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**Action Online – A Preliminary Study on Social Media**

**Activism on Facebook**

社群網絡與線上社會運動之初探研究

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A Master Thesis



By

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## ABSTRACT

This study posits that there is a connection between political action online and activism in the real life. In addition, social ties and networks as well as political knowledge and efficacy play an important role in this connection. *Causes*, an application on *Facebook*, was selected for analyzed. A mixed method study was conducted, consisting of two stages. In the first stage (quantitative), a survey was utilized to investigate the correlation between activities on *Causes* and conventional political engagement. A total of 45 responses were gathered using convenience sampling. It was found that there is a strong correlation between action on *Causes* and conventional political engagement. For example, information retrieval activities are correlated with conventional activism ( $r=.418, p<.05$ ), and social networking activities are also correlated with conventional activism ( $r=.661, p<.05$ ). In addition to the survey, intensive interviews ( $N = 5$ ) were conducted in the second stage (qualitative) to elaborate and clarify the results from the survey as well as to explore new grounds on the significance of ties and networks. Some themes have emerged from the interviews, including motivations for the use of *Causes*, *Causes* as an information channel, potential and problems of *Causes*, online versus offline activism, affiliation and involvement, political knowledge and efficacy as well as ties and networks. Interview findings concluded that the high correlation between online and offline activism is further specified by the interviewees to be an extension of each form of activism, meaning they are complementary rather than identical.

Key words: social media, political activism, political knowledge, political efficacy, social ties, social networks

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*“The proliferation of social-networking sites like Facebook has spawned a new and particularly superficial form of activism. It asks nothing more from participants than a few mouse clicks and makes everyone feel good. But these empty campaigns may not accomplish much, if anything, in the way of social change, and could even distract people from supporting legitimate causes.”*

*By Evgeny Morozov of Newsweek*

*From the magazine issue dated June 29, 2009*

### 1.1 An overview

There are various views regarding whether activism online has a value as well as how it affects conventional activism. Some people (Morozov, 2009; Ma, 2009) think such form of activism is meaningless and may even subtract engagement in political activities in the real life. Others are convinced that, due to the characteristics of the Internet, activism online is effective in raising awareness among users and in turn stimulating their efficacy (Ma, 2009). This eventually initiates participation in conventional activism. The direction of this correlation can be the other way around, too. In other words, participation in conventional activism may in turn lead to a greater likelihood of action online. It is the purpose of this study to find out more about these correlations.

To do that, this research returns to the fundamentals. The author believes there is more than a simple correlation between activism online and conventional activism. It is not merely a yes or no, i.e. enhance or subtract, question. It is believed that there must be some intervening factors that will provide some insights. Therefore, a

political platform in a social networking framework, namely the application of *Causes* on *Facebook*, is chosen for analysis. It is believed that the probability of political action either in the real life or online rises with one's level political efficacy and political knowledge. In other words, the more confident a person feels about his own political action, the more likely he or she will be engaged in political action. Likewise, the more knowledge a person has about a specific issue, the more likely he or she will be engaged in political action targeted at the issue. Now the question comes to what in the political network of *Causes* promotes the users' political efficacy and level of political knowledge and in turn increases their probability of political action in the real life.

The social networking feature of *Causes* is believed to be the essential factor. When using *Causes*, users have a chance to be linked to other users, some of whom may be relatively more active and more knowledgeable in the issue. The social networking feature of *Causes* makes connections among users possible. Because of *Causes*, it is a lot easier for people with the same political interests to come together and form associations that will eventually promote political efficacy. Users may connect through their use of the discussion board. On the other hand, there is also a large amount of information such as news posts and video clips on the topics related to the issue. Through these pieces of information, users have a chance to grow in political knowledge regarding the issue, and this will also lead to a higher level of political efficacy.

The first objective of this study is to find out whether activities on *Causes* are correlated with activities in conventional activism. Secondly, it will find out whether reinforced political efficacy and improved political knowledge play an important role in the aforementioned connection. It should be noted here though that this direction from action online to political efficacy and knowledge to conventional activism can

go the other way around as well. However, this study is mainly interested in the direction from action online to conventional activism.

## **1.2 What motivates this study?**

Diani (2000) pointed out that computer mediated communication (CMC) has been frequently believed to dramatically affect a whole range of fundamental human activities, from work organization (e.g. through telecommuting) to democratic procedures (as reflected in the advent of 'electronic democracy') to the multiplication of personal identities and the self. One of the most recent forms of CMC occurs in the space of social media or social-networking websites, and in recent years, they have been under constant discussion especially in terms of how they contribute to the functioning of society as well as the formation of a whole new culture in the cyberspace. Among all the controversies, how social media contributes to the concept and action of social, civil, political activism has been of particular interest to the academics and the activists alike. However, with a more comprehensive overview, it is not difficult to identify a wide range of opinions regarding the role social media plays in activism. Such discrepancy in the public opinion regarding social media activism is the basis of motivation for conducting this research, which aims to find out whether social media can effectively network users, whether it provides information that, and whether it can eventually initiate participation in conventional activism. Through answering these questions, this study hopes to solve the fundamental question as regards the true extent to which social media are able to contribute to the social, civil and political activism. To illustrate the aforementioned discrepancy, this chapter begins with a brief overview of some opinions in response to the effectiveness and the effects of social media on conventional activism.

### 1.2.1 *Positive opinions regarding social media activism*

Some express optimism as to the almighty power social media is able to inject into the work of activists'. A social media strategist named Jye Smith from Switched On Media<sup>1</sup> expressed such optimism. According to Smith (Ma, 2009), online campaigning is increasingly useful in raising awareness of issues and influencing change. In addition, he also believes that social media presents a new set of opportunities because now it only takes a click of a button to activate the action of the majority. Awareness is extremely important in this case, as people will not care unless they know. This is why some people believe that social media is essential in successful activism because it is effective in drawing people's attention to a certain issue. Ma (2009) gave another example where social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* had been successfully applied in raising the awareness of a cause dedicated to helping child soldiers in northern Uganda. The example illustrates an effective utilization of social media to provide a channel for thousands of people who care to make a difference and to tap into the organization in charge of the issue or cause.

### 1.2.2 *Negative opinions regarding social media activism*

On the other hand, people like Morozov, the writer of the passage quoted in the beginning of this chapter, seem skeptical about the true extent to which social media can bring about social change. Morozov apparently is not alone in holding and conveying such thoughts. Marc Lynch is a political scientist at George Washington University. He believes that being part of a *Facebook* group is perhaps a political activity that doesn't cost much in terms of various efforts (Morozov, 2009). It doesn't

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<sup>1</sup> Switched On Media is a digital marketing agency which focuses on search engine optimization and social media.

involve any commitment and dedication such as protesting and other real political work necessary to conventional activism. Holding similar views are also Nathan Bush, a social media expert at DP Dialogue<sup>2</sup>, and Omar Samad, a social media marketer. According to Bush, digital activism falls short in changing bigger issues such as political situations, especially in countries such as China or North Korea (Ma, 2009). He added that people consider it trendy to be seen as a good person among their network of friends online, and that's what matters. Samad shares the same view. He doesn't consider social media to be an ideal tool for causing social change, and even though it is a good medium for generating awareness and organizing people, it does not cause people in power to take notice.

People who are skeptical about the effectiveness of social media activism refer to it as "slacktivism"<sup>3</sup>, a term coined for people who join a cause group on *Facebook* just to gain social currency. Evgeny Morozov (2009) provided a definition of slacktivism: "slacktivism is an apt term to describe feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact. It gives those who participate in 'slacktivist' campaigns an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a *Facebook* group."

### 1.3 Conceptual organization

As illustrated in the previous section, the disparity in people's attitudes towards social media activism intrigues the author of this study and provides the motivation to ask several questions regarding what exactly determines the effectiveness of social media activism in enhancing conventional activism. Morozov (2009) expressed his concern about the influence of social media activism on conventional forms of

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<sup>2</sup> DP Dialogue is an Australian social media marketing company.

<sup>3</sup> Slacktivism (sometimes slactivism) is a portmanteau word formed with the combination of slacker and activism.

activism. He proposed an intriguing question: "Is it possible that now with availability of slacktivist forms of activism, people will gradually turn away from conventional forms of activism such as demonstrations, sit-ins, confrontation with the police, strategic litigation, etc?" This is worrying, according to him, because conventional forms of activism have been proven to be effective, while the effectiveness of social media activism is still unclear. Diani (2000) proposed a similar question: "Should we expect the emergence of new types of 'virtual' social movements, disconnected from a specific location in space and without reference to any specific 'real' community?" Both of them seem to express a concern for the disconnection between activism online and activism in real life. As a result, it is the purpose of this study to find out whether the answer to these questions can provide an insight to the understanding of activism and social movements.

The analysis of this study starts with the concept of networking. Several concepts in the network theory will first be reviewed and then applied to see how they contribute to the linkage between social media activism and conventional activism. Specifically, several networking activities on *Causes* will be examined to learn about the role they play in the linkage. Networking is the dominant feature of social media. Diani (2006) pointed out that social networks influence participation in collective action. Networking may increase individual chances to become involved and strengthen activists' attempts to further the appeal of their causes. This statement illustrates the fact that the networking feature that comes with social media may occupy an extremely important position in the discussion of activism. This study presupposes that while taking part in social media activism, i.e. taking part in specific *Facebook* cause groups, an individual, through several networking activities, establishes new connections and reinforces existed connections, which in turn may enhance their political efficacy and facilitate the development of new forms of

collective action at later stages (Diani, 2006). As a result, a question regarding the networking feature of activism is asked: Does being linked to people who already participate may enhance individuals' political efficacy and facilitate their decisions to devote time and energy to conventional collective action? In other words, when individuals use *Facebook's* application of *Causes* and through it meet people who are involved in conventional activism, these individuals will feel politically more efficacious and have a better chance to joining real-life activism events.

Then, the study moves on to discuss how the various types of information on *Causes*, such as news posts, links to relevant materials online, video clips and so on, can help users develop their political knowledge. An increased level of political knowledge will also allow the users to feel politically more efficacious and boost the possibility for them to participate in conventional political actions.

So what role does political efficacy play in this discussion? Hollander (1997), in one of his articles, discussed the implication of Gamson Hypothesis on social activism. According to him, Gamson proposed that "a combination of high political efficacy and low political trust is the optimum combination for mobilization" (quoted from Hollander, 1997). In the same article, Hollander also discussed Bandura's theory of efficacy. According to Bandura's theory of human coping behavior, "when self-efficacy feelings are high but response outcome expectations are low, the result is social activism, protest, and milieu change." The two theories proposed above demonstrate the significance of political efficacy in bringing about social change. As a result, this study will try to find out whether and how the networking feature of *Facebook's Causes* as well as the political knowledge of issue information will increase users' political efficacy, and in turn causes activism in real life.

## 1.4 Problem statement

As proposed above, several questions need to be answered in order to address the problem in question: “What determines the effectiveness of social media activism in initiating conventional activism?” Based on those questions, the problem statement is proposed as follows:

*Causes, an application on Facebook, seeks to achieve equal opportunity activism by providing a platform for not only political elites and established organizations but also individuals who wish to make their voice heard. Despite such grand objective, there is currently an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of such form of activism that takes place on social media. A problem lies in the fact that there has been no systematic analysis regarding the effectiveness of social media activism.*

The overall objective of this study is to learn more about the uses of *Causes* and to find out about users’ attitudes towards the effectiveness of social media activism.

## 1.5 Background

This section first provides a simple introduction about the growing concern over social networking sites both in the daily life and in the academia before introducing *Facebook* and *Causes*.

### 1.5.1 Social networking sites

It is not difficult to see the value of studying social media activism when a growing trend of social media usage is being witnessed. Aaron Uhrmacher is a social

media consultant. In a blog entry he wrote for Mashable.com<sup>4</sup>, he cited some research results from a report published by The Society for New Communications Research titled, “New Media, New Influencers & Implications for Public Relations”. One of the findings from the report is “Social media is rapidly becoming a core channel for disseminating information. 57% of this group of early social adopters reported that social media tools are becoming more valuable to their activities, while 27% reported that social media is a core element of their communications strategy.” (Uhrmacher, 2008)

**TABLE 1-1: Growth of Social Media Use**

<b>Social Networking Growth by Worldwide Region June 2008 vs. June 2007 Total Worldwide Audience, Age 15+ - Home and Work Locations Source: comScore World Metrix</b>			
	<b>Unique Visitors (000)</b>		
	<b>Jun-07</b>	<b>Jun-08</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
<b>Worldwide</b>	<b>464,437</b>	<b>580,510</b>	<b>25%</b>
Asia Pacific	162,738	200,555	23%
Europe	122,527	165,256	35%
North America	120,848	131,255	9%
Latin America	40,098	53,248	33%
Middle East – Africa	18,226	30,197	66%

Source: comScore

Also found in the same blog entry is some statistics about social media usage released by comScore<sup>5</sup> in 2008. As can be seen from the table taken from Comscore.com, the worldwide usage of social networking websites grew by 25%

<sup>4</sup> Mashable is a blog focused exclusively on Web 2.0 and social media news.

<sup>5</sup> comScore is a marketing research company that provides marketing data and services to many Internet businesses.

within a year. The growth was especially notable in Europe at 35% and the Middle East at 66%.

In another blog entry on *Mediapost.com*<sup>6</sup>, the growing use of *Facebook*, where the subject of this current study is located, further illustrates the point. According to the entry written by Mark Walsh who cited the statistics inside *Facebook*, *Facebook* had reached 200 million active users only seven months after the social network reached 100 million users and 90 days after reaching 150 million. On average, *Facebook* has 500,000 new members added every day since late August 2008. Mark Walsh also quoted Mark Zuckerberg, *Facebook* co-founder and CEO, who wrote: “Both U.S. President Barack Obama and French President Nicholas Sarkozy have used Facebook as a way to organize their supporters. From the protests against Colombian FARC<sup>7</sup>, a 40-year-old terrorist organization, to fighting oppressive, fringe groups in India, people use *Facebook* as a platform to build connections and organize action.”

From the aforementioned figures and statements, it is not difficult to see the growing significance of social media not only in connecting people but, more importantly, in delivering information and helping organizing social, civil and political action.

### 1.5.2 *An introduction of Causes and Facebook*

This study looks into the use of the *Causes* application on *Facebook*, a tool for social media activism. Before moving forward, it is appropriate to have an idea about some key terms. In addition, this study has selected causes of various scopes for analysis. These causes will also be introduced in this section.

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<sup>6</sup> MediaPost is an online resource for all advertising media professions.

<sup>7</sup> The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

## Facebook

*Facebook* Press Room provides a straightforward yet detailed introduction of the company as well as the popular online social networking website it created. This section, however, due to its scope and emphasis, will only focus on certain aspects of the site which are relevant to this study.

