EVERYDAY DIGITAL PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCES IN THE EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE SUBJECTIVITY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and International Relations

Fall 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my beautiful and gracious wife, Kate. She stood by me through the tough experiences of ABD life. Her impact on me is immeasurable. And she knows this. Only love.

I would like to thank my parents, Cathy and Jerry, for supporting me in all my endeavors. And my cats (RIP Hobbes) for cheering me up over the years.

I would like to thank my advisor and chair, Claire Rasmussen, for empowering me to do my own thing. And also, to the rest of the committee, who have seen me come and go over the years yet were ready and willing to help me wrap everything up quite quickly when I finally made the personal effort to finish.

I would like to thank my friends on the groupchat. Life as an ABD can be lonely, but they were always there for me. My friend, colleague, and frequent co-author, Tobias Lemke, was on the groupchat but also there in real life. Cheers to a productive research agenda for years to come.

I must thank the department of Political Science and International Relations for being nice to me. Especially to Dave Redlawsk, who allowed me to hop on a textbook project as a co-author in exchange for an assistantship at what was a crucial time in my personal life.

I would like to thank Undergraduate Academic Services for supporting me and (unbeknownst to them) providing me about as an ideal a situation as you can ask for when writing and researching.

I would also like to thank Ben Bagozzi for introducing me to CATA and STM. I have since been able to launch a fruitful research agenda related to my dissertation, and that's a really good and rare thing, I think. Thanks also to the people who created R-Studio and the people who answer questions on stackoverflow.

Thank you, so much, Twitter. For existing and providing me with data as a researcher. Thank you to my little Twitter community that unconsciously inspires almost everything I think about the way the world works.

Finally, thank you to Joel Embiid, to Anjunabeats and Anjunadeep, and to the geese on the river.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES xi
LIST OF FIGURES xii
ABSTRACT xiii

Chapter

1 INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Rendering Instagram Practices as Resistance 1
1.2 Purpose and Scope 4
1.3 Arguments and Conclusions 6
1.4 Summary and Dissertation Plan 6

1.4.1 The Internet-Democracy Discourse: What Does Social Media Do? 6
1.4.2 Why *Digital* Everyday Practices? Stretching Democratic Conceptual Categories 19
1.4.3 Social Media, Affordances, and Normative Considerations 23
1.4.4 Communication, Collective Action, and Social Media 27

1.5 Everyday Digital Practices, Performances, and Collective Subjectivity 34

1.5.1 Gesturing Toward Collective Subjectivities 36
1.5.2 From the Egyptian Revolution to the January 6th Insurrection 44

REFERENCES 45

2 LIKE, DISLIKE, OR BLOCK? EXAMINING POPULAR AND SCHOLARLY DISCOURSES ON THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MEANING OF THE INTERNET 49

2.1 The Internet and Democracy 49
2.2 What is the Internet's Relationship to Politics? 55

2.2.1 Example 1 – Facebooking to Freedom: The Internet Revolution 57

2.2.2 Example 2 – Democracy, the Public Sphere, and Participatory e-Governance: The Revitalization of the Public Sphere 59
2.2.3 Example 3 – The Libertarian Dream of Free Culture: Cooperation under the Structure of Zero 61
2.2.4 Example 4 – Raining on the Parade: Capital, the State, and Nonsense 63

2.3 Democratic Concepts and Digital Practices 66

2.3.1 The Public Sphere 67
2.3.2 Solidarity-Generation vs. Linking-Generation in the context of Collective Action 71
2.3.3 Globalization and Democratic Theory 73

2.4 The Internet and the Public Sphere 78

2.4.1 Dimension A – It's Liberal 79
2.4.2 Dimensions B and C – It's Inclusive because it's "Free" 79
2.4.3 Dimension D – Sharing Practices in the Virtual Public Sphere are Productive 81

2.5 The Internet and Participatory Governance 83
2.6 The Internet, Solidarity, and Collective Action 89

2.6.1 Dimension A – It's Fast and Spontaneous 89
2.6.2 Dimension B – Using the Internet does not Guarantee Success . 91
2.6.3 Dimension C – It's Liberal 92
2.6.4 Dimension D – Networks 94

2.7 Conclusion 96

2.7.1 The Mechanism of Openness 101
2.7.2 Internet Communities, Collective Identities, and Democratic Subjectivities 102

REFERENCES 111

3 A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE SUBJECTIVITY 117

3.1 Introduction 117

3.1.1 #llamas 118

3.2 The Disruption Machine – Conceptualizing Poaching in Everyday Practices 120

3.2.1 Poaching 125
3.2.2 The Unconscious Nature of Everyday Practices 128

3.3 Networks and Communities of (Everyday) Practice: Crafting Political Agency from Collective Subjectivity's Scratch 130

3.3.1 Theorizing the (Normative) Actors of a Networked Politics: Linking (Practice) Action to Identity 132

3.4 Do Social Media Generate the Wrong Social Capital? 147
3.5 Conclusion – The Contours of Collective Subjectivity 150

REFERENCES 153

4 RETWEETING REVOLUTION 158

4.1 Introduction 158
4.2 The Development of Digitally-Mediated Communication 159
4.3 Performing Liberal Activism 167

4.3.1 Facebook Lies and Social Ties: Forming Political Communities through Global Communications Practices 171

4.4 The Arab Spring and Occupy-Style Movements: Forms, Practices, and Performances 178

4.4.1 The Movements and Leaderless and Thematic, not Programmatic 181
4.4.2 Summary 186

4.5 Egypt: From Digital Spaces for Youth Culture to Regime Change 189

4.5.1 Discussion 195

4.6 Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution 199

4.6.1 Occupying Hong Kong's Political Spaces 201
4.6.2 Learning from the Occupy Central Movement 203

4.7 Discussion 212

4.7.1 Collective Subjectivities Emerging through Everyday Digital Practices ... 213
4.7.2 Implications for States ... 214
4.7.3 Liberal Means, Liberal Values? ... 221

REFERENCES ... 225

5 LIBERAL MEANS? ILLIBERAL ENDS: PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES ON SOCIAL MEDIA ... 231

5.1 Introduction ... 231
5.2 Performing ISIL on Social Media ... 232

5.2.1 ISIL's Solidarity Generating Practices ... 235
5.2.2 Connecting ISIL to de Certeau ... 241

5.3 Performing Collective Subjectivity Maintenance ... 246

5.3.1 Performing Populism: "We, the Pepes" ... 248
5.3.2 National Flag Emojis as Memetic Signifiers ... 249
5.3.3 Performing Populism Over Time ... 251

5.4 Performing White Nationalism: The Twitter-Based MAGA Movement 266
5.5 Discussion: The Anti-Agency Machine that Undermines ... 275

REFERENCES ... 279

6 CONCLUSION ... 281

6.1 Introduction ... 281
6.2 Five Principal Conclusions ... 283

6.2.1 Collective political subjectivity can emerge around and be based upon shared practices. ... 283
6.2.2 People poach performances across borders. ... 284
6.2.3 Collective political subjectivity is disruptive and shallow, breeding mundane extremism. ... 284
6.2.4 States struggle to comprehend everyday digital practices, for now. ... 286
6.2.5 Can we build other democratic concepts upon collective subjectivity and everyday digital practices? ... 287

6.3 From the Egyptian Revolution to January 6th ... 287

6.3.1 Trolling and the Ideology of Non-Governance ... 292

REFERENCES 297

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Internet Discourse by Concept and Characteristics 77

Table 2.2: Subjectivity in the Digitally-Mediated Era 103

Table 4.1: Effects of Protest Activity in Different Societies and Governments 188

Table 4.2: Cases 188

Table 5.1: STM Analysis Output of French Panel Tweets (6/1/17 to 5/22/18) 257

Table 5.2: STM Analysis of Mike Cernovich's Followers 267

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: The Internet-Democracy Discourse's Conception of What the Internet Does 96

Figure 5.1: @ISILCats 233

Figure 5.2: @MindyRobinson (as of February 2019) 270

ABSTRACT

My dissertation offers a novel understanding of democratic subjectivity. It ultimately argues that the digitalization of everyday practices and the public sphere reveals the constitution of collective subjectivity. Rather than analyzing the actions and words of elites, I focus on everyday people. I argue there are mechanistic properties (e.g. openness) of the internet—social media in particular—that tend toward contention and disruption. In a digitalized society, the practices associated with everyday life are imbricated with those necessary for participation and communication on social media. It is through and around what I identify as sharing practices that individuals come together to form overlapping transboundary political communities that I call collective subjectivities. I conceptualize a particular instance of sharing information online as a performance indicating membership to an evolving group of like-minded individuals. Because of their members' thin and overlapping allegiances, these kinds of groups exhibit the potential to coalesce into larger, more united and powerful transboundary political entities in salient historical moments. Rarely do they publicly present a positive political program; rather, because of the practices they used to find themselves together, they disrupt normal politics and move on.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rendering Instagram Practices as Resistance

In 2017, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp arrested, detained and took other action against several Iranian citizens considered to be leading "fashion models", or what we would refer today as social media influencers—those promoting brands and lifestyles to others. Their alleged crime? Posting images, especially selfies, on the photo-sharing social media platform of Instagram with the intention to subvert the "Islamic-Iranian lifestyle." The Corps took public credit for closing 50 hair salons, 50 fashion workshops, and 50 photography studios allegedly colluding with the fashion models. Through other means of digital control and surveillance, state officials revoked public access to many popular Instagram accounts.

The Revolutionary Guard Corps ultimately placed blamed on Kim Kardashian West for inducing these fashion models to engage in Instagram practices deemed to undermine the goals of the state. At the end of 2018, West had more than 123 million followers, some of whom were undoubtedly located in Iran. West is also closely associated with the increasing public consciousness of Instagram and so-called selfie culture, as she famously and frequently posts provocative and confident self-portraits. The Revolutionary Corps found her outsized influence among individuals in the fashion industry threatening to their own official interpretations of Iranian-Islamic culture. The message was clear: Do not emulate Kim Kardashian.

While this story may be viewed as a novelty—namely, that a reality TV star's activity on social media would cause a government such angst—it is broadly the case that state actors face challenges and confront contradictions when it comes to regulating social media, intervening in a society increasingly dependent upon digitally-mediated communication, and adapting policies to govern. Adopting a (social) practice theory framework to understand the emergence of agency and collective subjectivity in contemporary digitally-mediated society reveals a tension between the (ideal-typical) state's employment of coercive power and violence and the everyday tactics of resistance. Posting selfies on Instagram might be dismissed as mundane at best or *status quo* reinforcing at worst. But the practices associated with such activities were considered sufficiently subversive to the reproduction of the prescribed social order that Iranian officials felt it necessary to intervene. Indeed, the Corps' condemnation explicitly connected West to a plot to undermine the Islamic-Iranian lifestyle: "There is no doubt that financial support [from West to the Iranian models] is involved as well" (Makarechi 2016). The state was looking for tangible things it could control (e.g. financial flows). But "the everyday resides in the affective gestures of performativity" (Papacharissi 2015, 95), and so, the state fought back with its own kind of performance—a spectacular arrest of a round number of perpetrators.

This event—now dwarfed by various others at the intersection of social media, politics, and state violence—nonetheless sheds light on a logic at work behind the perception that Instagram selfies, along with other forms of social media activity, are threatening to state legitimacy and other powerful, formal entities. Many scholars have couched this perceived threat within broader normative concerns about the rising specter of right-wing populism in North America and Europe and Russian-led

interventions into domestic politics, online. Selfies are not the same kind of phenomena as populism, but they were perceived in a similar fashion by officials. They were apprehensive that cultural subversion would penetrate society and erode social solidarity, ultimately undermining state legitimacy. Mundane practices possess a resistive capacity that leads powerful entities to conclude the practices may be inherently disruptive to the degree they are diffused in particular sectors.[1]

As momentous events centered on and enabled by social media and digital communications pile up, it would seem the tide has turned on the question of whether social media platforms are inherently progressive. But *both* progressive and regressive movements have been adept at using social media in ways they perceive to further their cause. Disruptive practices tend to diffuse disruption across borders, but their meaning and consequences are different depending on the geopolitical and communicative context in which it enters. The Revolutionary Guard Corps example illustrates how Iranian fashion models were engaged in a (perceived) disruptive process of *poaching* practices from the (Kim Kardashian) West. They were engaged in translating what might be considered status quo reinforcing norms in one context (i.e. the "West," where using Instagram for posting selfies contributes to the bourgeoning "gig economy") to another context where these practices were seen as a threat, in part, at least, because of the differently situatedness of the actors within their respective

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[1] Mark Zuckerberg has taken great pains to assure authoritarians (if not liberals) that Facebook, for example, is not a threat to status quo interests. See (https://www.wired.com/story/why-zuckerberg-15-year-apology-tour-hasnt-fixed-facebook/). He has also allied his company with the Trump administration and his allies in the media in significant ways that run counter to liberal norms regarding mass media outlets.

contexts (i.e. fields). State actors have little choice but lay the blame on governable *bodies,* rather than practices themselves. They can put people into prison for posting selfies, revoke business licenses, or censor the selfies themselves, but the logic of state power does not sufficiently meet practices on their own terms. Collective subjectivities emerging from these everyday digital practices will also be quite slippery in the face of powerful entities.

1.2 Purpose and Scope

This dissertation explores the ways in which political agencies, identities and subjectivities are constituted, especially in the context of today's digitally-mediated world. It explores what these concepts look like when they are filled in with the shallow political and ideological content associated with the everyday practices of and affinity for sharing information (online). How do the publics that emerge interact with, challenge and sustain a liberal public sphere? What kinds of citizens do information sharers emerging from various internet and social movement cultures make? Why does the digital mediation of everyday practices constitute and then orient actors toward a particular kind of political subjectivity, one organized and articulated across borders? Our understanding of contemporary politics may well depend upon understanding the close relationships between ubiquitous information sharing practices and liberal democratic concepts.

In a contemporary, digitally-saturated environment where people are arrested for posting selfies on Instagram in Iran, the far right creates memes that reach White House officials, regimes are overthrown with the aid of digital tools, and elections, domestic public spheres, and political parties and institutions are disrupted by adversarial networks comprised of state and non-state entities, confronting questions

about the general direction of democratic politics is as important as ever. Internet evangelists and critics, politicians and strategists, scholars and theorists have together produced volumes upon volumes of work discussing the meaning of the internet to society, politics, democracy, and personal and collective psychology. While the debate has tried to move beyond an optimist-pessimist dichotomy, a consensus remains around the positive—in the *generative* sense—conception that the internet does do something—to people, to politics, to society. The disagreement remains around what it does, why it appears to be doing so, and how "it" can possibly exert such effects. Altogether, the literature on the *meaning of the internet to democracy* continues to reflect a need to cut across disciplines, paradigms, and frameworks to systematically understand what internet users *are doing* to our politics. In other words, it is pressing to understand what it is users of digital communications technologies and social media are "making by doing" (de Certeau 1984).

While the dissertation spends a lot of time on cases about and concepts developed with the purpose of understanding the internet and social media, it strives to not be *about* the internet and social media. It does not take the perspective that the internet or social media explains the state of contemporary politics. I do not seek to provide the latest, most persuasive accounting of the link between the internet and democracy. That does not mean there will be no gestures toward larger theoretical and empirical questions in political theory, democratic theory and political communication, but this is not the principal purpose of this project. It may well be that social media has limited people's political imaginations, has exacerbated the worst tendencies of surveillance capitalism, and has contributed to an erosion of democratic norms. However, the dissertation limits its scope to attend to five observations—

revealed by exploring what people do online—about concepts that are integral to any explanation of democracy, democracy promotion, or democratic decay.

1.3 Arguments and Conclusions

These observations are 1) collective political subjectivity can emerge around and be based upon shared practices; 2) People poach performances, often across borders; 3) collective political subjectivity is disruptive and shallow, breeding mundane extremism; 4) states struggle to comprehend everyday digital practices (for now); and 5) rethinking canonical democratic concepts in light of collective subjectivity and digital practices is worthwhile.

1.4 Summary and Dissertation Plan

The following sections introduce the dissertation's context, scope, and arguments. They also serve as an introduction to the chapters that follow.

1.4.1 The Internet-Democracy Discourse: What Does Social Media Do?

Debate and discussion continue within several literatures on the social and political meaning of social media, in addition to its impact on democracy. Notably, the discourse tends to state that digital communications, and social media in particular, are *generative* of either normatively positive or negative dynamics. The key is that both optimistic and skeptical perspectives tend to employ the same assumptions about what the internet, writ large, does. Agreement persists on the internet's mechanisms while disagreements abide over the dynamics these mechanisms create. In this section and in Chapter 2, I will address and build upon several arguments that emerge from my reading of the discourse as being shaped by the same underlying mechanism.

First is the notion that technologies constitute a variable that either causes (independent variable) or shapes (proximate variable) particular forms of social and political outcomes. Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars have long debated whether technological artifacts—cars, computers, nuclear power plants, Facebook—reflect, possess or embody particular values or goals. Almost inevitably, the creators and controllers of these artifacts tend to lose control of the meaning of the technologies once widely diffused (Winner 1977). Social media, to the extent it has a materiality (Latour 2005; 1992; Milan 2015), may foster a particular type of interpersonal and human-to-machine interaction suggestive of other entailed behaviors. Social media are said to possess affordances that delimit their possible uses and effects. How humans interface with technological artifacts and the discourse regarding how they *ought* to interact with them structure action and, in turn, the social and political world.

To return to the above example, one could argue the Revolutionary Guard Corps explicitly acted because they understand Instagram—created by Westerners—as something that inherently promotes particular Western values and social behavior. Perhaps the founder of Instagram, Kevin Systrom, wanted to change Iran when designed Instagram. However, the endurance and success of Instagram as a platform means making choices designed to attract the finite resource of attention of consumers so that the company can sell information and advertising space to other firms. Kim Kardashian West's use of Instagram undoubtedly helped Instagram to turn a profit. But the extent to which she was truly engaged in cultural subversion by posting provocative selfies is debatable. As in other sectors, the imperatives of capital are in tension with the desires and intentions of everyday people—in this case, the users of

Instagram—and both may become unwitting agents unconsciously in service of the goals of the other.

That said, however, perhaps Instagram-related activities were truly "out of control" from the perspective of the Corps. The accessibility and openness to everyday people, the incentive structure to follow celebrities, and the algorithms that control the display of content on personalized feeds may turn the platform into an undesirable social space in certain contexts. It is reasonable to believe that culturally-distinct Western owners, managers, and coders may have built-in particular affordances that—culturally, political, and socially—nudge users of social media in a particular direction. Posting pictures online can be understood as dangerously chaotic by a hierarchically organized institution.

Of course, the fashion models' agency lies in tension with the out-of-control narrative. Posting selfies appears superficially innocuous even as the models may indeed have a political goal in their minds. The practices of creating and sharing selfies diffused throughout their own network—consciously or unconsciously—and in turn could be imposed upon visitors, other users, and participants in and to Instagram. Indeed, it is natural to associate Instagram with specifically Hollywood-style media practices. Although Instagram was ostensibly created to make amateur photography easier and higher quality, (sometimes subversive) celebrity culture has transformed the ways in which people approach the platform and its affordances. Posting carefully crafted fashion-forward photos of oneself is simply what one *does* on Instagram (e.g. Marwick 2015). What makes selfie practices on Instagram so prevalent is the combination of celebrity status and salience, similar practices found on other social networking sites—engendering a sense of familiarity—and the affordances of social

media that allow for people to find themselves inadvertently enrolled in a network centered on fashion modeling, even if they never consciously sought out such content or membership. More than being exposed to different kinds of information through incidental exposure, people may begin to adopt the more substantive (political) culture imbued in such practices—a dynamic perceived as a threat by an officializing institution such as the Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The transforming relationship between *the* government and *the* people that has gone hand-in-hand with the proliferation of social media bears heavily on the construction of collective subjectivity. Peoples' attitudes toward the government as well as governments' attitudes toward the people change as people turn to novel ways to *cope* with their daily lives—many of which today emerge on the internet. People are increasingly dependent upon social media platforms to get through their day. Their intimate, everyday interactions occur through these services (Turow 2011). Digital practices performed on social networking sites are a part of everyday life. These everyday practices make their way into the realms of governance through repeated encounters between groups. This is how the former President of the United States, Donald Trump, comes to promote the trolling of others and engages in trolling himself on Twitter. Like minded sharing societies (social fields) constituted by particular evolving practices mark the emergence of more or less robust collectivities predicated on disruption. Everyday people are Instagramming (i.e. engaging in performances on Instagram) their way into different kinds of political entities—collective subjectivities—while dialogically creating a novel space/environment for political action and contention.

Second is the notion that the advent of the internet and social media decisively changed the character and practice of democracy. Many of the most prominent accounts of this shift are diminished, in my view, by a thin account of the social. However, a careful reading of the discourse reveals nearly general agreement that digital networks and social media facilitate a particular kind of political engagement driving transformations in our interpretations of democratic concepts within the liberal-democratic frameworks. The ongoing albeit waning debate about whether the internet is good or bad for democracy, especially its role in sustaining or disrupting the social order most conducive to liberal democracy, reveals the difficulties that democratic and international relations theory face in explaining contemporaneous political developments.

