Constant	44.005 (0.732)	0.881 (0.960)
Adjusted R^2	0.266	0.889
N	43	28

t values in parentheses
*°p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.010 *** p<0.001*

However, not all posts are created equal. It is conceivable that what groups are saying also matters in growing constituency. Therefore, a second set of models replacing average posts per week with variables for average number of communication type specific posts per week. The results of these

models can be seen in Table 4.3. This analysis does not include a model for total number of followers across both platforms.

The results for Model 4 show that like the previous models, *homepage* has a negative impact and *revenue* is not significant providing support for the finding in Model 2. However, the key variables of interest here are the roles of communication type. None of the variables is significant here at the $p<0.05$ level, but at the $p<0.10$ the average number of information posts per week is suggestive. This provides tentative support for Guo and Saxton (2013) assertion that communication type describes a hierarchy of engagement. Therefore, for Model 4, the null hypothesis for $H2_B$ is tentatively rejected. The adjusted R2 shows that this model accounts for roughly 26 percent of the variation in the data.

The analysis for the results of Model 5 shows that like Model 3, *revenue* is significantly related to *reach* on Twitter but at a magnitude that is so small it is effectively meaningless. This analysis shows that for every 1,000 dollar increase in revenue, there is a one follower increase on Twitter. However, the data for communication type presented and interesting relationship. First, average number of information posts per week is not significant at any level. Therefore, $H2_B$ is rejected. Yet, it is also interesting not that the average number of action posts per week suggests that this has a role in increasing a group's online reach. This calls into question Guo and Saxton's (2013) hierarchy of engagement, when applied to Twitter—a finding that is interesting

given the hierarchy of engagement was posited based on an examination of data from Twitter. Finally, the adjusted R2 shows that the model accounts for roughly 89 percent of the variation in the data.

Discussion and Conclusion

The factors that impact group reach is an important avenue of study that has gone unexamined in the literature. This analysis is a first cut at pinning down what factors increase group reach both overall and on specific platforms. This is important not only because it is of theoretical interest to scholars who focus on online advocacy or social media, but because it may be of practical interest to nonprofits looking to increase their online footprint. For both scholars and practitioners, the results of this analysis offer several key insights.

First, while awareness that a group's page exists is clearly the first step to increasing reach, it may not be through groups' websites that people become aware of the organization. Reach may be increased instead by getting existing followers to engage and share a group's post thereby raising general awareness. This may not only show other social media users that the nonprofit group exists and has a profile but that their friends have engaged and support the organization. This sort of stamp of approval from others may be a much clearer path to increasing reach than through a link on the group's homepage. Alternatively, this negative directionality for *Homepage* may indicate that people are discovering groups within these communities rather than on group

webpages. This is would emphasize having a link to organizational websites on their social media profiles to push traffic back to their website.

Second, activity on the profile provided mixed results. Activity was not statistically different from zero for neither overall reach nor Twitter. However, for Twitter this may make sense. The number of average posts per week on Twitter was much higher than on Facebook. Additionally, the nature of the platforms may make the impact of one Facebook post much longer lasting than the impact of one Twitter post. Small changes in the number of times a week groups engage Facebook may have a much larger impact in reach. A relatively small output, a 20 percent increase in Facebook activity, may have a dramatic impact on the group's reach within that platform. For smaller or emerging groups, this may be an especially key factor to helping them achieve their advocacy goals. Furthermore, while the average number of posts had a statistically significant relationship to reach on Facebook, the statical strength of the relationship to overall reach and Twitter reach suggested that activity on a group's profile may impact group reach.

Third, the relationship between revenue and reach is a particularly interesting finding given the prevailing trend in the current literature. Revenue is either not related to or has such a small magnitude of an effect on reach. Much of the current literature contends that resources should affect the ability of groups to leverage these media. At least in terms of reach, this seems not to matter. Social media may indeed be a democratizing force among advocacy

groups as these findings suggest that reach need not be limited to groups who have amassed traditional resources. Additionally, this suggests that social media may indeed by an effective way for new and emerging groups to increase their reach.

Fourth, what nonprofit groups have to say impacts group reach. This result does suggest that there is an interesting potential relationship between the number of information posts on Facebook and a nonprofit group's online reach. This is in line with Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and Guo and Saxton's (2013) expectations of how new followers are reached on Twitter. However, this is an odd finding given the way that the closed nature of Facebook would lead to the expectation that it would be action posts that would increase following. This clearly merits further investigation. Similarly, the finding that *action* may be related to *reach* is interesting and merits further investigation. First, because this is counter to the way in which the existing literature has furthered contending that nonprofit groups use these media to recruit news supporters to their social media profiles and ultimately their cause. Second, if this finding holds in further studies, it may have practical applications for nonprofit organizations. For most groups, the action category comprises the smallest portion of their online activity. If it is true that action tweets are positively related to reach, groups would be advised to adjust the way in which they use these media to better leverage them for their missional goals.

Fifth, there may be other factors that influence the reach of groups. One of the potentially theoretically interesting factors that are unexamined in the above analysis is coverage of groups' offline activities in traditional media outlets. This may raise awareness of the groups for individuals who might not seek them out or have friends who share the groups' posts. The inclusion of this or other factors may help explain the variation that is unexplained in the current models.

Taken together, these points of discussion further reinforce the assertion that Twitter and Facebook, despite the tendency of scholars and practitioners to treat them as such, are not identical platforms. Organization and use factors have different effects on reach. Scholars would do well to treat these platforms as unique entities in their analysis. Practitioners would do well to account for these differences when they are planning strategies to inform, extend reach, and mobilize their constituency. Finally, this analysis is a first pass at examining this relationship. Subsequent research could expand this analysis by looking at other issue areas to see if these results hold across issue areas.

Chapter 5: User Engagement

The previous chapter addressed the application of the information-community-action typology to the factors that impact a group's online reach. It focuses on group level analysis, what groups are doing with social media. It does not fully examine how the public responds to groups online actions. This is a piece of the puzzle to be fitted. The calculus of the decision to employ these media really rests on the ability of social media to help groups fulfill their missional goals through awareness and advocacy. The ultimate reason nonprofit groups employ social media is to engage their existing constituency. Yet, no research to date has examined the types of activity that foster engagement on these platforms. This chapter engages the question: how does group activity on social media impact follower engagement?

Literature Review

New information and communication technologies play an ever increasing role in the way that nonprofit groups work with and engage their constituencies. Nonprofits have come to rely on such online channels of communication for a variety of their organization functions such as recruiting volunteers, campaign for donations, and advocate for change (Ciszek 2013). From the initial spread of Internet technologies, scholars have noted that these technologies provide organizations a mechanism for engaging with stake holders that is also "low cost, direct, and controllable" (Coombs 1998, p. 289). It is natural for nonprofits to rely on any available means for engaging existing

and potential stakeholders as one of the key foundations for nonprofit management and success is "the ability to cultivate and maintain relationships with stakeholders" (Balser and McCluskey 2005 as summarized in Svensson, Mahoney, and Hambrick 2014). Furthermore, nonprofit groups have even greater incentive than other profit to use these media. Nonprofits groups may choose to use these media more readily and frequently because these groups need to size on quickly arising events and opportunities. It may be difficult to predict when the public and the mainstream media's attention to an issue, but capitalizing on these moments when they do arise, with the speed of social media, may contribute to group success.[22] Scholars have found some evidence to support this pattern of use among nonprofit groups. Barns and Andorran (2011) found that nonprofits use social media more actively than for-profit brands.