According to the introduction, *Facebook* is a social utility website established in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg along with some other co-founders. This was when Mark Zuckerberg was attending Harvard University as a Computer Science major. This social networking utility was developed with the aim of helping people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and coworkers. To reach that aim, several technologies have been renovated to facilitate the sharing of information of the social graph, the digital mapping of people's real-world social connections. Membership to this website was originally restricted to students of Harvard University but then was expanded to students of other Ivy League Schools and then eventually to anyone aged 13 or over. Now the site has more than 250 million active users. The site is also growing internationally. For instance, more than 50 translations are available, with more than 40 in development. In addition, about 70% of *Facebook* users are outside the United States. These international characteristics make Facebook an interesting research subject.

*Facebook* has a Platform feature, which allows companies and engineers to integrate with the *Facebook* website and gain access to millions of users through the networking function. In other words, developers can create so-call applications using this Platform feature. According to the statistics published on the site, currently there are more than 350,000 active applications on *Facebook Platform*, and more than 200 of them have more than one million monthly active users. In addition, more than 70% of *Facebook* users engage with these applications every month. This present

study is concerned with one of these applications called *Causes*.

### Causes

The organization *Causes* was co-founded by Sean Parker and Joe Green and was launched on May 25, 2007. In this section, the introduction of this organization and the *Facebook* application it designs is adapted from the organization's website at [www.causes.com](http://www.causes.com) First of all, about the founders, Parker comes from a background of consumer internet products such as Napster, Plaxo, and *Facebook*, while Green has a background in grassroots organizing and has worked in political campaigns on different levels, including the city, the state and the presidential. The organization, *Causes*, therefore, is a result of the combination of their knowledge in offline organization and online social networking. Aside from these two founders, a group of devoted engineers, graphic designers, administrators, and managers also contribute to the success of *Causes*. Currently based in downtown Berkeley, California, *Causes* operates on a fundamental principal, and that is equal opportunity activism.

As stated in the website, '*Causes* was founded on the belief that in a healthy society, anyone can participate in change by informing and inspiring others.' It is based on this belief that *Causes* was created to provide people with tools to mobilize their friends for collective action. When set in the social networking context of *Facebook*, the potential of *Causes* to extend impacts is fully maximized. With this application on *Facebook*, everyone can create an advocacy group. This group is referred to a cause group. What sets *Causes* on Facebook different from other models of activism is that on *Causes*, individuals and organizations share the same level-playing field, whereas other models of activism usually favor organizations with large budgets. The success of a cause vitally depends on how well the leader or the creator organizes and keeps their community engaged and mobilized.

A few routine functions in a cause include administrators posting announcements and communicating with members either through email or *Facebook*; members discussing the issues, sharing their experiences, posting media and signing petitions. A cause group can also choose whether to do fundraising by selecting an organization to benefit from the donations. According to some statistics on the website, since the day of its launch, over 50 million people have joined the different causes; over \$8 million has been donated through the application; over 240,000 causes have been created by users on various topics.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As carefully introduced in the previous chapter, the purpose of this study is to learn more about the relationship between social media activism and conventional activism through examining various concepts such as network theory, political knowledge of issue information and political efficacy.

Before reviewing past studies and theorization of the concepts in this study, the author first provides a general overview of previous studies on the subject of social networking sites (SNSs) by referring to a meta-analysis by boyd and Ellison (2008). Following that, the author continues to review literature regarding the aforementioned fundamental concepts before moving on to discussing their role in how social media activism influences conventional activism. In addition, this section also sees the proposal of several research questions which serves as the basis for the investigation in the later stage.

#### **2.1 Social networking sites**

This current study is significant for the very limited amount of research being devoted to the study of social media activism, especially when the discussion is focused on the relationship between social media activism and conventional activism. The majority of the research in the area of social networking sites (SNSs) or computer mediated communication (CMC) has mainly dealt with subjects other than activism online. boyd and Ellison (2008) presented a comprehensive overview of previous scholarship regarding SNSs. They categorized the research into five separate themes, including impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, bridging online and offline social networks, privacy, and other

research (boyd & Ellison, 2008). In the category of impression management and friendship performance, researchers have looked into the construction of users' online representation of self, and SNSs also provide scholars with a context where impression management as well as friendship performance can be investigated. In the category of networks and network structure, scholars have examined profiles and linkage data to study the action of friending. Some of them have also studied the role users play in the growth of SNSs by classifying users into passive members, inviters, and linkers. In addition, there has also been research done about the motivations for people to join a particular network. In terms of bridging online and offline social networks, the investigation has been mainly focused on the relationships between these two types of networks. Most SNSs have been proved to primarily support pre-existing social relations. Also studied is the concept of privacy. Researchers have investigated the potential threats to privacy associated with the use of SNSs. Finally, other research has also been done in the areas of race and ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality as well as how a variety of identities are shaped within the domain of SNSs.

Besides the aforementioned research areas, the application of CMC in political activism or social movements has also been extremely important and is worth further in-depth scholarship. This scholarship should deal with not only the application of CMC in activism but also the fundamental question of the influence on activism through/on CMC on conventional activism, which is the purpose of this current study. Various scholars (Castells 1996; Wellman et al. 1996; Cerulo 1997) believe that the rapidly growing role of 'computer mediated communication' (CMC) has attracted considerable attention from social scientists and generated extensive discussions of its possible impact on social organization (Diani, 2000). This is especially true when the discussion further extends into activism. Diani expressed his thoughts on the merits of CMC on activism. CMC may be expected to influence how

collective action evolves by improving the effectiveness of communication and facilitating collective identity and solidarity (Diani, 2000). Many believe that the reason why the Internet or CMC plays such an important role in the work of activists is because it connects all sorts of communities that are either geographically dispersed (Rheingold, 1993; Pini, Brown, and Previte, 2004) or forced to operate underground by the very nature of their activities. All these opinions reveal the significance of CMC or SNSs in the discussion of activism and social movements. However, at this time when the discussion mainly focuses on the application, it is even more critical to return to the basis and to study the fundamental relationships between social media activism and conventional activism, which is the significance of this research.

## **2.2 Social network analysis**

A search on Wikipedia<sup>8</sup> provides a simple yet comprehensive introduction about social network analysis. First of all, a social network is a structure composed of individuals or organizations. These components of a social network are referred to as nodes in the network theory. These nodes are then connected by various types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, sexual relationship, relationships of belief, knowledge, prestige, etc. These different forms of relationship are referred to as ties in the network theory. Social network analysis has been applied in several social scientific fields and has become a popular topic of speculation and study. This study will further the research agenda by extending the scope to cover online activism.

When studying a social network, it is essential to consider the concepts of

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<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia is a free, open content online encyclopedia created through the effort of a community of users.

bridging and bonding proposed by Putnam (2000). These two terms were coined on the basis of two other concepts, namely the weak ties and the strong ties, which had been developed by Mark Granovetter (1973) when he was studying people looking for employment. Putnam (2000) used the concepts of bridging and bonding to investigate social capital. According to him, bridging social capital is inclusive and mainly takes place when individuals from various backgrounds establish connections between social networks (Williams, 2006). By contrast, bonding can be exclusive. Bonding happens when close friends or family members provide one another with strong emotional or substantive support (Williams, 2006). A further point noted by Williams (2006) in his study is that despite the fact that the aforementioned concepts of bridging and bonding play an important role in understanding communities, they have rarely been applied to successfully study either online or offline communities. In other words, these measures need to be further conceptualized and validated.

### 2.2.1 *Significance of network analysis*

Do networks always matter? This is an important question raised by Diani (2006). Similar to previous research, this study aims to find out the effects networks have on mobilization or participation. The author of this study assumes that the network effects derived from being involved in the cause groups on *Facebook* can either enhance or subtract users' participation in conventional activism. In other words, the author assumes that there is a correlation between the two forms of activism. This is further illustrated by Diani (2006) in his review where he has identified several studies, in which the results of network effects are mixed. One example is Oliver's study (1984), which found that people acquainted with their neighbors were more likely to be involved in neighborhood associations, but network effects were mixed in her study. Another example is Nepstad and Smith's study (1999). They found that ties

to people directly involved were the most powerful predictor of participation, but ties to other organizations didn't seem to be as important. However, this relationship became reversed for those people who joined an organization after it has existed for at least 3 years.

Since the results of network studies varied under different circumstances, perhaps, it is important for the analysts to qualify their points. Diani (2006) has urged scholars to ask these two crucial questions: "What networks actually explain what?" and "Under what conditions do specific networks become relevant?"

In addition, the context or local condition is also very important. In areas where countercultural milieus are strong, and the overall attitudes toward collective action is generally more favorable, there is less need to be linked to members of specific political organizations to encourage adhesion. From the discussion above, it is not difficult to see the importance of incorporating network analysis in the current study.

### 2.2.2 Networks & ties

In the previous chapter, an introduction of the *Facebook* application of *Causes* was provided. This section of literature review then turns to examine how the network theory can be applied in the study of *Causes*. The concepts of bridging and bonding are helpful in understanding the nature as well as the functions of the *Causes* application on *Facebook*. Therefore, in this section, the author first presents some arguments from the existed literature and then discusses the application of these arguments on the study of *Causes*.

#### Weak ties of bridging networks and informational input

Williams (2006) pointed out that bridging has the potential of broadening social horizons or world views and thus opening up opportunities for information or new

resources. This kind of networks involves participants from different backgrounds. These participants usually share tentative relationships that lack depth (Williams, 2006). In addition, the same article on social networks from Wikipedia states that “more open networks, with many weak ties and social connections, are more likely to introduce new ideas and opportunities to their members than closed networks with many redundant ties.” According to Putnam (2000, p.22), networks with bridging or weak ties are “better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion”. External assets and information diffusion are the staple concepts. Based on these two concepts, Putnam implied some criteria that are good starting points for theorizing about bridging networks (Williams, 2006). These criteria are: 1) outward looking, 2) contact with a broader range of people, 3) a view of oneself as part of a broader group, and 4) diffuse reciprocity with a broader community. Williams (2006) then went on to use these criteria to develop questions for research.

#### Strong ties of bonding networks and emotional support

Bonding networks, on the other hand, provides stronger emotional support, which leads to mobilization of people to participate in various events and activities. The participants in these networks with strong ties tend to lack diversity in their backgrounds despite the tighter relationships among them. Oftentimes, the enhanced in-group emotional support may help develop antagonism against the out-group world. As illustrated in Sherif’s study (1988), the formation of a group can lead to feelings of mistrust and dislike for those outside of the group. This is why Putnam (2000) conceptualized bonding networks to be exclusive. Similarly, some criteria are proposed to theorize bonding networks (Williams, 2006). These include: 1) emotional support, 2) access to scarce or limited resources, 3) ability to mobilize solidarity, and 4) out-group antagonism. Based on these criteria, Williams (2006) also

developed some research questions.

In the case of *Causes*, participants in a cause group are recruited through different relationships, usually by friends or family. *Facebook* is an online platform where people have to be added to a user's friendlist through his or her own decision. As a result, these people added to the friendlist are usually close friends, family or at least acquaintances. However, once these users have joined a cause group, the ties they establish are usually bridging weak ties.

### 2.2.3 *Strength of ties and mobilization*

The previous sections introduce the concepts of strong ties and weak ties. But how is the strength of a tie measured? Haythornthwaite (2002) mentioned that it is by taking into account several factors, such as frequency of contact, duration of the association, intimacy of the tie, provision of reciprocal services, and kinship. Previous studies have concluded that more strongly tied individuals share a higher level of intimacy, more self-disclosure, emotional as well as instrumental exchanges, reciprocity in exchanges, and more frequent interactions (Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Different levels of strength of ties may bring about different mobilization effects. Therefore, in order to understand whether activism on *Causes* can be transformed to conventional activism, it is essential to first understand what kind of ties are maintained on *Causes*. According to Haythornthwaite (2002), "earlier theories and approaches to computer-mediated communication (CMC) have been tacitly concerned with the types of social network relations communicators can maintain via CMC." It is argued that because of a lack of social presence, online communication exchanges seem to be characterized as instrumental rather than emotional, simple rather than complex, and nonverbal rather than verbal (Haythornthwaite, 2002). Because of these characteristics, online networks seem to be able to maintain weak

ties more efficiently. CMC has been accredited for its ability to provide users with an access to those who are weakly tied, to extend communication potential to overcome temporal and spatial barriers, to inform local and remote operations simultaneously, to draw in more peripheral participants, and to give users an access to a wider set of contacts (Haythornthwaite, 2002). Even though *Causes* is placed within the framework of *Facebook*, a social networking website and is thus considered a form of CMC, it would be reckless to assume that ties maintained on *Causes* are exactly the same as those on other CMC contexts.

Next, it is imperative to learn more about the connection between the strength of a tie and the mobilization of collective action. Some scholars such as McAdam (1986) believe that “it is the broad support, emotional aid, and companionship of strong ties that provides the encouragement and solidarity necessary for collective action” (cited from Hampton, 2003). However, scholars such as Granovetter (1973) disagree. He argued that weak ties provide the connectivity indispensable for collective action. This viewpoint is thoroughly illustrated in his pioneering work “The Strength of Weak Ties”, in which he argued that although weak ties represent social relations of less intimacy, they are able to bridge clusters of stronger ties and to provide access to a wider range of information and resources (Granovetter, 1973).

### **2.3 Issue information and political knowledge**

According to delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), political knowledge is defined as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (p.10). Political knowledge can be obtained from several sources, such as formal education, interpersonal discussion about politics, and traditional news media consumption, such as newspaper reading (Kenski and Stroud, 2006). In addition, according to delli Carpini and Keeter (1993), a common conclusion in an increasing

number of studies is that political factual knowledge works well in predicting political sophistication and some related concepts, such as expertise, awareness, political engagement, and even media exposure. The significance of political factual knowledge is also illustrated in McAllister's (2001) study about civic education and political knowledge in Australia. McAllister (2001) pointed out that one of the most important requirements for the functioning of representative democracy is the existence of knowledgeable citizens. Political knowledge may affect citizen's political sophistication as well as political competence. This is one of the assumptions of the current study. Information regarding an issue on *Causes* can help promote users' factual knowledge about the issue and in turn increase their efficacy and chance of participation. In other words, political knowledge makes users more politically competent. Political competence refers to the extent to which a citizen can make use of abstract political concepts to interpret the political world, to evaluate arguments and debates, and to make informed political decisions (McAllister, 2001). Although in McAllister's study, political knowledge belongs to the area of electoral politics, the same concept can be applied in this study as well which focuses on civil politics.

What is even more relevant to this study is the fact that political participation also increases with political knowledge. According to McAllister (2001), political participation involves a wide range of activities, starting from activities such as discussing politics with others, which requires little skill or initiate, to more demanding activities, such as joining a political party. This study assumes that with the information users obtain from *Causes*, be it factual information from news posts or imagery information from video clips, users' knowledge about the issue can be enhanced. And this enhanced knowledge will lead to a higher level of efficacy and a higher chance of political action in the real life activism.