The historical development of global communication networks accounts for an exponential growth in interaction capacity and the emergence of and an increased emphasis on communicative practices among actors at all levels—particularly non-state and individual actors. The evolving era is in many ways defined by the so-called information revolution begun some three decades ago. At the time, people became familiar with communicating more frequently with more widely dispersed others, whether that be through the deregulated telephone system, email, listservs and message boards. Later, Web 2.0 was marked by the arrival of widely available means to publish content online. People posted their opinions and personal experiences while commenting on and appropriating the work of their peers in digitally-mediated fledgling communities. The opportunity costs of political action were reduced as networks were less tied to geographic locale. Those unfamiliar with technical aspects of the internet were now able to participate in an emerging and revitalized digital

public sphere featuring overlapping social networks (e.g. Bohman 2004; Dahlgren 2005; Shirky 2008). Observers recognized that social media effectively democratized political action, allowing "transformational politics and democratic values" to "evolve unhindered" (Karagiannopoulos 2012), "impacting the identities and interests of actors" (Singh 2013). Today, the high adoption rate of connected devices, apps, and web platforms and associated social technologies has cemented the social reality and awareness of constant connectedness to information and others. As such, social media and connected devices weave actors together and increase their awareness of interested others.

According to one line of reasoning, all this means a higher frequency with which competing ideas and groups will come into contact, enriching the public sphere and/or increasing the chances for contention. These developments in global digital communications structures affect the opportunities for deliberation and social mobilization in ways that alter the dynamics of national-level and transnational politics. Global communication networks multiply opportunities for collective political struggle by empowering new actors. The social ties that constitute networks are premised upon digital communication practices, such as friending, following, and sharing everyday, mainstream or subversive content. Mundane activities are the very stuff that establish and perpetuate the social ties that can serve as the foundation for transformational social and political movements. It is the multiplicity of the connections available to any particular person (on the internet) that can help bundle together various grievances into novel identity categories (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilley 2001)—so important for the success of any political movement.

Historically, changes in opportunity structures produced by global digital communication networks have been said to inspire progressive action.[2] For example, Castells boldly declared in 2012 that the "Internet embodies the culture of freedom" (231) because of the culture under which it was developed. In his reading, freedom means *autonomy:* "the ability for an individual to become a subject capable of designing and undertaking projects independent from existing societal institution (2010, 231). Moreover, he claims that the culture of autonomy is "the fundamental cultural matrix of contemporary societies" (2012, 230). His model implies that the autonomy made the Internet the way it is, and the more time people spend on the Internet, the more autonomous they get, and on and on and on.

Ideology and cultural ideas went hand-in-hand with the emergence of internet-based communication technologies. What Fred Turner termed cyberculture emerged from a tension between the new communalists and the new left in their approach to new technologies. New communalists believed that the most important struggle was to provide the information necessary for the individual to achieve, in Dean's words, "personal freedom and transformation" (2010, 20). This belief was based in a libertarian wish that simply designing and deploying the right kind of technology would create a situation of where complete self-reliance would be possible (2010, 20). New communalists had faith that incorporation of "research culture" values of

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[2] See, for example, John Boli and George M. Thomas, 'World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-Governmental Organization', *American Sociological Review 62*(2), 1997; Martha Finnemore, 'Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights from Sociology's Institutionalism', *International Organization 50*(2), 1996; Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Audie Klotz, 'Norms and Sanctions: Lessons from the Socialization of South Africa', *Review of International Studies 22*(2), 1996.

collaboration, flexibility and technological skill would create a more free society and a more fulfilling life experience (2010, 21). Instead, their adoption of cybernetics as an ally in liberation contributed to the emergence of neoliberalism (2010, 21). The mechanisms they hoped would unlock local practices and therefore freedom from big institutions produced networks that spread communicative capitalism (2010, 22).

It is largely happenstance new networks of weak ties alter opportunity structures in favor of progressive change; this was because access to the technologies was restricted to relatively rich actors from the West who mobilized resources for local activists. As such, the initial diffusion of digital technologies was closely bound to the prevailing political-economic-social order and the hegemonic projects of powerful states. Today, digital technologies are further diffused, and many more people and agendas are publicly vocalized. Digital communications technologies such as mobile devices connected to the internet aid in the creation of weak ties between individuals and groups without state-sponsored mediation. Moreover, the self-radicalized lone wolf is one of many emergent phenomena revealing that principled counter-progressive actors also reside in the West (Bob 2012).

The evolution and expansion of specific social technologies has expanded the digital space for contention in absolute terms, but the depth of its reach into more and more aspects of society and everyday life has limited the possibilities of such contention. On the one hand, social and communications technologies exemplify the human capacity for creativity. Innovations such as #hashtags in social media posts, subscribing to newsletters; sharing video and photos on platforms like YouTube and Instagram; following or friending political advocacy groups on Twitter and Facebook; participating in political blogging communities–-may all be broadly characterized as

variations on the basic practices of following, friending, and sharing. These involve the ubiquitous, frequent and lightweight practices of receiving and sending information, images, and videos. They also produce a distinct form of political dynamic, often referred to as the "politics of outrage" (Castells 2012). Actors promote normative agendas like liberal human rights and the rule of law or disseminate ideological content and recruit interested others to attack Western institutions. Instead of depending on diplomatic efforts at the state level, for example, individuals and groups communicate across borders autonomously.

On the other hand, many of these social technologies have dramatically aided in the expansion of state surveillance capabilities, the cooptation and emulation of innovative tactics of resistance, and capitalist incursions into digital space. The values associated with the various groups involved in the creation digital communication tools and networks matter in important ways, even as the tendency is toward contradiction. Consider the phenomenon of free software and its associated movement. While it seems intuitive that providing software for free would serve egalitarian purposes--more people would have access to powerful tools--such widespread availability ended up enhancing the power of the those with the resources to invest in leverage the free software and network protocol resources. Moreover, the "freedom" with which software and other information could spread meant that very rapid expansion and adoption of these networks. This perspective argues that the internet, writ large, has exacerbated neoliberal-induced inequality (Dean 2010, 25). The politics behind programmers and developers and are subsumed behind technocratic rhetoric and benign statements about openness and access. Dean concludes that "The very practices of media that we enjoy, the practices that connect

us to others and ostensibly end our alienation, appropriate and reassemble our longing s into new forms of exploitation and control" (2010, 30).

All this, in addition to online harassment and the specter of hacking with intent to expose and embarrass, works to paralyze people politically, making them reticent to explicitly discuss politics. It should therefore be no surprise that individuals resort to mundane, mostly passive sharing practices to cope with their digitally-mediated lives. To the extent political content is shared at all, it is often presented without comment or amended with disclaimers ("Retweets are not endorsements"; "I just thought it was funny"; "I just liked the picture of the cat"; etc.) to put distance between the sharer, the originator, and the audience. Political discussion is not entirely absent, but it does take a different form. Just as people navigate rules and regulations in de Certeau's imaginings (1984), people today muddle through the technical infrastructure by turning to "hacked" techniques and innovative tactics. They poach officially-sanctioned anti-harassment and anti-malware tools to avoid paralyzing situations. They need not be looked upon as bad citizens not fulfilling their political duties, however. They are merely trying to get through their day.

To summarize, six features of the discourse stand out. The internet: 1) reduced (opportunity) costs for coordination which led to increases in political participation; 2) allowed everyday people to gain access to publishing platforms effectively revitalizing the public sphere; 3) inspired the creation of cleverly designed mechanisms for political deliberation, direct participation and more effective and legitimate decision-making institutions; 4) promoted information flows across borders that created a vibrant global civil society existing parallel and in response to more formalized globalization processes; 5) facilitates collective organization in more egalitarian and

horizontal forms due to its (contested) equal treatment of information; 6) enables increased surveillance by capital and state interests. Each of these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Many of these conclusions are relics of an old pessimist-optimist debate about the internet. For example, Shirky's (2008) book, *Here Comes Everybody,* argued that social media's ability to reduce opportunity costs inherently benefitted progressive yet individualistic grassroots movements by providing digital tools that facilitate quick political mobilization, increased instances of disruptive politics, and the creation of scalable organizational forms. The second conclusion reflects the discourse's (largely) adoption of the Habermasian bourgeois conception of the public sphere. Early in the history of social media, the discourse was enthralled with the possibilities related to the ease of "publishing" online, especially in its ability to transform the relationship people had with gatekeepers. It was acknowledged that much of the content was hardly read, but many were encouraged that everyday people might feel empowered by seeing their content made ostensibly public. Papacharissi also felt this sense of optimism as late as 2015, arguing that the ability to "play" on social media helps individuals understand their multiple potentials. For others, the many-to-many communication structure of the internet promised a more egalitarian form of decision-making and governance, where government official would be able to solicit the public more easily and broadly to better identify and address—and even crowdsource solutions to—public problems. More egalitarian forms of decision making would also mean more frequent and more successful egalitarian movements, such as Occupy. This went hand-in-hand with even more optimistic visions of the internet supporting a more direct form of (deliberative) democracy.

In the mid-aughts, democratic theorists and those studying international organizations were increasingly concerned about a democratic deficit at the international level of governance. The internet-democracy discourse picked up on this thread and argued that the internet could support a global civil society to keep the most exploitative tendencies of neoliberal globalization at bay. Fraser (2009) even gestured toward the emergence of a transnational critical public sphere acting through internet and global communications media networks. The envisioned concomitant global public sphere was clearly going to fall short of the deliberative ideal, but following its threads provided clues as to the discourse's expectations about the potential character of emerging publics, subjects and agents. Any act of deliberation assumes an identifiable subject; identifying such online is problematic as it is frequently difficult to ascertain who is speaking for whom to what audience. This difficulty is extended to the protest movements of past decade, where leaderlessness is prized. However, the subversive elements of deliberative practices aid people in thinking about unjust and arbitrary social conventions. The form that communicative action takes, ideally deliberative or not, comes to define the character of the public sphere.

The pessimistic side of the old debate seems to have won the day as we move into the third decade of the 21st century. For all its emancipatory promise, the largely private and monopolistic ownership of digital communications infrastructures and services severely undermined progressive possibilities. To compound things, the very openness that makes social media-based organizing attractive to activists lends itself to surveillance by state and capital actors. Van Dijck (2013, 16) argued that social networking sites thought to produce valuable social capital for everyday people have instead been leveraged to transform it into surplus value. As Couldry summarizes,

"the digital social platform is a socially constructed term that enables the continuous and seemingly unremarkable interface between everyday social interaction and commercially oriented tracking" (2015, 620).

While Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars have long warned of the dark side of the widespread diffusion and adoption of digital networks, there is a need for scholars to decouple the conclusions we draw from this empirical reality from Western interpretive frames. First, global communications technologies should not be thought of as yet another battlefield for Western-vs.-other ideas. Underlying much of the discourse on the relationship between the internet and democracy is a premise that, because 'the West' developed this technology, it will or *ought* to be used to promote liberal agendas. Second, refusing to decouple risks liberalism and democratic concepts becoming targets of poignant critique themselves. Instead, the more likely culprit for the emergence of normatively 'bad' (inegalitarian, dominating, violent, misogynist, chauvinist) practices and groups is the transformative power of digital practices and their related social behaviors. Social and political dispositions are revealed in the practices with which people engage. Being that the information sharing practices ubiquitous on social media are rather lightweight in terms of articulated content and level of effort, it may take some time for these dispositions to arise, especially relative to a more structured deliberative discussion in which differences in opinion or the intention to shut down the entire process would be quite readily apparent. But when these dispositions are realized as practices, they are also rather—in their repetition—ingrained. Pushing against these mimetically expressed dispositions *persuasively* will be fruitless. However, rather than forging new concepts in light of this, and rebranding democracy or politics with a new descriptor or taking the normative stance that the

public sphere itself has failed to protect itself and is therefore lacking conceptually, I argue that we should learn how the public sphere functions under these conditions.

Putting the internet-democracy discourse into dialogue with democratic theory reveals (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) that the internet exerts mechanistic effects that, from a relatively uncritical point of view, folds in a normatively positive reading of the effects of digital technologies on democratic politics. It appears as a one-way causal street that, depending on the assumptions made by the author or any particular interpretive framework, leads to different locales. Thus, the problem with the discourse, I argue, is social media would be said to directly or proximately *cause,* for example, a democratic subjectivity to be shallow, people to retreat to performative politics, and unsuspecting individuals to unconsciously fall into the dueling spirals of mundanity and radicalization. Rather, I argue, individual and collective behavior on social media reveals a larger shift where collective subjectivities are coming to be based around shared, mundane, everyday practices.

1.4.2 Why *Digital* Everyday Practices? Stretching Democratic Conceptual Categories

When put into dialogue with democratic theory and digital everyday practices, the internet-democracy discourse, especially its techno-optimist side, posits that democracy and democratic subjectivity itself is transnationalizing via technologies enabling a more robust public sphere, easily scalable collective action, improved knowledge dissemination (in the sense that it is both more free and more controllable), and, in turn, the growth of a thin solidarity emerging from common practices. People learn through their experiencing of these practices. Some enterprising individuals and groups do go above and beyond and make large splashes. Those things are rare. The

more likely transformative potential, I argue, lies in everyday practices, and they are made knowable by our encounter with the internet and social media.

Digital practices are a particular kind of everyday practice that is an ever-appealing candidate for what must--circumstances dictate--be taken as a democratic practice if we are to hang on to characterizing what constitutes political life today as democracy. A practice-based subjectivity is distinct from a public-sphere based subjectivity.

Within the internet-democracy discourse, there is a lack of agreement empirically over the extent to which the ideal-typical digitalized liberal democratic actions can actually take place. Usually, it depends on the scale of the argument being made. This makes the specification of *demoi* in the digitally-mediated era problematic, and prompts democratic theorists to revisit various normative disagreements over the extent to which the liberal public sphere is able to support critical-rational discourse, inclusion, and emancipation, and whether the public sphere ought to be revitalized in the first place. A practice-based understanding of subjectivity—founded on the more basic and ostensibly simply activities of everyday practices—has potential to skirt a fair amount of these debates. It means, for example, leaving the higher order—those most difficult to actualize—citizenship requirements alone (for now). The practice-based understanding thus has the advantage of explaining the emergence of illiberal political agency and groups with non-liberal agendas. These include far-right groups (and their opponents) whose organizing presences online have come to define the current populist zeitgeist in the West, not to mention their precursors (e.g. Stormfront.com and ISIL).

A practice-based understanding of collective subjectivity (presented in chapter 2) can help with thinking through vexing issues associated with identity politics and the politics of inclusion. The difference is that, in the absence of a more or less "proper" public sphere, the political effects are not known until the actions of individuals and groups are well under way. In other words, the constitution and coalescence of collective subjectivity occurs without deliberation. In the absence of a public sphere that would (in modernity) aid the knowability of a emerging political actor, it is imperative to analyze the cultures from which the practices that define kinds of agency emerge and are imbued so as to ascertain their potential effects, all the while keeping in mind that they are based more around what they do than what content they share. Communities emerging around everyday practices must be afforded the opportunity simply to keep *doing.* As such, it is imperative for them to maintain access to the tools that are, in short, the ultimate material source of agency.

What would a traditionally annunciated subjectivity look like if it were based on the internet's practices and social media's affordances? Here, the work of Castells (2012) might be instructive. He notes that the internet was created by a techno-meritocracy "enlisted" in a project by the global hegemon to help it dominate the world in the realm of power-knowledge. But the community fought back, keeping its autonomy by relying on peers (and here, the "peer review" culture of the academy was key) as a source of legitimacy. The impetus for the construction of the internet as we now know it came from the hacker culture.[3] Hackers helped to specify the ways in which the meritocracy would reward members and, therefore, construct boundaries of

[3] This followed from the male-dominated libertarian counter-hippie culture exemplified by Steward Brand (Turner 2006).

the technologically-inclined community. Membership was awarded based on an individual's capacity to create technology and share it. Thus, we get a subjectivity imbued with meritocracy, technological expertise, maleness, and having the economic wherewithal to share things for free, all wrapped up with a set of practices, over time taken for granted, that over time became an ethic from which the rest of the content of the subjectivity followed. Castells notes how this ethic quickly spread to the social realm. (61). If a constitution were to be drawn up, the first fundamental human/hacker right would be free access to technology. It is the organizational communication platform the Internet represents that translates the culture into the practice of autonomy. Social media, to the extent they connect many dimensions of people's lives, transform general culture through the "culture of sharing" (Castells 2012: 232). Castells himself, in the conclusion of his book, makes a plea for understanding these movements not as something brand new, emblematic of a new postmodern, post-ideological age, but as modernist, derived from Enlightenment values (245).

I argue there are important implications for democratic theory that are revealed with the discussion of the work in democracy and the internet when read alongside the cases shared in Chapters 4 and 5. While the internet-democracy discourse argues that an increase in digital communications technology, and, in turn, interaction capacity, may lead to a either a revitalization or a shutting down of the public sphere, what we see at work is a different kind of practice, everyday practices, proliferating in the public sphere. Arguably 'liberal' channels of communication and actions (e.g. communicative action), are now hosting these newly emergent and popular practices. It is not a perfect match, and this inability to translate these practices *as* democratic holds democratic theory back from fully comprehending them as political. But I argue

that the practices emphasize a different location of politics, a politics that occurs under an alternative logic based more on individual action and communication across borders.

1.4.3 Social Media, Affordances, and Normative Considerations

More recent literature situated within democratic theory has developed added nuance regarding the impact of the internet on democracy. While the internet in many ways continues to be seen as an independent variable, for either good or bad, in most research, as the digitally-connected world evolved, other normative perspectives emerged as well, especially as an interdisciplinary accounting of the internet took shape.

As noted in the above section, intellectuals and advocates alike argued that the internet could revitalize the publics sphere *precisely because* of the ease with which it facilitated anonymity. The social consequences of putting forth unpopular ideas would be absent, and this was seen as an inherent benefit. Partly, if not wholly, this sentiment was due to the tendency for Northern intellectuals to be thinking more about how the internet could help individuals living in non-democratic countries become pro-democratic activists and reformers, rather than on the potential impact the internet would have on individuals in established industrial democracies. Ostensibly, the marketplace of ideas mechanisms would be more valuable in those power-political situations. That said, practicing anonymity is especially useful in situations where activists must take risks to challenge autocratic regimes.

As time moved on and capital encroached upon the internet in increasingly unignorable ways, the verdict on anonymity found itself in dispute. While there are moneymaking benefits associated with forcing users of various platforms to use “real

names" (e.g. advertising), there are other perverse incentives that go along with anonymity. People who believe they are speaking or acting anonymously are less likely to advocate their positions seriously and think through the implications of them carefully. The counterargument is context dependent, where in some situations, being anonymous enables more thoughtful articulation. Trolling is more effective in a digitally-networked world, for example, because anonymity makes the public articulation of the most outrageous things a lower-cost endeavor. The affordances of social media, including relative anonymity, privileges certain kinds of performances over others, in terms of their effectiveness and acceptability and prominence of extreme content.

The idea that the internet could produce a better public sphere was predicated on technical "fact" that digital space is unlimited, and that it would provide *political* and social space for collective and emancipatory action. But considering the structuring of the seemingly unlimited space became an important line of inquiry. The affordances of social media—along with their intentional design—especially shape the possibilities of digital space. Thinking of social media as a space for action and contention goes beyond thinking of it as a mere tool. Rather, social media enable the creation of communities with particular political dynamics based in part on the choices architects of websites make. Different kinds of actors operate differently depending on the space they inhabit and the space's relative flexibility and boundedness (Forestal 2017, 151).

The spaces actors create and inhabit shape political discourse and experience. Social media spaces have become the almost default locations where people consider public issues. The plethora and dynamism of social media spaces reveal a tension (or

tradeoff) between the instinct to create boundaries (organized around topics, causes, social groups, employers, etc) and the desire to retain the perceived innovative/creative benefits of openness. A "restricted range" according to Dewey, as Forestal explains, grants people a better understanding of their place within a community. Over time, the people contained therein find ways to live with each other, developing informal practices and institutions to resolve conflict. The smaller the space, the more important considering the perspectives of the other. Of course, any social media platform occupies an ambiguously defined space. But social media platforms can be designed to support an ideal number of occupants for various purposes.

Spaces themselves can be designed to foster a sense of equality, shared interests, aims and goals among occupants (Forestal 2017, 155). The spaces can also nudge people into action and collaborations while structuring interaction in ways that encourage *democratic* principles, such as reciprocity, accommodation and inclusion (155). Recent history shows, however, that in social media's most widespread uses, this has not been the case.

Forestal describes a kind of social media tragedy. Gawker, a now defunct website, had an innovative commenting system. At its core was one of the internet and democracy discourse's most promising features—anonymity. But anonymity made it difficult to trace conversations and find each other on another thread, effectively cloistering discussion to a few comments and commenters finding themselves (accidentally) in close proximity with one another. Anonymity and the lack of connection across threads meant, in Forestal's words, that it was impossible to decide who was a good neighbor and who was a bad neighbor (157). These choices led

directly to the trolling attack. A new commenting system was implemented in which there were 'approved commenters' that were free to comment on any new thread, sitewide. This reduced the cloistering, but also increased their capacity to be recognized and perform as 'good neighbors' (Forestal, 2017: 157). The self-policing of comments by approved commenters put a halt to the disruptive trolling. But Forestal notes the tradeoff: Norm enforcers did just that–-namely, *enforce norms* rather than encourage "self-reflection, adaptation, and innovations that mark inclusive democratic actors" (158).