Additionally, advocacy groups may especially benefit from social media since advocacy, is, is at base the process of representing an organization or idea to persuade audiences of its importance or necessity. Social media have the potential to not only put a face on nonprofit organizations but also to expand the capacity, reach, and effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Understanding how the public responds to group social media use is important

[22] This in many ways echoes Baumgartner and Jones' (1991) punctuated equilibrium. These authors contend, building on Kingdon (1984), that moments of dramatic policy change happen when the existing status quo is altered by events such as increased media attention. Subsequent scholarship has contended that advocacy within policy subsystems can be successful in causing and/or capitalizing on these punctuations (e.g., Pralle 2006).

because both practitioners and scholars both base their activity and analysis respectively on the idea that social networking sites create an interactive environment that not only makes engagement possible but that it fosters engagement in ways that older information technologies such as websites do not (Waters et al2009). This assumption becomes more important when one considers that for nonprofits broadly and advocacy groups, in particular, rely on engaging supporters so as to mobilize them later for success (Ciszek 2013). Furthermore, when traditional means of engagement are precluded to certain groups' social media as a means of engagement becomes even more powerful.

Social media can provide both voice and community to marginalized groups who either cannot or chose not to operate through traditional means. Ciszek (2013) examined the "It Gets Better" movement to examine how marginalized groups make use of those media to create safe spaces for dialogue. Ciszek found that for those that may otherwise choose to use traditional media channels but lack resources, the Internet proves access to public at a relatively low cost. This also allows groups to by-pass gate keepers and opportunities for message convolution to communicate directly to the public as a means of alternative media through which groups can engage stakeholders (Waters and Lo 2012). But the traditional means of Internet technology required users to seek out the group to keep up to date or actively recruit new members. The channel of communication was more direct and cost

efficient than ever before, but websites are a single channel. Social media offers a new element of complexity and diversity. Rather than single Megaphone shouting into the crowd of the Internet, social media increase the number of channels through which nonprofit groups can engage state holders while at the same time further decreasing costs (e.g., the cost of maintaining and updating group websites) (Saxton and Guo 2014).

Social media allow users to interact with groups and exchange content they have created. That these media can engage users in dialogue is a powerful and tempting thought for nonprofits. Social media allows supporters to participate in the creation of content giving the group added power through the people reminiscent of *e pluribus unum.* Therefore, the value provided by these media is "not simply by the size of audience, but rather from the power to connect with other users, produces, and consumers of this media to form a public" (Ciszek 2013). However, the potential power of these media is not a simple by-product of use. Groups must create a much more dynamic and interactive presence than websites afford. A static online presence is almost as dangerous as no web presence at all. A static online presence can be a negative signal to potential stakeholders resulting in "the loss of potential clients, volunteers, and donors" (Waters and Lo 2012, p. 22). Yet, if groups do make an effort to be dynamic the features of these media can get the public involved in the nonprofit work by allowing for dialogue and exchange of original

content engagement—through which reach and engagement is sill limited to the willing or aware and sympathetic audiences (Waters and Saxton 2014).

Yet so far, most of what scholars know about engagement and social media use focuses on the organizational level. Initially, groups seemed to believe that their mere presence on social networking sites would create dialogue and stakeholder engagement (Bortree and Seltzer 2009). But as Waters and Lo (2012) point out, “providing an outlet for communication is a far cry from actually engaging audiences” (p. 300). Still, when examining group activity online, scholars have concluded that regardless of platform groups fail to fully utilize the engagement potential of these media. This follows not only for Twitter (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012) and Facebook (Bortree and Seltzer 2009) but also other social media such as blogs (Seltzer and Mitrock 2007). As a result, scholars have consistently concluded that nonprofit organizations routinely miss engagement opportunities presented by social media.

However, this is only one side of the story. Scholars have reached the conclusion that nonprofit groups are failing to engage the public by observing the actions of nonprofit organizations. From this conclusion, scholars have further conjectured about what will (and won't) produce dialogue and engagement. Only a handful of scholars have begun examining the public reaction to nonprofit’s activity to probe public engagement with nonprofit groups on social media.

When specifically associated with nonprofits, groups are attempting to generate public interest and action on the issue at the heart of the nonprofit group's mission. The more public purchase a group can get on their issue, the more the public empowers the group as an external agent in the policy-making process (Ozdemir 2012). This appeared to work well during the 1960s and as a result, "the last three decades stand out as a period in which NGOs spend more time and gave more priority to advocacy activities at local, national, and international levels" (Coates and Rosalind 2002 as summarized in Ozdemir 2012). To aid in this advocacy, groups adapt to new and emerging technologies to serve their ultimate goals: engaging and mobilizing the supporters. This might suggest a reason as to why nonprofits use social media more than for-profit groups. This also makes it more urgent for scholars to fully understand why and to what the public responds within these online environments.

The first step in a better understanding of public social media engagement is to understand what engagement actually means. This is not an easy task because despite the wide use of the term, "there is a lack of consensus on a definition" (Cho and Moya 2012). At the forefront of any discussion of online engagement have been Taylor and Kent. From their seminal 1998 piece on dialogue to their 2014 review of the state of the literature, these authors have consistently been at the center of this work for nearly two decades. Taylor and Kent (2014) contend engagement occurs when

the public is consulted on matters that affect them that there are opportunities to access and participate in such interaction and that the public can articulate desires and demands to the organization. Within the context of social media, engagement can be any means through which the individuals can interact with the group. For example, such engagement can mean liking a status on Facebook or a favorite on Twitter. Such interactions take place or when "publics initiate or participate in conversations with an organization and its publics via their social media platforms" (Cho and Moya 2012). But many scholars contend that such actions represent a deeper dialogue often based on the five deeper dialogic features principles established by Kent and Taylor (1998; 2002).

These principles have been used to examine how various types of organizations have used both the Internet more broadly and social media specifically to engage users. Through examining websites, Kent and Taylor have developed five principles of building public relationships through the world wide web. These principles examine the ways that the web can be used to promote two-way communication. Because so much of the existing literature draws on, in large or small measure, these principles set forth by Kent andTaylor, it will be helpful to explore these principles more fully.

The first principle is a "dialogic loop". This is a feedback loop in which both the nonprofit and supporters are exchanging information. The process that Kent and Taylor (1998) consider to be the starting point of online dialogue.

This process is facilitated by social media in that the ease of content creation by both nonprofit groups and general social media users. This allows users to either respond to groups posts or query the groups to initiate dialogue from the public end. These loops, Kent and Taylor contend, must be complete—that is stimulation on one end and response from the other.

The second principle is "usefulness of information." This is the idea that information given to the public should be of value to that public. Kent and Taylor (1998) meant that information on group webpages should include things like brick and mortar addresses, phone numbers or information about the product or service provided. However, subsequent scholars have applied this to social media to mean that groups should be transparent about both who is running the account and the goals of the account.

The third principle is the "generation of return visits." Kent and Taylor contend that the longevity of relationships helps generate dialogic relationships. When applied to websites, Kent and Taylor meant that groups should keep sites up to date, fresh, and engaging. Groups are more constrained in some ways on social media in this respect due to lack of control over the user interface. However, content can generate attention to groups and willingness to keep following groups, which is arguably equivalent to the value of return visits on a traditional website. Keeping people available to engage in conversation is an important element in creating dialogue.