## **2.4 Issue related political efficacy**

Based on Abramson and Aldrich's definition, political efficacy determines the enactment of political behavior, which means that without feelings of competence and beliefs that one's actions are consequential, one has little incentive to act politically (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954), in *The Voter Decides*, defined the concept of political efficacy as "the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (p.187). In the later stage of theoretical development, efficacy was further developed and identified to be made of two different constructs, namely a personal sense of efficacy, commonly known as internal efficacy, and a more system-oriented sense of efficacy, known as external efficacy (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). A more detailed description of these two constructs can be found in Hollander's study. Self-efficacy (or internal efficacy) has to do with perceptions of one's ability to deal with and influence public affairs, and the system (or external efficacy) concept has to do with perceptions of the system's responsiveness to citizen needs.

## **2.5 Networking, knowledge, efficacy and participation**

This section moves on to investigate the connections among all the aforementioned essential factors contributing to political participation within conventional activism. The level of knowledge and efficacy regarding an issue within civil-political activism depends largely on the amount of information retrieved from as well as the frequency of communication or discussion initiated and encountered in a political social network. In the case of this current study, this social network of political communication and exchanges is any cause group. In order to find out whether social networking in a cause group will lead to increased information input and enhanced political efficacy, it is critical to first find out what goes on in a cause

group in terms of information retrieval and political communication and discussion.

Discussion of social networks is often closely associated with that of social capital, which is often defined as trust in social relations. In a study about social capital, social networks, and political participation, La Due Lake and Huckfeldt (1998), argued that politically relevant social capital is realized through networks of political communication and thus enhances the likelihood that individuals will become politically engaged. But how is this correlation established? La Due Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) believed it is through obtaining relevant political information. Political activity cannot be meaningful unless it is informed, and the cost of information is a primary cost of political participation (Fiorina, 1990). However, sometimes, the costs of information may discourage expectation of any significant benefit arising from participation (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). In this case, economizing this information retrieval process may be the most efficient though a social network. On the basis of this argument, this study argues that *Causes* provides its users a social network, in which they are able to acquire information in an economical manner.

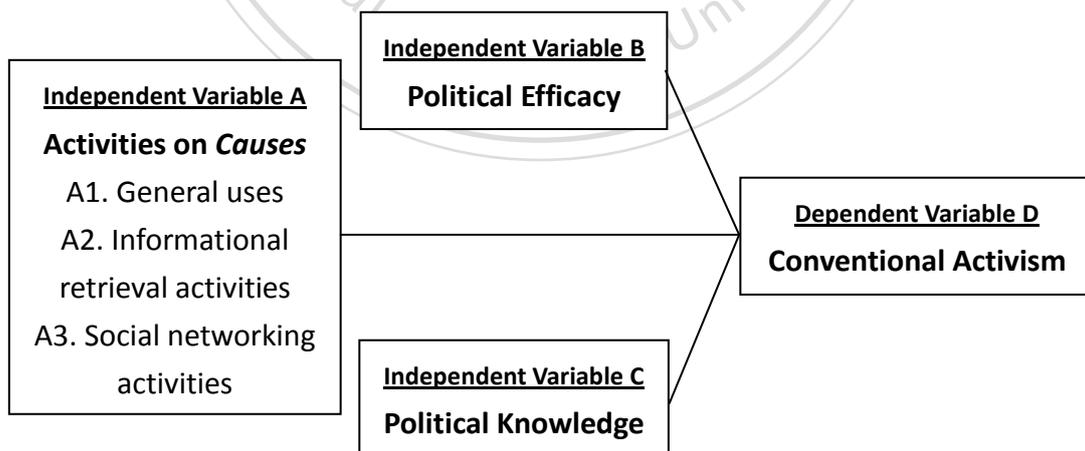
According to La Due Lake and Huckfeldt (1998), social capital is produced through networks of relationships, which means that politically relevant social capital is created as the result of political interaction within these networks. Furthermore, some specific dimensions proposed by them can be helpful in understanding politically relevant social capital. These dimensions include the number of individuals in one's network, the level of political knowledge and expertise among the people in an individual's network, the frequency of political interaction with others in the network (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). These dimensions are believed, in this study, to stimulate users' political knowledge and efficacy, which, in turn, enable the users to become more fully engaged in a wider range of political activities, namely

those in the area of conventional activism. In other words, *Causes on Facebook*, with its networking characteristics, empowers its users to participate in civil politics. This is attested in a study by Zhang and Chia (2006). Their survey showed that social connectedness enhances both civic and political participation.

## 2.6 Theoretical structure

The following theoretical structure provides an overview of the first part of this study which examines the correlations among all the major concepts through a survey. As mentioned above, the correlations among the variables can be examined both ways. In other words, activities on *Causes* can facilitate conventional activism; on the other hand, experiences with conventional activism can also facilitate political action online. However, the analysis in this study focuses on whether the variables are correlated or not rather than whether there is a causal relationship among them.

FIGURE 2-1: Theoretical Structure



## 2.7 Research questions

Based on the structure proposed above, the author raises the following research questions.

RQ1: What is the connection between the activities on Causes and participation in conventional activism?

RQ2: What is the connection between political efficacy and participation in conventional activism?

RQ3: What is the connection between political knowledge and participation in conventional activism?



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY & RESULTS (SURVEY)

This study begins with a survey in order to investigate some overriding correlations among the concepts. In addition, as explained later in this chapter, to complement the responses to the survey, this survey is treated as a pre-test, whose results will be used for the author to continue to carry out interviews with some of the survey respondents in order to uncover some truths and findings that add weight to the significance of the results gathered through the survey. As a result, this chapter will focus on the survey as a pre-test and will discuss some simple findings. In the next chapter, the questions to the intensive interviews will be partly based on the results of the pre-test.

#### **3.1 Research subjects**

The aim of this study is to find out whether users of *Causes* will continue to participate in real life political activism concerning Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation after being involved in specific cause groups and carrying out the actions mentioned above which are defined as the uses of *Causes*. This section will briefly outline some fundamental concepts related to Proposition 8 and then discuss the process of selecting subjects to take part in the survey and the interview.

##### *3.1.1 Proposition 8, its proponents and opponents*

Wikipedia.com provides a detailed account of the California Proposition 8. According to the article on Wikipedia.com, Proposition 8, also known as the California Marriage Protection Act, was a ballot proposition and constitutional amendment passed in the November 2008 state elections. The measure added a new

provision, Section 7.5 of the Declaration of Rights, to the California Constitution. The new section reads: “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” By restricting the definition of marriage to opposite-sex couples, the proposition overturned the California Supreme Court’s ruling of *In re Marriage Cases* that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry.

The campaigns for Proposition 8 were led by the ProtectMarriage.com organization and raised \$39.9 million. Some of the ideologies on which their claims were based were that heterosexual marriage was an essential institution of society, that if the constitution was not changed, children would be led on to believe gay marriage was okay, and finally that gays did not have the right to redefine marriage for everyone else.

On the other hand, the campaigns against Proposition 8 were led by Equality for All, a renowned gay activist group. They raised \$43.3 million. The basis of their argument is that the freedom to marry is essential to the society, that the California Constitution should guarantee the same rights and freedom to everyone and that having different sets of rules because of differences in sexual orientation is unfair.

### *3.1.2 Selection of subjects*

Even though there are two camps of political campaigns which are dedicated either for or against Proposition 8, this current study will only focus on one of them, namely those against Proposition 8 and for same-sex marriage. There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, the objective of this study is to find out the relationship between online activism and conventional activism. Therefore, even though incorporating the ideologies of marriage from both camps will be valuable, for a study on this scale, such incorporation might complicate the matter to the extent behind the comprehension of this study. The ideologies, however, can be a

valuable variable to take into account for future studies. Secondly, the Internet is especially valuable for those who are socially marginalized to reach their political aims. As a result of that, it is reasonable to select the Cause groups which are dedicated to overturn Proposition 8.

The application of *Causes* on *Facebook* has a function which allows users to search for cause groups of a subject matter. By typing in some key words of the subject, a list of cause groups related to the subject will appear on the screen. First, the key words, 'Proposition 8' were used to do the search. A list of 35 cause groups (as of 2010/3/10) dedicated to Proposition 8, both for and against, appeared on the screen. The author then chose the three cause groups on the list with the largest numbers of members. They are respectively *DEFEAT Proposition 8* (109,617 members as of 2010/3/10), *REPEAL Prop 8* (43,315 members as of 2010/3/10) and *Don't eliminate same-sex marriage in California* (3,874 members as of 2010/3/10). The reason these three groups were selected is because they have the largest numbers of members and thus can maximize the number of respondents to the survey. However, due to the lack of survey respondents, the author then chose and input the key words, 'same-sex marriage' to do the search. A list of 94 cause groups (as of 2010/4/10) appeared on the screen. Some of the groups are also on the previous list. Excluding these overlapping groups, another four groups were chosen because of their size. These groups are namely *One Million for Same-sex Marriage* (444,583 members as of 2010/4/10), *Marriage = Person + Person* (11,373 members as of 2010/4/10), *Legalize Same-sex Marriage* (2,108 members as of 2010/4/10), and *Support Same Sex Marriage both Gay and Lesbian* (2,600 members as of 2010/4/10).

Respondents are recruited through a few channels. First, the author sent out emails to the administrators of the groups and asked them to forward the link to an online survey to the users of the groups. The users were invited to fill out the

questionnaire online. In the second stage, due to a lack of response, the author then went on to each group and sent individual emails to some users and asked them to forward the link as well. At the same time, the author also asked some friends who are also members of these groups to fill out the online questionnaire and to forward to their friends the link to the questionnaire.

### 3.2 Sampling and questionnaire design

The survey of this study, which aims to find out the correlations among variables such as the uses of *Causes*, political efficacy, political knowledge and conventional activism, adopts the method of convenience sampling. Based on a search on Wikipedia, convenience sampling is also known as accidental sampling. This type of sampling usually involves taking a sample from a section of population that is readily accessible.

The main reason for such a choice is the difficulty to reach the users of these groups and to recruit them to participate in the survey. This observation stems from the fact that while attempting to conduct a pre-test of the questionnaire, the number of responses was very low. Despite this, it was still decided that the result of the survey with a low response number can be useful as a reference for the intensive interviews. In other words, the results of the survey and those of the interviews will work complementarily to answer the research questions.

It should be noted that in spite of the large numbers of members in the selected groups, the number of 'active' users is actually considerably smaller in each group. For example, according to the statistics on the *Causes* page, as of 2010/4/10, *DEFEAT Proposition 8* has only 72 active users. *REPEAL Prop 8* has only 34 active users. *Don't eliminate same-sex marriage in California* has only 20 active users. *One Million for Same-sex Marriage* has 2,346 active users. *Marriage = Person + Person* has 44 active

users. *Legalize Same-sex Marriage* has 16 active users. And *Support Same Sex Marriage both Gay and Lesbian* has only 8 active users. Even though these numbers fluctuate over time, they remain relatively small compared to the total numbers of registered members. This may justify the fact that survey respondents were difficult to find. More discussion regarding a lack of active users will be found in a later chapter.

The questionnaire contains seven parts. The first part asks about demographic information. The second asks about the general uses of *Causes*. The third asks about the uses of cause groups related to Proposition 8, focusing especially on two types of activities, namely the information retrieval activities and the social networking activities. The fourth asks about political knowledge. The fifth asks about political efficacy. The sixth asks about participation in conventional activism. Finally, the questionnaire ends with an invitation to the intensive interview. To see the questionnaire, please refer to Appendix A.

### **3.3 Variables**

This section introduces the variables presented in the theoretical structure. At the same time, a reliability test among all the items in each part of the questionnaire is also conducted to see if they can be combined to establish indexes for later analysis.

#### *3.3.1 Independent variables*

##### Demographic variables

The first set of independent variables in this study are about the demographic information of the users. The study asks about nationality, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, age, level of education, and political stance.

### General uses of *Causes*

Another set of independent variables are about the activities performed or enacted on cause groups. However, to begin with, the study asks several questions regarding the general uses of *Causes*, questions such as how familiar users are with *Causes*, how often they use *Causes*, and how often they use the cause groups on Proposition 8. In addition to those, it also asks how long a user has used *Causes* and how many cause groups he is a member of. There are, in total, five questions. However, a reliability analysis found that when deleting question 4, the reliability rises from Cronbach's alpha = .515 to Cronbach's alpha = .888. Therefore, question 4 of this part is deleted. The other four questions are together treated as the "general uses of *Causes* index".

### Uses of Proposition 8 cause groups

Then, moving on to the uses of cause groups dedicated to Proposition 8, the study asks questions about the activities, such as fundraising, recruiting, awareness, advocacy, and karma, which are available on all cause groups. First of all, certain but not all cause groups are geared toward not only awareness but also donation. For these groups, the function of fundraising allows the users to either donate money or raise funds. The unit of donation and fundraising is US dollars. These two sub concepts are operationalized to be the amount of money donated or raised by a user. On the users' main cause page, they not only can see a record of donation made by themselves, but they also know how much their friends have donated, which is known as fundraising.

Next, recruiting is an activity on *Causes* where users can invite their friends to be part of a cause group. Once a person joins a cause group, either through invitation

or self-discovery, they will have a choice to post this information on the main personal *Facebook* page. It is through this information on their personal page that their friends can be exposed to the same cause group. This is a special function on *Facebook* called News Feed<sup>9</sup>, where friends of a user are kept updated with the activities a user is involved in. Also, after a person joins a group, he will be given an option to send invitation to his friends on *Facebook* to join in this group. Through either way, if any of his friends joins the group, he is said to be a recruiter. The unit of recruiting is the number of members.

The third activity available on *Causes* has to do with awareness. On a cause group page, users may often post links to articles, video clips of relevant subject matters or simply their own stories or experiences. If a user clicks on one of these links and read or watch the material, he is said to perform this action of awareness. *Causes* keeps a record of the number of links viewed by a user as well as the number of links viewed by his friends. The unit of awareness in this study is the frequency of links viewed and posted. Besides viewing, this study will also look at the number links posted by a user as their effort to raise awareness. Therefore, this concept is divided into awareness giving and awareness receiving.

The next activity on *Causes* is advocacy. It's an activity through which a user can sign a petition and help gather signatures for the petition in order to appeal to a certain target audience. The units of advocacy are the number of petitions signed by a user and the number of signatures gathered by a user. For the purpose of this study, a new concept is named signature gathering.

The last function of *Causes* is karma. On *Causes*, a user can send thanks to another user for joining the group or for recruiting someone to be part of the group

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<sup>9</sup> A News Feed is a list of updates on a user's own Facebook home page, which will show updates about those people who are on his or her friend's list, as well as odd advertisements.

through the use of karma. The unit of karma is the number of thanks sent and received. As a result, the concept is divided into karma thanks sent and karma thanks received.

Besides these functions and activities listed on *Causes'* main page, there is also a discussion board in every cause group, where users can initiate a discussion and/or join in the discussion by posting their views on the issue. For the analysis in this study, the unit of discussion board use is the number of postings as well as the frequency viewing on the discussion board. Therefore, the concept is divided into discussion posting and discussion viewing.