More recent literature has better theorized why it is that social media has not, in fact, encouraged the use of democratic practices and principles to become more prevalent. For one, in digital space, it is more difficult to recognize the kind of space one is *in* that it is in physical space (Forestal 2018, 159). Programmatic algorithms dictate the content that shapes a space perceived by the user. While users are generally aware that algorithms are mediating their access to the content that constitutes the community/social media space, the inability to discern its exact behavior means that they are less able to recognize, criticize, or challenge changes to a particular space.

Science and Technologies Studies (STS) has long acknowledged the principal link between politics and technological artifacts. Those scholars approaching social media have made the case that digitally-mediated technologies enable, with much more ease and regularity, are *non-organized* collectives. In conceptual terms, this means technology inaugurates structuration processes. The institutionalization of the collective should be theorized as a socio-technical process (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 10). The technical infrastructures of the internet enable the emergence of "similarly

oriented individual actions" that today, constitute or replace collective action proper, and "coordinate, guide, monitor, and, to a certain degree, control" collective action (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 5). Internet technologies generate new means of social control (6).

Conceptually, these non-organized collectives stand at odds with *collective actors*. Their resources for action are gathered situation, they do not possess a collective decision-making capacity, nor do they have an independent capacity for intentional, strategic action, and their collective behavior is an aggregation of individual actions, rather than that based on institutionalized processes of consensus, negotiation or voting (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 2). Because these collectives are embedded so tightly into a technological infrastructure that is frequently changing, the members of these groups are forced to engage in the necessary social processes of coordination and institutionalization time-again, if they are to maintain viability as a collective, over time. This is a double-edged sword, as it can mean that the maintenance processes force members to solve problems together, developing awareness of themselves as a group. On the other hand, the costs associated with maintaining visibility may be so high, that it explains the rapidly fizzling out of many contemporary movements that at certain points in time had seemed crucially important to the success of a particular political program.

These points are discussed in Chapter 3, and at length in the context of the case studies that appear in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.4.4 Communication, Collective Action, and Social Media

> "The form of connectivity on Twitter engages that which is privately imagined and collectively aspirational, personally defined and politically directed, individually motivated and civically inclined,

> phatically presented but also reflective of a deeply personal ideology of a *networked* self." - (Papacharissi 2015, 100).

The question of what people—especially everyday people (e.g. non-elites)—*actually do* on social media has been explored to a lesser extent within political science. Part of the barrier to doing so is the absence of an analytical framework geared to fit neatly into political theory and political science traditions. And until very recently, the social movements literature had not yet afforded communication processes themselves with particular significance (McDonald, 2015). Mostly, what people do on social media, is communicate. And those involved in social movements try to reach others with salient (affective) messaging.

Social media's ability to reduce the costs of communication has been among its most important organizational and explanatory advantages. Early entries into the discourse on the meaning of social media to liberal democracy insisted that organizing and participation costs approached zero. Ostensibly, as noted above, anyone is able to publish something on Twitter, find something on Facebook, link to any news article found on Google. But, as we shall see in later chapters, the prevalence of #fakenews, or disinformation campaigns, shows that there are still real costs and challenges associated with navigating the information environment where someone is trying to participate or organize.

The affordances of various social media platforms, websites, and apps play a role in the ways in which people communicate with each other. Since its advent, activists have found that Twitter is suited toward the emergence of mobilization frames. Twitter, in particular, has been designed in such a way that aids collective mobilization. Moreover, most of Twitter's affordances were designed by the users themselves and later adopted by the company as official features. Researchers have

found that, for example, Twitter was a hub for political discussion and for the distribution of information about protest events organized by Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados, and the Aganaktismenoi movements (Theocharis et al. 2015).

Twitter has also become an effective medium for storytelling and meaning-making. It enables "co-creating and collaborative filtering that sustains ambient and affective engagement for the public it interconnects" (Papacharissi, 2015: 27). Twitter is most useful (to activists) when newsworthy events are happening, and most helpful in contexts where mainstream mass media is controlled or restricted by governments, or in contexts where they are known to be untrustworthy. In momentous events, Twitter allows for collaboration in the creation and sharing of information which challenges the distinction between journalists and audiences (Papacharissi, 2015: 34).

But Twitter is not often used as a space to call for participation, despite the widespread notion that Twitter is quite adept at spreading messages on a massive scale at a rapid rate. Twitter has been conceived of as "an awareness system"; it is "broad, asynchronous, light-weight, and always-on" (Hermida, 2010: 301). Twitter should act as a connector, or a "dynamic switching mechanism" that links various networks together (Agarwal et al. 2014a).

The open and crowd-sourcing structure of Twitter means that certain kinds of stories are best told there. Moreover, such a structure also invites certain tendencies, such as promoting conspiracy theories and misinformation. Real and fake news stories have the potential to attain elevated status and salience when Twitter is the primary medium for sharing news (38). It could also be argued that people with particular kinds of predispositions would find themselves at home on Twitter, and therefore, be exposed to a (confusing combination of) real, fake, and radical/extremist stories.

The speed with which Twitter-aided communication commences is linked to the fact that digitally-mediated movements across time and space have generally coalesced around a few core reform-oriented desires and demands. They tend to express dissatisfaction with the performance of state institutions and regimes, signal a desire to move beyond representative liberal democracy, and wish to employ participatory media across all aspects of social and political life (Freelon 2014). The people who provide the impetus for these movements are generally against developing comprehensive ideological agendas, preferring instead issue-specific activism over government- and media-led politics (Freelon 2014, 192). To render a movement visible and relatively coherent, the challenge is to make an issue or argument go viral and activate networks of potentially-interested others that take action outside of a particular context's conventional politics.

While the Occupy-style resistance movements of the 2010s all look quite similar based on their demands and organizational structures, some important distinctions have emerged. Political conversation on Twitter was more common in the indignados and OWS movements than for the Aganakistemnoi movement. Talk about organizational issues is more prominent in OWS and Greece than in Spain. But all three movements used Twitter to call for more participation, mobilization, and coordination at low rates--less than 10 percent of the messages (Theocharis et al. 2015, 208). Everyday citizens were the predominate communicators on Twitter during these movements, relative to more formal organizations (211). And, the plurality of tweets were concerned with distributing information (213). Finally, in terms of the links that participants included in their Tweets, Theocharis et al. find that (roughly) in Greece,

tweets were more likely to link to alternative media; in Spain, to mainstream media sources and blogs; for OWS, blogs, videos and pictures (2015, 213).

And social media's affordances help some groups and political projects more than others. Social media has a particular kind of collective action baked in (Milan 2015, 5). Different platforms generate different action repertoires. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that truly *new* categories of collective action have emerged on the coattails of social media. Chadwick (2007; 2012) argued there is increasingly a convergence among the local, global, offline and online repertoires. This has led to a prevalence of hybrid forms of networked repertoires only tacitly associated with more formal institutional structures (Theocharis et. al 2015, 204).

Aside from the implications regarding reduced opportunity costs, a platform like Twitter encourages the formation of weak ties among accounts. When they sign up, users are encouraged, first, to find their world friends and colleagues, and second, to follow a selection of more famous, influential and curated accounts (e.g. nodes) in order to generate a timeline of interest. From there, while it is mostly up to the user to add new people that they may come into contact with on the platform, on the web version, a persistent box tells you "who to follow." Similar functions exist on the other popular platforms as well.

The concept of identity, when put into terms that the social movements framework understands, can help us to theorize community and agency. Actors act in the name of their identity (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). McDonald argues that the rise of "digitally-mediated action" potentially problematizes the central role of collective identity as a concept that explains other actions (2015, 969). Bennett and Segerberg also draw attention to the role that digital communication can play in personalizing a

connection to a social movement, bypassing traditional notions and sources of (the need for) social solidarity. Real actors were responsible for this individualization to take root, however, and their discursive work–especially indymedia, according to McDonald, in particular–has driven the internet-democracy discourse.

Indeed, Occupy Wall Street participants took care to emphasize the individual nature of their membership by proclaiming, for example, that *I* am the 99%. The medium seemed to encourage this kind of individualization of a collective movement, and although it complicate the task of cultivating solidarity, people were drawn to OWS *because* they found an environment where their *singular* life story was salient.[4] These practices would later emerge into the mainstream consciousness when individuals began posting pictures of hand written messages countering #blacklivesmatter with #allivesmatter, or #bluelivesmatter.

This practice appeared as a forerunner to the now ubiquitous production, use and creative remixing of memes. Although memes cannot stand on their own and be created by one single person, the encyclopedia of memes available differ across groups and networks. The overlapping membership of these groups provides memes with a kind of fluidity that inspires creativity. Memes help give rise to the construction of a collective memory, as members of a group can generally readily recognize its

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[4] This tendency to emphasize singularity is later manifested in the resonance that single stories carry for right-wing networks. While it may seem obvious to social scientists to not mistake a single case for a general rule, those steeped in the culture of singularity and the ephemeral believe that, "yep, that's me too," develop an affinity with those ordinarily extraordinary stories, such as an illegal immigrant murdering a white American citizen, a terrorist attack, or even a fake news story or photo. There is no need to refer to a long archive of events; it does not even occur to them, because, in true 4chan fashion, it has already dropped off the page. Faint impulses drive this community, even when presented with archival data.

meaning. They "connect across contingency" and "connect a group of people which are otherwise dispersed and unconnected" (McDonald, 2015: 973; see also Knuttila, 2011).

The recommendations of who to follow and what to tweet, i.e. how to perform on social media, tend toward the creation of echo chambers, but the prevalence of weak ties on Twitter still enables activists to extend their messages across groups The ability to reply to others and to view others' replies, for example, helps to strengthen in-group identity among (potentially and ostensibly) like-minded others, while replies and references to different-minded individuals strengthen the sense of in-group and out-group identities (Yardi & Boyd 2010; Penney & Dadas 2014)—for example, dunking on or belittling perceived enemies[5] using retweet and quote tweet functions. Tweeting about others' tweets draw attention to certain ideas and topics, providing a way to expand political discourse beyond that found in traditional media publications, highly-trafficked blogs and news websites. Individuals and activists can augment existing content to extend and shape the narrative frames that sustain a movement (Theocharis et al. 2015, 216).

The discussion borders along the literature exploring whether technologies themselves may have a politics. Social media's affordances certainly gesture toward a particular

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[5] This phenomenon is not meant to persuade the intended audience of the original tweet to consider a different point of view. Rather, it is communication meant to generate an emotional response, perhaps a sense of excitement, about the idiocy of original tweeter. This dunking practice is perhaps most visible among opponents of Trump, digitally-networked, whose efforts were to draw attention to the inanity of his Tweets as a kind of identity-affirming experience. Donald Trump Jr. also tends to spend a significant portion of his time on Twitter "dunking" on liberal tweets, although it appears closer to trolling.

kind of politics—if not an outright political orientation or ideology. More will be said in chapter 2, but for now, let us say that social media are political in the sense that they are designed with the idea that there (should be) a level and accessibly space providing *opportunities* for people to do things (Milan 2015; Gillespie 2010).[6] According to this approach, any technology will exert a selection effect on the stakeholders of a movement. Thus, the technological media linking participants together will empower some stakeholders over others (e.g. Agarwal et al. 2014b, 328). Picking the right technology is one way to win a political turf war.

Thus, we might more closely consider the notion that *communication itself* has become a form of organization (Tufekci 2014). Communication tools and digital media replace traditional political institutionalization. This has meant that simply using social media as an organizing tool has itself become a story. For example, the alt-right was able to garner a wider audience and even mainstream media attention simply because their use of social media was seen as novel and innovative. The fact that we can even speak of an "alt-right" is predicated on a group of like-minded people posting neo-Nazi content (e.g. memes) on social media platforms.

1.5 Everyday Digital Practices, Performances, and Collective Subjectivity

This section serves as a brief foray into the contents of Chapter 3, where the framework that drives analysis of the cases in Chapters 4 and 5 is developed. It also

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[6] This point underscores other arguments suggesting that social media are a product of a neoliberal era (e.g. opportunities matter more than outcomes), and therefore, contain affordances, rules and assumptions about what they are for and what people ought to do with them.

introduces some of the conclusions reached by those also studying these kinds of digitally-mediated social movements and events.

Collective political subjectivity can emerge around and be based upon shared practices. The work of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Vincent Pouliot on practice theory, everyday practices and communities of practice heavily inform this dissertation. People engage in everyday practices in order to get through their day. Often, what people do comes into tension with what powerful institutions—the state and capital—would prefer people do. Because *what people do* today often occurs on social media, we can observe these platforms and the behaviors of the people as they use them to reveal the unconscious tactics they employ to fight officializing strategies.

Users tap into their own cultures, intentions, and practices when they use internet technologies and platforms, and so, use them in ways that were not anticipated by the original designers (Kavada 2013). This puts users into (asymmetric) tension with the producers of commercial social media, the precise implication of Bourdieu's concept of *poaching,* where everyday people appropriate another's property and make it more suitable to their needs. People *perform* to get through the day, and to the extent they couple that with poaching, positive affect is generated (de Certeau argues there is a small, inherent resistance and hence, empowerment associated with the act of poaching). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the diffusion of the Occupy-style protests from the Arab Spring, through New York and to Hong Kong was predicated on people performing liberal protests in ways they (save for the movement elites) had unconsciously picked up previously. The ideological content and political orientation of any particular collective subjectivity is understood to be poached and performed.

The ways in which social media and other digital communications technologies interact with what people do everyday create collective identity, political agency and ultimately, collective subjectivity. What people do in their everyday constitute the practices that provide the basis and organizing logic for an organized informality that ultimately leads to the emergence of (overlapping) ever-evolving collective actors (with shallow political goals and weakly consequential decisions in the case of today's digital everyday practices). There is an unconscious nature to these practices, that sharing information with others is simply what people do to get through their day. Thus, people find themselves accidentally enrolled in projects of collective subjectivity building, and along the way, also become members of collective action networks more specifically engaged in particular political projects and disruptive political events. This perspective emphasizes the (paradoxically) individual nature of collective subjectivities, whereby massive numbers of individual actions lead to the formation of non-organized collectives that are yet imbued with agency.

1.5.1 Gesturing Toward Collective Subjectivities

Chapters 4 and 5 address digitally-mediated protest events over the past decade. Specifically, Chapter 4 covers the "Occupy-style" protests of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Central Movement in Hong Kong and their shared character. Chapter 5 addresses the digitally-mediated transnational mobilization of ISIL and right-wing populism. These quasi-case studies help to fill out the six principal arguments and observations of this dissertation. In (historically) tracing the everyday digital practices enabling very different normatively-oriented political movements, I aim to conceptualize the coalescence of collective subjectivity, and to theorize its emergence

as a political entity that has always been with us, but has gained more salience and staying-power over the past decade.

This section introduces the perspective of a few other scholars who have set their analytical sights on these kinds of movements with an eye toward differentiating my own insights from theirs.

One project in Chapter 4 is to start thinking about how—rather than following exactly from Charles Tilly's framework—dispositions explain the emergence of a state of affairs where interpersonal transactions are the basic stuff of social processes. Interpersonal transactions (logic of sharing) are indeed the mechanism, but we can only know the causal properties of the transactions by knowing the something about the dispositions of the individuals and collectivities engaged in them. Therefore, I would argue, it is difficult to see why the two should be distinct. Theorizing the role dispositions play in the process of the constitution of subjects and subjectivities must take place simultaneously with analyzing new evidence from digitally-mediated interpersonal transactions. Doing so reveals *how it is* that we live in a world where interpersonal transactions appear as the fundamental motor of social processes. The dispositions are not timeless, but are culturally and historically contingent, even accidental. Thus, it makes more sense to say that interpersonal transactions themselves carry important causal properties, especially digitally-mediated transactions, that reduce the importance of the content of particular dispositions in explaining social processes.

engages with the literatures and concepts surrounding social media and (ostensibly) new forms of protest and collective mobilization. In his preliminary thoughts in one of his most recent books, Manuel Castells (2012) argues that there is a

pattern emerging from the recent cascade of protest and social movements and he calls them “networked social movements”. This is a new form of politics—and it is networked. They become movements by occupying urban space, which becomes, crucially, a space of autonomy. The movements are simultaneously manifest locally and globally, often quite spontaneous in their formation, triggered by some kind of extraordinary event. They take a viral form that follows the logic of the way the Internet networks itself (Castells 2012, 221). Digital communication networks are “indispensable” in the “practice and organization of these movements as they exist” (229).

Outrage follows from the extraordinary event. Normally, a movement begun by intense anger burns out quite quickly, usually with a spat of violence, such as a riot. But these movements today are able, crucially, to transition from outrage to hope (and, therefore, non-violence) by engaging in deliberation in the space of autonomy. By deliberating first, in other words, putting the politics (the within-group politics) before the program, it encourages the development of the twin commitment to leaderlessness and togetherness. The network form, especially its horizontality, facilitates cooperation and the building of solidarity, without encouraging the need for formal leadership. The commitment to deliberation, the lack of formal institutionalization, leads to a highly self-reflective movement politics (Castells 2012, 221). Occupy, the *Indignadas*, Tahrir--these are not Seattle 1999; these movements went a step further, crafting a positive, inclusive politics devoid of controversial policy demands. They put, if you will, the horse (the mechanism) before the cart (the desired outcomes/goods).

Gerbaudo has a similar, if a bit more sober, take. Argues that there is an emerging form of public gathering that are the "hallmark" of today's popular and social movements (2012). Rather than enabling leaderlessness, social media lead to the *choreography of assembly:* "the process of symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualized constituency" (5). In each of the recent movements, a small group of highly influential Facebookers and Tweeters are present as soft leaders that help to set the scene and construct the "emotional space" for collective action. Movements are successful to the extent they can engage in the 'centering' of a message and appeal to the "narrative of popular reunion" (14). Countering Castells and Shirky's focus on networks and crowd-sourcing, Gerbaudo's interview evidence sees a class of reluctant leaders that suggest actions and provide emotional narration, constructing togetherness.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) use the Occupy protests to theorize what they claim is an emerging "logic of connective action". They argue that the movements are not organized in the traditional ways. Instead, they observe that communication itself has become a prominent part of the organizational structure. Connective action is based on personalized content sharing over social media network. Digital media change the logic of the collective action. What makes this so is the act of sharing, the formative element of which is the personalization of ideas and actions, across network structures.

Social media are a near perfect match for the (neoliberal) ongoing shift from group-based to individualized societies. They go well with the notion of 'weak tie' networks (Granovetter 1973) that help individuals to express their identities and

navigate an environment fraught with complexity in social and political realms. The digital mediation of these weak ties makes for a different set of values that guide the formation of communities and actions (Bennett & Segerberg 2012).

In a world where connective action is prevalent, social media and other technological platforms replace and take on the roles of established political organizations. This was especially true in the case of the U.S. Occupy, where political demands and grievances were shared in very personalized ways (Bennett & Segerberg 2012, 742). The rapid diffusion of "we are the 99%" is exemplary, as it focused on the people, not the reform program.[7] "Taking public action or contributing to a common good becomes an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships" (753).

Social media, through their connective affordances, can activate ties imperative to collective mobilization and the formation of networked publics (Papacharissi 2015, 8; 20). Networked publics are (re)structured by networked technologies (Boyd, 2010: 39). They are an "imagined collective" emanating from "the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (Papacharissi 2015, 20). What people do online can introduce, she argues, disruptions that challenge established hierarchies (8). It does so by animating unorganized individuals into networked publics organized around various articulations of community (9). They are then sustained by affect, "however fleeting or permanent those feelings may be" (9).

These networked publics may be a subset of what Papacharissi calls "affective formations" (more on that in Chapter 3). Social media and other networking

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[7] They go on to refer to these collective action frames as "memes" (747) that have rich histories of social transmission.

communications technologies "enable affective processes" that produce publics by facilitating affective connection of people holding distinct ideological predispositions (2015, 24); marginalized viewpoints may find more support in these social spaces (Sobieraj & Berry 2011). Papacharissi argues that some scholars (namely, Bennet and Segerberg 2012) may misreading information-sharing practices as *being* (inherently) connective if the affective side is not accounted for (Papacharissi 2015, 61). Affective networking *brokers* relationships between actors that may in turn aid in the appearance of connective action. Taking the affective nature of the networked framing and gatekeeping process that occurs on Twitter reveals that it is "less susceptible to the information control practices of both repressive and open regimes" (61). In states lacking a liberal public sphere, affective expressions are effectively political statements (62).

The takeaway is that social ties across borders are facilitated by social media and by the strategic actions of principled individuals. While social media appear to allow us to deal with others without needing to fully be with them—an expression of the condition of individualization experienced in today's (presumably rich) societies (Bauman 2001; Beck & Beck-Geernsheim 2002), there are practices by which social media users can be transformed into people occupying urban space, engaging in protest activity.[8]

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[8] Gerbaudo goes on to add that "Countering the spatial dispersion of contemporary societies, Facebook messages and activist tweets have contributed in constructing a new sense of social centrality, focused around 'occupied squares', which are thereby transformed into trending places, or venues of magnetic gatherings, with a great power of emotional attraction" (2012: 13).