The fourth principle is “intuitiveness of user interface”. This, in the realm of websites, is an understandably important foundation for the previous principles of dialogue. Yet, the world of contemporary social media, groups are again limited in this respect as the user interface is largely static and controlled by the platform rather than by the group. But the ease of navigation is still important. Not only should, according to this principle, groups make it easy for users to get from their webpage to their social media profiles but groups should also make it easy to their websites from their social media pages. Similarly, nonprofit groups need to make it easy to navigate from social media to opportunities for donation, advocacy, and volunteering. This gives groups and users a chance to dialogue about opportunities and group missions.

The fifth, and final, principle of creating online dialogue is “conservation of visits”. For websites, Kent and Taylor contend that it is not just visits that matter but the length of time visitors spend on websites. When organization websites make it too easy or attractive to navigate elsewhere, it becomes difficult to engage visitors in meaningful dialogue. When applied to social media, this could mean keeping users attentive to group social media pages and posts. This helps engage users and move them towards dialogue, which for Kent and Taylor is the end goal of online user engagement. Both posting too often or not posting enough could undermine attempts at dialogue.

It is clear that these principles, if enacted, would be an avenue for engagement. However, research across organizations has found that few

organizations fully employ these principles either in the design of websites or social media activity (Waters and Lo 2012). As to whether these can be captured or embodied by "liking" or "sharing" a post is up for debate. Kent and Taylor (2014) would say not necessarily. The authors contend that dialogue is the product of consistent and continual interaction and engagement from both sides is necessary for dialogue. However, this misses and misconstrues the meaning behind such social interactions in the realm of social networking sites.

These dialogic principles have been much of the foundation of the subsequent scholarly discussion of online engagement potential. This has led many authors to focus on the characteristics of social media user and the capacity of groups to bring followers and fans into a deeper dialogic relationship with nonprofit groups. Many expected to see opportunities and actions to capitalize on the new potential would create more dialogue, especially given that the initial Kent and Taylor piece focused on group websites, not social media. Yet, scholars have found that in large measure groups do not use these features as much as might be effective to initiate dialogue. Instead, scholars have repeatedly found that group rely on informational posts, frequently through posting links to other websites (Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton 2012). Indeed, many scholars go so far as to lament that

> "this limited use does not encourage the public's engagement and build relationships, even through information destination can be the first step to stimulate publics to pay attention to an organization. Ignored to build dialogic communication and quality relationships with publics, nonprofit organizations should use two-way symmetrical communication" (Schewerkort and Haase 2014).

This conclusion has been reached based on what groups do not how the public responds to these actions.

On one hand this approach makes sense. Interaction and engagement are the result of strategic choice by organizations when such organizations choose to value and strive for dialogue (Saxton and Waters 2014). This is a choice that some groups may not be inclined to consider. Some scholars have found that organizations have been hesitant to adopt social media or adapt to a dialogue based approach as innovative. Groups reject interactive strategies when they view those strategies with a sense of fear of the unknown, but also as a potential means of losing control of the group's narrative and message (Aragon and Deomingo 2014). But what organizations chose to do also matters because social media can be used to create social capital. Organizational social media activity, that is to say an organization's body of online activity and attempts to manage stakeholders can increase a public's engagement with the group both on and off the Internet (Saxton and Guo 2013). But thus far, this only tells half of the story. Social media have the capacity to be used to create dialogue and social capital, and while it is true that how groups use these media matters, what the public does online matters too. Because so far, the key underlying assumption at the foundation of most of the scholarly discussion is that the public actually wants and responds more to attempts to create a dialogue from the group.

Only a handful of scholars have even begun to probe this relationship. Initial scholars, stating that there is not clear way to observe public response, relied on surveys and focus groups to suss out this relationship. This approach is problematic because such approaches may be subject to sample bias (Saxton and Waters 2014). Surveys and focus groups generally examine the opinion and actions of highly engaged users who are most likely not representative of the broader community. Occasionally, authors have incorporated such attitudinal work into experimental studies (Ki and Han 2007). Aside from the potential sample bias, such approaches do not account for message content or other elements of data collection available to scholars and practitioners.

More recently, scholars have begun to move beyond surveys to better understand what features and organization public responds to. One of the first attempts to do so examined Facebook looking at likes and comments on group posts (Bortree Seltzer 2007). However, the focus and description of content was too focused and then on content motivations on the part of the group. Others since then have begun to incorporate group activities and content as well as over reaction. The findings of these studies generally focus on likes, finding that individuals like brands because they have an underlying and preexisting loyalty to the brand. The hope is that loyalty can be deepened most effectively by participation in the community (Mgesheimer et al 2005; Bordie et al 2011). However, while this study was unable to exactly identify what

individuals respond to, the authors do find that only a small subset of users interact with brands on social media (Lilijander, Weman, Pilhistrom 2014). Instead, most users are simple information consumers who use group social media sources for up to date and changing information. Similarly, stakeholders are more likely to engage with organizations if they are targeted by the group. In other words, groups can increase response and engagement by targeting their communications to subgroups of their supporters (Saxton and Guo 2014).

Cho, Schweikart, and Haase (2014) examine and test five models of public relations to see which produces the highest level of user engagement, which the authors conceptualize as commenting on a Facebook post. Most notably, the authors found that one-way information models did not illicit conversation or engagement. Nor does the public engage with two-way asymmetry models at a high level despite the fact that such posts are designed to illicit response and engagement by asking questions of users. The authors conjecture that these models fail because users perceive two-way asymmetrical communication as insincere. What they find the public does respond to is two-way symmetry models of public relations that focus on organizational response to as well as initiation of dialogue. Such actions include things like giving thanks and tagging other users.

However, as examined the previous research on engagement is decontextualized the major stream of literature that focuses on organizational usage that increasingly relies on Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) information-

community-advocacy typology. Many of these studies rely on the same principles. For instance, Cho, Schweickart, Haase's (2014) examples of two-way symmetry post are very similar to what Lovejoy and Saxton would classify as community posts. Only one study to date has used the information-community-advocacy typology to examine what types of posts generate users response and engagement. Saxon and Waters (2014) examined differences in numbers of likes, comments, and shares based on a slightly modified information-community-advocacy typology of posts of the 100 largest nonprofits over a three-week period. The authors found that advocacy and community posts received more likes, community building posts receive more comments, and no message were more likely be shared when compared to baseline information post category.[23] Saxon and Waters (2014) also regressed posts based on number of likes, comments, and shares. They found that information posts were more likely to be shared.

This is a good first step but it needs to be confirmed and can be added to by considering how the average number of posts in each category might affect the overall engagement environment. This is important to consider because as Cho, Schweikert, and Haase point out how groups position these posts may affect perceptions of sincerity and thus public response. This is an important next step because previous studies show that most groups post more informational posts that post from any other category. This matters

[23] The authors note that several categories were "close" to significance, the closest being information.

because the one-way ANOVA tests used information as a baseline. This taken with Saxton and Waters's finding that information posts are more like to be shared may show that decrying an "over-reliance" on information posts can help increase reach by generating a key point of engagement among current users.