For the purpose of this study, the activities above are divided into two categories, namely the social networking activities and information retrieval activities. Activities belonging to the first group have a proactive nature, meaning a user has to produce or initiate an action. Examples include fundraising, donation, recruiting, posting links, clips or stories, signing petitions, gathering signatures, sending thanks other users. These are questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 in Part 3 of the questionnaire. This category has a high reliability (Cronbach's alpha= .892) and is treated as the "social networking index".

Activities belonging to the second group have a reactive nature, meaning a user has to respond to information on *Causes*. Examples include reading or watching information in the links, clips, or personal stories as well as viewing the discussion. These are questions 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. This category also has a high reliability (Cronbach's alpha= .916) and is referred to as the "information retrieval index".

### Political efficacy and political knowledge

As shown in the theoretical structure presented in Chapter 2, there are two other independent variables in this study. They are respectively political efficacy and

political knowledge.

First of all, issue specific political knowledge is defined as the level of knowledge a user has about the issue and relevant topics. In the case of this current study, the issue is Proposition 8 regarding same-sex marriage in the USA. This study will ask a series of 8 questions regarding Proposition 8 and relevant issue topics to assess the users' level of knowledge on this issue. The questions, as presented in the fourth part of the questionnaire, are mostly about details regarding dates, people, and statistics about Proposition 8. These questions are devised by the author with the reference to relevant documents and information on the Internet. For every question answered right, one point will be given, so the scores vary from 0 to 8. The final score represent the subject's level of political knowledge regarding Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation. The reliability among all the items in this group is very low (Cronbach's alpha= .144).

Next, political efficacy regarding Proposition 8 and relevant issue topics is defined as the level of confidence in one's effort in making a difference. This study will ask the users to assess their own level of confidence in their ability to change the status quo of Proposition 8 and relevant issues. This study uses a list of statements adapted from their original from Campbell et al. (1954). Please see the questionnaire in Appendix A for the statements. These statements are adapted from Campbell et al. (1954). The subjects will be asked to answer either agree or disagree for each of the above statements. If they answer agree to statements 1, 3, 4, and 5 and disagree to statement 2, then they are considered to be politically efficacious. For statements 1, 3, 4 and 5, for each statement agreed, one point will be given, and for each statement disagreed, 0 point will be given. On the other hand, one point will be given if statement 2 is disagreed, and 0 point will be given if it is agreed. In the end, the final score represents the subject's level of political efficacy. The reliability among the

items in this group is also quite low (Cronbach's alpha= .375).

### 3.3.2 *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable in this study is about the participation in conventional activism related to Proposition 8. This study asks the users about their experiences in which they have involved themselves in the following Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage related activities: protests, parades, rallies, sit-ins, demonstrations, petitions, or discussions. It also asks them about affiliation with organizations, volunteer work, and recruitment. For the first two questions, the answers range from 'none' to 'more than 10', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than 10' scoring 4. For question 3, the answers range from 'none' to 'more than \$US 201', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than \$US 201' scoring 5. For questions 4, 5, and 7, the answers range from 'never' to 'everyday', with 'never' scoring 0 and 'everyday' scoring 5. For question 6, the answers range from 'none' to 'more than 4', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than 4' scoring 4. For question 8, the answers range from 'none' to 'more than 16', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than 16' scoring 4. Please see the questionnaire for the questions. The reliability of the items in this group is high (Cronbach's alpha= .884).

**TABLE 3-1: Correspondence between Variables and Questionnaire Items**

<b>Independent Variables</b>		
<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Questionnaire Section</b>	<b>Numbers of Items</b>
Demographics	Part 1 (Q1-Q7)	7
General uses of Causes	Part 2 (Q1-Q5)	5
Social networking activities	Part 3 (Q1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17)	12
Information retrieval activities	Part 3 (Q7, 8, 9, 10, and 11)	5
Political knowledge	Part 4 (Q1-Q8)	8
Political efficacy	Part 5 (Q1-5)	5
<b>Dependent Variable</b>		
<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Questionnaire Section</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
Conventional activism	Part 6 (Q1-Q8)	8

### 3.4 Data analysis

This study adopts several levels of data analysis, such as frequency analysis, ANOVA, T-test, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression as well as multiple regression analysis.

First of all, a correlation analysis is conducted to find out the connections between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Then, to learn more about the connections and see if certain independent variables can serve as predictors of the dependent variable, several regression analyses are conducted. Finally, to explore the role demographic variables play in this study, ANOVA and T-test are conducted to see if there are significant differences among the users with different backgrounds.

### 3.5 Survey results

#### 3.5.1 Demographic data

At the end of the survey, 51 responses were collected, but 6 of them were

excluded due to the extent of incompleteness. In total, 45 responses were analyzed. This section looks at the results of simple frequency analysis of the demographic data as well as the results of T-test and ANOVA used to test the connection between these demographic variables and the dependent variable of conventional activism.

#### Frequency distribution of demographic data

First of all, most subjects are Americans (84.4%), and the largest ethnic group is Caucasian (77.8%). The percentages of male and female subjects are quite similar at 59.1% and 40.9% respectively. In terms of sexual orientation, more than a half of the subjects are homosexual (62.2%), while heterosexuals and bisexuals account for 22.2% and 15.6% respectively. Age distribution is relatively even. The largest percentage (27.3%) is found in the 26-30 group. With regard to the level of education, a little over a half of them (52.3%) have a bachelor degree as the highest degree. Finally, concerning the political stance, an overwhelming majority of them are either liberal (54.5%) or very liberal (27.3%).

**TABLE 3-2: Demographic Frequency Distribution**

<b>1-1. Nationality</b>			
American (84.4%)		Others (15.6%)	
<b>1-2. Ethnicity</b>			
Caucasian (77.8%)	African American (4.4%)	Hispanic/Latino (2.2%)	
Asian (4.4%)	Native American (4.4%)	Others (6.7%)	
<b>1-3. Sex</b>			
Male (59.1%)		Female (40.9%)	
<b>1-4. Sexual Orientation</b>			
Heterosexual (22.2%)	Homosexual (62.2%)	Bisexual 15.6%	
<b>1-5. Age</b>			
16-20 (13.6%)	21-25 (13.6%)	26-30 (27.3%)	31-35 (4.5%)
36-40 (11.4%)	41-45 (11.4%)	46-50 (9.1%)	Above 51 (9.1%)
<b>1-6. Level of Education</b>			
High School (20.5%)	Bachelor (52.3%)	Master/PhD (27.3%)	
<b>1-7. Political Stance</b>			
Very Conservative (2.3%)	Conservative (2.3%)	Neutral (13.6)	
Liberal (54.5%)		Very Liberal (27.3%)	

Notes: In the table above, the percentages of each answer item is presented, following the question in each part of the questionnaire. For example, question 1-1 is the first question of Part 1.

#### T-test and ANOVA test of the demographic data

Next, these demographic data were examined using T-test and ANOVA to find out whether any significant differences exist among the groups in response to the dependent variable, participation in conventional activism.

It was found that only in the items of sexual orientation and level of education do differences exist for the dependent variable. Firstly, for sexual orientation, the Levene Test ( $P = .022$ ) result (Equal Variance Assumption) implied that ANOVA was not a suitable analytical framework; therefore, a non-parametric test, the Kruskal-Wallis (KW) test was applied. It was found that there exist significant differences among people with different sexual orientations ( $P = .015 < .05$ ). In addition, one-way ANOVA found that there also exist significant differences among

people with different levels of education ( $P = .022 < .05$ ). As for the other demographic items, there exist no significant differences among different groups.

### 3.5.2 *Independent variables vs. dependent variables*

The following tables present the frequency distribution results of the items of general uses of *Causes*, information retrieval activities, social networking activities as well as conventional activism.

#### Frequency analysis of general uses

68.8% of the respondents are familiar with the operation of *Causes*, to different degrees. Even though the majority of them have logged into the application since they joined, there are more than one-fourth of them (26.7%) that have never logged in since they joined. The situation is even worse when it comes to logging into the groups of Proposition 8. Close to one-third of them (33.3%) have never logged in since they joined the groups. Regarding how long they have been using *Causes*, only 11.1% of them have a history shorter than one month. Most of them (62.2%) have been using *Causes* for at least one year. Finally, noteworthy is the fact that a lot of them (86.6%) are members of more than 10 cause groups.

**TABLE 3-3: Frequency Distribution of General Uses**

<b>2-1. How familiar are you with the operation of Causes?</b>				
Not very familiar (13.3%)	Not quite familiar (17.8%)	Familiar (51.1%)	Very familiar (13.3%)	Extremely familiar (4.4%)
<b>2-2. How often do you log into the application of Causes?</b>				
Never since join (26.7%)		At least once every two months (42.2%)	At least once a month (11.1%)	
At least twice a month (11.1%)		At least once a week (6.7%)	Every day (2.2%)	
<b>2-3. How often do you log into cause groups related to Proposition 8?</b>				
Never since join (33.3%)	At least once every two months (35.6%)	At least once a month (17.8%)	At least twice a month (13.3%)	
<b>2-4. How long have you been using Causes?</b>				
Longer than two years (11.1%)	18-23 months (20%)		12-17 months (31.1%)	
6-11 months (11.1%)	3-5 months (11.1%)	1-2 months (4.4%)	Less than one month (11.1%)	
<b>2-5. How many cause groups are you a member of?</b>				
More than 21 (42.2%)	16-20 (33.3%)	11-15 (11.1%)	6-10 (4.4%)	1-5 (8.9%)

Notes: In the table above, the percentages of each answer item is presented, following the question in each part of the questionnaire. For example, question 2-1 is the first question of Part 2.

### Frequency analysis of information retrieval activities

A glance at the items regarding information retrieval activities shows that the percentages of those who have never done these designated activities since they joined the groups are lower than those of social networking activities, at 37.8% for reading personal stories, 35.6% for clicking on links, 46.7% for watching video clips, 31.1% for looking at still images, and 42.2% for reading posts on discussion boards respectively. The corresponding figures for social networking activities are much higher.

**TABLE 3-4: Frequency Distribution of Information Retrieval Activities**

How often do you _____ on cause groups related to Proposition 8?							
	Never since join	At least once every two months	At least once a month	At least twice a month	At least once a week	Every day	No answer
3-7. read other people's personal stories	37.8%	26.7%	17.8%	6.7%	6.7%	2.2%	2.2%
3-8. click on links	35.6%	20.0%	24.4%	8.9%	6.7%	0%	0%
3-9. watch video clips	46.7%	20.0%	20.0%	6.7%	4.4%	0%	2.2%
3-10. look at still images	31.1%	31.1%	20.0%	8.9%	8.9%	0%	0%
3-11. read posts on discussion boards	42.2%	26.7%	11.1%	11.1%	6.7%	0%	2.2%

Notes: In the table above, the percentages of each answer item is presented, following the question in each part of the questionnaire. For example, question 3-1 is the first question of Part 3.

Frequency analysis of social networking activities

The table shows that the percentages of respondents who have never done these activities are very high. This, along with the similar condition for information retrieval activities, doesn't seem to correspond with the situation for conventional activism. There seems to be, in the online sphere, a higher overall proportion of

inactivity.

Looking at the details, almost one-third of them have donated or raised money for cause groups dedicated to Proposition 8, with the largest percentage found in the “more than \$US 16” category. In terms of posts on cause groups, 22.1% have posted personal stories, and 28.8% have posted links. However, only 15.6% have posted video clips, and only 13.3% have posted still images, such as photos or comics.

**TABLE 3-5: Frequency Distribution of Social Networking Activities**

<b>How much money have you _____ to/for cause groups related to Proposition 8?</b>							
	None	Less than \$US 5	\$US 6-10	\$US 11-15	More than \$US 16	No answer	
3-1. donated	66.7%	4.4%	4.4%	2.2%	20.0%	2.2%	
3-2. raised	68.9%	2.2%	4.4%	0%	24.4%	0%	
<b>How often do you post/initiate _____ on cause groups related to Proposition 8?</b>							
	Never since join	At least once every two months	At least once a month	At least twice a month	At least once a week	Every day	No answer
3-3. personal stories	77.8%	13.3%	2.2%	2.2%	4.4%	0%	0%
3-4. links	71.1%	20.0%	4.4%	0%	4.4%	0%	0%
3-5. video clips	84.4%	8.9%	6.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
3-6. still images	84.4%	8.9%	2.2%	0%	2.2%	0%	2.2%
3-12. discussions	77.8%	8.9%	0%	6.7%	4.4%	0%	2.2%
<b>How many _____ for cause groups related to Proposition 8?</b>							
	None	Fewer than 3	4-6	7-9	10-12	More than 13	No answer
3-13.	28.9%	11.1%	17.8%	4.4%	17.8%	17.8%	2.2%

friends have you recruited							
3-14. petitions have you signed	15.6%	42.2%	17.8%	6.7%	8.9%	6.7%	2.2%
3-15 signatures have you gathered	64.4%	8.9%	11.1%	0%	4.4%	11.1%	0%
<b>How many thanks have you _____ cause groups related to Proposition 8?</b>							
	None	Fewer than 5	6-10	11-15	More than 16	No answer	
3-16. sent to friends for joining	51.1%	15.6%	13.3%	2.2%	13.3%	2.2%	
3-17. received for joining	55.6%	31.1%	4.4%	0%	8.9%	0%	

Notes: In the table above, the percentages of each answer item is presented, following the question in each part of the questionnaire. For example, question 3-1 is the first question of Part 3.

### Frequency analysis of conventional activism

The table below which illustrates the frequency distribution of the questionnaire items about conventional activism shows some interesting aspects. First of all, in terms of conventional activism, the majority of the respondents have participated in relevant political activities, such as protests, parades, rallies, sit-ins or demonstrations, at close to 62%. As regards signing petitions, there is an even larger proportion, at approximately 71%. Almost half of the respondents (48.9%) have never donated any money to support the cause of fighting Proposition 8. In addition, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (close to 89%) initiate Proposition 8 related discussions or conversations in daily life; however, to different degrees.

Interestingly, when it comes to participating in these discussions or conversations, everyone has had this kind of experience before, with the frequency distributed relatively even across different groups. Furthermore, close to one-third of them are not members of any organization dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage in the real life. And when asked how often they do volunteer work for these organizations, close to 70% of them have never done so. Finally, in terms of recruitment, a little over half of them have recruited someone to these organizations, at around 51%.