What about conservative movements? For better or worse, the earliest scholarship on the internet and social media was inspired by generally progressive groups of actors challenging the status quo in the aughts and early 2010s. I argue that this left-skewed perspective on the whether the political content of a particular movement mattered for how they approached social media and, in turn, the kinds of politics they generated. Progressive movements tend to prefer horizontal organization, while conservative movements prefer hierarchical organizational structures. Therefore, social media would largely be the domain of left activists. The seeming one-to-one connection between progressive organizing and "successful" mobilizations enabled by social media implied that social media was inherently disruptive, but in a *liberating* way. The current political environment, of course, suggests a much more complicated story. The political orientations and goals of the groups factor into their approach to social media and digital communication, and, in turn the kinds of politics in which they engage.

There tends to be a profound unwillingness to discuss the function of the normative content of distinctly liberal forms of communication, protest, and organization. Especially in the early years of the 2010s, there was little effort to explain why it appears that the liberal activities are highlighted as the most successful. Understandably, scholars studying social movements and political communication are unlikely to want to take an explicit stand on the notion that liberal protests for liberal reforms are a more attractive (to international observers, to potential participants) or appropriate than other kinds of reforms or techniques (for example, fundamentalist Islamic politics and violent revolution).

One place to look is liberalism in the context of the study of International Relations (IR), where liberal practices are considered a normative good powering peace in the international system. Its causal mechanism curiously relies on the behavior of individual citizens, but it generally does not bestow much agency on the part of the kind of everyday person conceptualized by Michel de Certeau. That said, according to IR's conception of liberalism, liberal states must respect the wishes of their populations. Liberal societies have an affinity for other liberal societies, and tend to quickly categorize in-groups and out-groups based on their perceptions of others' relative liberalness. Citizens learn about other societies through media, traditional and new. Social media adds a new element, however, with direct (unmediated by official journalism practices) communication, interactivity, and shareability. Today, digital environment encourages an ever more liberal distribution of everyday users' "consumption" of information (e.g. the data is more "free"). It also means a multiplication of interactions and their effects with others. The evidence suggests the possibility of switching from realist forms of interstate cooperation to relations regulated by a logic of appropriateness about openness and dignity. The formation and political content of protest actions foregrounds an emergent (and increasingly effective) "unit" (in the form of collective subjectivity) founded on "doing and making" things that challenges illiberal state behavior, intervenes in and transforms 'official' foreign policy, and formulates its own 'tactical' policy. This "unit", what might be called a society of sharing in liberal IR's terms, is animated by a performative agency—one that performs liberalism.

It is this final point that is the key to understanding why this mechanism can lead to normatively bad outcomes. People may choose to perform something else—

whether that be violent extremism, far-right populism, etc. Chapter 5 addresses these cases, ultimately connecting the practices that facilitate the emergence of liberally-oriented collective political subjectivities to the emergence of counter-progressive ones.

1.5.2 From the Egyptian Revolution to the January 6th Insurrection

The concluding chapter revisits the five major observations that can be drawn from the dissertation, and gestures towards future research by considering the connections between the Arab Spring and other Occupy-style protest events and the rise of MAGA, Q-anon and the January 6th, 2021 insurrection.

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Chapter 2

LIKE, DISLIKE, OR BLOCK? EXAMINING POPULAR AND SCHOLARLY DISCOURSES ON THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MEANING OF THE INTERNET

> "In our society, the public space of the social movements is constructed as a hybrid space between the Internet social networks and the occupied urban space: connecting cyberspace and urban space in relentless interaction, constituting, technologically and culturally, instant communities of transformative practice" (Castells 2012, 11).

> "The Internet embodies the culture of freedom" (Castells 2012, 231).

2.1 The Internet and Democracy

Those invested in the well-being of democracy are well aware of its interfacing with digital communications technology. Our lives are increasingly performed online and mediated through digital communications technologies. The fields of political science and political theory should benefit from a more efficient understanding of the ways in which the decentralized and horizontal technical design of the internet and the thin, casual, and mundane conversational style of social media have wide-reaching social and political effects through digitally mediated, everyday experiences and practices.

By now, the importance of these effects has seeped into the greater public consciousness, as examples internet emergent and enabling 'scandals' are in high

supply. Consider the 4chan.com celebrity hacking and phishing scandal of 2014[9], a case that gave us a first glimpse at the kinds of normatively negative mobilizations and practices flourishing on the chaotic or anarchic web—practices that would be on full display during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and reactions to it. For one, the scandal showcased the fragility of autonomy and security people experience when living out their lives online—a lifestyle choice that is hardly a realistic *choice* for anyone interested in communicating with loved ones, tapping into the political sphere, or to purchase products and services. It also highlighted the contested nature of what is considered public and private once rendered digital—both the "content" itself and the spaces. Consider also the publicizing of the private, digitally-mediated correspondence of Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, John Podesta, near the conclusion of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. It too brought the tension between the public and private into plain view. Implicit in the release and reporting on the emails was that, as an ostensibly public figure, Podesta's thinking deserved scrutiny; furthermore, his falling for a phishing trap meant, at least to some, that he opted-in to this exposure. This mentality is reflected in the notion of radical transparency, as championed by Wikileaks, among others, where, in principle, any content put onto a digital network—presumably because internet protocol is "free"—should *also* be freely accessible to anyone with the wherewithal to find it. Relatedly, the unsettled discussions about net neutrality in the United States and the European Union show how corporations and

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[9] While the victims are celebrities—often seen as legitimate targets due to the intense publicity of their lives—the uproar was more about privacy, security, and appropriate hacker practices--hack, don't trick--than it has been about the scandalous nature of the images themselves.

other organizations attempt to control the flow of information via algorithms strategically. These moves are, of course, subject to resistance and contestation. And consider, finally, the (largely Russian in origin) "troll armies" that leverage, inspire, and utilize right-wing populist networks to engage in coordinated campaigns aimed at disrupting liberal political normalcy (see more in Chapter 5).

Together, each of these occurrences seem to suggest that there is something inherently subversive—to the social and political *status quo*—about the internet. But is this true? What does the discourse at the intersection of the Internet and democracy suggest? Is the internet supposed to liberate and empower everyday citizens and enrich (liberal) democratic societies, subverting capital and government control, or is it destined to cause confusion in the public sphere and promote surveillance? I argue that the discourse at the intersection of the internet and democracy has severe limitations and is fraught by the problem of "dueling anecdotes" (Shirky 2011), where each side of the debate can credibly point to a case in their favor. I contend that this hardened discursive structure is due to the discourse's lacking understanding and acknowledgement of the democratic theory concepts upon which it relies. The discourse employs a public sphere-based understanding of how the internet in general and social media websites in particular exert political effects. In general, while digitally-mediated communication technologies and platforms purportedly improves liberal political forms of participation and governance (or not), it largely misses how the networked public sphere exerts effects on all forms of political action, from protest to revolution, in ways that mute or transform the manifestation of several conditions and/or mechanisms deemed--in the discourse's view--necessary to the improvement or deterioration of democracy, such as spontaneity, creativity, the diffusion of ideas, and

deliberation. This chapter will assess what the discourse says, while the case studies and data presented in the following chapters will attempt to reveal why the mechanisms located at the individual and collective levels do not work in the ways either side expects—and this is due to the ubiquity and fundamental importance of social media sharing practices.

The discourse views the internet in multiple ways. First, it has been hailed as a revolutionary technology that supports social movements concerned with civil rights and dignity, such as that exemplified by #BlackLivesMatter in 2014, political protests like Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, and the 'hacktivism' of Wikileaks and Anonymous. Second, the internet is said to directly support democracy. Specifically, it is seen as an extension of the all-important public sphere into virtual–and, therefore, *limitless*–space from which the revitalization of stagnant political cultures in post-capitalist societies may be staged. Third, many hope that the internet can support new modes of participatory governance, where deliberation (ideas), discussion (choice) and crowdsourcing (of relevant policy information) are employed to produce greater justice in the Aristotelian sense. Fourth, internet-based tools are thought to get us nearer to the goal of the political-economic dream, making cooperation so efficient by reducing transactions costs to nearly zero, thus fulfilling the libertarian promise of 'free culture', where everything that is worth doing can be done. And finally, the internet is perceived as enabling a kind of *anti*-public sphere saturated with vitriol, pornography, consumerism and nonsense serving to reinforce existing power structures. It is important to note that a common thread in all these perspectives is the faith that the internet will improve the functioning of the mechanism of information sharing.

This chapter explores how what people do online and, perhaps more importantly, what people *say* people do online affects our understanding of democratic concepts as portrayed in recent work on identifying, achieving, and sustaining democracy and justice in a post-Westphalian and post-globalization world.[10] In particular, it explores how the internet is said to impact the public sphere, the security and potential for justice within states and other political communities, and the improvement, consolidation, and expansion (or backsliding and deterioration) of liberal political logic. The task I set out to achieve is to explore the ways in which the concepts of the public sphere, participation and governance, and the pair of collective action and solidarity are treated within the discourse, looking especially for assumptions held in common. Doing so helps to reveal the differences between a public sphere- and practice-based subjectivity, as discussed in the introductory chapter.

The chapter is organized into five sections. The first section asks the literature what the internet's relationship is to politics. It aims toward generating a notion of what the internet *is* on democratic theory's terms. To do so, a set of five themes from the discourse are introduced. A second section briefly outlines democratic theory's perspective on concepts important to the discourse, namely, the public sphere, participation, governance, solidarity, and collective action. After briefly touching on the literature's perspective on the interrelation between cosmopolitanism and globalization, a third section presents evidence from the Internet-democracy discourse,

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[10] See, for example, the work of Young (2000, 2011), Bohman (2008; 2010; 2004), Dryzek (1999, 2006), Follesdale & Hix (2006), Fraser (2009; 2013), Kuper (2004), McGrew (2002), Anderson (2006), Leatherman & Webber (2005).

organizing them along the dimensions outlined in the first section, with a goal toward putting it into dialogue with democratic theory. A framework for interpreting the discourse is synthesized from the particularly speculative statements found in democratic theory on the meaning of technology and in the Internet discourse on the meaning of democracy. A fourth section synthesizes the literature and posits that there is fundamental agreement on the causal effects of the Internet via the basic mechanism of information sharing. The chapter briefly concludes by arguing for a practice-based understanding of the internet, presented in more detail in chapter 3. Such a perspective enables, I argue, an effort to distinguish notions of practice-based and public sphere-based conceptions of subjectivity. It is possible to make sense of the discourses by focusing on digital practices and attempting to read them as democratic, and yet, everyday practices. For most people, life is digitally-mediated--politics is no exception.[1112] Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the same digital practices that we employ in our everyday situations are manifest in the way we engage in politics.

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[11] Kahn and Kellner (2007) argue that "one of the novelties of the contemporary era is that much significant political struggle is mediated by technopolitics". See also Best & Kellner, 2001; Kahn & Kellner, 2005; Kahn & Kellner 2004). It is hard to argue against this position. As current protest movements around the world, including, incidentally, the Islamic State in Syria and Levant, demonstrate, it is the norm to employ Internet-enabled tools in political mobilization and information dissemination.

[12] The literature often displays a tendency to claim that the politics follows a digital or Internet logic. And this leads people to find their own theoretical perspectives embodied by the Internet. For example, Castells (2012) claims that the new type of politics, the new form of social movements of 2011 and beyond, are 'viral', and follow the logic of his famous usage of the conception of the "network society".

2.2 What is the Internet's Relationship to Politics?

It might go without saying that the social-scientific literature on and popular accounts of the internet are too numerous to assess *in toto.* I initially employ the term 'internet', here, because works that that set the groundwork for future analyses did not readily distinguish among its various manifestations—a feature that stands in contrast with the more recent literature. Volumes have been written about the political and social implications of the internet. However, the literature—spanning almost every discipline and subfield—is unsurprisingly disjointed and lacking in consensus, especially on the question of democracy, as each subfield tends to refer to the concept from within the bounds of its own preferred paradigm. Although multiple dozens of empirically-informed scholarly articles on the topic appear each month, some of the most highly cited works in the discourse lack the rigorous evidence generally thought necessary to generate causal claims. This uneven development produces long-standing debates in the various subfields on whether the Internet is 'good or bad for *x*,' a situation that makes it quite difficult to assess claims. Generally, there is little solid foundation from which to stand, forcing scholars to stake their own claims and develop their own concepts.

But a lack of agreement on the implications of the internet also stems from a lack of ontological consensus on what the internet is. We can begin to alleviate this problem by focusing in on the discourse at the intersection of the internet and democracy (internet-democracy discourse). Here, the discourse ultimately depends upon democratic, liberal, and republican conceptual foundations. But we are left without a notion of what the internet *is* in terms friendly to democratic theory. By taking the Schumpeterian criticisms of democracy for granted, the content of this discursive framework undermines its own normative, emancipatory goals. Such a

project involves the unearthing of the content and implications of the internet-democracy discourse and putting them into dialogue with democratic theory. Doing so increases our leverage in understanding the internet's meaning to democratic possibility in a digital age.

The chapter demonstrates how discourses both shape and take advantage of ongoing historical events. It reveals deep disagreement on both the premises and consequences of digitally-mediated politics on democracy and societal well-being. It becomes clear that the discourse relies on a few particular, high order—even rare—digital practices (and not others) to found its claims. It is missing an understanding of the political consequences of the most basic behaviors: digital everyday practices.

There are five common ways in which the relationship between the internet and democracy is conceived. The following five tropes are not exhaustive, nor should they be taken as representative of the literature on the internet as a whole. But they are highly-cited examples, are often referred to in passing in popular discourse, even make their way into mainstream discourse, such as in the 2015 State of the Union Address.[13] Raising these particular examples foregrounds an engagement with the evidence presented in subsequent chapters. They help to reveal that, although the claims themselves are often at odds with each other, the practices that are responsible for these disparate outcomes are not altogether different. This means that the different interpretations of the democratic concepts are of utmost importance. The literature

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[13] The speech highlighted the ways in which the Internet is educational and therefore uplifting to average Americans, innovative and supportive of economic development, and vulnerable to foreign nations and hackers. President Obama called for legislation to "protect the technologies that have unleashed untold opportunities for people around the globe" (www.whitehouse.gov).

ranges from that claiming the internet is mostly good for democracy and beneficial to society, almost unconditionally, to that viewing it as a domination-producing technology.

2.2.1 Example 1 – Facebooking to Freedom: The Internet Revolution

> "For us [in the pre-millennial generations], no matter how deeply we immerse ourselves in new technology, it will always have a certain provisional quality…The mistakes the novices make come from a lack of experience. They overestimate mere fads, seeing revolution everywhere, and they make this kind of mistake a thousand times before they learn better. But in times of revolution, the experienced among us make the opposite mistake. When a real once-in-a-lifetime change comes along, we are at risk of regarding it as a fad" (Shirky 2008, 303).

The quote from Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody* represents a typical perspective that says the internet is revolutionary and freedom-producing. Shirky's arguments rest upon the assumption that the internet represents a rupture from the other technologies supporting forms of communication and cooperation. This is a revolution, he might have said, and we cannot risk *not* taking advantage of it. But this was also the second time we heard about an internet "revolution". And the Occupy movements and those of the Arab Spring have provided a third round of such pronouncements.

Shortly after the early libertarian/hacker/fanfare about the revolutionary qualities of the Internet subsided, the advent of so-called Web 2.0—marked by the emergence of Xanga, MySpace and Facebook—initiated a new round of rhetoric about

the ways in which the Internet would revolutionize politics and society.[14] Social media signify the emergence of sharing and cooperation supported by the internet.

One of the prominent themes in the early days of before the internet was so widely diffused was that it was a revolutionary technology set to overturn the last vestiges of undemocratic bureaucratic rule (Moore 2003; Barlow 1996). This aspect of the discourse made a comeback with the mainstream mass media's tendency to link adoption of social networks to the Arab Spring and the Occupy uprisings and movements. If not for Facebook, the revolutions could not have been possible, and almost certainly they would not have cascaded across borders and societies in the ways they did (Castells 2012; Gerbaudo 2012).

On the political economy front, the internet is said to have ushered in a "new economic democracy" (Tapscott and Williams, 2007) in the "age of engage" (Shiffman 2008). The "participatory culture" is imbued in the technologies of Web 2.0 (Jenkins, 2008), contributing to the emergence of new forms of activity, like "produsage", blurring the distinction between the roles of user and producer (Bruns 2008). New media is interactive, globally networked, and increasingly participatory (Deuze 2007). Benkler's influential account posits that the internet ushers in an era of commons-based peer production systems that are "radically decentralized, collaborative, and nonproprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other

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[14] This included much fanfare about how political campaigns could become participatory and, in turn, help to get policies that were closer to the desires of the majority (Trippi 2005; Moulitsas 2008).

without relying on either market signals or managerial commands" (2006, 60). The internet brings with it revolutionary changes in the modes of production.

Conveniently, this is a revolution without any of the things traditionally associated with a revolution like violence, economic depression, or international condemnation. "These changes will transform the world everywhere groups of people come together to accomplish something, which is to say everywhere" (Shirky 2008, 24). Thus, it is more a revolution terms of the ways in which *organizations* work. The "old limitations" have been "radically reduced" (Shirky 2008, 12). Indeed, "We are living in the middle of a remarkable increase in our ability to share, cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside of the framework of traditional institutions" (Shirky 2008, 21). Instead of having to gather together and then share information and opinions, today, people share information and opinions, and gather together later (36). But it is also a revolution in the capacity for self-expression: "We are living in the middle of the largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race" (Shirky 2008, 106).

2.2.2 Example 2 – Democracy, the Public Sphere, and Participatory e-Governance: The Revitalization of the Public Sphere

> "The value of freedom outweighs the problems, not based on a calculation of net values but because freedom is *the right thing to want* for society" (Shirky 2008, 298 emphasis added).

When scholars began to seriously explore the relationship between the Internet and democracy in the early 2000s, they usually premised their arguments on the notion that democracy is in decline; it is not efficacious for solving what are perceived as fundamentally new problems and behaviors (specifically, lack of civic participation), and needs to be revitalized. Globalization, neoliberalism, recession and racism

challenge democracy's institutions. Problems understood as highly technical and transnational, such as global warming, reveal that the old liberal democracy is a poor mechanism of governance; legislative bodies hardly produce policy due to partisan gridlock. How can they come together to solve important problems?

Enter the digital public sphere and the *netizen*. Armed with more information and more diverse and developed opinions, the netizen is better able to practice citizenship than his predecessor, the liberal modern mass citizen. The internet can host a new and improved public sphere. More people can participate in productive discussions, and more opinions can be heard, due to the speed and freedom of communication flows, as well as, importantly, reducing the necessity for people to be geographically proximate. These arguments rely on a conception of the Internet as a tool for many-to-many communication, of both interest aggregation and public deliberation. The public sphere could be *fixed* through a technologization of practices of liberal citizenship.

The literature on the internet and public sphere was swept up into the fanfare surrounding political blogs like Daily Kos and email lists like MoveOn.org in the early 2000s. In principle, large scale participation through e-governance was posited as a realistic possibility, and one that would increase the fairness and efficacy of public policy. Moreover, creating digitally-supported centers of governance was seen as the *responsibility* of a liberal democracy, as the costs were low and the benefits were eminently clear.

While this discourse takes a Habermasian conception of the liberal public sphere, it ignores his critique of the structures surrounding the public sphere. Habermas expresses a preference to get reduce the influence of capitalism in the

public sphere, as well as the democratization of the power of media. But according to the discourse on the internet and the public sphere, democracy could be revitalized without disturbing the march of neoliberalization. Freedom, more important than reform, after all is the right thing to want for society, as Shirky's quote claims. Cynicism, fragmentation, unfair policies, all could be obviated by without challenging the neoliberal model.

In this line of thinking, neoliberalism's ideological victory over socialism and communism seemed to do give credence to the Schumpeterian and Schmittian critiques of democracy. Mass participation in decision-making was seen as not only unlikely, but unfeasible. However, with the advent of the Internet, as with radio and television before it, participatory, deliberative and direct democrats came out of the woodwork, arguing that the problems with democracy are not ontological, but epistemological. The internet presented a technological solution. Everyone could have a voice, every opinion deliberated, and every issue decided by every citizen.

2.2.3 Example 3 – The Libertarian Dream of Free Culture: Cooperation under the Structure of Zero

This aspect of the discourse argues that the internet can aid the realization of the libertarian dream of free culture, where cooperation is so cheap and easy that non-economically motivated goals are now on the agenda. Projects that express a collective desire to construct the world we want to live can be met without straining any particular individuals, and without the creation of an unwieldy government hierarchy. Because of its ease, people are able to do what they want: they can participate as much or as little as they want. The communicative capacity and computing power of the internet allows individuals to have their efforts multiplied in ways that compensate for

others' lack of interest in society-building. Everything can be free and individuated. Importantly, this means that people do not need to be subjected to mass culture. This is an extreme expression of John Stuart Mill's experimental life, but without the social pressure toward conformity in society, let alone in political participation. Citizenship is effectively a voluntary activity, not a responsibility.