Hypotheses

There are two factors that could affect user engagement on Facebook and Twitter. First, communication type may result in changes in user engagement. This falls in line with the presentation of Lovejoy and Saxton's information-community-action typology as a hierarchy of engagement. Therefore, *H1: As groups move up the information-community-action typology, user engagement will increase.*

Similarly, the type of post may also affect user engagement. There has been some evidence to suggest that visual stimuli may impact users response. So accounting for the type of post may also account for variations in users response to social media posts. Therefore, *H2: Video and picture posts are more likely than other types of posts to generate user engagement.*

Operationalizations and Measures

Engagement

In this chapter, I will conceptualize engagement as users response to group post. This can take a couple of different forms. On Facebook users can engage posts by liking, comments, or sharing a post created by a nonprofit

group. On Twitter, users can also engage posts in three ways: favoriting, @replies, and Retweets. Engagement is measured here by a count of the number of responses to each post. For every Facebook post, there is a count of the number of likes, comments, and shares. For each Twitter post, there is a count of the number times users favorited or Retweeted a post. For this study, @replies are not captured because there is no effective or accurate way to capture this as the Twitter algorithm only displays the most recent replies and maintains no accurate total count of such messages. This is a missing piece of the puzzle, but better to omit this piece than measure it poorly.

Post Type

The type of post may also affect engagement. There is some evidence to suggest that users are more likely to respond to visual stimuli (Saxton and Waters 2014). So all posts have been coded as text, link, picture, and video, as was similarly done in chapter 4. The distribution of post types varies across platforms, but the primary category of posts fell into the link category, particularly on Twitter. This makes sense as on Twitter groups are constrained to 140 characters or fewer. Therefore, the incentive to rely on links is greater.

Communication Type

Each post has been coded for according to the Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) information-community-advocacy typology. *Information* posts are those that seek to give information about the group or its cause to users. *Community* posts seek to build a sense of community among users and with the group.

Such posts do things like acknowledge contributions, respond to users, and celebrate holidays and achievements. *Action* posts seek to get users to do something beyond liking or commenting on a post. This can include anything from sharing a post to donating to the group to buying group gear to joining a real world protest. Posts were coded by multiple coders. The first 100 posts were coded until there was 100 percent agreement among coders. The next 500 posts were coded by all coders with a Cohen Kappa's score of 0.83, signaling solid agreement among coders.

Results and Analysis

Two sets of analysis will be run to test the relationship between these variables. First, group fixed effects models will examine how, within groups, post type and communication type effect. These models hold constant features that do not vary within groups, such as number of followers or group resources. This also holds constant any stimuli that apply to all groups such as national news attention to the issue (i.e., a mass shooting). This removes all across-group systematic variance from the parameter estimation. This estimates a model for each group the aggregate the findings up to estimate population parameters. These models were run for all five engagement factors across Facebook and Twitter.

For Facebook there are three separate dependent variables to help capture user engagement. The results of these models can be seen in Table 5.1. For Model 1, the dependent variable is a count of likes for each post. For

Model 2, the dependent variable is a count of user comments on each post. For Model 3, the dependent variable is a count of shares that each post received.

TABLE 5.1: GROUP FIXED EFFECTS MODEL FACEBOOK

	Model 1 Likes	**Model 2** Comments	**Model 3** Shares
Community Post	-929.343 (-0.96)	115.056° (1.74)	-343.240 (-1.13)
Action Post	-47.677 (-0.45)	-55.423 (-1.22)	109.66° (1.71)
Text Post	-495.470 (-1.19)	-329.063 (-1.41)	-137.218 (-1.09)
Picture Post	3035.328 (1.21)	-254.728 (-1.42)	1130.605 (1.32)
Video Post	844.295 (1.02)	-286.506 (-1.40)	362.818 (1.23)
Constant	1487.752*** (12.99)	404.564* (2.11)	303.374*** (5.31)
N	70	70	70

t values in parentheses
*°p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.010 *** p<0.001*

For likes, Model 1, none of the variables are statistically significantly related to an increase in the number of likes in a post receives, when compared the baseline category of *information posts* for communication type and link posts for post type. Thus rejecting both H1 and H2 for Model 1. This is counter to what Guo and Saxton (2014) found in the one-way ANOVA test of user response and post communication. This may be because the public is

somewhat indiscriminate about what they like on Facebook. Liking may not be the signal of engagement that it has been theorized to be.

With respect to *comments*, again none of the variables are statistically significantly related to the number of *comments* a post receives, at least not at the $p<0.05$ level. However, at the $p<0.10$ level, *community post* are positively related to the number of *comments*. This suggests that a *community post* results in, on average, 115 more *comments* than an i*nformation post*. This is a tentative, partial confirmation of H1. However, counter to what H1 hypothesized, action posts are not statistically different from either *information* or *community* posts. This intuitively makes sense as creating a community is an important part of creating dialogue. Therefore, it is unsurprising that *community posts* would generate a form of user engagement that most directly represents dialogue. Additionally, frequently, *community posts* ask for comments on a story, users to share an experience or answer a question. It seems that users, to some extent, respond to such calls for response. *Post type* did not have statistically, significant effect on the number of comments when compared to the baseline category of link post. Thus for Model 2, H2 is rejected.

Finally, for shares, Model 3, again, none of the variables are statistically significantly related to the dependent variable *shares* at the $p<0.05$ level. Yet, at the $p<0.10$ level, *action posts* are related to the number of shares a post received when compared to the baseline category of *information posts*. On

average, an *action post* receives 109 more shares than an information post. Again, this makes sense given that a number of *action posts* ask the user to share the post. It seems that users may be inclined to engage when groups ask them. But users may also be incline to share calls to action in an effort to help the group affect the desired change. This confirms H2. However, once again post type is not significantly related to the number of shares.

TABLE 5.2: GROUP FIXED EFFECTS MODEL TWITTER

	Model 4 Favorites	**Model 5** Retweets
Community Post	0.0124 (0.00)	-4.328 (0.61)
Action Post	0.834 (0.35)	9.032 (0.97)
Text	10.592** (3.24)	35.037** (3.34)
Picture	15.174° (7.566)	35.925* (2.09)
Video	2.762° (1.69)	7.049 (1.51)
Constant	2.398° (1.69)	10.383*** (2.47)
F Satistic	4.29**	4.88**
N	40	40

t values in parentheses
*°p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.010 *** p<0.001*

The Twitter group fixed effects models tell a drastically different story. The results of these models can be found in Table 5.2. For *favorites*, neither *community* nor *action posts* generated a statistically significant, different affect

on *favorites* when compared to the baseline category of i*nformation posts*. Thus leading to a rejection of H1. However, unlike Facebook the post type matters when compared to the baseline category of *link posts*. At the $p<0.10$ level te*xt posts*, on average, receive 10 more *favorites* than a *link post*. Similarly, when compared to *link posts*, *pictures* receive 15 more *favorites* and *videos* receive 2 more *favorites*. It is also interesting to note that differences between other post type categories is also significant. On average, a *text post* receives eight more *favorites* than a *video* (at the $p<0.01$ level). This is an interesting finding given that video is consider to be more dynamic and just would be expected to be more engaging than text. Additionally, a picture produces an average of 13 more favorites than a video (at the $p<0.05$ level). For the number of favorites a post receives, the post type matters while communication type does not.

Similarly, for the number of *Retweets* a post receives the communication type is not statistically significantly related. Neither *community* nor *action* posts are statistically significantly related to *Retweets* on a given post when compared to a base line category of *information post*. When compared to a baseline category of *information posts*, neither *community* nor *action* posts is statistically related to the number of *Retweets* a post receives. However, when tested against one another, an *action post* receives 12 more *Retweets* than a *community post* (at the $p<0.05$ level). So while action posts do not generate more *Retweets* than *information posts*, it does more than *community posts*.