**TABLE 3-6: Frequency Distribution of Conventional Activism**

<b>6-1. How many Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage related protests, parades, rallies, sit-ins, or demonstrations in the real life have you participated in, excluding those on the Internet?</b>					
None (35.6%)	1-3 (35.6%)	4-6 (15.6%)	7-9 (4.4%)	More than 10 (6.7%)	No Answer (2.2%)
<b>6-2. How many Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage related petitions have you signed, excluding those on the Internet?</b>					
None (28.9%)	1-3 (48.9%)	4-6 (11.1%)	7-9 (44.4%)	More than 10 (6.7%)	
<b>6-3. How much money have you donated to organizations or campaigns dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage legislation, excluding those on the Internet?</b>					
None (48.9%)	Less than \$US 10 (4.4%)	\$US 11-50 (17.8%)	\$US 51-100 (13.3%)	\$US 101-200 (4.4%)	More than \$US201 (11.1%)
<b>6-4. How often do you initiate conversations or discussions related to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage, excluding those on the Internet?</b>					
Never (11.1%)		At least once every two months (28.9%)		At least once a month (26.7%)	
At least twice a month (8.9%)		At least once a week (20.0%)		Everyday (4.4%)	
<b>6-5. How often do you participate in conversations or discussions related to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage, excluding those on the Internet?</b>					

Never (8.9%)	At least once every two months (24.4%)	At least once a month (20.0%)		
At least twice a month (17.8%)	At least once a week (22.2%)	Everyday (6.7%)		
<b>6-6. How many organizations dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage are you affiliated with?</b>				
None (33.3%)	1 (17.8%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (13.3%)	More than (13.3%)
<b>6-7. How often do you do volunteer work for organizations or events dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage?</b>				
Never (68.9%)	At least once every two months (20.0%)	At least once a month (4.4%)		
At least twice a month (4.4%)	At least once a week (0%)	Everyday (2.2%)		
<b>6-8. How many people have you ever recruited to organizations dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage, excluding those on the Internet?</b>				
None (48.9%)	1-5 (26.7%)	6-10 (4.4%)	11-15 (6.7%)	More than 16 (13.3%)

Notes: In the table above, the percentages of each answer item is presented, following the question in each part of the questionnaire. For example, question 6-1 is the first question of Part 6.

### Correlation analysis of the variables

To answer the first research question about the connection between activities on *Causes* and activism in the real life, focusing especially on the three sub sets of variables, such as general uses of *Causes*, information retrieval activities, as well as social networking activities, a correlation analysis was conducted. The results are displayed in the following table.

**TABLE 3-7: Correlation Analysis of Variables**

DV		IVs	A1 (GU)	A2 (IRA)	A3 (SNA)
D (CA)	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)		0.260	0.418	0.661
	P-Value		0.084	0.004**	0.000***

Notes: DV= dependent variables; A1 (GU)= general uses of Causes; A2 (IRA)= information retrieval activities; A3 (SNA)= social networking activities; D= dependent variable; CA= conventional activism; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.001

As can be seen in the table, information retrieval activities are correlated with conventional activism ( $r=.418$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Social networking activities are also correlated with conventional activism ( $r=.661$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In other words, to answer Research Question 1, the more frequently a person uses *Causes*, the more frequently he participates in conventional activism. However, it should be noted that the uses that are correlated with conventional activism are information retrieval activities and social networking activities only.

Research Questions 2 and 3 will not be answered in this section due to the low reliabilities of political efficacy and political knowledge items. In the next chapter, questions regarding the significance of these two variables as well as their connection with conventional activism will be investigated.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY & RESULTS (INTERVIEW)

#### 4.1 Background information and new research questions

The survey is useful in investigating the correlations among the major concepts in this study. However, as the literature review has pointed out. It is also essential to incorporate the concepts of networks and ties in studying social media activism. The author plans to learn more about this connection through intensive interviews with some users from certain cause groups. Another reason for conducting interviews is to probe deeper to supplement as well as explain the results from the survey.

In addition, the survey, due to a limited size of sample, has been unable to answer certain aspects of the research questions, such as those of political knowledge and political efficacy, especially in response to conventional activism. As a result, these interviews are to probe into these un-specified aspects. This section first introduces the interviewees before moving on to present the results of the interviews placed under deferent themes. Before that, the author proposes some new research questions, which it is hoped to be answered through the interviews.

RQ 4: What are some driven factors behind the use of *Causes*?

RQ 5: What are the merits and problems of *Causes*?

RQ 6: What roles do ties and networks play in the connection between online and offline activism?

RQ 7: How do political knowledge and political efficacy influence the level of political involvement?

## 4.2 Results

### 4.2.1 The interviewees

The last part of the survey asks those respondents who are interested in having a talk with the researcher to leave their email. In total, ten volunteers put down their emails. The researcher then sent out an invitation to these ten people three times in a period of two weeks. In the end, five people responded and were successfully interviewed. They are all men. Only one is heterosexual, and the rest are all homosexual. All of them are Americans. One of them is Native American, and another is African American by ethnicity. The interviews took place between 2010/4/8 and 2010/4/23. These people were all contacted through emails first and then on Skype, one of the popular communication technologies. All the conversations were recorded for further analysis. To ensure their privacy, their names are replaced with English letters. The following table introduces these interviewees.

**TABLE 4-1: Basic Information about the Interviewees**

Interviewee	Sex	Sexual Orientation	Occupation	Age	Location	Interview dates	Total length
A	M	G	Teacher	27	Chicago	4/8; 11;19	80 mins
B	M	G	At airport	36	Minneapolis	4/12; 23	40 mins
C	M	S	Lawyer	50	San Diego	4/14; 19	60 mins
D	M	G	Accountant	29	Minneapolis	4/16; 23	30 mins
E	M	G	Actor	25	Salinas	4/23	30 mins

Notes: M= male; F= female; G= homosexual; S= heterosexual; mins= minutes

### 4.2.2 Activism on Causes

This section looks at some themes that arise in response to the uses of *Causes*, and also specifically cause groups dedicated to Proposition 8.

## Motivation behind the uses of Causes

Given the social networking feature of *Facebook*, most of the interviewees were invited to use the application, *Causes*, in the very beginning, and mostly by friends on *Facebook*. Most of them stress the fact that it was through invitation that they got to learn about this application. This shows the significance of bridging networks on *Facebook* and also responds to the social networking feature in the survey. Each of the excerpts below has something to do with ties and networks, and the underlined parts illustrate the motivations for joining the *Causes*.

**Mr. B:** I started using Causes maybe like two years ago when that application first came out. I started using it because I was invited. I don't think I would have known about it if someone had not invited me. The first ones were related to my tribe, which had to do with land recovery and alternative energies.

**Mr. D:** It was either one year or two years ago, and I think I was invited by a friend. I agreed with the cause, so I joined up. It was someone I didn't know in person, but I knew him online on one of the Facebook groups. I wanted to use it because I agreed with the cause. I agreed with the message I saw there. And it didn't look like any real commitment to do anything, and also a lot of things on Facebook are a simple click to let people know I support that cause or have that opinion.

**Mr. E:** One of my friends on Facebook sent me an invitation to one of the causes. The first one was about breast cancer awareness. At that time, we were doing Relay For Life<sup>10</sup>, which is a cause to help stop breast cancer. That's what got me involved with the Causes.

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<sup>10</sup> Relay For Life is the signature fundraising event of the American Cancer Society.

**Mr. C:** I found about Causes through Facebook in one fashion or another. It was through invitation, but I don't get as many of those anymore. I was reluctant to give any money through Facebook Causes until a friend Erica Tiffany, who works for Lotus Outreach<sup>11</sup>, started doing fundraising for Lotus Outreach through Facebook Causes. I started making initial contributions to her group.

To answer Research Question 4 about the motivation behind the uses of *Causes*, the following excerpts illustrate the motives brought up by the interviewees. The excerpts above show that there seem to be various motivations behind the reasons why they started to use *Causes*. Mr. B is a Native American. The first few cause groups he joined are related to issues that happened or are happening in or to his community or ethnic group. He also stressed the fact that if he had not been invited by friends, he would not have joined and used the application. For Mr. D, the motivation seems to be simpler. He joined the group mainly because he agreed with the cause and it would not require much effort or commitment to be part of it. For Mr. E, it was mainly because the cause had something to do with his real life work in raising awareness for breast cancer.

All these four people were invited or recruited by friends on *Facebook* to be part of *Causes*. This illustrates the significance of networks and ties. This situation for Mr. A, however, was a little different. He found out about *Causes* when he was reading an article about the United Nations and Burma issues. Even though, he wasn't invited by anyone on *Facebook*, but the fact that he found out about the application through a post on *Facebook* also illustrates the aspect of connection on *Facebook*.

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<sup>11</sup> Lotus Outreach is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the education, health and safety of vulnerable women and children in the developing world.

**Mr. A:** I think I started probably about three years ago, shortly after I got on Facebook. The first one I became a member of was the UN and the Burma issue, with the monks in Burma. I sought it out myself. It was through me reading something that was posted on Facebook.

The motivations can be placed into two categories, with the first being intra-motivation and the other being inter-motivation. Belonging to the intra-motivation group are Mr. A, Mr. C, and Mr. D. They joined the cause groups mainly because how they felt about the cause. On the other hand, belonging to the inter-motivation group are Mr. B and Mr. E, who were responding to an aspect of their life through getting involved on *Causes*.

#### *Causes* as an information channel

The information flow on the application is a very important feature that characterizes its uses. For most of them, information sent to them from *Causes* is what drives them to log into the application and to find out more about the issue that is being presented to them. They then move on to share the information with their friends although in different manners and for different purposes. This responds to the information retrieval feature of the survey.

**Mr. A:** Sometimes the *Causes* will send out different bulletins. That pushes me to log in to the application. I generally read the information sent to me. If I think the information is interesting or needs action, then I will repost it or invite other people to it. I share the information online or in conversations. I usually post on my general wall, then everyone can see it. Sometimes, for specific issues, I target at certain people. I will go through my friendlist and send to those people to try to get them to do action. Anyone that I come into contact with that I discuss things with. From close friends to friends to colleagues at work. Basically through work and friends.

Mr. A actively shares the information he learns about from *Causes* with his friends both online and in daily conversations. Mr. C, on the other hand, often receives information from friends who are celebrating their birthday by raising money for a cause. This happens quite regularly, about once every month. And according to Mr. C, nine times out of ten, he ends up making a donation. When he receives these messages from friends, he usually logs into the application and makes a donation. Mr. D, however, participates in a more passive way of information sharing. He believes simply by being part of a cause group, he reveals to other people something about himself. By doing so, he is making a statement about himself or his own belief. And he also acknowledges the fact that this is a more passive way to let people know what his opinions are.

### Potential and problems

In this section, the answer to Research Question 5 about the merits and problems of *Causes* can be found. Many of the interviewees mentioned what they believe to be the potential as well as several problems associated with activism on *Causes*. The potential agreed upon by most of them is *Causes'* ability to raise awareness for an issue in question.

**Mr. A:** For me, I want to increase the awareness about issues by inviting people and get more people involved with it and make sure people understand that by us coming together whether it is through *Causes* on Facebook or whatever it is, we do have a voice in our democracy. I think this is a new way of doing it, of mobilizing people. I think *Causes* does have some value, but I don't think it has the value a lot of people want it to have. A lot of time, it is very similar to lazy democracy. People vote and don't look at it again. A lot of the applications are driven by

passionate people. It is the same people who post and are active.

**Mr. E:** I think it is a great thing. It is a new way of communicating with others. The Internet is huge now. It is a very good way of spreading the words. This is a way for those people who are not involved in political or other kinds of causes to put a base to those causes and to have people investigate on their own. I definitely believe that this form of activism eventually leads to conventional activism. I really believe that the election of our president was largely imparted to being able to send the words out online. Most of our younger generation are very computer savvy. They know what they are doing online. It brings younger audiences. It brings in a way of communicating to more people.

Mentioned in the excerpts above, raising awareness of an issue seems to be the most significant potential of *Causes*. A closer look at the answers, however, reveals some interesting facets. Firstly, *Causes* is believed to be a platform where people can voice their opinions. It acts an equal-activism platform where everyone has a chance to participate in a cause they care about in one way or another. However, there is the problem of discontinuity with this form of activism. Only certain people are active users, namely those who are passionate about the cause and the groups are not usually maintained well because the organizers have lost their interests or have become too busy. This second view is expressed by Mr. B, who believes *Causes* has a potential but is not used to fully realize the potential. Finally, *Causes* is considered an efficient tool for information to be delivered. Mr. E even believes that due to a prospect of the Information Age, sooner than later, the majority of people will have access to this form of activism online.

Aside from the potential of this form of activism, several problems associated with activism on *Causes* are also pointed out by the interviewees. In addition to the

problem of discontinuity, there is also the issue of privacy proposed by Mr. D. Being affiliated with a certain cause reveals a certain aspect of a user's identity or belief. This revelation of information can sometimes be problematic.

**Mr. D:** If you didn't let everyone know what your opinions were and some people did not know that you were gay or that you supported gay marriage, I could see them having problems with that. I almost think that's a problem with the users that they are not being honest in their everyday life, and that would be a sort of problems more than the Causes would be a problem. I could also see that by subscribing to a cause, you would be saying you agree with someone's position, and if the owner of that cause updated that cause to have a more extreme position or have arguments that you don't agree with, there can be a problem.

It should also be noted that some interviewees pointed out that *Causes* are not an ideal medium for online activism. According to them, this application is becoming segregated from the general framework of *Facebook*. Some pointed out that fan groups or pages on *Facebook* that are dedicated to specific causes are much more useful both in information sharing and also in organization for events.

**Mr. A:** I think there's an increase of people getting away from the Causes aspect and actually just creating a fan page. Facebook is changing. Less people are using Causes. Fan page is a lot easier to use. And the bulletins they send out show up more often. And a lot of time, they are all linked to organizations.

**Mr. C:** I've got a number of friends who are on Facebook and are deeply involved in same-sex marriage issues. I don't think much of it is done through Facebook Causes. I get emails from Facebook group pages or fan pages. Facebook fan pages and groups are more useful in

communicating with people. There is higher traffic and these pages and groups than there is in the Causes pages. Causes used to be well integrated with the rest of Facebook, but now it is segregated.

#### 4.2.3 *Online vs. Offline Activism*

This section examines the discussion about real-life activism and its connection with activism on *Causes*. Several themes have emerged regarding this subject.

##### Online vs. offline activism

In the interviews, respondents were asked to compare their activism experiences online and offline. For most of them, activism on *Causes* does not so much change their activism in the real life as enhances it.

**Mr. D:** I am more engaged and doing more things counting the online Facebook activities. I think my real life activities have stayed the same, but online activities have definitely increased. Generally, people who read my feeds know me in the real world, so I am talking to the same audience but in different ways.

This view of Mr. D is shared by Mr. B as well as Mr. E. Both of them believe that the Internet has not changed the essence of their activism, but it definitely has enhanced it. However, for Mr. A and Mr. C, the situation is a little different. For both of them, timing seems to be a key feature. Mr. A first came into contact with the Proposition 8 issue when he was living abroad. For him, the Internet, or more specifically, *Facebook*, was an ideal channel for him to stay updated with happenings at home in the USA. He only became active in the real life activism after he had returned to the USA. For Mr. C, his involvement fluctuates with his volunteer work

related to Proposition 8. The more preoccupied with Proposition 8 matters, the more involved.

**Mr. A:** When I first became a member of Causes, I wasn't living in the United States. At the same time, when I was coming back, that's definitely when I became more involved on the ground to move the agenda forward.