In particular, Shirky claims that the Internet reduces the barrier to the attainment of information which my increase efficiency in the provision of public and private goods and services. Combining economic and social organization theory, Shirky claims that the reduction in transaction costs has drastically altered the incentives for people to organize themselves. What is most amazing to him, are the "tools that provide simple ways of creating groups lead to new groups, lots of new groups, and not just more groups but more kinds of groups" (2008, 20), or "ridiculously easy group forming".

Anderson (2006) argues that the internet increases the ability for the economic concept of the 'long-tail' to matter. The importance of the mainstream is reduced. Those with unpopular tastes can remain significant (important, recognizable) because the communicative capacities of the internet reduces the transaction costs associated with reaching these potential consumers. Diversity is thus encouraged, as is the ability for people to organize themselves along different kinds of interests beyond the typical categories of socio-economic class or political party.

There is life on the internet, and it is free, "pulsating, dynamic, radiating through countless modes" because of the technology's being modeled on the vision of the open commons (Bollier 2009, 5). Its population, concerned with improving the environment, public health, human rights, and social development, is free from the

hegemonic influence of the U.S. state and consumerist culture (Moore 2003). "Governments of the Industrial World, …You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather" (Barlow 1996). The Internet is said to support non-market sharing practices that make possible "a world where all have access to cultural works, the right to share them and the technical means to produce new works" (Aigrain 2012, 15). Piracy is celebrated, not condemned.

2.2.4 Example 4 – Raining on the Parade: Capital, the State, and Nonsense

Finally, there is a discourse that emphasizes the capitalistic and surveillance aspects of the internet. It has enjoyed increased prominence in light of too many to count recent events involving nefarious online activities and "big tech." It argues that global capital, the media, and elite ideology have eroded the fabric of the liberal democratic compromise. The internet is only here to contribute to antidemocratic tendencies. The Internet was created through official sanction of the global hegemon in an effort to extend its rule. As such its efficiency vastly increases the scale of surveillance. Moreover, it is infested with consumer capitalism. The neoliberal practice of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) may spell and end to the equal access to the internet and the equal treatment of data. ISPs that control valuable infrastructure demand compensation for the kinds of data it or their investors deem undesirable.

Some argue that what is most notable about social media is the massive provision and storage of personal information that is in turn used to sell us products (Fuchs 2012). There also those who view social media as, understandably, yet another way to extract excess labor from unsuspecting groups. The commons of society (for example, the content we post on Facebook and Youtube) are exploited by capital through advertising (Fuchs 2011; Andrejevic 2009). Web 2.0 optimism is quite

uncritical, is an ideology that serves corporate interests (Fuchs 2008, Scholz 2008). It almost goes without saying that there are contradictions everywhere in Web 2.0 practices (Cammaerts 2008).

Cyberwarfare, the ways in which autocratic regimes used SNS to crackdown on protestors, and the revelations over U.S. government spying have renewed efforts to theorize the internet as a space of surveillance. People share information about their lives that can be used in various ways, but the psychological impact of this self-disciplining practice is even more severe. We know what is appropriate and expected of us to put on Facebook and Twitter, and we force ourselves to do so. This leads to conformity but also to a kind of alienation from what we would prefer to do and what we portray ourselves as doing. Eventually, the two are indistinguishable, and the Internet, especially social media, is mostly another disciplining apparatus. If it is the norm that politics are conducted online, even revolutionary movements run the risk of reinforcing the status quo by using social media to organize themselves. It is far from guaranteed that they will learn practices fit to subvert technical hegemony.[15]

While internet evangelists like to claim the internet cannot be "shut down"—a stylized fact underpinning the progressive nature of their claims—these authors in the skeptical group are wont to warn that this is only a half-truth at best. The Facebook revolutions occurred in regimes where the internet was seen as something mostly

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[15] This perspective also argues that social networking sites have a role to play in practices that resist domination. The contradictions within the field of surveillance present this possibility. Citizens themselves, given the right tools and knowledge, are able to conduct their own surveillances of the surveillers, and generate attention and sympathy in public for injustices committed by the powerful upon the weak (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtlund & Sandoval 2012).

innocuous, a welcome distraction for restless society. In other words, the Internet was social, not political (Schwarz 2014; Morozov 2011). And so, while the digital protest activities got a head start, and a boost from online organizing and international publicity, states reacted swiftly to both shut down access to the internet, in some cases even cutting off cell phone towers, to curtail activist practices. Moreover, content from social networks was used to track down people who were pictured participating in the protests.

If protest activity is so unpredictable, spontaneous and untraceable when organized online, then it stands to reason that surveillance[16] can be too. The insidious aspect of the Internet is surveillance is now (even more) hidden, unseen and impossible to trace. It is through surveillance practices that some uses of the internet become "official" in that formal decisions are made to establish surveillance systems which in turn control Internet populations.[17]

This part of the internet-democracy discourse also doubles down on its negative outlook due to capital and state interference by portraying the internet as kind

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[16] According to Mathieson, there are a few characteristics of surveillance that come to the forefront in the digital age. Surveillance-the-practice is transformed into a system or a set of systems that "silently silences" people. It is described as "suave, unnoticeable, and undetected" that in turn silences opposition.

[17] But where there is domination, there is always the possibility for resistance: "The Internet is not only a surveillance tool that allows the state and corporation to watch citizens and to create political profiles, criminal profiles, and consumer profiles, but that it also poses the potential for citizens to conduct surveillance of the powerful and to try to exert counter-power that tries to create public attention for injustices committed by the powerful against the weak" (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund & Sandoval 2012, 13). There are ways of watching the watchers and surveilling the surveillers (14).

of worthless, anyway. It is chaotic, unprofessional, and disorganized: a space of nonsense. As such, it is an impediment to the consolidation of democratic society. While it is ostensibly good that anyone can publish online, it also means that the probability of inaccurate information increases, leading to a situation where it is impossible for them to participate in decision-making processes with those with correct or different information. In his discussion of deliberative enclaves, Sunstein (2007) claims that while people learn a great deal by reading blogs, they have a difficult time distinguishing truth from exaggeration, creating an atmosphere of misunderstanding no conducive to (liberal) deliberation. Spending too much time in one space is likely to do more harm than good, dealing a major blow to the plurality thought necessary for the well-functioning of democratic society. Because people can hide behind anonymity and easily interact with one another without changing out of pajamas, the forums, blogs and social media tend to encourages unvirtuous and illiberal behaviors that ultimately contribute to the failure to internalize important liberal social norms. Therefore, the internet does real damage to the functioning of the public sphere, especially in causing incoherent or illegitimate collective action and unpluralistic solidarity. Most web 2.0 users are wrapped up in a precarious underclass of creative types in need of new economic models that help them to get by on a day-to-day basis. Blogging is a "self-centered, nihilistic, cynical activity" (Lovink 2008; 2012). Thus, most of the content enabled by the supposedly liberating communication technologies and publishing platforms is nonsense and not democracy producing.

2.3 Democratic Concepts and Digital Practices

As seen in the above examples, there are numerous assumptions about the nature of democracy and related concepts at work, and the consequences of making

these assumptions are taken quite lightly by the internet storytellers themselves. In particular, Clay Shirky explicitly eschews such a discussion in order to focus on a normative agenda promoting what he thinks are the best features of the internet age. *Here Comes Everybody's* conclusions, for example, heavily rely on (what were) the hegemonic liberal democratic conceptions of the public sphere, the free market, and the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights. In this section, I attempt to remedy this situation by reading in a more systematic discussion of a few of the most prominent concepts in need of more rigorous discussion: The public sphere, participation and governance, and solidarity.

2.3.1 The Public Sphere

The public sphere is of integral importance to the internet-democracy discourse. The story goes that if the public sphere can be improved via the internet, in various ways, then democracy can be improved. The discourse largely adopts the Habermasian bourgeois conception of the public sphere. It is my position that the critiques should be taken seriously as well.

The public sphere is an open space, held in common, where individuals and groups that populate a society discuss the kind of society they wish to live. It is a space where people come together as a public to rationally-critically debate rules governing relations in society. The public sphere is distinct from a private sphere and often a political sphere. It is a space that influences politics and policy through the vehicle of public opinion. Actors, public and private, *appear* in public, to articulate opinion and be held accountable. Individual opinions are aggregated, but also debated. In this way, the practices of public communication mesh with the practices of democratic politics.

Normatively, the public sphere's function speaks to the notion of the general will, in that the ideal constitution of a society can be gleaned from the processes and outcomes found within and emerging from the public sphere. This entails adherence to principles of equality and inclusivity. Ideally, common and not particularistic issues are to be discussed and language to be used. Moreover, discussions within the public sphere help to confer legitimacy upon persons and policies. Structurally, the media (independent or otherwise) plays an important role. And if the media is captured by non-democratic forces of capital and vocal minority interests, the discourse argues that it is important that the internet can help to ameliorate these negative tendencies.[18]

On face, it is true that the web and social media contain a diversity of comments, opinions, content, and access that compares favorably to even the ideal bourgeois public sphere. But there are dimensions of the public sphere that come to light in each of the four examples of the internet and democracy discourse and that should be considered before celebrating the promise of the virtual public sphere. The first regards the relationship between speaking and deliberation in public. Any act of deliberation assumes a subject and this is problematic online because it is quite difficult to understand who is speaking for whom and to what audience. But deliberation enables citizens to come to an understanding about the rules by which they will live together. Deliberation also contributes to democratic goods of

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[18] The critiques of this cursory understanding of the public sphere are many, and the Internet & democracy discourse fails to take them seriously. It ignores the fact that it is male dominated, excludes alternative publics, brackets inequalities based on identity and class, and that there is little way to agree to an objective understanding of what constitutes a common concern. Thus, while there is such a thing as a public sphere, there are also other spaces of subaltern counterpublics and counterpolitics (Benhabib 2004; Fraser 2009).

legitimacy, publicity, and efficacy (e.g. solving problems in better ways). Some theorists also direct our attention to the subversive elements of some deliberative practices. This often leads to calls to make the practices themselves subject to deliberation. Deliberation is said to aid people in thinking about unjust and arbitrary social conventions. Thus, it is integral to identifying a subjectivity's members and its character. The form that communicative action takes, deliberative or not, effectively defines the public sphere. These are insights missing from the discourse that can help to clarify some of its aspects

Deliberative practices tend to privilege one identity over others, especially as group members reinforce their identity through socialization processes.[19] The communicative form matters a great deal to what kind of subjectivity potential members orient themselves to. Consider, for example, the stark (yet slowly merging) differences between academic and instant messaging styles of communication; one rarely meets the other. Communication thus has an affective dimension, and it is people's experience with the particular form or practice that determines its consequences. Lastly, the Internet could support a public sphere, because the sphere could be conceived of as less a thing or a space and more an ideal type of public reasoning. To the extent this space can be guaranteed by non-state entities, the myth of Westphalian sovereignty is just that.

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[19] While Habermas is criticized for excluding some from the public sphere because they do not know the proper language with which they must participate, and for asking them to shed identities and engage in a subject-less form of communication (cf. Benhabib 2004; Young 2000), I argue that, when reading Habermasian theory alongside actual everyday digital practices, people can learn deliberative processes organically from associations, from iterated, if mundane, interactions with others.

The public sphere contains mechanisms for its own reproduction. More recent democratic theorizing (and essentially the entirety of the Internet-democracy discourse) retains the concept as an element crucial to any well-functioning and justice-distributing democracy. It is a space for informal deliberation and innovation in the liberal tradition, but it also construed as a forum for the construction, consolidation and performance of collective identity. While the state can aid the public sphere through official means, there is a tradition that celebrates the unofficial public sphere of associations (Tocqueville; others). The activity of these associations helps to establish a notion that democracy is self-evidently practical. In addition to creating officially-sanctioned institutions to inspire citizens to develop civic capacities that enable them to more effectively participate in political processes and reduce cynicism, associational life is also a kind of institutional space that produces solidarity and affinity for democratic society. By privileging the positive development of democratic affinity, the design of institutions should try to maximize the natural character of people that has been distorted by the unfair formation of society. Thus, it seems possible to many democratic theorists that institutions can explain the emergence of new democratic subjects by creating and including 'new' citizens.

The public sphere is constantly under threat from private and capital intrusion. Arguable, globalization processes have accelerated these tendencies. In response, several theorists seem to recognize the emergence of a transnational critical public sphere acting through Internet and global communications media and networks (Fraser 2009). The critical function of the public sphere seems to be shifting into activities typically associated with the private sphere. Thus, the conceptual elements of the

public sphere support some of the strongest claims about the effects of globalization and global communications technologies on democracy.

2.3.2 Solidarity-Generation vs. Linking-Generation in the context of Collective Action

I argue that the literature extending from and beyond the internet-democracy discourse tends to be roughly split into two camps when it comes to the emergence of collective action in a democratic society. One tends to emphasize solidarity-generating strategies and mechanisms, while the other emphasizes linking-generating strategies and mechanisms.

Collective action is an important part of the internet-democracy discourse. In terms of practices, it is often seen as in tension with communication—a tension personified by the work of Arendt and Habermas. Action in public is part of any act of association and for the maintenance of a subjectivity, especially one not anchored in the material. Action occurs within a network of actors having various relationships with each other. Communication is useful for the articulation of a subjectivity, the diffusion of ideas, and adherence to the publicity principle. But, as a concept, it stops short of considering the implications of a "speech act." Therefore, communication serves more a linking function than as a solidarity production function, which is more the domain of action.

Solidarity itself is conceived as a disposition involving feelings of emotional connection and commitment to support the struggles of others to challenge oppression (Ferguson 2009, 186; Gould 2007; Mohanty 2003; Barkty 2002; Allen 1999; O'Donnell 2007). The concept of solidarity has taken on new meanings over time. But due again to the increase in political and social connections across identities, classes

and borders and the interdependencies of international political economy, the concept of solidarity needs to be expanded beyond its Marxist comfort zone (Gould 2007). Once we think of solidarity as something more akin to fraternity, the possibilities multiply. Substantively, one can think of cosmopolitan, civic, interest-based and welfare state conceptions of solidarity. More specific to the purposes here, a cosmopolitan solidarity "would claim that all humans should be conceived of as one big moral community, and thus that we have moral obligations to aid and support all other people" (Ferguson 2009, 190). The problem is that it is not 'realistic' in the sense that there are empirical difficulties associated with getting people who do not know each other, and may not even be like each other, to developing feelings of solidarity (Bartky 2002). Pragmatically, solidarity among potentially fiercely independent individuals has developed by the 'fact' that by forming a group with the express purpose to stand up for common purpose creates a moral or political obligation to defend group rights against opponents who threaten the common interest (Ferguson 2009, 191).

The linking and solidarity divide maps somewhat onto the liberal-republican spectrum in democratic theory and practice. Thus, it should be noted that each perspective has an argument for why institutions matter. Institutions promise mechanisms by which to do both solidarity and linking generation. Institutions can provide guidance for appropriate political practice, and also help to determine and publicize procedures that help to determine membership. Institution can be conceived of as spaces of learning, and therefore, productive of social and political order. They represent or are rules that may be internalized by participants but they are also spaces that produce solidarity through the legitimate creation of decisions. When laws are

created, those participating in the process are said to constitute the democratic subject, those to which membership is bestowed.

Institutions may also 'wear off' onto individual participants, which in aggregate, makes for a healthier, more highly skilled deliberating public. Well-designed institutions do not merely aggregate and adjudicate differences; they can produce new understandings and identities. Solidarity emerges from the act of lawmaking. Every act of legislation defines a basic subjectivity and boundary (Benhabib 2004, 104). For republicans, solidarity or affinity might be said to arise from the legitimacy of the decision-making process and the quality of the outcome.

The concept of solidarity is important to recent, more neo-Marxist aspects of the Internet-democracy discourse, in addition to its real role in cosmopolitan or transnational democracy. If democracy is said to spill across borders, theorists recognize the necessity of at least a thin solidarity as a precondition.

2.3.3 Globalization and Democratic Theory

Globalization is a concept and an integrative process signifying a distinctive logic of bordering, the breaking open of boundaries, and a new experience of spatiality—all marked by increased neoliberalization. The literature on the intersection of democracy and globalization tends to be better grounded empirically than the literature extending from the internet-democracy discourse, and while it does not always explicitly refer to the consequences of the internet, the processes it encounters and describes are highly informative on the question.

Although politics happens online, the bulk of recent democratic theory work resorts to speculation about, remains silent on, or folds the digitalization of politics into more general discussions about globalization processes and their effects. Because

democratic theory is largely conceived with the modern states system in mind[20], by challenging the nation-state, globalization also tests the limit of stretching democratic theory concepts. Globalization has led to the fragmentation of sovereignty, leaving people connected to each other to a degree unaccommodated by traditional democratic arrangements (Behabib 2004). Decisions made by one polity undoubtedly affect another, meaning that actions generate moral obligations that are mostly left unfulfilled. The dichotomy of self-preservation vs the duty to others is an increasingly inadequate way to conceive the normative obligations of governance. In fact, state action contributes to disorder when it has fought back against the countervailing globalization process, especially, for example, as states began to denaturalize members of unwanted minority groups, creating refugees and stateless people across borders. It is no surprise that political communities are turning to alternative forms of organization, such as networks and supranationalism. In doing so, they are also innovating in new ways of constituting themselves as a people, as a democratic subject.[21]

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[20] For an account of how historical international relations made a decisive impact on democratic theory, and not vice versa, see Inayatullah and Blaney's *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (2004).

[21] The literature on the politics of inclusion or membership expand the notion of who is available to join in the new memberships emblematic of transboundary democracy. When new people are included in decision-making processes, they bring new ideas and perspectives to the table and they learn basic skills by associating with various democratic practices and liberal values. While the ethical issues regarding agency are left unresolved in such a process, it is possible that 'they' may be able to learn just enough to leverage transnational networks or global communications technology and become efficacious citizens in innovatively organized political units.

Reading about the effects of globalization on democracy alongside the internet-democracy discourse is revealing because it helps us to think through the difficulties of identifying a subjectivity in a digitally-mediated and physically-dispersed environment. Democratic theorists of various traditions have attempted to confront the difficulties present in the globalization-information-digitization moment. For example, Barber (2003) argued that technology and communication are crucial to the evolution of democracy in the globalized era. Barber believes that the speed, and, to some degree, scale, of communication is a net negative for democracy. Citizens are not provided enough time to reflect and effectively deliberate. This can lead to a kind of schizophrenia where people are able to rapidly switch their affiliations with several constitutive subjectivities or allegiances. Much of this occurs without regard to borders, and are reinforced by global communications technologies.

The internet continues to be ahead of globalization in time, in the sense that what is happening online is a precursor to what lies ahead for globalization processes, as the two are inextricably linked in material and ideational ways. It is said that the Internet is helping to accelerate trends that have been present since the 1940s. Thus, it is more of a precursor suggesting where we are going, rather than a space of activity indicating where we are right now. The same kinds of horizontal community formation and linking processes that are happening online also tend to occur in the globalized world. This kind of future-telling capacity came to fruition even during the recent populist wave, where borders were suddenly back in vogue. In chapter 3, I will detail how transnational networks of right-wing individuals came together to turn the logic upside down and argue that liberals and "globalists"—in league with amorphous entities of big tech and the mainstream media—were the real enemies of (racist and

Islamophobic) information flows. By looking at how democratic theory has treated globalization and its consequences, we may find clues as to how it might treat the digitization of politics, more generally.

While many argue that institutions explain the emergence and perpetuation of democratic subjects due to their normative and coerce capacities to bind people together, a starting point is Rousseau's notion of the general will and the social contract and its legacy in more recent democratic theory. Indeed, the task of coming to know the general will is a longtime concern of democratic theory. In the digital and globalized era, the expressions of founding acts are increasingly more arbitrary, and are better conceived as a series of acts or an ongoing process. We are able to give 'others' the benefit of the doubt and include them in 'our' deliberations because, in the globalized age, we are decreasingly certain of how all is (or ought to have been) included in 'the people's' founding acts of association, to the extent they exist, because of the difficulties of finding the boundaries of political community. Innovations like the all-affected principle are meant to compensate for a lack of knowledge about the citizenry (subject) or constituency of a particular decision-making assembly while simultaneously increasing the legitimacy of the decisions. In other words, when faced with an environment where there is no discernable founding act, it is still preferable to have mechanisms in place that allow for deliberation to discover what the founding act might have been and who was included in that act that put us into reciprocal relations (i.e. a social contract) with others. The relationship between sovereignty and the demos also comes into play, as processes associated with globalization threaten to wear away the material foundations of sovereignty. Geography and cultural homogeneity have been undermined by the freer flow of

people, ideas and capital. Thus, a collective identity, often seen as a necessary component of any subjectivity, is founded less on material and more on ideational elements.

The next section relies on Table 2.1 to systematize the claims of the Internet and democracy discourse in terms more friendly to the task of theorizing. The works analyzed in the following sections are, for their part, highly-cited and highly visible within various literatures. It asks: what *is* the internet? And what is it doing to and for democracy? The "internet" is an understandably vague and ambiguous term. It facilitates all kinds of activity, and it is impossible to decisively deduce its meaning, effects, explanatory attributes, etc. I believe it is helpful to treat it as an analytical concept with a large conceptual family. Rather than define it, it is best to think of it as "the internet and x." Thus, while it is in aggregate a technology that distributes information through networks of computers, it is also much more than that. It is infrastructure, it is media, it is a tool, it is a platform. It is dynamic in that it has an ability to scale and reach beyond its physical and immanent capacities.