Therefore, H1 is tentatively supported here. Again, it seems that post type matters more than communication type for engagement posts on Twitter. However, both *text* and *picture* posts are statistically significantly related to *Retweets*. Similar to Model 4, *text posts* is related to the number of *Retweets* a post receives, when compared to *link posts*. On average, a *text post* receives 35 more *Retweets* than a *link*. Additionally, on average a *picture post* receives more *Retweets* than a *video post* (at the $p<0.05$ level). This is counter to what one would expect and was hypothesized. As a result, the evidence to support H2 is at best mixed with respect to Model 5.

But individual post type may not be the only thing that matters for cultivating user engagement. A handful of *community posts* in a sea of *information post* may not be successful at creating dialogue or fostering user engagement. Instead, it may be that perception of communicant types matters too. To test this, new variables were created looking at the average number of posts per week. This is done for all three communication types, all four post types, and all five engagement types. The *average number of posts per week* in each category are regressed on average number of users responses per week. All models also include number of followers to control for the impact of size variation.

TABLE 5.3: OLS REGRESSION AVERAGE POINTS OF FACEBOOK ENGAGMENT PER WEEK

	Model 1 Likes	**Model 2** Comments	**Model 3** Shares
Average Information Posts Per Week	123.745 (1.353)	7.850° (1.903)	4.368 (0.580)
Average Community Posts Per Week	-69.953 (-0.131)	11.333 (0.393)	-21.456 (0.580)
Average Action Posts Per Week	1036.859*** (3.811)	24.347° (1.911)	-17.575 (-0.597)
Average Number of Text Posts Per Week	-1052.995* (-2.383)	-5.857 (-0.480)	-2.051 (-0.088)
Average number of Pictures Posts Per Week	49.047 (0.179)	-1.353 (-0.104)	56.453° (1.700)
Average Number of Video Posts Per Week	-5081.431* (-2.510)	339.398° (1.893)	1793.483*** (5.855)
Number of Followers	0.012*** (8.342)	0.001*** (9.949)	0.002*** (7/003)
Constant	-315.375 (-1.041)	-28.075° (-1.985)	-12.884 (-0.498)
Adjusted R^2	0.700	0.752	0.692
N	66	64	62

t values in parentheses
*°p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.010 *** p<0.001*

For Facebook it is important to note an outlier problem. In the three Facebook models have different number of groups in the analysis to account for outliers in the models. Any influential outliers are removed from the

analysis. The results of these models can be found in Table 5.3.[24] For likes, the *average number of action posts a week* is significantly related to the *average number of likes per week*. Increasing the *average number of action posts per week* results in a substantial increase in the *average number of likes* a group receives per week. It may be that users like the post as a signal to the group that they have done what was asked in the post. Additionally, several action posts ask users to like and share the post. This may also help explain this relationship. This provides support for H1. Also of note in the model, is that post type has an effect, but a negative one. The higher the *average number of text* and *video* posts the lower the *average number of likes per week* when compared to the baseline category of link posts. This provides mixed support for H2. Finally, the adjusted R2 shows that the model accounts for roughly 70 percent of the variation in the data.

Finally, with respect of Facebook, for the *average number of shares per week*, communication type does not have a statistically significant relationship with the *average number of shares per week*—thus rejecting H2. This is consistent with the findings of Guo and Saxton (2014) who found that the modified information-community-action typology does not have a statistically significant relationship to average number of shares. Yet, it is also worth noting that post type does not have a statistically significant relationship to average number of shares per week. *Average number of video* posts per week has a

[24] Outlier tests were run for cases included in analysis. Any influential outliers were removed. This accounts for the N size variation across the three models.

positive statistically significant relationship with average number of shares per week. The magnitude of this effect is quite large. It seems that the best way to get users to share a Facebook post or engage at all is to post video content. At the $p<0.10$ level, the *average number of picture posts* has a positive, significant relationship to average number of shares per week. It seems that visual stimuli are more likely to be shared than non-visual stimuli. Finally, it is worth noting that the adjusted R^2 shows that the model accounts for roughly 69 percent of the variation in the data.

However, once again the Twitter models tell a different story. First, it is worth noting that both Twitter models only include a variable for *picture posts*. This is because variables were added stepwise. The difference in R^2 was not statistically significantly different for models that included *video posts* and *text posts*. As a result, the models were specified with average number of each communication type per week, *average number of pictures posts* and *average number of followers*. The similar models were run for Twitter. The results of these models can be found in Table 5.4.

For average number of *favorites* per week model, nothing was statistically significantly related to the dependent variable at the $p<0.05$ level. However, at the $p<0.10$ level, both the *average number information posts* and *communication posts* are positively related to the average number of *favorites* per week. Again, this calls into question the claim that many scholars have made regarding the utility and impact of information posts. It is also important

to note that the impact of *average number of communication posts* is more than two times the magnitude of *average number of information posts*. The adjusted R^2 shows that model accounted for 38 percent of the variation in the outcome of interest.

TABLE 5.4: OLS REGRESSION AVERAGE POINTS OF TWITTER ENGAGMENT PER WEEK

	Model 1 Favorites	**Model 2** Retweets
Average Information Posts Per Week	5.219° (1.871)	18.743° (1.722)
Average Community Posts Per Week	12.837° (1.789)	51.156° (1.826)
Average Action Posts Per Week	11.198 (0.553)	55.562 (0.703)
Average Picture Posts Per week	-22.935 (-0.749)	-115.564 (-0.926)
Number of Followers	0.001* (2.621)	0.004* (2.276)
Constant	.23.249 (-0.928)	-95.018 (-0.971)
Adjusted R^2	0.383	0.352
N	40	40

t values in parentheses
*°p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.010 *** p<0.001*

Finally, for *Retweets*, again nothing was statistically significantly related to average number of *Retweets* per week at the p<0.05 level but again a*verage number of information* and *community posts per week* are significant at the

p<0.10 level. This is suggestive that the a*verage number of information and community posts* are positively related to the average number of Retweets per week. Again, similar to favorites, the magnitude of the effect of community was nearly two times that of information posts. Additionally, it is worth noting that the adjusted R^2 indicates that the model accounts for roughly 35 percent of the variation in the model.

Discussion and Conclusion

There are several observations worth highlighting. For Facebook, communication type is more important than post type when considering the impact of individual posts and user engagement. For Twitter on the other hand, post type is more important than communication type with respect to the impact of individual posts. This indicates two things. First, when using Facebook and considering the response to individual posts, groups would be advised to consider *what* they are communicating with users. Second, when using Twitter and considering the impact of single posts, groups would be advised to consider *how* they are communicating with users. The majority of Tweets used links to achieve their ends. The results indicating that including pictures or videos visible within the platform may not only increase willingness of users to engage with groups in these online communities, but also a willingness to act on that inclination call that decision into question. Picture and video posts may draw the eye away in a way that links and text do not. The

visual nature of this platform lends itself to engaging users with posts that effectively capitalize on that nature.