**Mr. C:** My engagement has changed, but not because of Causes. My involvement in same-sex marriage issues will fluctuate on whether there is something to do in court. As a lawyer, I will file a brief. If I am working to file a brief, I am putting many hours into it. I am focusing a lot of time, effort and energy on it. When I am not filing a brief, I am probably not doing very much.

### Affiliation and involvement

An interesting aspect shared in common among some interviewees is the fact that affiliation with a certain aspect of their life, such as a specific identity (Mr. B and Mr. E), an organization (Mr. A and Mr. C) or even just the professional background (Mr. C and Mr. D), can make a big difference in their level of involvement. In fact, their affiliation plays a very critical role in both initiating and maintaining their involvement in both online and offline activism.

**Mr. B:** I think a lot of it comes from the fact that I am Native American, and our history is filled with being oppressed. Because of that and because of the things that not just what my ancestors had experienced but even just my grandparents and parents had experienced and some of the very horrible things they have experienced. Because of that, I know what is like having to deal with as a minority in this country. I know what is like to deal with prejudice or people making decisions for you based on your race or sexuality. Because of that, I have to be more active.

**Mr. E:** Being African American is a struggle all on its own and I think that when the possibility that Barack Obama would be President, I felt I needed my voice to be counted. During the elections, I made a point of trying to be more aware of the issues. It was one of the few times that I felt my voice could be helpful. I did not agree with Obama's stance on Don't Ask Don't Tell<sup>12</sup>, so I made efforts to share my view online and in my community. As a gay man, I struggle with the Prop 8 issue because I have friends who got married while it was still legal. I did not want to see my rights turn into second class citizen status. I became involved because it affected me personally.

**Mr. C:** My involvement comes through my church and through wanting to be involved and to do something in the community. If I have lived through the civil right struggle for African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s and did nothing, I'd feel kind of bad about it. I am in the position where I can do something and help. I'll do something that plays off my strength and skills where it can make a difference, that is in my ability as a lawyer. And as a Unitarian Universalist<sup>13</sup>, I can leverage the religious issues when most people couldn't.

**Mr. A:** For me, I have always been political. Before I became comfortable with being a gay man, I was actively involved in politics and political campaigns. While in high school, I became involved with various political campaigns and I even became active in the local political party working on the state platform. Now that I am an out gay man, my political activity has continued but has been more focused on issues regarding equality. I have become more active in contacting and voting politicians that are proven supporters of the GLBTQ community. I

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<sup>12</sup> Don't ask, don't tell is a term for the policy restricting the United States military from efforts to discover or reveal closeted gay, lesbian and bisexual service members while barring those who are openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual from military service.

<sup>13</sup> Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religious tradition which has roots in Christianity.

worked on campaigns for a state senator that was running for office which would make him the first, openly gay state senator in the Illinois State Government. I have also been active in Join the Impact<sup>14</sup> which is a marriage equality group that sprung up after the outrageous vote on the definition of marriage in the state of California. Join the impact Chicago has been involved with various civil disobedience protests that have resulted in peaceful demonstrations. These actions have brought attention to the marriage equality struggle, here in Chicago, the state of Illinois and the country as a whole.

As read in the excerpt by Mr. A above, he mentioned several times about his affiliation with the organization, Join the Impact, where he has made some friends. He has also stressed the fact that the transition in the acknowledgement of his own sexuality plays a significant role in bringing him into activism of issues related to this identity. Mr. D also mentioned several non-profit organizations that he worked part-time for prior to his current job. The examples above clearly illustrate the connection between affiliation and level of involvement.

#### 4.2.4 *Political Knowledge*

There is generally a high level of self-assessed political knowledge among the interviewees. When asked to evaluate or compare their level of Proposition 8 specific knowledge, most of them rated themselves above the average. However, it seems that this knowledge is largely information based. According to most of them, they probably would not know the specific numbers on a certain aspect of the issue, but they are confident in discussing non-number-specific facts. They have very similar sources of information on which their knowledge is based. Most of them gather the

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<sup>14</sup> Join The Impact is a grassroots and netroots organization geared at gaining full equality for the LGBTQI community through outreach, education and demonstration.

information on the Internet. Some other sources are newspapers and friends.

**Mr. A:** I'm quite well immersed in same-sex marriage and Prop 8 issues over all. Basically, the knowledge is from a lot of basic reading. Usually, on a daily basis, each of the organizations will have an article that is linked to equal rights or equal marriage, so it comes through as daily feeds. I will look at it or at least skim it, trying to gain more knowledge.

**Mr. B:** I would say I am mostly knowledgeable. If you ask me about specific laws, I probably couldn't answer it, but I have a pretty good idea what these laws are and how they affect people. My main sources are the Internet, friends, TV, and newspapers. People that are more knowledgeable about this issue, I will go to them first. I google a lot of things. I have to read a lot of things because I feel a lot of information can be twisted.

Mr. C and Mr. D also consider themselves quite knowledgeable in the issue of same-sex marriage and Prop 8 in the USA. Mr. C is an attorney, so his knowledge, in a large part, comes from legal research and court papers, while Mr. D reads newspapers and commentaries or sometimes talks to friends in California for information.

#### *4.2.5 Political efficacy*

As reviewed in the second chapter, there are two aspects of political efficacy. Generally, the interviewees have a high level of internal efficacy, but a low level of external efficacy. This is the premise of social change based on the Gamson Hypothesis (Hollander, 1997). Generally, all of the interviewees are not happy with the current situation of same-sex marriage in the USA now, but they are all hopeful that in the long term, it will eventually come through. Some share the belief that

because same-sex marriage is not on the top of the priority among the legislators, it is difficult to push it forward at the moment although one interviewee believes that due to the Constitution and the judicial system in the USA, same-sex marriage will eventually arrive.

**Mr. A:** I am very apathetic about the situation just because nothing is moving anywhere. It doesn't seem like it is an important legislative agenda or issue with the politicians. Legislatively, I am very apathetic, whereas regarding the judicial system, I am much more optimistic, just because it seems the judicial system is more on our side, just because the Constitution is more about the freedom and rights of the minorities.

**Mr. E:** I think it is horrible. I think it creates second-class citizens in a supposedly free community. We can talk about health care, but we will get to Prop 8 later. If you are not directly involved or if it doesn't directly affect you, it is easy to push it to the background. That's what I think our government is. Homosexuality is like 10% of the population, so that means there's 90% who is not dealing with issues that we are dealing with, so it's not important.

These two sections answer Research Question 7 regarding political efficacy and political knowledge's influence on conventional activism. In a word, efficacy and knowledge do have a powerful influence on individuals' decision to participate in political activities. However, the connection may not be as straight forward as have predicted. It is important to take into consideration the appropriateness of measurement of these two items. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 5.

#### 4.2.6 *Ties and networks*

The concepts of ties and networks are not explicitly addressed in the interviews,

but they have arisen several times when interviewees are explaining about their activism experiences both online and offline, and, therefore, answer to Research Question 6 can be found in the following excerpts. For example, most of them are invited to use the *Causes* application by friends, and they have also recruited friends on *Facebook* to join in some political activities. Mr. A, for example, mentioned that some of his friends may accompany him to certain events just to be supportive, but these friends may not be active at all in the issue. This is true of Mr. E's experiences as well. Mr. C mentioned that being involved in a certain cause groups encourages networking among those who share the same interests.

**Mr. A:** I have two close friends that have attended a particular national march in Washington, and that is because I asked to go with me, so it's more a support than an active participation.

**Mr. E:** Because of my lifestyle and who I am, most of my friends would support it on Facebook. However, I don't know that everyone will get involved.

**Mr. C:** Facebook will suggest friends on the basis of common connections. Once in a while, I will post things on pages. Sometimes, on the account of having posted on a page, sometimes I have people who ask me to be a Facebook friend because they see we have common interests.

One thing they share in common is the use of *Facebook* with its social networking feature to reach the target audience. For example, Mr. A mentioned that people who he is in contact with on a daily basis are already on his side. It is through *Facebook* that he is able to reach those with different beliefs.

**Mr. A:** Personal contacts don't do me much good just because the people that I general come

into contact with are already on my side. When I do things on Facebook, sometimes they are not necessarily those people who believe the same way that I believe. Some of these people who I am trying to reach on Facebook are my colleagues, present or past, family members and friends.

The homosexual interviewees are also asked about their relationship with their family and whether their identity as a gay man is known to their family and friends. The excerpts below provide a glimpse into the connection between strong ties shared with immediate family and their level of activism.

**Mr. A:** My family know that I am gay. My mom and brother are amazingly supportive. My brother actually is involved with and follows equal marriage. He has become a political activist because of my lifestyle and my own activism. My family treats me just as they would if I had dated women. My mom and brother often ask about how my dating life is going and how my past boyfriend is doing. I am lucky to have their support and unconditional love.

**Mr. D:** My family all know I am gay. My family support me, especially in my relationship with my partner. They also support my activism and expressed a great deal of support during the recent Prop 8 style referendum on Maine's marriage equality law. I may not do a good enough job explaining my activism, and they do not ask very many questions about it.

**Mr. E:** My family does know I am gay, but it is one of those subjects that we do not talk about. I come from a very religious family, and I think my family want to support me but don't always know how to because of religious beliefs. My mother is a big supporter of mine and I can talk with her, but it's my extended family that have issues with my lifestyle and choices. I know they love me, but don't always agree with me.

Networking can also transfer in between the online and the offline contexts. Both Mr. A and Mr. C have had such experiences. Mr. A met some people in events that belong to the same organization. Later, they became friends on *Facebook*. The communication continues on *Facebook*. Friendship grows from this interaction and communication. Now they even socialize with each other.

**Mr. A:** I spend a lot of time working with Join the Impact Chicago, I did come to be friends with a couple of people. I am still in contact with them. They do a lot of planning for the protests and different events that are going on. Generally, we post on Facebook and talk about things there. I do know all of these people in person as well. Because of this, I've built friendship, and now we go out for drinks once in a while.

Also worth mentioning is a theory reviewed in the second chapter, which states that being tied to already active individuals promotes one's own level of involvement. This can be seen in Mr. E's example. Some of his close friends are activists, and they have inspired him and encouraged him to be more involved. Another example is the connection between Mr. B and Mr. D. They are friends on *Facebook* and are both quite active in gay rights issues. According to Mr. B, having got acquainted with Mr. D, makes him more aware of gay rights issues, including same-sex marriage issues. This is true of Mr. E, too. He mentioned that many people have taught him a lot about issues related to same-sex marriage. In addition, Mr. C was originally skeptical about *Causes*, especially donating money through *Causes*. However, this changed when he was recruited by a good friend of his to make some donations. Mr. D, in addition, also spoke about the active friends in his social network.

**Mr. E:** I have some friends who are directly involved. They inspire me to want to do more. It's thought-provoking. It makes you think about what's going on around you. Sometimes, I can feel like I am living in a bubble. I don't know what's going on everywhere. I am just staying in my own lane. But when I have people to bring the issue to the face of it and help me to see what's going on, it definitely wakes me up. It gets me more involved. It makes me more inquisitive of what is going on.

**Mr. B:** I see him (Mr. D) once in a while at rallies and something like that whenever there are things related to same-sex marriage or gay related rights issues. If I go to a rally, he is usually there. I see him quite often actually. I think because of that we are closer and get to know each other better because of the activism stuff.

**Mr. C:** I was reluctant to give any money through Facebook Causes until a friend Erica Tiffany who works for Lotus Outreach started doing fundraising for Lotus Outreach through Facebook Causes, and I started making an initial contribution to group and found out how it works.

**Mr. D:** I have about a dozen friends that are active. Some of them are virtual friends in California and very engaged in real world events. Generally, I will see something on their Facebook wall, and I will repost it. I will comment on their posts if they have an event they are trying to get people to go to. I will help promote them, and I will also show up.

Despite the capability of *Causes* to recruit those already known or to make them more involved, it is also not uncommon that they do not establish new connections on *Facebook*. This illustrates the differences between bonding and bridging effects of *Causes*. Mr. A expressed his opinion about establishing new connections on *Facebook*, and this sentiment is shared among some other interviewees as well.

**Mr. A:** All of my friends on Facebook are my friends in real life. Some friends are closer. The majority of those I recruited are closer friends of mine that I see on a regular basis. A few have also participated in real life demonstration and protests because of Prop 8 as well. I have not met anyone on Facebook. I generally don't use Facebook as a way to meet people like that. I don't add them unless I actually know them.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The original main objective of this study is to find out the connection between political action online and conventional activism in the real life through examining the concepts of political knowledge and political efficacy. However, the inadequate data collection for the survey due to the nature of the medium as well as the subject matter studied, the researcher decided to postpone the analysis of the political knowledge and political efficacy during the survey and tried to explain their roles through a series of interviews. Furthermore, to probe deeper into the implication of the survey results, a few interesting themes have also emerged from the interviews. This chapter will focus on the discussion of these themes, and see how they influence one another, hoping that new insights can be formulated regarding social media or online activism.

#### 5.1 Action online and activism in the real life, any differences?

This study is concerned with socio-political activism performed in two different spheres. Therefore, it is important to find out if they are different from each other, and if they are, how they differ. According to the survey results, action online, as denoted through a series of activities on the application *Causes*, and political participation in reality are highly correlated. Interesting, the interview results revealed some other significant facts. For all interviewees, there seems to be very little distinction between these two forms of activism. For some, they even believe that these two forms of activism should not be distinguished. This is a significant discovery.

In recent years, with the rise of information technology and especially various

social media sites, the boundary of many aspects of human daily life has become blurred. This is especially true when it comes to the intersection of our online and offline life spheres. As a result, it is essential to take into account the implication of the medium. To be more specific, as mentioned by several interviewees, the Internet is merely a channel or a tool. For most people, especially the younger generation (usually more technology savvy), activism means more than marching on the road and shouting for social change; it means more than engaging in direct conflicts with the authority or the police. The Internet has provided them with an effective channel to reach various audiences, to help increase awareness among the general public regarding an issue of concern, and finally to create changes.

The Internet is perceived to be a valuable tool for political engagement or for social change. However, as mentioned earlier, as the online and offline aspects of human life are gradually integrating, perhaps it is not as appropriate to try to differentiate online and offline activism. This is a significant response to the various contrasting opinions reviewed in the first chapter. It is believed that political action online either enhances or subtracts conventional activism, according to the commentators cited in the first chapter. However, this belief also implies that these two forms of activism are distinctively different. This, based on the interviews, doesn't seem to ring true.

This concept of integration of online and offline aspects of people's life has also been carefully examined in a study by Bimber (2000). In that paper, he argued for the abandonment of the idea of the Internet in connection with some research on civic engagement. In particular, he believed that there should be no distinction between technology-related civic engagement and traditional civic engagement (Bimber, 2000). In his belief, there are two reasons why the Internet is a problematic construct for research. The first one concerns the integration of different technologies. Already for

the time being, the variety of information technologies available and used is abundant. When discussing the use of the Internet, it can mean anything from exchanging electronic mails via Gmail<sup>15</sup> to watching video clips on YouTube<sup>16</sup> to social networking on Facebook to chatting with friends on MSN messenger<sup>17</sup>. This variety will only grow in the future. Therefore, to speak of the Internet in overly simplified terms cannot uncover the distinct implications for civic engagement (Bimber, 2000).