Table 2.1: Internet Discourse by Concept and Characteristics

Concept	Characteristics
1. Public sphere	A: Liberal (best ideas will rise to the top) B: Inclusive (easy to publish) C: Free (unconstrained) D: Sharing information and ideas is productive
2. Participatory governance	Emancipatory Technological solutions for mitigating path dependence (political choice) Virtual communities with perfectly voluntary membership
3. Solidarity & Collective	Fast and spontaneous

Action	Liberal Networks Internet does not guarantee success

2.4 The Internet and the Public Sphere

Much of the literature discussing the internet and democracy continues to rely upon the Habermasian conception of the public sphere. There are those who subscribe to the idea that the Internet represents a new public sphere, and those who believe it represents the potential for the creation of ideal institutional settings for deliberative democracy. As noted above, the internet is said to support the idealized public sphere that was lost in the transformation detailed by Habermas. Anyone can publish and a plethora of opinions are available (Dimension B), allowing the better argument to emerge. Moreover, it can help keep government official accountable. The Internet enables the escape from corporate for-profit media into a meritocratic information realm. Included in this camp are also those who believe that the internet can support ideal deliberative decision-making settings, through creative programming, with a view towards reinvigorating democracy and realizing the ideal of self-rule. It appears so self-evident that the internet should be a deliberative space because there is *so much* text; the "send-reply" format of publication is hegemonic.

The discourse suggests that the internet is highly structured yet supports spontaneity. Putting Shirky into dialogue with Arendt, for example, reveals that it is conceivable social media platforms can support Arendtian-like spontaneous formations of democratic subjects. Because of the technical structure and the popularization of lightweight social networking sites, such spontaneity is made knowable to a larger number of people, and the barriers to participation are reduced. Arguably the practices that constitute mashup culture and flash mobs are akin to those

employed in more momentous events, like the Occupy Wall Street and the Occupy-like movement(s).

2.4.1 Dimension A – It's Liberal

The public sphere that the internet supports is a liberal one. It has room for everyone and is supportive of minority cultures. In doing so, it is said to have the opportunity to "expand dialogue" (Bohman 2004) through the inclusion resulting from linking practices. This goes hand in hand with the notion that the Internet, especially "Web 2.0" (i.e. social media) can support the construction of a healthier public sphere (e.g. Shane 2004; Trippi 2004). This is in part due to the "openness" of the internet, whereby the Internet is highly accessible (unlike newspapers or television). The internet is ostensibly "open to everyone" and in terms of making our thoughts known, "anyone can do it." The internet-democracy discourse posits that democracy and democratic subjectivity itself is transnationalizing via technologies that enable a more robust public sphere, easily scalable collective action, more efficient knowledge dissemination, and, in turn, the growth of a thin solidarity emerging from common practices. Openness is generally good. Although it makes it easier for us to be subject to public criticism, it also makes it easier for people to "find each other" (Shirky 2008: 12), which is good for the promotion and circulation of good ideas.

2.4.2 Dimensions B and C – It's Inclusive because it's "Free"

The internet-based public sphere is also "free" and it should be kept that way. It is able to subvert authoritarian regimes and thwart capitalism. It is a "basic truth" that communicative freedom is good for political freedom (Shirky 2011). The way the internet "works" means that conversations are effectively impossible to police (12).

One recent study of the Russian media landscape found that alternative media was able to act independently from state rules, something deemed self-evidently impossible before the Internet (Kirita 2012).

Folded into these arguments are that the Internet can thwart the laws of supply and demand. There was no known demand for alternative media in Russia, but the low costs of producing it and evading state retribution made it possible. As noted above, the notion that the Internet reduces transaction costs is a longstanding element of the Internet-democracy discourse. Such observations have inspired a sub-literature on copyright reform and what is known as net neutrality. The realities of the way that the Internet distributes information necessitates a return to the pre-20th century capitalism mode of culture production and dissemination.[22] This line of argumentation combines two logics. The first is the equal treatment of data, held as a liberal right. The second

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[22] Zittrain (2008) and Lessig (2009) have separately argued that there is a need to establish a new social contract for cyberspace. It is time to make a choice between more or less democratic versions of the Internet. While neither Lessig or Zittrain specifically venture into drawing conclusions about the normative politics of the Internet, they do each establish a related criteria for which to evaluate proposed alternatives to the status quo. Lessig, in speaking of regulability, interrogates the benefits of regulable technologies in the expression of liberal democratic values. The Relative democratic-ness of the Internet depends upon the relative democratic-ness of the regulations and regulators. Zittrain, in conceptualizing generativity, discusses the merits of particular characteristics of a technological artifact in terms of a general benefit to a particular society. It could be added that certain characteristics enable a society to better provide for its general welfare and extend happiness. Such outcomes purportedly extend democratic society's benefits to more people. The connection between democracy and regulability is tenuous, but workable, in that both concepts address phenomena that should take place in the liberal democratic public sphere. Generativity provides a conceptual framework for discussions of Internet-enabled cultural creation and participation. A generative artifact enables democratic control of cultural commodities.

is the common ownership of a culture, held a republican right. Both acknowledge ways in which the Internet helps obviate the need for gatekeepers and middle-men: "we don't need them anymore." The ideas, opinions, and interests flow freely.

The discourse promotes the idea that anyone can publish, and publish proper, as if they were their own media outlet, with their own op-eds promoting ideas and their own investigative reporting speaking truth to power. The amateurization (or democratization) of the public sphere makes it easier for people to connect with one another as well, to find mutual interests in publicizing something. In other words, there are no more gatekeepers: "the mass amateurization of publishing undoes the limitations inherent in having a small number of traditional press outlets" (Shirky 2008, 65). What Shirky is really supporting is the notion that the amateurs have acquired and employed a digital literacy that makes collaboration possible.

2.4.3 Dimension D – Sharing Practices in the Virtual Public Sphere are Productive

The discourse on the internet and the public sphere also included the notion that the internet is supportive of the creation of a productive space represented by the "virtual public sphere". What people do online, including one of the most common activities, sharing information, is generative of a sense of community and a subsequent culture. Sometimes these cultures are thought to be good for democracy, such as those emerging from political blogging communities, Whatsapp chats, and even piracy websites. When Condry (2004) right asks "why do people want music in the first place?" it implies that new cultures should not be prejudged by other criteria. The virtual public sphere is a space where minority cultures can flourish, functioning as a

training ground so they can be more effective in the more general debates in the larger public sphere.

Sometimes the results are less than desirable. For example, the ability to share information quickly and then walk away may extricate users from responsibility for their actions; they may not be able to see how their actions undermine the well-being of the community (Hinduja 2008). If people spend too much time more or less homogenized communities, they risk polarization or even radicalization as opposed to empowered ideal liberal citizens (Sunstein 2007).

Finally, there is the general sentiment that the arrival of the internet—and more specifically, social media and internet-connected smartphones—is a marker of another historical transformation of the public sphere. Papacharissi (2010) argues that the internet and social media, by enabling the transmission of what would traditionally be considered private thoughts into traditionally public spaces, have aided a shift of the political from the public to the private sphere. Thus, we should treat what looks like private thoughts and experiences published on social media, at least according to the conventional conceptual distinctions, as at least potentially political. For reasons that will become clear from the empirical work in this dissertation, it is quite difficult to separate the political and the personal with any scientific confidence; one slides into the other. Therefore, it is important to consider the effect these changes have on various understandings of the public sphere and its role. What most people think of as vapid 280-character posts into the Twitter void may indeed constitute what counts as the political in the digitally-mediated era.[23]

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[23] And here, there is support for Papacharissi's perspective from the internet-democracy discourse as well. Shirky takes pains to defend the mundane from being dismissed outright, or for having the mundane come to define the new digital public

Wading into these details regarding the internet and the public sphere suggests that reveals that we really are not talking about a public sphere, as conceived by liberal democratic theorists, anymore. It may therefore be useful to think of the internet and social media as foregrounding an historical rupture, not revolution. Chadwick implies that we are "living through a time of fundamental change in the nature of political life as a result of the disruptive influence of digital communication" (2013, 3 emphasis added). The transformation of the public sphere will inevitably empower new groups. Using ethnographic evidence from the boundary, Chadwick (2013) claims that it is those in the alliance between the online video-broadcast media. He observes that "changing practices in the world of older media, particularly television, increasingly mesh with these online norms (210). Rather than only "transmission and reception" of ideas and information, there is "circulation", "recirculation", and "negotiation".

The discourse at the intersection of the internet and the public sphere suggests that the virtual public sphere is liberal, free, and the practices it supports are productive of subcultures and new relationships between the public and private spheres. Generally, the internet-democracy discourse largely relies on its ideal images of a "virtual" public sphere.

2.5 The Internet and Participatory Governance

There were those who thought that the internet represented a chance for a truly emancipatory politics. This group included libertarians as well as techno-socialist

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sphere. He argues that just because Tweets or cat pictures or drunk texts about girls are in public that does not mean they are public (2008, 87). "Now that the cost of posting things in a global medium has collapsed, much of what gets posted on any given day is in public but not for the public" (Shirky, 2008: 90).

utopians. They argued, in part, that the emancipatory value of the internet is highest in situations where it offers the only viable space for the rearticulation of identity and cultural meaning (Langmia 2008). This is especially true in authoritarian societies. The internet's revelatory tendencies, they argued, expose the uniformity of bureaucracy and challenges the administration of life by encouraging self-identity formation at blogs, in forums and social networking sites. The conceptualized *unlimitedness* of the internet space seemingly allowed people to move rather freely away from undesirable or oppressive situations. Moreover, the internet offered a better way to institutionalize rules due to its uniform and horizontal qualities (i.e., its technical structure).[24]

These libertarians and techno-socialist utopians relied on a stylized fact that the structure of the internet is such that there are essentially no permanent structures beyond those limited by the digital paradigm: The internet is unruly and free. Institutions, when they exist, are usually a product of the creators of internet protocols, who have been relatively free of uninvited influence. Winner (1980) argues that "machines, structures, and systems of modern material cultures…can embody specific forms of power and authority" (121). Technologies can be political in their conception

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[24] Some have suggested that large numbers of people use the internet to escape into a realm with more appealing rules and structures (see for example, the Barlow's declaration of cyberspace referenced above). People, as well as corporate-commercialized interests, have been able to claim some agency in the creation of the public realm of the internet. In doing so, they are expressing by their very divergence from the physical public realm a dissatisfaction with it, a feeling most evident in spaces that explicitly attempt to dialogue with the status quo and critique it. With ever more people extending their lives online, it is interesting to consider how the vast number of people are touched by experiencing a qualitatively different social structure.

and design or purpose and in their compatibility with particular kinds of political relationships. Thus, we should take into consideration that many of the early internet pioneers and developers were part and parcel of these cultures.

The highly cited work of Manuel Castells is especially imbued with the notion that the internet was purposely designed as a technology of free communication.[25] The key is the openness and free modification of the source code of Internet software (2001, 38). Being able to do so encourages a culture of cooperation under the "free articulation of technical knowledge" (38). Moreover, all of the key Internet subcultures he identifies "contribute to the ideology of freedom" (Castells 2001, 36). His discussion of the hacker culture reveals that it is one of "technological creativity based on freedom, cooperation, reciprocity, and informality" (50). The networking capacity of the internet was able to spread these values of "freedom, horizontal communication, and interactive networking" to others and to the social realm. Triumphal claims such as these cannot stand without some significant conceptual stretching.

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[25] The counter argument is just as prevalent, and one gets the sense that the discourse about the internet and the public sphere wants it both ways: the Internet is democratically-oriented and the internet is a "mere tool" or extension of immanent human capacities and desires. The "mere tools" theme claims that social media are simply a way to channel existing motivation, that we now have the technology available to match our innate social prowess as humans. As Shirky claims "we now have communications tools that are flexible enough to match our social capabilities, and we are witnessing the rise of new ways of coordinating action that take advantage of that change" (2008: 20). People have "always desired to share" they just could not do so in these ways in the past (45). And these desires are so strong that any tool that makes sharing easier will spread. The key here is the naturalness of the desire for and skill at group effort.

If there is to be internet-based participatory governance, then there need to be rules determining membership. There is a sense that, in the early days of the Internet, what observers were doing by defining 'virtual communities' populated by 'virtual citizens' or 'netizens' was to imbue these groups with some unit-like qualities, such as boundaries, membership criteria, and shared cultures of practice.[26]

An old debate begun by Rheingold (1993) regarding the ways in which the internet provides new ways of defining membership within communities (Goode 2010) permeates the discourse about the internet and the public sphere. The argument goes that the internet is undoubtedly supportive of subcultures. It is easier to find like-minded people with unique tastes online. Empirical work has found that immigrant and diasporic communities are supported and supplemented by online activities (Langmia 2008). Koster & Houtman (2008) demonstrated that groups stigmatized in offline society find online forums—perhaps especially true for right-wing groups—as a refuge. Mainstream culture is less likely to inspire a sense of community online. There is a sense that the worst of the Internet can simply be evaded. For example, it seems logical that if a space on the Internet becomes oppressive form the perspective

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[26] There is a fairly significant effort to promote a set of myths about the creation of the internet and its founding fathers. They serve to highlight the inherent goodness of what happens online. For example, Bollier's (2009) conception of the internet is based on the tenuous position that the interactions between people and information are "free" from the physical world's structures. This is so because the Internet was created with "freedom in mind" (2-3). Bollier's evidence for this is the emergence of alternative copyright regimes like the Creative Commons. Their creation was the result of what might be called norm entrepreneurs who were inspired by the way the Internet as a technology works. The self-proclaimed "commoners" explicitly referred to their forays into the digital piracy of cultural commodities, finding that the old laws were unworkable.

of a user, he or she can rather easily leave it for another or create their own. Even a highly structured site like Facebook can serve in this process with the self-organization of people around pages, groups and notes. The same can be true of groups rapidly switching from one platform to another due to concerns about privacy, corruption, etc.

Thus, it makes sense to some scholars to rethink the meaning of community in a digital age (Feenberg & Barney 2004), reconsider the 18th century assumptions about human capacities, and restate the place of various conceptual distinctions that form the basis of democratic politics, such as the public-private divide (Margolis and Moreno-Riano 2013).

Indeed, the internet seems prima facia challenge conceptions of deliberation and participation. The first waves of theorizing about the internet's impact on democracy were quite optimistic that it could support "perfect" participation. In fact, an edited volume appearing in 2007 went so far as to say that the internet was the logical destination for the realization of radical democracy (Dahlberg and Siapera 2007). Presumably, people who use social networks, for example, create their own blogs, and share photos they have taken are presented with an ability provided by digital technologies to dictate their own rules for interaction. During their heyday, political blogging communities like Daily Kos and RedState.com were hailed as more or less ideal forums for deliberation. The rules, regulations and social norms there were meant to facilitate discussion and encourage participation. The rules were relatively free—self-policing, self-organized, vaguely democratically decided and of course much debated (that is, reflexive—with the barriers to participation much lower than traditional modes of publication. So long as the discussion remained within the

bounds established by the essentially self-policing communities, political talk was cheap and easy.[27]

Blogging communities, to the degree they adhere to these principles, are reminiscent of the constitution of local democratic forms. Exploring this literature with the Internet in mind reveals that what were once thought of a local democratic forms—the republican community, the town hall, the issue area-based interest and civic groups, deliberative bodies, co-ops, etc.—are being supported by the internet, and importantly, they are spanning boundaries. Or at the very least this is what the internet and democracy discourse implies, without specifying them as such, to our detriment.

But these local forms of democratic politics, due to the digital technologies, do not rely on geographic proximity. So then, it is appropriate to consider the literature on transnational democracy. But instead of focusing on how "democracy across borders" would work, including ever growing numbers of communities, it considers how people

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[27] In terms of the actual practices they learned, there are four promising areas. First, individuals might express frustration with political leadership and elected officials in particular, or bureaucratic administration more generally. They may advocate for the establishment of autonomous power bases. Second, individuals may be concerned that issues of local important are not being effectively addressed, reflecting a frustration with the centralization of politics. Third, individuals might be expected to express frustration with the Internet medium or forum itself, in that it is not enough to simply have a say in the political process. They desire to obtain the capacity for action beyond speech. Fourth, people may see themselves engaged in a historical struggle to restore power to the people, irrespective of their actual perspectives or ideological affinities. As such, they may feel like an embattled minority, under the tyranny of a bureaucracy ruled by no one. They may, moreover, become explicitly self-aware of the fact that although they are seemingly controlled, administered, or dominated by external, seemingly objective forces , their experience on the Internet has shown them that this may not always be so, for they have expressed freedom of action and redesigned political spaces and structures.

can have membership in many communities at once. Social media allows individuals to quickly find themselves wrapped up in any number of communities, of a different kind, different purpose, with highly overlapping memberships and organization logics.[28] This is supported by a bourgeoning empirical literature employing network analysis to the activities of individuals on social networks like Twitter and Facebook.

2.6 The Internet, Solidarity, and Collective Action

The internet-democracy discourse also focuses on the possibilities for digitally organized and mediated collective action to compensate apathy on the part of citizens, isolationism in foreign policy, and governance. The internet and social media are able to do this because they lower the opportunity costs associated with organizing, enabling the "self-synchronization of otherwise latent groups" (Shirky 2008, 39). Given the right tools, the argument goes, anything is possible—to the extent one agrees that there are latent capacities of citizens that simply need tapping into.

2.6.1 Dimension A – It's Fast and Spontaneous

There are those who believe that the internet can support a digitally-mediated Arendtian space of appearance[29] for the realization of (the benefits) of spontaneous collective action. This pillar includes literature celebrating the ways in which the

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[28] The challenge for democratic politics is to develop some kind of thin transnational constitutionalism that may serve as the basis of a truly reflexive political order. The overlapping-ness may indeed provide the minimum conditions needed to establish an order in which global justice is an attainable goal. The most important aspect of globalization may then be the way that it transforms our conceptions of an actual emergence of the political or democratic subject.

[29] For an in-depth discussion of these possibilities, see Schwarz (2014).

internet supports social movements with limited resources by disseminating information to participants and linking them to transnational advocacy networks to garner financial and political aid. There is, simply put, more and more. Social media present an enhanced ability to undertake collective action (Shirky 2011). They do not need to be locally situated to the information. This of course can help any groups, but it is especially helpful to a more loosely organized one "operating without managerial direction and outside the profit motive" (47), to react (153).[30] An event "can go from local to global in a heartbeat" (Shirky 2008: 12). Any particular event can be subjected to crowdsourcing and made into something large. The fleeting nature of a trending topic hashtag on twitter, or a viral meme on TikTok are apt reminders of this.

One might call the meetup.com-inspired (Shirky's favorite example in his 2008 book) theme "solving suburbia." People are no longer anchored to their picket fence homes where contact with neighbors is limited. Instead, they can meet people with common interests to theirs online, find kinship, and even meet in person should they choose to. Meeting in cyberspace can reduce the initial emotional risk of putting yourself out there—not to mention political values—and not earning reciprocation. People can meet and organize themselves *and then* begin to move into face-to-face encounters in what was once considered the "real world."

It is relatively cheap to *try* things online. As Shirky argued, emblematically, the "Web became a core part of modern life as quickly as it did precisely because it is

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[30] And here, the notion of a post-Westphalian world emerges. Shirky (2008) is quick to dismiss other organizational logics as old and ineffective: "Organizations that assume geography as a core organizing principle, even ones that have been operating that way for centuries, are not facing challenges to that previously bedrock principle" (155).

such a flexible environment for letting people try new things" (Shirky 2008, 158). The accomplishments of hacktivism in challenging big corporations and rights-infringing governments have been cited favorably in this regard. A somewhat outdated term today, hacktivism was celebrated as a new, emancipatory way of directing hacking activities to expose corruption, engage in public shaming, and virtual sit-ins (e.g. "denial of service" attacks; Jordan & Taylor 2004).

The internet inspired these creative activities, enabling temporary but situationally significant groups of people geared toward political action. But while the internet may promote creative spontaneity on the part of individuals, it also tends to enable a rapid response by status quo-oriented authorities and institutions. The internet-democracy discourse does not fully reconcile the flipsides of this coin. The low cost of action leads to unpredictability; but these same affordances also enable an unprecedented degree of social policing and self-surveillance. Both are "good" things.

2.6.2 Dimension B – Using the Internet does not Guarantee Success

Even the most optimistic readings of the internet in the early Web 2.0 (2005+) days were quick to point out that using the internet to help organize a movement does not guarantee success. The failed color revolution in Belarus in 2006, the Green Movement in Iran in 2009, and the Red Shirt Uprising in 2010 are examples of failure. In these cases, state sanctioned violence interrupted activists' ability to build solidarity, and their ability to respond creatively. In 2021, there are many more "failed" cases to point to. Movements learn from the successes and failures of their predecessors around the world. The response to these failed attempts tended to be to adopt limited and broadly liberal demands and goals—with varying success.