Additionally, when considering over all average weekly user engagement, there are a couple of findings worth highlighting and contextualizing. First, video posts have a statistically significant relationship with all forms of user engagement but equally important, it has a negative effect on the average number of likes. Groups should again consider the overarching social media goals of their posts and consider this fact accordingly. Similarly, visual stimuli are more likely to be shared on Facebook than text or link posts. Furthermore, while communication type does matter for average number shares per week, it does matter for likes and comments on Facebook. Again, groups should be aware of this and make strategic choices regarding goals relating to their social media activity. For Twitter, communication type matters with average number of information posts and community posts, with community posts having a much larger impact. This signals that building a community online may be a prerequisite for stimulating dialogue and user engagement.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting that average number of information posts is possibly related to average number of favorites and Retweets on Twitter, and comments on Facebook. This indicates that scholars may have been too quick to decry the number of information posts observed in previous studies. Many scholars have contended that this is a sign that groups are

missing the engagement potential of these media does not seem to hold when looking at user engagement. This is especially stark when considering that average number of information posts is positively related to Facebook comments, which many scholars contend is the highest form of social media engagement. Comments take the most user effort and most directly stimulate dialogue.

The final and key takeaway is that the users engage stimuli differently across Facebook and Twitter. This is important for a couple of different reasons. First, it has scholarly implications as many authors have treated Facebook and Twitter are very similar if not the same medium. This does not seem to be the case; indicating more thought and studies should be given to the differences between platforms. Secondly, from a practitioner standpoint, these results indicate that strategies for social media usage should not be the same across all platforms. Groups should consider their goals and structure their posts in a strategic way so as to best achieve those goals. Ultimately, all social media posts do not generate similar responses.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study set out to explore how groups communicate on social media, and how the use of social media by nonprofit groups affects user response. Instead, this study has focused on what and how groups communicate on these media and how users engage those communications.

The political application of social media has received substantial attention from popular commentators. The news extensively covered the integration of these media into President Obama's 2008 campaign, the efforts of Occupy Wall Street movement, the awareness drive for Kony 2012, and many others. Receiving less popular attention has been the use of these media for advocacy by nonprofit groups. Yet, these media provide important avenues for mobilizing people and resources. Indeed one of the first instances of mass media coverage of Twitter focused on the use of Twitter to spread awareness and updates about the threat posed by a wildfire in California in 2007, less than a year after Twitter was created. In recent years, the Red Cross has frequently employed these media to raise funds and spread awareness. These media are so important to nonprofit work that when new groups are formed, one of the first steps is the creation of a social media profiles, particularly on Facebook and Twitter. Yet, despite the wealth of commentary both lauding and decrying the potential of social media for advocacy and engagement, with respect to nonprofits very little is known about how stakeholders respond to these media.

This study sought to address this gap in the literature by addressing three questions: First, do nonprofit groups communicate the same way on Facebook and Twitter? Second, how do nonprofit group organizational factors and social media use affect group reach? Third, how does nonprofit group social media use affect user engagement? This chapter seeks to summarize and synthesize the answers to these questions.

Different Communication Patterns on Different Platforms

Existing literature on how groups communicate on social media has two major deficiencies: it focuses almost exclusively on Twitter and has a tendency to treat Facebook and Twitter as identical platforms. Chapter 3 sought to address these concerns through an application of a typology of social media communication developed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012). Like Lovejoy and Saxton, this analysis showed that Twitter usage by nonprofits focusing on gun control and gun rights was similarly distributed across communication types with most post being informational in nature and the fewest number of posts fell into the action category. This is not a surprising finding given that all existing studies applying the information-community-action typology to Twitter have reaffirmed this pyramidal distribution of posts across categories. However, unlike past studies, this study suggests that this distribution holds for smaller groups as well as the large groups used in previous studies.

These previous studies have argued that, while never directly applied to Facebook, this pyramidal distribution of posts across the typological categories

would also hold for Facebook. However, the results of this study do not support that conjecture. The categorical distribution for Facebook was not a pyramid it was an hour glass. Furthermore, in Chapter 4 the average number of posts per week and the average number of post per category differ across platforms. Despite the inclination of scholars and practitioners to talk about social media as a monolithic entity, these platforms been employed differently by the nonprofit groups in this study.

This is an important finding for two reasons. First, this analysis suggests that nonprofits use social media platforms dissimilarly. Nonprofits not only use varying proportions of posts across these categories depending upon the platform, but they also post at different frequencies based on the platforms. Whether through strategic or intuitive choice, these platforms are used for different ends, through different means by nonprofits. The actions taken by nonprofits have distinct impacts on reach and user engagement based on platform. Second, though largely descriptive, this analysis helps present a fuller picture of how nonprofit groups use social media. Facebook is the world's largest social networking site, with nearly double the unique users of any other single social networking site in the world (Bennett 2014). To study this platform through the proxy of another is to do a disservice to the scholarly and practical understanding how nonprofits use social media.

Given these findings, further exploration of how nonprofit groups communicate on Facebook is needed. This study focuses on one issue area

and groups with a variety of resource levels available to them. It would be interesting to see how groups from other issue areas use this platform. Furthermore, while the disparity of resources provide an interesting investigation into the impact of resources on this use, it would also be intriguing to see an examination using the traditional 100 largest nonprofit groups in America approach to test whether these effects are a result of revenue disparity.

While these findings are interesting given the state of the literature, this study does not address all the questions related to how groups communicate on Facebook and Twitter. Perhaps the largest outstanding questions is why do these differences occur? This study does not look at the motivations behind these choices. These distributions may be the result of strategic choice, intuition, or chance. An exploration of group motivation would show whether these patterns result from strategic choices, an important missing piece of this puzzle.

Different Factors Affect Reach on Different Platforms

Existing literature has not thoroughly examined the impact of organizational features on reach. Many scholarly and popular commentators alike tend to talk about the potential of social media as being equal across groups. The common thought process is that having a social media page will result in a greater number of followers. However, other factors may affect this decision that have been largely unaccounted for. Chapter 4 sought to examine

the impact of organizational capacity, access, and social media usage on reach.

The literature largely suggests that the organizational capacity would still limit nonprofit group impact online. However, the findings of this study do not support that hypothesis. While organizational capacity did have an impact on group reach on Twitter, the magnitude of that effect was so small that it was effectively meaningless. The results of this analysis consistently found that for a 1,000 dollar increase in annual revenue, groups saw only a one follower increase in reach on Twitter.

Otherwise, studies of nonprofit reach on these platforms reaffirmed the finding that Facebook and Twitter have different effects. While the average number of posts per week, regardless of communication type, had a positive impact on nonprofit group reach on Facebook. This did not hold for Twitter. Similarly, while the increase in the number of action posts on Twitter suggests an increase in group reach on Twitter, this did not hold for Facebook. It seems that the impact of a social media presence differs across these platforms. Small increases in the number of times per week a group posts on Facebook, regardless of communication type, can impact reach positively. But the story of Twitter is different. Here increases in the number of action posts result in this positive increase in reach. Taking the same approach on both platforms would result in differing results. This is an interesting finding because, to date, little

other research has examined the relationship between of how groups use social media and the size of their audience.

Given this finding, scholars interested in reach of nonprofits on social media should not talk about Facebook and Twitter as being identical. This is an understandable finding given that information and posts move across these media in different ways. To expect a single post on Facebook to have the same impact on as a single post on Twitter is to misunderstand how these platforms function. The underlying structures of these media differ drastically so that use would impact reach different make sense.

However, it is also important to highlight that the measure of reach on this platform is a static measure. Therefore, this study does not test whether these characteristics increase reach over time. These results cannot say whether these activities are attracting new members or merely effectively keeping the ones that a group already has. Rather it addresses the question: what are the characteristics of and group profiles, with larger online reaches? Future research in this area could use a measure of reach that captures movement over time to test whether these attributes are attracting new supporters. Such studies would be useful both in creating a fuller scholarly understanding of the factors that impact reach, but also aid practitioners who aim to expand the reach of their nonprofits to better advocate for their causes.