More relevant to this current study is Bimber's second reason for abandoning the idea of the Internet is mutualism. Mutualism is defined by Bimber to be the interdependence of new and old modes of communication in civic life (Bimber, 2000). One example in his paper is that traditional political protests or boycotts are organized and managed via information technologies but are advertised through broadcast and print media. Illustrated with this example is the fact that political engagement is facilitated not through a single means of communication but many. This is also testified by the interviewees. For them, activism on *Causes* or even just on the Internet is not a different form of activism but simply the extension of conventional activism. This, nonetheless, does not mean that studying social media activism is of no use. As proposed by Bimber (2000), instead, studies should focus on the characteristics of information. In other words, information on different forms of media can create different levels of effectiveness. Specific to this study, the information available via a social networking site is unique in its way in terms of initiating and maintaining a person's level of engagement. This is where the concepts of ties and networks come into play. In one of the sections below, this discussion will be further elaborated.

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<sup>15</sup> Gmail is a free, advertising-supported webmail service provided by Google.

<sup>16</sup> YouTube is a video-sharing website on which users can upload, share and view videos.

<sup>17</sup> MSN messenger is an instant messaging client created by Microsoft.

## 5.2 Social media activism, any good?

Another area of discussion stems from a long-lasting argument about whether social media activism has any value at all. Most previous comments, such as those presented in the first chapter, are concerned with two extremely different viewpoints. However, the interview results have shown that it is much more meaningful to speak of how and why social media can be helpful or problematic than simply to find out whether they are useful or not.

From the survey results, we come to understand that there is a close link between activism online and conventional activism. In addition, according to most interviewees, these two forms of activism are rather similar and mutually integrated. Since this is the case, perhaps it is more important to look into the value of social media in political action. It is agreed among most interviewees that the Internet generally and *Facebook* specifically have a great potential in raising awareness. *Facebook*, as a medium, makes it easier for those who are actively involved to reach certain groups of audience, some of whom are their friends. Doing so sometimes reinforces one's own efficacy as well. This medium, in addition, is also more useful for the younger generation who are more in touch with the use of Internet. Nonetheless, it is also agreed upon by some interviewees that for those who are not as active, social media activism may not make any difference at all. However, in response to the bridging effects of a social network reviewed in the second chapter, one interviewee mentioned that through *Causes* on *Facebook*, he is able to reach people with different beliefs, since most people with whom he is in contact with already support him and what he believes in.

Sometimes, activism online might even cause setbacks, such as unintentional privacy disclosure. This is especially true when the cause is socially marginalized or

politically controversial, such as the one under discussion in this study. According to boyd (2008), with a relatively new function, “News Feed” on Facebook, when logged in, users come to this start page that lists every act by their friends within the system – who befriended whom, who commented on whose Wall, who altered their relationship status to ‘single’, who joined what group and so on. This new feature has made the information more accessible and visible on *Facebook* (boyd, 2008). This new feature, when first launched, caused an outraging response from a large number of users. Groups such as ‘Students Against Facebook News Feeds’ were set up in protest of what users believed to be a violation of their privacy. boyd (2008) proposed an intriguing theory which explains this reaction. In the tech world, the concept ‘private’ is often viewed as a single bit that is either 0 or 1. In other words, data are either exposed or not. However, when *Facebook* made a decision to make the data visible in a more ‘efficient’ manner, it became shocking, prompting users to speak of a violation of ‘privacy’ (boyd, 2008). This discussion is significant to this current study, because as mentioned earlier, same-sex marriage related issues, are still considered controversial both socially and politically in most places. Therefore, certain users may not feel completely comfortable having such information as joining a certain same-sex marriage legislation cause group exposed. This may well influence their participation in relevant activism online.

### **5.3 Knowledge and efficacy**

Political knowledge and political efficacy and their connection with the level of conventional activism have not been able to be tested in this study, mainly due to the design of the questionnaire as well as the low response number to the questionnaire. This is illustrated with the low reliability of each of these two constructs.

Nonetheless, the interviews reveal some intriguing aspects, which require some

explanation. As regards political knowledge, there is a high level of self-assessed or subjective knowledge about Prop 8. Most interviewees consider themselves knowledgeable. But with some specified clarification, there seems to have emerged a need to define what political knowledge really is. In other words, exactly what kind of political knowledge works best to predict a person's level of activism in the real life? And what kind of political knowledge can be enhanced through action online? delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) defined that even though 'attitudes' are still a central concept to the study of political behavior, more and more attention is being diverted the cognitions underlying attitudes. According to them, the cognitive knowledge usually takes the forms of political facts, information that citizen hold. The questions used in the survey in this study are about random facts about Proposition 8, the so-call objective knowledge. Most of them are concerned with names and numbers. According to the interviewees, it is relatively easy to answer the questions regarding the stakeholders, such as political figures, lead organizations, and religious groups that are involved in the issue. However, when it comes to specific statistics, such as the number of states which recognize same-sex marriage, they become less certain. For future studies, first, it is important to take into account the difference of subjective (self-assessed) and objective (factual) knowledge. They may place different weights in the prediction of political knowledge. The fact that the survey of this current study only applied objective knowledge questions which did not yield to a significant result means evaluation of political knowledge need to be re-evaluated. It is worth looking into the assessment of political knowledge, especially in terms of event or issue specific political knowledge. Is issue specific political knowledge or the assessment of it similar at all the political knowledge of general politics? If not, how are they different?

With regard to political efficacy, the interviewees are similar in that they are

unhappy with the current situation but are hopeful and optimistic about the eventual outcome. According to the Gamson Hypothesis, a person with high internal efficacy and low external efficacy is like to rise and revolt against the status quo hence a higher level of political involvement (Hollander, 1997). Most of the interviewees displayed a very low level of external efficacy due to being discontent with government policy toward Prop 8 issues. Even though they didn't exactly present a high sense of internal efficacy either, they all carried a strong belief that things will turn out in their favor in the long run. This explains why they are all still very active in events related to Prop 8. As a result, in the future, when drawing on the Gamson Hypothesis, it will be useful to take into consideration of the concept of "prospect", meaning how individuals feel about the less immediate but long term outcome.

Another noteworthy aspect regards the design of efficacy items in the survey. Based on the interview results, it is evident that the efficacy items in the questionnaire are over simplified and should be extended in order to yield a more comprehensive measurement of political efficacy. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned the two levels of legislative and judicial systems. According to him, the judicial system is on the side of people against Prop 8 because it is based on the Constitution, which protects human rights, and the right to marry is considered as a basic right protected by the Constitution. Therefore, he has high efficacy towards the judicial side of the government. However, legislatively, he didn't seem optimistic. Sharing this belief is another interviewee who believes that same-sex marriage is just not a prioritized issue for the legislators. Perhaps, in the future, research can integrate different concepts when determining one's external efficacy.

#### 5.4 What really influences the level of activism?

This present research set out, in the beginning, to try to find out whether a person's action online will stimulate his activism in the real life, especially through reinforced political knowledge and efficacy. The survey result did indicate that action on *Causes* and conventional activism are highly correlated. This is especially true if we pay particular attention to the social networking activities on *Causes*. However, based on the interviews, action online may be correlated with activism in the real life even though there may not be a causal relationship between them. For most activists, activism is essentially a way of political expression. Whether it is online or offline doesn't seem to make fundamental differences. For some, online activism is merely an extension of the real life activism; for others, it is vice versa.

As a result, the relationship between these two forms of activism is more complementary than causal. Besides political action online, there seem to be other factors that determine a person's level of real life activism especially in terms of Prop 8 issues and events. Some factors that have emerged in the survey as well as interviews include a person's personal identity, his or her affiliation with an organization, and finally his or her ties with other activists.

##### 5.4.1 *Personal identity*

To begin with, personal identity revolves around many spheres of a person's life. For example, a person's ethnicity in certain contexts, such as that as a minority, usually has a significant link to his or her level of activism. This is illustrated with one of the interviewees in this study. Mr. B is a Native American. According to him, his people, including his ancestors, his grandparents, his parents, and even himself have long suffered from repression to various degrees and in different domains in the American society. He believes that it is this status of minority and repression that

made him politically active. He has double minority statuses. He is a Native American, and at the same time he is also a gay man. This intersectionality of minority statuses is an even more powerful predictor of activism.

Intersectionality is a concept that has been applied in the discussion of both practical and scholarly work on equality in recent years. The term “intersectionality” was first defined by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw to explain the various ways in which race and gender interact to create multiple inequalities in Black women’s employment experiences (Mendez, 2007). According to Crenshaw, intersectionality can be distinguished between structural and political (Verloo, 2006). Structural intersectionality occurs when inequalities and their intersections are directly relevant to the experiences of people in society (Verloo, 2006). Verloo (2006) gave an example of how a black woman is not considered for one job because she is black since a ‘normal’ employee is a white woman, while other jobs are also unavailable to her since the jobs available to black persons are predominantly male jobs. Political intersectionality, on the other hand, occurs when inequalities and their intersections are relevant to political strategies (Verloo, 2006). One example is that the unavailability of statistics on domestic violence police interventions could provide information on arrests differentiated by race because of the fear of the reinforcement of racial stereotypes (Verloo, 2006). The review of this concept of intersectionality is valuable to this study or the extension of this study because identity plays a major role in one’s level of activism. With individuals such as Mr. B and Mr. E now living with multiple minority statues, it is important to see how this plays into the discussion of political participation.

The discussion of identity is important because it has a close link to political participation. According to Diani and della Porta (2006), feelings of belonging, namely one’s identity, is constantly reinforced or weakened through political action. But in

this study, it can clearly be seen that this relationship can be reversed as well, as a person's level of political involvement is deeply influenced by his or her identity. As mentioned by Diani and della Porta (2006), reference to identity is significant in order to understand the mechanisms underlying an individual's decisions to get involved in collective action. The concept of identity was also brought up by Mr. A, who considers himself to have always been politically active. It is worthwhile to tap into the link between a person's minority status as well as his level of activism in the future.

#### 5.4.2 *Personal ties, organizational affiliations and political participation*

Aside from personal identity, ties are also a very important factor, both in terms of organizational affiliations and interpersonal ties. McAdam and Paulsen mentioned several times in their study (1993) that both organizational and personal ties are significant predictors for individual activism. First of all, strong or dense interpersonal networks not only encourage participation but also ease the uncertainty of mobilization (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Furthermore, participants with more organizational memberships have a stronger sense of efficacy, which is a good predictor for collective action (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). These ties and affiliations also appeared in the interviews constantly as a purpose or reason for participation and recruitment. For example, Mr. C is a member of a religious group, the Unitarian Universalist Church, which supports the repealing of Proposition 8 (as reviewed in one of the previous chapters). Professionally, he is an attorney, and he has filed several cases for his church regarding Proposition 8. This shows how his affiliation with an organization, in this case a religious group, influences his level of activism. A lot of time, affiliation with an organization may produce social ties with those that are either already politically involved or those that are newly active. These social ties

then work as reinforcement to an individual's own level of activism. Mr. A is a good example. He became a member of an activist organization, Join the Impact. Through his membership, he has established a network of connections with other activists, which in turn enhances his participation in Prop 8 related events.

Even though interpersonal ties and organizational affiliations have been significant in determining the level of a person's level of involvement, a researcher can never be too cautious about the nature of ties in question. According to McAdam and Paulsen (1993), most researchers have failed to take into account various dimensions of social ties. This is important as social ties may both encourage and constrain activism. It is, therefore, important for researchers to acknowledge the fact that each person's life is characterized with "multiple embeddings" (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Even though based on the interviewees' experiences, there is a strong connection between the amount of support gained from the immediate family, and the level of activism, scholars should be cautious to make conclusions regarding strong ties and activism. Take Mr. E for example. His family supports him, but there is an undeniable strong force of religion pulling the support in a different direction as well. This will be an interesting aspect for future research.

## **5.5 Connection between the quantitative and qualitative results**

This study adopts two different methods to investigate the relationship between action online and activism in the real life. The survey shows these forms of political action are highly correlated. The interviewees, furthermore, put forth the idea that both are considered political action, be they online or offline. In other words, now with the Internet, the opportunities as well as the frequency of overall political participation have increased. Nevertheless, whether one form of activism enhances or subtracts the other still remains unknown or according to the interviewees, not

significant. This discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative results may well result from the fact that these beliefs come from people with different levels of involvement. It is suspected activists, who directly engage themselves in political action, hold a different perspective regarding the connection between online and offline activism from those who are not directly involved.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Summary of the study

This study set out to investigate the connection between social media activism and conventional activism. The intent behind this investigation stems from the fact that there exist a wide range of opinions regarding the effects of action online on activism in the real life. Some scholars and social media commentators praise the Internet as an efficient awareness-raising tool. In addition, most social networking sites are characterized with functions that make mobilization and organization more efficient. Because of these features, political action initiated online is considered to be valuable in bringing about more concrete and practiceable form of activism in the real life. On the other end of the spectrum are people who regard social media activism as shallow and even problematic. Terms such as feel-good activism or slacktivism prevail in the discussion of this topic. Some even go so far to suggest that seem-to-be political action on the Internet may distract potential activists from conventional activism that requires people to go out and participate in demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, etc.

In order to find out whether the connection between these two forms of activism really exists, the author looked into *Causes*, an online platform for political action and tried to find out how and whether users connect their activism experiences online and offline. Aside from political action online, the author also regards political knowledge and political efficacy as factors that influence the level of political engagement in the real life. Therefore, he chose them as additional independent variables. Then, with an online survey, the author found a highly correlated connection between action online and activism in the real life. After that,

some intensive interviews were carried out to learn about the highly correlated connection. It was found that most interviewees seem to believe activism in both spheres, in essence, is the same. One is usually the extension of the other. Such an indistinguishable relationship is due to the prevalence of Internet use in people's daily life, and with that the online and offline aspects of people's life are now gradually integrated.

Next, the discussion continued to the merits and the problems of activism online. Through the interviews, it was found that as expected, awareness-raising is still the commonly agreed upon value of social media activism. Noteworthy is the fact besides discontinuity of action, privacy is a growing concern for users, considering the issue in discussion is controversial in nature and the medium is networking in function.

Furthermore, identity is significant when a person is trying to make political decisions, especially decisions about engagement. This aspect of identity was not intended so much as an expected precondition for conventional activism as political knowledge and political efficacy. However, it emerged in the interviews as an interesting aspect to probe into in the future, especially in terms of multiple minority identities.

Finally, ties and networks, as a major concept in this study, turned out to be important in influencing a person's involvement as predicted in the literature. Affiliation with political and religious groups which have compatible beliefs and objectives is very good reassurance and reinforcement for one's political belief, and this will in turn facilitate his participation. This is demonstrated in this study with the interviewees' experiences in life. Moreover, individuals with a high level of political engagement have support from their family and close friends. This demonstrates the importance of strong ties.