This dimension about the success and failure of digitally-mediated movements will be visited in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.6.3 Dimension C – It's Liberal

The internet-democracy discourse tends to argue that the internet supports *liberal* protest action. While the story ostensibly goes that the internet may be empowering to any underrepresented or relatively unempowered group, the discourse is actually quite clear that social media are considered tools to help democracy because they inspire distinctly liberal forms of action and politics. This is especially true for groups who find themselves living in societies governed by authoritarian regimes. In the pre-digital days, a movement aimed at transforming society or government would have organized itself into some kind of hierarchy. Doing so made it easier for status quo institutions to arrest the leaders and repress the rank-and-file. However, proponents of the internet-democracy discourse take pains to point out there is a new kind of organizational form that is enabled by digital mediation: No leaders; no plot.[31] The "flash mob" protest form--a concept all the rage in the days of Web 2.0--is considered the new pinnacle of liberal political action. In the previous round of demonstrations in Belarus, Shirky argues, flash mobs left the government with a choice between either "gross overreactions (a curfew in Oktyabrskaya, a ban on ice

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[31] The issue with this thinking, however--and I will go into this in greater detail in later chapters--is that the discourse failed to identify the crucial mechanism animating internet-based movements--disruption--which is a more generally useful concept explaining ideologically thin liberal and anti-liberal action.

cream--a ironic tool of the protesters--or the internet) or waiting for the mob to form, then disrupting it" (Shirky 2008, 170).

A blind spot in the development of theoretical frameworks using these kinds of examples is created by, I argue, the notion that *all good things go together.* It is a stylized fact that liberalism gave us free speech which led to the freedom of the press which--in the digitally-mediated society where everyone can publish--gave us the freedom of assembly--everywhere at all times (Shirky 2008, 171). One liberal good can only lead to another. The frequency with which liberally-oriented movements and protest events are brought up to illustrate the effects of the internet on democracy is significant. It was difficult for Western intellectuals in the 90s and aughts to see other ways in which the "mere tools" of social media and digital communications technologies would be used. Shirky also assumes that we are all in a rich liberal system where other barriers to collective action do not exist: "Most of the barriers to group action have collapsed, and without those barriers, we are free to explore new ways of gathering together and getting things done" (2008, 22).[32] The mundane

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[32] This is especially true in the vignette about the stolen cellphone and the crowdsourced effort to have it returned. Shirky opens this book with this story, expecting the audience to be absolutely fascinated by it—the tools and practices supported by the Internet, specifically crowdsourcing, "the cloud" and publicity to right a wrong, or, more specifically, the restoration of private property. Shirky even sensationalizes the off-topic nature of the forum created to help get the phone back, implying that what was truly remarkable was how seldom participants ventured off-topic into racist or sexist commentary. He is astoundingly optimistic, refraining all the while from thinking through the implications of how a poor black person's life was ruined to appease a rich white guy and a mainstream audience interested in law and order. Instead, according to the narrative, it was "the people" that did it, by "coming together" (6) to put pressure on a teenage girl and the police to mete out justice. Shirky does at one point later in the book acknowledge that comparing this episode with the work done to help families find each other after the tsunami in Thailand is problematic. But in the same breath, he argues that the logic is exactly the same: the

content is only to be judged harshly by those who are "users" of social media. Non-users are therefore excluded from the conversation about the merits of such a world. Moreover, the postindustrial democracies are given a free pass for creating these tools that, in those contexts, are used for spreading banal, largely consumer-oriented content. This is okay because "*we already have democracy."* While the flash mobs on American college campuses of the mid 2010s were fun and games, they are deadly serious emancipatory activities in different power-political structures.

2.6.4 Dimension D – Networks

The internet-democracy discourse emphasizes the ways in which the internet is particularly adept at supporting collective action, especially when it is organized into a network form. One main reason for this is that the internet is largely seen as a communication medium: "Since our practice is based on communication, and the Internet transforms the way in which we communicate, our lives are deeply affected by the way in which we communicate, our lives are deeply affected by this new communication technology" (Castells 2001, 5). According to Castells, people network to create meaning. Communication practices are about sharing meaning through information exchanges. *Socialized communication,* he adds, "exists in the public realm beyond interpersonal communication" (Castells 2012, 6).[33] *Mass self-communication*,

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new ease of assembly makes more groups happen, even if they have undesirable goals content.

[33] He goes on to say that "There is however, one feature common to all processes of symbolic construction: they are largely dependent on the messages and frames created, formatted and diffused in multimedia communication networks. Although each human mind constructs its own meaning by interpreting the communicated materials on its own terms, this mental processing is conditioned by the communication environment. Thus, the transformation of the communication environment directly affects the forms

presumably what takes place online, is facilitated by horizontal networks of interactive communication. Their form means that they are difficult for governments or corporations to control. This emphasis on the communicative elements supported by the internet has persisted through the years and across subfields.

As such, a very large empirical literature has taken up these kinds of claims. Analysis of the use of internet-supported networks by social movements is quite prevalent—including in this very dissertation. Social media and other websites such as search engines serve to personalize contentious politics, for example, by encouraging connective action "based on personalized content sharing across social media networks" (Bennett & Segerberg 2012). What social media does for us, is enable the sharing of internalized, personalized ideas images and plans with networks of others. Facebook and Youtube, etc., are providers of massive action networks at a scale and accessibility unheard of prior to their arrival. The application of social ties theory to social media networks has also generated a significant literature, some of which explores the possibility for the spread of a thin transnational ethic about the ways in which politics should be conducted.[34]

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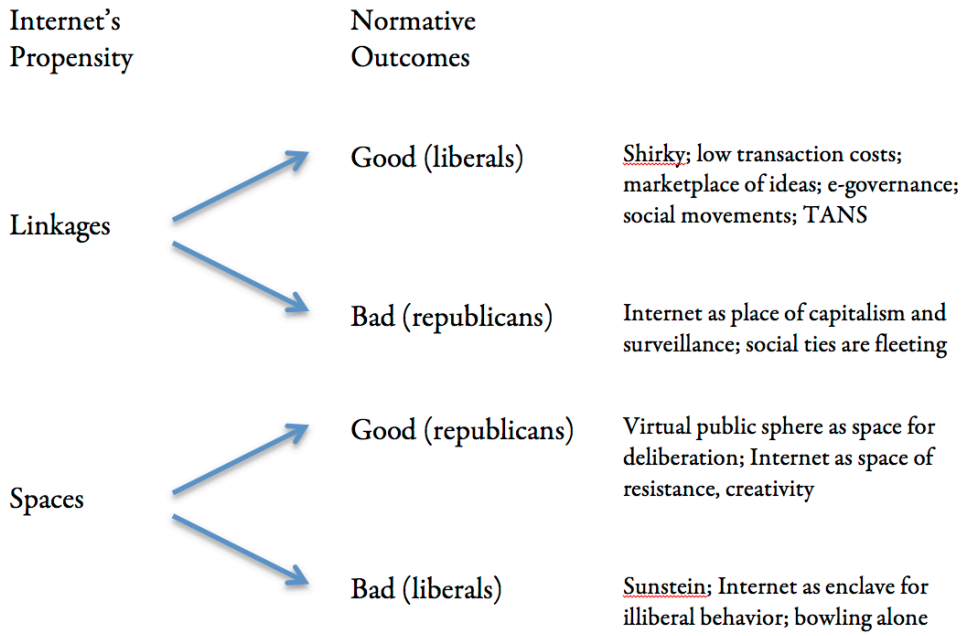
of meaning construction, and therefore the production of power relationships" (Castells 2012, 6).

[34] In analyzing the diffusion of the Occupy movement, Castells (2012) argues that there are important commonalities across regions. Protest participants wish for dignity, accountability, sustainability, and a commitment on the part of governments to anticorruption. The movements also espouse the rhetoric of leaderlessness and horizontalism. See also (Gerbaudo 2012).

2.7 Conclusion

Figure 2.1: The Internet-Democracy Discourse's Conception of What the Internet Does



The internet-democracy discourse's normative stances roughly plot upon the liberal-republican stances on democracy. In the above figure, I try to map the discourse in a first step by dividing those who suggest that internet's most important empirical propensity is toward linkages or spaces. As noted above, liberal democrats have a more favorable attitude toward linkages, while republican democrats tend to have a healthier appetite for the possibilities of spaces. In turn, liberal democrats believe that linkages are good because they lower transaction costs, make more ideas more available, enable better governance through networks, support more big tent coalitions in social movements, including transnational advocacy networks. Republican democrats, on the other hand, are skeptical of the prevalence of linkages,

noting that wide and frequent linkages is liable to serve capitalism, enable public and private surveillance of individuals and groups, and create shallow and fleeting social ties. Thus, republican democrats are more drawn to the possibilities of the spaces enabled by the internet. They see the potential for a (multiple various) virtual public sphere for deliberation to emerge, and view the internet as a space of resistance and creativity. Liberal democrats, on the other hand, tend to worry that the internet's ability to support spaces will mostly lead to enclaves of illiberal behavior on the part of disparate groups with increasingly little affinity for the liberal democratic nation-state.

But, I argue, the key is that both "sides" of the "debate" rely on the same mechanistic explanations of what the internet does to and for democracy in crafting their conclusions as to how we should approach of democratic-theoretic concepts the digitally-mediated moment.

In the conclusion of this chapter, I seek to gesture toward a few takeaway points that helped to inspire the bulk of what is found in the remaining chapters. I try to present a way to directly assess what the internet-democracy discourse contributes to a discussion of the digitally-mediated constitution of political agency. When read in tandem with democratic theory, the literature is largely divided on the role of the public sphere along liberal and republican lines: that which emphasizes the objective or instrumental capacity of technology to link things together[35] and that which

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[35] The linkages perspective is manifested in discussions emphasizing that technologies are largely apolitical tools for the solving or creation of political or social problems. Content is easily shared across borders (of groups, states, etc.). They follow liberal assumptions in that this capacity enhances Mill's marketplace of ideas and his experiments in in living. Social meaning, rather than being produced in concert via various activities and practices is promoted, appropriated and borrowed from others.

emphasizes the productive capacity of digital public spaces.[36] Because the liberal public sphere is a constant in both camps, it is possible to synthesize from both an account of how a subjectivity might come about. At this point it is important to acknowledge that there are many alternatives to the mainstream Internet and democracy discourse that are making positive inroads into political theory. I highlight this here because the examples that drove most of this chapter's discussion are hardly an exhaustive list.

First is the notion that internet communities learn together. Lurkers and members pick up knowledge about how to best craft the bits of information they share and when and where to share it to get a desired effect—usually affirmation. In doing so, they pick up norms that *ideally* lead to a moderating of personal opinions toward the mainstream, encouraging the development of a kind of objective viewpoint so desired by liberal democrats. When they express opinions, the possibility of feedback in the form of comments and likes motivate them to do it well so that it maximizes the attention of an imagined audience. Of course, the degree to which moderation or

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Identities may be linked together and in doing so, common ground may be found. But no new social meaning is necessarily produced. Therefore, solidarity is a function of the degree to which values are shared across interested groups and/or the relative gravity of the problem at hand. Linkages approaches therefore celebrate the Internet's capacity to promote inclusion.

[36] Public space approaches emphasize the ways in which technology, especially the Internet, contribute to the production of social and political meaning. The Internet is a space where people come together and share ideas, arguments, perspectives, and solutions to problems. When they find common ground to take action, the participating individuals open themselves to the possibility of identity transformation. Therefore, and orientation to a particular subjectivity is a product of the experience of conversation, deliberation and various practices and activities conducted in concert.

radicalization—what I call the spirals of mundanity or radicalization (discussed in Chapter 3 and revisited in Chapters 4 and 5)—occurs depends on the kind of community an individual finds themselves a participant in and their original predispositions. In the old school political blogging communities such as Daily Kos and Red State circa 2002-2008, members tended to learn to articulate political arguments and deepen their political knowledge (Capella, Price & Nir 2002) in order to gain notoriety within a community of practice. Inclusion within the community motivates participants to improve the quality of their contributions by limiting self-interested appeals and inflammatory statements to appeals to justice (e.g. Young 2011).

If this idea of political blogging communities as spaces for political self-actualization and participation sounds like a kind of deliberative democratic ideal, this is no accident. There was much optimism surrounding the emergent blogosphere of the early aughts. My own research supported the conclusions of the above paragraph. I found that, over time, bloggers were able to improve the frequency of engagement their posts had to the degree they made more concise, generalizable political arguments and linked to other posts from within the community (Habegger 2011). At the time (2010), it was clear to anyone who spent time reading or commenting on political blogs like Daily Kos that the potential for substantive deliberation exist(ed), even if some posts are lazy, many comments are inane, or few alternative perspectives are shared. However, it also becomes clear that people try to write carefully to gain and maintain the attention and readership of the community, even though their abilities to do so vary widely. This is especially true if members are exposed to even nominal

levels of disagreement—a key ingredient for the functioning of deliberative democracy (Gutman & Thompson 1996).

These relatively "deep" digitally-mediated communities with longstanding standards of practice are few and far between, however. Thus, it is important to look elsewhere to better understand how democratic theoretic concepts may be evolving. I argue we should not be engaging in trying to fit a set of old concepts to an existing phenomenon. Rather, we ought to rethink how these concepts play out in light of empirical developments.

One of these developments is the production of transnational solidarities. The ubiquity of digitally-mediated everyday practices, especially the continuous connectedness people have with friends and acquaintances, seems to have played a part in generating a layer of thin, latent solidarity across borders among those who find themselves in similar power-political positions. In the midst are particularly thick solidarities around issues or values to the degree that a commitment to them binds people socially, intellectually, or accidentally. If practices generate solidarity—or , at least, a felt disposition or affinity to a particular practice, held in common—even unconsciously or "willy nilly", as Bourdieu says, then they also have the power to transform identities and interests. Therefore, solidarity is a function of the degree to which values are shared across interested groups and/or the relative gravity of the problem at hand. Some approaches to understanding the meaning of the internet for democracy therefore celebrate the internet's enhanced capacity to promote inclusion. This falls in line with institutional approaches to solidarity in democratic theory that bestows importance on the ways in which efficient institutions link people and interests together.

Another related approach emphasizes the particular ways in which technology contributes to the production of social meaning, putting the internet and social media at the center of such analysis. People come together and share ideas, arguments, perspectives, and solutions to problems. When they find common ground and take action, the participating individuals open themselves to the possibility of identity transformation. Therefore, solidarity is a product of the experience of conversation, deliberation, and various practices and activities conducted in concert. Solidarity is part and parcel of group consciousness, an integral component of any subjectivity, even non-democratic ones, collective or otherwise.

While it *appears* that social media is being used for these purposes quite often, what is more important is that, when political action is digitally-mediated, the identity-transformation effects are quite minimal. The people might have failed to remove Trump from office before the 2020 election using hashtags or Tik Tok campaigns, but it was never a life-or-death situation for any particular online participant. Until it was (January 6th).

2.7.1 The Mechanism of Openness

My reading of the internet and democracy discourse suggests that there is widespread agreement upon one mechanism that drives the analysis: Openness. Observers look at the internet and can't help but conceive of its possibilities as a kind of 21st century manifest destiny for the ultimate realization of their normative preferences. Internet networks and social media are ostensibly open to everyone, and everyone can do it. Cascades of protest activity across borders and revolutions within them emerge suddenly—not from nothing, but actions snowball much more quickly and unexpectedly. Such openness is also responsible for the more common fleeting

nature of online-mediated social and political movements and actions. The internet has mechanistic effects: It is a one-way causal street. Depending on the assumptions about democracy made by the author, it has different effects. This is a key observation that underpins much of the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 and the conclusions drawn from the empirical chapters (4 and 5).

2.7.2 Internet Communities, Collective Identities, and Democratic Subjectivities

This chapter explored how what people do and say online affects thinking about democratic concepts. The empirical developments associated with the rise of the internet are vital to recent work dealing with questions of democracy and justice. The chapter paid particular attention to how the Internet is said to impact the public sphere, the possibility of justice within states and other political communities, and the consolidation and diffusion of a thin transnational liberal political logic. It explored the ways in which the concepts of the public sphere, participation and governance, and collective action and solidarity are treated within the discourse, looking especially for assumptions held in common. Doing so helped to reveal the differences between a public sphere- and practice-based subjectivity.

This chapter in part represented an exercise in teasing out how a collective subjectivity with a particular agency might come about through what are mostly digital practices. It began such a task by putting the internet-democracy discourse in dialogue with democratic theory. Because of the assumptions about democracy made in the discourse, I think it is appropriate to move away from the public sphere-based conception of subjectivity and begin to theorize a practice-based understanding of subjectivity. I conceptualize acts of communication as digital everyday practices. The

items in the third column of Table 2.2 (Digital Everyday Practices) will be discussed in great detail in Chapter 3.

Table 2.2: Subjectivity in the Digitally-Mediated Era

Perspective	Internet and Democracy Discourse	Digital Everyday Practices
Type	Public sphere-based subjectivity	Practice-based subjectivity
Membership	Appearing/Speaking in Public	Knowledge of tactics
Participation	Deliberation, voting, conforming to institutional norms	Mundane practices of linking and sharing
Articulation	Expression of public opinion in media outlets	Sharing something in common, expression of solidarity
Action	Speaking, social movements, politics of inclusion, petitioning state, political / electoral campaigns	Linking across constituencies or emotional communities, resistance to state/powerful entities techniques and strategies
Constitutive/normative content	Liberal	Repetitive unconscious action over time (horizontal, err on side of action)
Relationship to the state	Complimentary or adversarial	Absent or adversarial
Quality of felt membership / solidarity	Constructed we-feeling, imagined communities	Emotional, often characterized by empathy
Relationship between politics and constitutive components	Content and membership appears before politics	Content comes about during the process of activity
General effect on status quo	Reinforcing of hegemonic, in this case, liberal discourse and logic	Destabilizing, unpredictable. Could produce domination or emancipation depending on

		the cultures from which practices emerge
Form of governance	Hierarchical, institutionalized, egalitarian, information-driven	Networked, based on personal investment in a particular issue, driven by repetitive experience

A practice-based subjectivity is distinct from a public sphere subjectivity, as detailed in Table 2.2. The advantage is that within the internet and democracy discourse, there is a lack of agreement, empirically, that these supposed activities are going on, and it presents problems for specifying democratic subjects in the digital era. There are also normative disagreements centering around whether the liberal public sphere is able support critical-rational discourse, inclusion and emancipation, and whether it should be revitalized. A practice-based understanding of subjectivity is founded on the more basic, seemingly simple activities of everyday practices (e.g. leaving the higher order citizenship requirements behind). It thus has the advantage of explaining the emergence of illiberal political forms and groups with non-liberal agendas. A practice-based subjectivity could help to think through identity politics or the politics of inclusion. The difficulty is that, as noted in Chapter 1, in the absence of a proper public sphere, the political effect will not be known until the actions are already taking place. In other words, there is a politics—constitutive of subjectivity—occurring without deliberation. Without a public sphere to help make a subjectivity knowable, it is imperative to analyze the cultures from which the practices emerge and are imbued so as to ascertain their potential effects, all the while keeping in mind that these communities are based more around what they do than what content they share. It is more important that communities emerging around everyday practices be able to keep doing. This is especially so since the stakes are raised: everyday practices are the

source of identity formation. None of this precludes the possibilities for deep divisions between those communities with sharing practices in common based on what they are sharing. The idea is that even in competition and contention, they tend to contest the nation-state model, in that they are frustrated with the lack of accountability, horizontalism,[37] reciprocity and efficiency characteristic of their experiences online.

Although the way the narrative is presented is not unproblematic, it is no fluke that the story about a cellphone, something of decidedly trivial import, gained public traction. For one, the cellphone is something many the world-over have and value. Second, the event is not overtly political or contested in the sense that it is commonly accepted that it is unvirtuous to steal personal property. It may be, therefore, that individuals and groups will (almost) unknowingly engage in political activity to the degree it appears to them as social, common, and within the moral mainstream. The upshot of the story is that, from Shirky's perspective, such practices of sharing, discussion, and crowdsourcing will bleed into more momentous events. The same logic that drives mundane examples of crowdsourcing is present in extraordinary events mediated by digital communications technologies.

The discourse wants it both ways. People on Shirky's side truly believe that the Internet lets us all have our cake and eat it, too. We are provided the freedom to do whatever we want to do online, but also the tools to control it (unlike, say, a nuclear power plant), even democratically: the new tools "enable alternate strategies for keeping that complexity under control" (2008, 21).

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[37] Tufekci (2017) argued that the Occupy movements around the world all tended to display a "culture of horizontalism".

The early internet-democracy discourse also tended to marvel at the juxtaposition of the momentous with the mundane. One might go on NBA Superstar Lebron James' Instagram account to find out what shoes he is wearing or what music he is listening to these days, but instead is greeted with a post about Black Lives Matter. The next post might be a photo of he and his family relaxing by a pool. Come for the commodified lifestyle content, stay for transgressive politics.

One of the difficulties with making the claim that practices can be integral in the constitution of a political subjectivity is that they may not be adequately deep or strong. But if these everyday practices of sharing can be construed as communicative practices, there is more promise. In his observation about the internet and collective action, Shirky argues that conversation is a form of cooperation, and that sharing is "easier" than cooperation. According to this formulation, sharing occupies a lower rung on the ladder of action than even conversation. But Shirky does offer a window into why sharing might be a satisfactory basis for the establishment of groups in the digital era: "Conversation creates more of a sense of community than sharing does, but it also introduces new problems. It is famously difficult to keep online conversations from devolving into either name-calling or blather, much less to keep them on topic. Some groups are perfectly happy with those effects (indeed, there are communities on the internet that revel in puerile or fatuous conversation), but for any group determined to maintain a set of communal standards some mechanism of enforcement must exist" (2008, 50). The takeaway is that conversation is hard, sharing is easy.