Users Engage Nonprofits Differently on Different Platforms

One of the thing that practitioners are most interested in is follower engagement. However, scholarly attention to this has been largely theoretical. Very little attention in political science has been given to the effect of what groups say and how they say it. Furthermore, when engagement has been examined there has been a tendency to treat all user responses as equal. However, not only might a different forms a response signal different things from users, but different forms of user engagement may better serve other group goals (e.g., extending reach or aiding advocacy). Chapter 5 sought to examine the effect of both what groups said and how they said it on user engagement across Facebook and Twitter. Once again, the findings of these analyses suggest that user response differs across these platforms.

What nonprofit groups say is much more effective at generating dialogue on Facebook than it is on Twitter. This is interesting because if groups are interested in hearing what supporters and stakeholders have to say through these media, Facebook would seem to provide a much better way to access that information. However, this study does not address the role of @replies on Twitter because even a count of such replies is difficult to measure accurately. So while this analysis suggests that comments on Facebook are responsive what groups say, it is not possible to say if that holds true for Twitter. Future studies should look that the role of @replies in response to what groups say on these platforms. There is a caveat to this point though.

When frequency is added to the consideration of what groups say on these platforms, Twitter does show an increased effect of what groups say. This is a result of how these platforms operate; showing again that treating these platforms as identical is a mistake.

How groups communicate matters as well as what they communicate. Both in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 5, these studies and previous studies suggest that visual stimuli are potentially powerful, but rarer than one might expect. A single visual stimulus is increase engagement on Twitter, more impactful than on Facebook. This suggests that practitioners would do well to increase the amount of visual stimuli they introduce into these platforms.

But it is not just a matter of what or how groups are communicating on these platforms, it is a matter of how often these categories are used. Increasing the average number of posts per week has a different effect than an additional single post from a single category. Increasing the average number of picture posts or video posts per week, introduces the effects of post type onto Facebook usage. Understanding these dynamics is important for both scholarly and practitioner understanding of the impact of social media on usage by nonprofit groups.

Regardless of these considerations, however, the fundamental conclusion is that users respond to these platforms in different ways. This further suggests that scholars, in seeking to fully understand the impact of these media, should treat these media as independent platforms. For

practitioners, they would do well to be aware of these differences. Paying attention to how engagement responses differ based on platform, communication type, and post type can give nonprofit groups powerful tools and a clearer strategy for achieving their broader missional goals.

Limitations of this Study

This study uses nonprofits groups from one issue are of a variety of sizes. While this ensures that groups are being stimulated by the same factors (e.g., news coverage, policy initiatives, et cetera), it also presents a problem for generalizability. Gun rights and control groups may not operate in the same way as groups from other policy or issue areas. Gun rights groups tend to be particularly well-organized and well-financed. Furthermore, the issue of gun rights and control is frequently on the agenda on the state or national level. These attributes do not necessarily hold true for groups in other issue areas. Groups from other areas may be more subject to fluctuations in traditional media attention and policy agenda fluctuations. While using this case provides insight into nonprofit social media usage and response, the findings may not be entirely generalizable to all nonprofits.

Another limitation of this study is that availability of revenue data. The disparity in filing requirements of Form 990s is an obstacle to using all information that might be theoretically interesting. This is a problem that arises from using nonprofit groups of different sizes. Many state-level groups did not have to file Form 990s at all. Furthermore, accessing this information through

the IRS website is complicated. Information is often difficult to access or mired in other data. Some external websites (e.g., GuideStar.org) maintain a free database of these forms but group profiles on such websites may be out of date (e.g., not having a recent 990 on file). This was complicated by the lack of transparency from most states in reporting PAC revenue data. Most states require filings for these groups but not all states make this information available online. Approaching the study of nonprofit social media use by looking at varying resources provides new information, but that some groups lacked a measure of this revenue is a definite limitation of this study.

Avenues for Future Research

This study is only one of a handful that examine message content on nonprofit groups' Facebook pages, let alone the impact of that content on user response within this platform. Future studies should continue this exploration of message content and impact on Facebook. While examinations of Twitter should not be ignored, the different structures and impact of these platforms indicate that more studies that include direct examines of Facebook are an important part of a fuller understanding of how social media impact nonprofit groups ability to achieve their missional and advocacy goals. Furthermore, future explorations could also focus on groups within other issues areas to see if these findings hold.

This study only examines the use and impact of Facebook and Twitter. However, as other platforms emerge, develop, grow, scholars and practitioners

should not treat them as natural extensions of Facebook and Twitter. There are other social media platforms that are both popular and used for advocacy that are not examined here. Platforms like Tumblr and Instagram have millions of users and can be used by individuals and nonprofit groups to reach different types of constituencies than are available on Facebook and Twitter. As the average age of Twitter and Facebook users continue to rise, alternative platforms could become especially important. These studies should test to see whether these effects discussed in this study hold true for the other platforms. Future studies should resist the temptation to study these platforms by proxy.

Studies of how nonprofits use social media and the impact of that use have clear practical implications. The findings of this study and other studies like this one offer the components of a social media strategy for nonprofit advocacy. However, the practical implications of these findings are highlighted infrequently in scholarly writing, which results in missing key opportunity to affect the use of these platforms by nonprofit groups. Putting these findings in conversation with practitioners could help nonprofit groups better leverage these media to meet their goals, mobilize people, and raise resources.

Finally, advocacy by nonprofit groups takes many forms. This examines user engagement with nonprofit group generated content. However, some of the most successful social media awareness campaigns in recent years have started as grassroots movements that nonprofits have successfully coopted for organizational success. The most obvious example is the Amyotrophic Lateral

Sclerosis Association's (ALS Association) use of the Ice Bucket Challenge. This challenge started as one individual using an existing meme to focus attention on this organization. In the end, this meme raised over 115 million dollars, in the United States alone, for the ALS Association (ALS Ice Bucket Challenge - FAQ. (n.d.)). Understanding how these memes emerge, become rapidly memetic, and can be coopted by nonprofit groups is currently a missing piece of this puzzle. Grassroots advocacy that aids or can be coopted by nonprofits is an important avenue for future research.

The future of the study of the impact of social media on nonprofit group advocacy is bright. Compared to social media usage by campaigns, candidates, and corporations, very little research is done on how non-profits use the media and the success of that implementation. This study has sought to understand how do groups communicate on social media and what is the success of that communication? In seeking to address this question, one finding was continuously reaffirmed: Facebook and Twitter are different. Future research should focus on understanding and adapting to platform differences in order to better understand the impact of nonprofit groups social media usage.