Even though this study failed to find out the connections between political efficacy and knowledge and conventional activism, through the interviews, it found some interesting aspects about efficacy and knowledge. For example, in terms of efficacy, it is important to investigate how individuals feel about both current situation and future prospect. In terms of knowledge, it should be examined whether simple factual information is an appropriate index to political knowledge.

## **6.2 Limitations of the current study**

Despite the findings in this study, there are limitations to this study that should be noted. The most significant drawback to this study is the fact that the number of responses to the survey was very low. Therefore, the survey could only be used as a pre-test for simple correlational results. In addition, either it was because of the lack of response or the design of the questionnaire was problematic, the items of political knowledge and political efficacy were not successfully measured, as their reliabilities were very low. In the end, the analysis for these two items had to be abandoned in the stage of survey.

The low response number may be due to various reasons. However, it is suspected that the Internet, as a research tool, and some administering difficulties it produces are the main reason. Take the current study for example. The author contacted the administrators of some cause groups in the beginning and was guaranteed assistance. In the end, the result was less than satisfactory. Communication with most of them was suddenly terminated since they did not continue the correspondence. It is suspected that perhaps with other more important obligations, these administrators got distracted and could not provide the assistance they once promised, but the Internet also made it less reliable, as a lot of communication actually was lost in between messages and emails. Internet, as a

research topic or tool, can sometimes create a methodological illusion, which needs to be treated with caution in future studies. As mentioned in an earlier section, despite the large numbers of 'members' in the cause groups studied, the actual 'active users' are quite few in numbers. These active users can even overlap among the groups studied due to the similar subject matter they address. In this case, members and active users need to be distinguished.

In addition to the problematic communication with the administrators, the author also acknowledges the fact that no incentive in any form was offered to the survey respondents. Usually when conducting a survey, the researchers will provide respondents with concrete forms of motivation, such as money or different prizes. The lack of incentives, along with the fact that the survey is quite long, may explain the low response rate.

Therefore, in response to this drawback, potential future extension of this study may consider selecting a different medium for investigation. Perhaps, a specific online forum dedicated to specifically Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage issues may be a better choice than groups on *Causes*, especially those forums where the level of participation can be more easily tracked and where the administration is more organized.

Another drawback to the study lies in the interviews. There are, in total, five interviewees, and all five of them are male. Even though there is one heterosexual man, who brings in some different perspectives, the limited demographic distribution of the interviewees may yield into some insufficiency in the results. Future studies, as a result, should incorporate interviews with females as well, both heterosexual and homosexual.

### 6.3 Research potentials

One of the original objectives of this current study is to find out whether political knowledge and political efficacy are effective intervening factors between action online and activism in the real life. Nevertheless, this aspect of the research has not been fulfilled, mainly due to the design of some questionnaire items. Literature review has indicated that there are strong correlations between political knowledge/efficacy and political participation. The question of whether they may intervene the connection between activism in two different spheres is worth investigating. When designing future study to investigate these two items, it is important to look into the measurement of issue specific political knowledge and efficacy regarding a certain prospect.

Another intervening factor that has emerged in this study is identity. It has been found that identity plays a significant role in initiating or/and maintaining a person's level of political engagement. This is especially true when the issue in discussion is related to one specific aspect of the person's identity. The issue in this study is about same-sex marriage. Essentially, it is a gay/civil right issue. Being a homosexual has long been considered a marginalized status in most societies in the world. Various forms of repression that comes along with the issue helps produce a force of resistance that may become a very effective incentive for political action. This should be taken into account when further research is being done about online action and offline activism concerning socially marginal groups.

Finally, it should be noted that the current research findings provide a first step for further investigation among researchers interested in connecting theories of social networks, political activism and social media to create a framework in which more knowledge of how human's online and offline experiences interact can be studied. It is hoped that with the expansion of research on activism and media,

human's desire to voice and communicate their struggle for equality and human rights can be better elaborated and understood.



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## Appendix A: Questionnaire

### A Survey about Political Action Online & Conventional Activism

Dear *Causes* users,

My name is Danny Chien. I am a graduate student from Taiwan, who is currently studying the connections between social media activism and conventional political activism. I would really appreciate it if you can spare some time to fill out the questionnaire below. All the information obtained through this questionnaire is used for this current study only and will be handled anonymously and confidentially.

If you should have any question, please contact me at [daniel524tw@yahoo.com](mailto:daniel524tw@yahoo.com) Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Best regards,

Danny Chien

#### **Part 1 – Demographic information** *Please check the appropriate box.*

- Nationality:  (1) American  (2) Others. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Ethnicity:  (1) White/Caucasian  (2) Black/African  (3) Latino/Hispanic  (4) Asian  
 (5) Native American Indian  (6) Others. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Sex:  (1) Male  (2) Female
- Sexual orientation:  (1) Heterosexual  (2) Homosexual  (3) Bisexual  
 (4) Others. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age:  (1) Below 15  (2) 16 – 20  (3) 21 – 25  (4) 26 – 30  (5) 31 – 35  
 (6) 36 – 40  (7) 41 – 45  (8) 46 – 50  (9) Above 51
- Level of education:  (1) Below High School  (2) High School  (3) Bachelor  
 (4) Master or above  (5) Others. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Political stance:  (1) Very Conservative  (2) Conservative  (3) Neutral  
 (4) Liberal  (4) Very Liberal

#### **Part 2 – Information about the general uses of *Causes*** *Please check the appropriate box.*

- How familiar are you with the operation of *Causes*?  
 (1) Not familiar at all  (2) Not quite familiar  (3) Familiar  
 (4) Very familiar  (5) Extremely familiar

2. How often do you log into the application of *Causes*?  
 (1) Never since join     (2) At least once every two months     (3) At least once a month  
 (4) At least twice a month     (5) At least once a week     (6) Everyday

3. How often do you log into cause groups related to Proposition 8  
 (1) Never since join     (2) At least once every two months     (3) At least once a month  
 (4) At least twice a month     (5) At least once a week     (6) Everyday

4. How long have you been using *Causes*?  
 (1) Longer than two years     (2) 18-23 months     (3) 12-17 months     (4) 6-11 months  
 (5) 3-5 months     (6) 1-2 months     (7) Less than one month

5. How many *Causes* groups are you a member of?  
 (1) More than 21     (2) 16-20     (3) 11-15     (4) 6-10     (5) 1-5

**Part 3 – Information about your uses of cause groups dedicated to Proposition 8**

*Please answer each question by checking the appropriate box.*

How much \_\_\_\_\_ to/for cause groups related to Proposition 8?

	None	Less than \$US 5	\$US 6-10	\$US 11-15	More than \$US 16
1.money have you donated					
2.money have you raised					

How often do you \_\_\_\_\_ on cause groups related to Proposition 8?

	Never since join	At least once every two months	At least once a month	At least twice a month	At least once a week	Everyday
3.post personal stories						
4.post links						
5.post video clips						
6.post still images, such as photos or comics						
7.read other people's personal stories						
8.click on links						

9.watch the video clips						
10.look at the still images, such as photos and comics						
11.read posts on the discussion board						
12.initiate discussions in the discussion board						

How many \_\_\_\_\_ for cause groups related to Proposition 8?

	None	Fewer than 3	4-6	7-9	10-12	More than 13
13.friends have you recruited						
14.petitions have you signed						
15.signatures have you gathered						

How many \_\_\_\_\_ cause groups related to Proposition 8?

	None	Fewer than 5	6-10	11-15	More than 16
16.thanks have you sent to friends for joining					
17.thanks have you received for joining					

**Part 4 – Information about how much you know about Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation** *Please answer the following questions by checking the appropriate box.*

- According to Proposition 8, only marriage between \_\_\_\_\_ is valid or recognized in California.  
 (1) a man and a man     (2) a man and a woman     (3) a woman and a woman
- Proposition 8 was passed in \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (1) 2007     (2) 2008     (3) 2009

3. By Election Day, contributions totaled over \$ 83 million, setting a new record nationally for a social policy initiative and surpassing every other race in the country in spending. This statement is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (1) True       (2) False       (3) true except for the presidential contest
4. As of November 2009, same-sex marriage was defeated in all \_\_\_\_\_ states where it had previously been put to vote.
- (1) 12       (2) 27       (3) 31
5. \_\_\_\_\_ led the campaigns FOR Proposition 8.
- (1) Equality for All       (2) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints  
 (3) ProtectMarriage.com
6. \_\_\_\_\_ supports Proposition 8.
- (1) Gavin Newsom       (2) John McCain       (3) Barack Obama
7. The members of \_\_\_\_\_ publicly support the proposition.
- (1) Unitarian Universalists       (2) American Jewish Committee  
 (3) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
8. \_\_\_\_\_ was the lead organization opposing to Proposition 8.
- (1) Equality for All       (2) Human Rights Campaign       (3) ProtectMarriage.com

**Part 5 – Information about how you feel about Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation**

*Please check the appropriate box according to whether you agree with each of these statements or not.*

	Agree	Disagree.
1. I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think of Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation.		
2. Voting is the main thing that decides the outcome of Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation.		
3. Voting is the only way that people like me have any say about how the government decides on Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation.		
4. People like me don't have any say about what the government does about Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage legislation.		
5. Sometimes issues like Proposition 8 and same-sex legislation seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.		

**Part 6 – Information about your participation in real-life activism**

*Please answer the following questions by checking the appropriate box.*

1. How many Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage related protests, parades, rallies, sit-ins, or demonstrations in the real life have you participated in, excluding those on the Internet?  
 (1) None     (2) 1-3     (3) 4-6     (4) 7-9     (5) More than 10
  
2. How many Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage related petitions have you signed, excluding those on the Internet?  
 (1) None     (2) 1-3     (3) 4-6     (4) 7-9     (5) More than 10
  
3. How much money have you donated to organizations or campaigns dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage legislation, excluding those on the Internet?  
 (1) None     (2) Less than \$US 10     (3) \$US 11-50  
 (4) \$US 51-100     (5) \$US 101-200     (6) More than \$US201
  
4. How often do you initiate conversations or discussions related to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage, excluding those on the Internet?  
 (1) Never     (2) At least once every two months     (3) At least once a month  
 (4) At least twice a month     (5) At least once a week     (6) Everyday
  
5. How often do you participate in conversations or discussions related to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage, excluding those on the Internet?  
 (1) Never since join     (2) At least once every two months     (3) At least once a month     (4) At least twice a month  
 (5) At least once a week     (6) Everyday
  
6. How many organizations dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage are you affiliated with?  
 (1) None     (2) 1     (3) 2     (4) 3     (5) More than 4
  
7. How often do you do volunteer work for organizations or events dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage?  
 (1) Never     (2) At least once every two months     (3) At least once a month  
 (4) At least twice a month     (5) At least once a week     (6) Everyday
  
8. How many people have you ever recruited to organizations dedicated to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage, excluding those on the Internet?  
 (1) None     (2) 1-5     (3) 6-10     (4) 11-15     (5) More than 16

**Part 7 –Interview**

**For further study, I would like to invite you to have a chat with me about your uses of Causes and your participation in Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage related activities. If you would like to have a talk with me, please leave your email with me, and I will contact you.**

**Your E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Thanks for all your help!**



## Appendix B: Operationalization of independent variables

First of all, the in terms of the general uses of Causes (Part 2 in the questionnaire), survey questions use scales to measure the following three types of questions, namely questions that ask how familiar (question 1), how often (questions 2 and 3), how long (question 4) and how many (question 5). For the question that asks how familiar, the answers include 'not familiar at all', 'not quite familiar', 'familiar', 'very familiar' and 'extremely familiar', with 'not familiar at all' scoring 0 and 'extremely familiar' scoring 4. For the questions that ask how often, the answers include 'never since join', 'at least once every two months', 'at least once a month', 'at least twice a month', 'at least once a week', and 'everyday', with 'never since join' scoring 0 and 'everyday' scoring 5. For the question that asks how long, the answers include 'longer than two years', '18-23 months', '12-17 months', '6-11 months', '3-5 months', '1-2 months', and 'less than one month', with 'less than one month' scoring 0 and 'longer than two years' scoring 6. Finally, for the question that asks how many, the answers include 'more than 20', '16-20', '11-15', '6-10', and '1-5', with '1-5' scoring 0 and 'more than 20' scoring 4.

In terms of the uses of cause groups dedicated to Proposition 8 (Part 3), the questionnaire asks questions of how much (questions 1-1 and 1-2), how often (questions 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 2-6, 2-7, 2-8, 2-9, and 2-10) and how many (questions 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3 as well as 4-1 and 4-2). For the questions that ask how much, the answers include 'none', 'less than \$US 5', '\$US 6-10', '\$US 11-15', and 'more than \$US 16', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than \$US 16' scoring 4. For questions that ask how often, the answers include 'never since join', 'at least once every two months', 'at least once a month', 'at least twice a month', 'at least once a week', and 'everyday', with 'never since join' scoring 0 and 'everyday' scoring 5.

There are two categories of questions that ask how many. The reason for such categorization is due to the nature of the variables. For the first set of questions that ask how many (questions 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3), the answers include 'none', 'less than 3', '4-6', '7-9', '10-12' and 'more than 12', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than 12' scoring 5. For the second set of questions that ask how many (questions 4-1 and 4-2), the answers include 'none', 'less than 5', '6-10', '11-15', and 'more than 16', with 'none' scoring 0 and 'more than 16' scoring 4.



## **Appendix C: Interview questions**

### **About Causes:**

1. When did you start using Causes? How did you find out about it?
2. What do you think of Causes? Why did you choose to use it?
3. How often do you use Causes? What do you use it for?
4. What are some common activities on Causes?
5. What do you think of these activities? Do you think they have a certain value?
6. How is Causes different from other forms of online activism?

### **About cause groups dedicated to same-sex marriage or Proposition 8:**

1. When did you start using cause groups that are dedicated to same-sex marriage or Proposition 8 issues? How did you find out about them?
2. Why do you use them? How often do you use them? What do you do?
2. Do you know people who also use these groups? How would you describe your relationship with them?
3. Have you ever established any new connection with other users through using these cause groups? If so, how would you describe your relationship with these people?
4. Do you think these cause groups are useful? If so, in which way? If not, why not?
5. What kind of information can people get on these groups?
6. Is there much interaction?
7. After using these groups, has your involvement in same-sex marriage related issues or events changed? How has it changed?

**About same-sex marriage and Proposition 8 issues:**

1. How much do you know about same-sex marriage or Proposition 8 issues?
2. What is your main source of information for these issues?
3. Do you share this information with others? With whom mainly? How?
4. How would you describe your involvement in events dedicated to same-sex marriage or Proposition 8 issues?
5. Do you have friends who have also been involved in these events? What is their level of involvement? How would you describe your relationship with them?
6. How do you feel about the current situation of same-sex marriages in the USA?
7. Do you think your previous experiences in same-sex marriage related issues or events have links to any similar experiences online?

**About activism online in general:**

1. Do you know much about social media activism? What do you think it is?
2. Do you perform much activism online? Through what means specifically?
3. What value or problems do you think it has?