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Appendix 1: 501(c) Tax-exempt Status

TABLE A.1: OVERVIEW OF 501(C) TAX EXEMPT STATUS

Tax Code	Organizations
501(c)(1)	Congressional Corporations
501(c)(2)	Title Holding Corporation for Exempt Organizations
501(c)(3)	Religious, Education, Charitable, Scientific, Literary, Public Safety, Amateur Sports Competition, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Children
501(c)(4)	Civil Leagues, Social Welfare Organizations, and Local Associations of Employees
501(c)(5)	Labor, Agricultural, and Horticultural Organizations
501(c)(6)	Business Leagues, Chambers of Commerce, Real Estate Boards
501(c)(7)	Social and Recreational Clubs
501(c)(8)	Fraternal Beneficiary Societies and Associations
501(c)(9)	Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Associations
501(c)(10)	Domestic Fraternal Societies and Associations
501(c)(11)	Teachers' Retirement Fund Associations
501(c)(12)	Benevolent Life Insurance Associations, Mutual Ditch or Irrigation Companies, Mutual or Cooperative Telephone Companies
501(c)(13)	Cemetery Companies
501(c)(14)	State-Chartered Credit Unions, Mutual Reserve Funds
501(c)(15)	Mutual Insurance Companies or Associations
501(c)(16)	Cooperative Organizations to Finance Crop Operations
501(c)(17)	Supplemental Unemployment Benefit Trusts
501(c)(18)	Employee Funded Pensions Trust (created before June 25, 1959)
501(c)(19)	Post or Organization of Past or Present Members of the Armed Forces
501(c)(20)	Group Legal Services Plan Organizations

TABLE A.1: OVERVIEW OF 501(C) TAX EXEMPT STATUS

501(c)(21)	Black Lung Benefit Trusts
Tax Code	**Organizations**
501(c)(22)	Withdrawal Liability Payment Fund
501(c)(23)	Veterans Organizations (Created before 1880)
501(c)(24)	Section 4049 ERISA Trusts
501(c)(25)	Title Holding Corporations or Trusts with Multiple Parents
501(c)(26)	State-Sponsored Organization Providing Health Coverage for High-Risk Individuals
501(c)(27)	State-Sponsored Workers' Compensation Reinsurance Organization
501(c)(28)	National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust
501(c)(29)	Qualified Nonprofit Health Insurance Issuers (Created in section 1322(h)(1) of the Affordable Care Act)

Appendix 2: Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) Typology and Coding Examples

Below is a reproduction of Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) explication of their typology and coding examples (p.342).

Table 1 Tweet Functions

Category	Example	Freq.	(%)
Information (58.6%)			
Information	*WorldVisionUSA:* Tribal clashes with police send 16,000 people fleeing from #Congo's Equateur Province . . . http://tr.im/DRC_clashes #conflict	1,429	58.6
Community (25.8%)			
Giving recognition and thanks	*Smithsonian*: The @NationalZoo cuties are Twig Catfish. @UserID, @UserID & @UserID got it right!. More photos: http://ow.ly/Du3b	321	13.2
Acknowledgement of current & local events	*NYPL*: Patience and Fortitude Salute the Troops on Veterans Day! The Library Lions love a parade! http://bit.ly/2uvxm5	9	0.4
Responses to reply messages	*DucksUnlimited*: @UserID We hope you get to go too. If you get out, tweet using the #duckhunting tag & let us know how it goes!	199	8.2
Response solicitation	*ChildFund*: Change a childhood #childfundcac event starts now. Give us your best tweets on child rights. Rules @ http://www.childfund.org/twitter	99	4.1
Action (15.6%)			
Promoting an event	*atAMNH*: Is there biology behind holiday madness? Find out what makes us naughty or nice at Dec. 2nd's SciCafe. RSVP on Facebook http://bit.ly/4bituI	190	7.8
Donation appeal	*UCPNational*: Sign up for "Black Friday" Deals on Amazon.com and a % of your purchase goes to UCP. Use this link: http://bit.ly/284BRx #disability #autism	75	3.1
Selling a product	*MetOpera*: The new online shop is now open! Browse through for great gifts, CDs, DVDs and more! http://www.metoperashop.org	12	0.5
Call for volunteers & employees	*ChildrensLA*: Pls RT Mission Critical: Looking for a great online communications coordinator to help our hospital at http://bit.ly/9wRW4 #jobs	20	0.8
Lobbying and advocacy	*WorldVisionUSA*: On World #AIDS Day (Dec. 1), help end mother-to-child #HIV transmission. Ask Congress to keep promise . . . http://tr.im/wad_promise (VIDEO)	14	0.6
Join another site or vote for organization	*CatholicRelief*: Were you at the Komen Global Race in DC this year? You definitely need to join the facebook group: http://bit.ly/qvSCk #globalrace (komenforthecure)	29	1.2
Learn how to help	*SalvationArmyUS*: Want to sign up for an Online Red Kettle, but need a little help? Here are some fun video tutorials to get you started! http://bit.ly/3j7GHN	40	1.6
	Total	2,437	100%

Appendix 3: Coding Examples from this Study

TABLE A.2: CODING EXAMPLES FROM THIS STUDY

	Information
Twitter	*NYSPRA*: It might have cost NY $50m-$70m to create an ammunition database under SAFE Act. So now the state is delaying it *http://t.co/BptPMr9aAU*
Facebook	*Buckeye Fire Arms Association*: Washington Post: In Ohio, momentum favors gun rights movement *http://ow.ly/2Ce4Ds*
	Community
Twitter	*CPRANews:* May you all have a safe and Merry Christmas! *http://t.co/tqzBpKMlTO*
Facebook	*Children's Defense Fund: "We owe our children–the most vulnerable citizens in any society–a life free from violence and fear." –Nelson Mandela Children of all ages mourn the passing of this great man. [picture]*
Twitter	*NRA*: Go to the range more often? Teach someone to shoot? Join the #NRA? Do you have a firearm-related New Year's resolution for 2014?
Facebook	*Cure Violence*: What's your violence prevention New Year's resolution for 2014?
Twitter	*Smiartgunlaws:* @VPCinfo Thanks guys!
Facebook	*Gun Owners Action League:* Here is the list of Lucky 20 Winners, all winners have been notified, thank you everyone for participating and look for our "Big Bang" Annual Fundraiser soon! [Names removed]

TABLE A.2: CODING EXAMPLES FROM THIS STUDY

	Action
Twitter	*CeasefireOregon:* Looking for a meaningful gift? Donate to Ceasefire Oregon in honor or in memory of a special person. [addressed removed]
Facebook	*CeasefirePA*: Help us Ring in a Year of Real Reform. These last few days of 2013 will help us determine how much we can do and what we can take on in the new year. We're tired of politicians remaining silent, we're fed up with dangerous loopholes that allow criminals to get guns and we're sick about the ongoing toll of gun violence. In 2014 we're going to continue to work to change all this and bring real reform to Pennsylvania, but we need your help. Please make your end-of-year tax deductible donation now. *http://www.ceasefirepa.org/contribute*
Twitter	*BradyBuzz:* Gun dealers should care when guns go missing. So should ur US Senators. Call them at [phone number removed]. #Stolengunskill.
Facebook	*Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*: WE HEAR YOU!! To Get I-591 Petitions to sign and distribute, contact Protect Our Gun Rights at [address removed] Phone: [phone number removed] !! YesOn591@liberty.seanet.com *http://yeson591.org/*
Twitter	*ArkansasCarry:* Arkansas Carry will host legal open carry celebration in Ft. Smith *http://t.co/D13ZodrXAc*
Facebook	*Virginia Citizens Defense League:* VCDL-PAC has an election mailer to get out, and volunteers are needed THIS WEDNESDAY, October 30, from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm! [Names and Address Removed]
Twitter	*NYAGV1:* Need a last minute, meaningful #HolidayGift? For just $35, a membership to New Yorkers Against Gun Violence. http://t.co/nxsuJP8Mg7
Facebook	*Gun Owners of California:* Just a little reminder about the Yuba Sutter Fundraising Banquet that's just 2 months away! Get your tickets today and help GOC fight against the anti-gunners in the Legislature, the elections, and the courts!