Castells' work, too is instructive in the identification of collective subjectivities that may emerge online. He notes that the internet was created by a techno-meritocracy "enlisted" in a project by the global hegemon to help it dominate the

world in the realm of power-knowledge. But the community fought back, keeping its autonomy by relying on peers (and here, the "peer review" culture of the academy was key) as a source of legitimacy. The impetus for the construction of the Internet as we now know it came from the hacker culture (which followed from the male-dominated libertarian counter-hippie culture exemplified by Steward Brand). Hackers helped to specify the ways in which the meritocracy would reward members and, therefore, construct boundaries of the technologically-inclined community. Membership was awarded based on an individual's capacity to create technology and share it. Thus, we get a political agency motivated by meritocracy, technological expertise and maleness, along with a presupposition that it is materially possible to share things for free. It is all wrapped up with a set of practices—taken for granted—that over time became an ethic from which the rest of the ideological content was fleshed out.

If a constitution were to be drawn up, the first right would have been free access to technology. This particular political agency went about employing technological networking tactics that allowed them to expand their reach, defeating the state and capital powers, making the Internet ubiquitous in our daily lives. So, they poached the resources of the state, created something not quite what the state wanted, and transformed society. But I would not argue it was as revolutionary as Castells makes it out to be: "The culture of the Internet is a culture made up of a technocratic belief in the progress of humans through technology, enacted by communities of hackers thriving on free and open technological creativity, embedded in virtual networks aimed at reinventing society, and materialized by money-driven entrepreneurs into the workings of the new economy" (2012, 61).

Using sharing as a basis for the construction of political communities is not only more inclusive, but would move beyond the well-founded pessimistic conclusions of internet-democracy thinkers Sunstein (2008), Lovink (2008; 2012) and Morozov (2011) namely, that the internet is a space for the gestation for normatively bad content and undemocratic behavior. Using sharing as the basis for collaborative production means there is no institutional or procedural rules, nor any strict requirements on who can become a nominal member of such a project. People share things because they want to, because they *can.* Whether or not there is a conscious desire to share things online is irrelevant.

There is no need to engage in external or even internal deliberation, meaning that digital literacy is the (low) bar for participation. The lower the threshold for participation, in the practice-based formulation, the better. Shirky notes that the basic question facing all potential cooperators in the digital era is "how did you do that?" That is, how did you post that picture? How did you archive those Tweets?" How did you make your sources so transparent to the reader? The key is that asking such a question "in public" (in a forum or blog or Twitter) "is a spur to such communities of practice, bridging the former gap between publishing and conversation" (2008, 102-3). That is, between making public statements one might stand by, and deliberating. There is little need for formal training in digital techniques. Rather, people learn the skills they need by necessity, as they get through the day.

On this basis, perhaps, instead of communities proper, formed around some shared values, we think about communities of practice, which are, according to Shirky "inherently cooperative, and are beautifully supported by social tools, because that is exactly the kind of community whose members can recruit one another or allow

themselves to be found by interested searcher" (2008, 101). This is about finding each other, finding the 'other' who has shared interest in cooperation on some project. The shared practice of, say, hashtagging is what provides the link. In this way, it is the process of locating the "link" that becomes most important.

The internet-democracy discourse is instructive for updating our notions about political agency in the era of digitally-mediated, ubiquitous, horizontal person-to-person communication and interaction. Although its insights are somewhat limited, the discourse generally highlights an important, yet overlooked, emergent fact: the activities the Internet supports are of utmost importance. It may not be that they are revolutionary, changing the nature of our social relations. After all, there are deep disagreements within the discourse regarding the effect of the Internet on democracy. There are conflicting notions about the role of the public sphere, the ways in which collective action may come about, and how collective identities and thin solidarities are consolidated. But looking at what people do everyday might tell us something about the emergence of the basic building blocks of a democracy—"the people"—and how the processes by which they become a people affect their behavior as such. Investigating this question is more pressing than considering the ultimate possibilities for emancipation, freedom, or justice that the Internet would appear to enable. Returning to one of the most fundamental, widespread activities that people engage in online—sharing—helps to skirt the debates over whether the Internet is principally about linkages between people and groups or about spaces of resistance and production, and whether what happens online is good or bad for 21st century democracy. "To insist on talking about the Internet in everyday life is to deny the

medium its extraordinary status, to see it as ordinary, but in no case as unimportant" (Bakardjieva, 2011: 59).

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Chapter 3

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE SUBJECTIVITY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the what I call the internet-democracy discourse. This chapter aims to rescue some of the discourse's most compelling claims presented at the end of Chapter 2 and put them into conversation with the concepts of poaching and resistance in everyday practices. In doing so, a framework for understanding the collective subjectivities and especially, their emergence through everyday digital practices, comes into view. People tend to associate their identities with their everyday practices, and these become especially salient during momentous events, such as social movements. As the chapter will show, collective subjectivities emerging through digitally-mediated everyday practices tend toward disruption rather than engaging in goal-oriented sustained contentious politics. People (unconsciously) employ performative practices to maintain their standing within a collective that also evolve the character of a larger collective subjectivity.

Following from practice theory, one of this chapter's ultimate arguments is that networks and communities can form through practices rather unconsciously. Everyday practices, such as the sharing of a biting political meme, are conduit of interpersonal relationships. Practices construct (things) through cultural expression; they build solidarity, and, perhaps, a" feel for the game." These networks and communities of

practice, over time, coalesce into collective subjectivities with comprehensive—if not always as thick as an ideology—political agendas.

3.1.1 #llamas

On a cold February day, Washington was facing another showdown on the federal budget. The annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) was in town as well. A relatively small group of amateur and professional pundits were sharing their thoughts on Twitter about the budget debates and quotes emanating from CPAC. These are people who normally function as rather famous or exceptional members of what those featured in chapter 2 would call a virtual public sphere discussing domestic and foreign politics. Suddenly, without warning, something caught their undivided attention: There were #llamas on the loose in Arizona. As with all viral cascades that take place within this community, the tweets turned satirical quickly, as jokes about llamas drifted into plays on words involving the topics of the day, such as #thanksOllama, #BlackLlamasMatter (as one of the llamas was black, the other was white), and #BlameISILL. It was fun for a few hours, generating 220,000 tweets, but then eventually the conversation turned back to politics. But they soon became distracted again by #TheDress: a debate raged over whether a dress was #blackandblue and or #whiteandgold based on a photo posted to the social media website Tumblr. Over 11 million tweets were published about the topic. It also quickly took a satirical turn toward politics within the DC political crowd, as Tweeters started asking for politicians to go on the record with their opinion. One moment they were talking about the Department of Homeland security

shutdown, ISIL, or Benjamin Netanyahu, and the next moment were engaged in a viral cascade about llamas and a dress.[38]

In digital communication, the performative acts of sharing "blend resistance and play, idea and action, online and offline, the shocking and the mundane" (Yang and Jiang 2015, 223). Sharing things online becomes a kind of ritual that may be interpreted in multiple ways (Couldry 2003). The practice of sharing "memes", for example, may be appropriated or *poached* by activists as expressions of dissent (Pfaff & Yang 2001).

Bourdieu's discussions of *habitus* reveal that a culture of an entity is knowable by the habits its members practice. Pouliot argues that cultural practices take the form of Bourdieudian *habits.* The culture of sharing could be conceptualized in this manner. Sharing may be viewed by everyday people as an "end in itself". As a habit, the practice of sharing (or not) information is never questioned as such. It therefore becomes a self-evident practice, and one that can be measured against other self-evident practices that define other historical types of entities. A subjectivity could emerge from practices much like it may through an articulation of "we, the people…". To the extent a practice is considered self-evident, it is intersubjectively real, and can be a thin but defining characteristic of a collective subjectivity. These arguments will be addressed again in section 3.3.

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[38] Based on the evidence about a group of people talking together on Twitter, it may be that a humorous, satirical and reflexive subjectivity is emerging through digital practices. However, this group of people have derisively been reminding themselves that "Twitter is not real life" since the 2016 election. A subjectivity that announces itself by denying its own existence, perhaps.
(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/19/opinion/twitter-debates-real-life.html)

3.2 The Disruption Machine – Conceptualizing Poaching in Everyday Practices

It can be argued that people will tend to engage with everyday practices that are (unconsciously) felt as empowering. This feeling of empowerment, Bourdieu wrote, is due to the disempowering modern social structures that are the result of vast power asymmetries between official, large institutions and everyday people. When people turn to everyday practices to cope with this feeling of disempowerment, they may begin to associate their identity with these practices. Thus, one's identity is aligned with the kinds of practices they use in order to get through their day. Indeed, what people do on social media might be thought of as "sense-making activities" (Milan 2015b) that help people cope with their experience of post-modern society. It is reasonable to expect that people would come to view the practices that are helpful to them individually as helpful to them when engaging in more explicitly political "sense-making."

As Bourdieu described the powerful, large, and faceless entities characteristic of 20th century regulative states and large capital firms supported by the state, he drew particular attention to the ways in which they employed what he called "officializing" strategies—what we might call today "normalization," "mainstreaming," or "legitimizing." These strategies were meant to produce a structure in which everyday people were coerced into regularized and predictable practices. The powerful entities desired to reproduce the social order in the ways most favorable to their interests. However, Bourdieu's conceptualization of practices gives credit to the lesser-empowered everyday people. The practices that people with less freedom rely on are unconscious, in the sense that they are in fact *not* strategic, but rather, are a product of necessity and human ingenuity. Thus, when these everyday people encounter officializing strategies seeking to govern their behavior, they end up crafting, over

many iterations, their own practices. Practical reason entails unconscious strategies built on experience about the way the world works.

This observation gives way to Bourdieu's own version of the dialectic, a kind of historical behavioralism if you will, with explanatory power. Historical events, he argues, are defined by the combination of official and unconscious strategies and tactics—along with the background of objective material conditions (Bourdieu 1977, 49). *Habitus* are practices and collections of dispositions that come together into "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions"* (Bourdieu 1977, 72). Some facets of social life possess the capacity to become *habitus* that serve to guide practices. For example, when Bourdieu distinguishes official representations and tactics, he argues that "when official representations of what man officially is in a considered social space become *habitus,* they become the real principle of practices (Bourdieu 1998, 87)." *Habitus* produces individual and collective practices and is hence fastened to the engines and structures of history (Bourdieu 1977, 82). Bourdieu's *field* (e.g. a given political arena) is constructed through a "dialectic of the official and the useful" (Bourdieu 1977, 41)[39], or the strategies and tactics employed by the powerful and less powerful "agents" or subjects within a given field, respectively. Active and knowing agents are endowed with a practical sense, that is, an acquired system of preferences, or principle of vision and division (what is usually called tastes), and also a system of durable cognitive structures (which are essentially the product of the internalization of objective structures) and of schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response" (Bourdieu 1998, 25).

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[39] Bourdieu also argues that agents unwittingly create objective reality through this dialectic (see, 79).

According to Bourdieu's vision of political contestation, people inherently live in a reality defined by a set of social positions bundled with a set of activities and commodities that may themselves be bound in relations to other social positions (Bourdieu 1998, 5). To maintain a degree of agency, people are constrained to participate in a "game that requires great efforts and great sacrifices" (Bourdieu 1998, 26). Bourdieu argues that social agents employ a practical sense, a 'feel for the game'—that is, *habitus*—or they rely on biological dispositions (instincts) to make their way through their daily lives in a particular society. Subjects are "active and knowing agents endowed with a practical sense, or an acquired system of preferences, a principle of vision and division (tastes), and also a system of durable cognitive structures—which are essentially the product of the internalization of these structures)—and a scheme of action which orients the perception of the situation and the appropriate response" (Bourdieu 1998, 25). Practical reason entails unconscious strategies built on experience about the way the world works. They are not ideas or beliefs about the world, but rather a belief that does not believe itself a belief. Practices are a shallower, less official logic of politics than a logic is normally conceptualized (Bourdieu 1998, 81).

> "The theory of action that I propose (with the notion of habitus) amounts to saying that most human actions have as a basis something quite different from intention, that is, acquired dispositions which make it so that an action can and should be interpreted as oriented toward one objective or another without anyone being able to claim that the objective was a conscious design" (Bourdieu 1977, 98).

To maintain a degree of agency, people are constrained to participate in a "game that requires great efforts and great sacrifices" (Bourdieu 1998, 26). Agents with different capabilities and goals confront each other and attempt to better their

position relative to other in various overlapping fields. In doing so, they transform or reinforce the more or less fluid structure (Bourdieu 1998, 32).

Agents possess dispositions based on their present and past positions in social structures (Bourdieu 1977, 82). They employ--but not necessarily choose--the practices based on these dispositions to cope with unexpected circumstances and a dearth of resources available to them (Bourdieu 1977, 72). The homogenization of dispositions—a result of *habitus*—counterintuitively leads to more competition among agents; it is precisely because so many are engaged in similar activities oriented toward reproduce and better their positions, that creativity is much needed to succeed, especially in the most unified of fields (Bourdieu 1977, 64).

While we are many decades removed from the time in which Bourdieu was writing, I argue there are many corollaries in today's digitally-saturated world. The digital mediation of everyday life can be felt as a constraint, that, in time, inspires unconscious creativity. The development of specific social technologies also expanded the space for political expression and contention, partly due to choices made by big tech companies and the character of the algorithms that govern information flows, but also due to the creativity of regular people encountering the technologies on their own (e.g. Earl and Kimport 2011; Castells 2012, 58). Innovations such as the inclusion of hashtags in social media posts, subscribing to newsletters, sharing photos and videos, following or friending political advocacy groups, and participating in political blogging communities may all broadly be characterized as variations on the fundamental practices of digital communication. Today, people use the knowledge they gather through everyday experience to act creatively and take advantage of the communicative opportunities provided by the affordances of digital media.

Powerful actors and everyday people use digital communication to accomplish goals. Everyday people must negotiate with *official* logics of digital communication; they may do so through creative appropriation (Postill 2013) or critical resistance (Barassi 2015). What it is everyday people actually *do* is open to interpretation. And on this point, Bourdieu directs our analytical attention to the "technical dysfunctions" of the "system" that aid us in understanding strategies of social reproduction (Bourdieu 1998, 28).

The issue with the current system is that strategies of social reproduction are failing in some sociopolitical power contexts and succeeding with flying colors in others. In liberal democratic societies infused with digital communication, the prevailing rationality of social reproduction is not obtaining. As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, social media, we were told, ought to be enriching the public sphere by opening it to more people which, in turn, reduces the importance of traditional markers of status. And yet, even someone as powerful as the President of the United States—let alone everyday people—generally does not encounter information on social media that enriches the public sphere; instead, he was faced with groups of harsh critics and sycophants that came together to his feed haphazardly and unintentionally. We do not experience what was promised to us by the social media companies, for example. The giant tech companies and their state and capitalist backers that sustain our digitally-mediated society are largely located in liberal democratic societies with open information norms. Thus, they try to argue their platforms will help to reproduce an idealized version of society. But online, everyday people engage in sharing practices that generative an iterative, evolutionary process that reshapes identity and status within a field.

3.2.1 Poaching

Bourdieu's dialectic is useful for revealing the social dynamics. It is appropriate to expound further on exactly how the unconscious practices of everyday people constitute a resistance—one that might be productive of agency. Michel de Certeau theorizes that everyday people encroach on others' property through "tactics," which run counter to strategies. On the one hand, strategies impose upon spaces — where social, political, and everyday life occurs—and determine when *actions*— especially formal ones—take place (de Certeau 1984, 29-30). Strategies are "actions, which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of power), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourse) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places within which forces are distributed" (de Certeau 1984, 38). In short, strategies are ordering principles seeking to categorize and compartmentalize social and political activity.

Tactics, on the other hand, are described as the "arts of doing…and being in between." When employed, they produce results unexpected in a particular situation (de Certeau 1984). While today's scholars worry that there is no way of knowing if social media activity will be directed towards or away from consequential political action (Couldry, 618), de Certeau focuses on mundane or seemingly inconsequential activities—walking, talking, reading, residing, and cooking. He argues that these activities have the capacity to resist official strategies.[40] The physical or psychological

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[40] De Certeau goes to great lengths to explain how sidewalks are the physical manifestation of an officializing strategy meant to make people respect property rights. That sidewalks make walking easier is part of the bargain: We want you to walk to a set of preferred destinations, so we will make it easier for you to go to them. Other places to go? That's on you.

practices and the related tactics, as he describes, are defensive, opportunistic, and creative moments of autonomy. In particular spaces, they "manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" (de Certeau 1984, xix). Tactics turn the "actual order of things" to their own ends, "without any illusion that it (the order) will change any time soon" (de Certeau 1984, 26).[41] While strategies make use of spaces, tactics are defined by a "clever utilization of time" (de Certeau 1984, 39).

De Certeau argues further that people "make" or "do" something depending on the ways in which they live. This includes—crucially for a theorist making sense of the mid-20th century's bourgeoning commitment to consumerism—deducing what it is that people make or do in their consumption of commodities. Doing so leads to the question of how people get on with their lives, how things change--in light of a presumed and apparent lack of agency and power. Everyday people make or do things by perusing blogs and newspaper websites, participating in discussions on Facebook and Twitter, and taking selfies on Instagram and Snapchat—among other things.

By appreciating that something noteworthy is produced simply by the ways in which people consume things, de Certeau goes on to argue that everyday life is never fully determined by the social structure or the technical infrastructure. Thus, there is room for creativity and spontaneity expressed in the expression of everyday practices. What de Certeau calls the "procedures of everyday creativity" highlights the multitude

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[41] De Certeau goes on to explain that "Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive movements in action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc." (de Certeau 1984, 38.)

of tactics that emerge in everyday life that "reappropriate the space organized by the techniques of sociocultural production" (1984, xiv). The act of making while doing contributes to the production of a network of *antidiscipline,* which he argues is formed through "dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals…" (1984, xv). Those with less power must "continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them," combining elements from many sources into a kind of "intellectual synthesis" that allows them to determine when to identify and seize an opportunity (1984, xix). Indeed, de Certeau (nostalgically) conjures the image of a pre-modern time, where these are like "a hunter's cunning" (1984, xx). Modernity and the rise of the continental sociological tradition has, according to de Certeau, clouded our ability to recognize the importance of the little things in life.

De Certeau's observations in the previous few paragraphs help us to identify the tactics part and parcel of everyday digital practices. Coming to a complete understanding of the way in which the internet and other digital communications technologies function in technical particulars is for all intents and purposes an impossibility for everyday people. But they can combine what they do know, gathered through everyday experience, acting creatively and take advantage of opportunities.

I wish to expand this observation to include acknowledge the possibility that officially-sanctioned actors also attempt to act creatively, although strategically, in their approach to fields dominated by everyday people. These officialized actors find it difficult to gain attention in these fields, as they lack the feel for the game, the unconscious awareness of what to do in that space. Thus, they may turn to ideological allies who are familiar with effective practices because they, too, have come of age using them to get through their days—along with unwitting agents—to advance their

agenda. Including these interested parties, those occupying a kind of middle position, into the otherwise quite straightforwardly dialectical framework further cements against the notion that in analyzing everyday practices, we are only able to observe progressive or emancipatory efforts on the part of the oppressed.

3.2.2 The Unconscious Nature of Everyday Practices

On the one hand, Pierre Bourdieu conceives of practices in terms of what agents do in the fields they occupy. Bourdieu also emphasizes the unconscious qualities of practices. Practices tend to go *without saying,* in that there is little intentionality at work. Practices appear neither as completely structured events and actions nor the are they seen as the choices of self-interested autonomous agents. Thus, determining their meaning presents difficulties. He argues that "For practices, their temporal structure, direction and rhythm are constituent of their meaning (Bourdieu 1977, 9)." The unconscious is something that is felt, such as the felt obligations involved in his favorite example of gift exchange. Or, perhaps, the those felt in sharing and favoriting items on social media.

On the other hand, Michel de Certeau (1984) directs us to analyze the repetitive and unconscious activity of everyday people. The common activities become, over time, "everyday" practices. Each individual is a site of interaction of incoherent and often contradictory social relations which determine the prescribed behavioral imperative. De Certeau argues that consumers—those occupying a dominated position in society—are not passive or docile. Everyday life is made possible by encroaching on the *property* of others through everyday practices (1984, xii). The practices are a condition of existence for ordinary people.

De Certeau shows how it is valuable to study how it is that people make things more *habitable* through their implementation of various tactics. His investigations of "ways of making" or "ways of using" (i.e. ways of consumption) rely on a rather differentiated set of activities, such as cooking and walking. His work directs attention to instances of *poaching,* where users make others' property their own. This can be as simple as the way in which a reader poaches an author's text, challenging its intended meaning by providing a novel interpretation that relates more to their everyday life. On Instagram, this can be as simple as making oneself at home by posting a fashion selfie.[42]

De Certeau paints everyday activities as being played out in and about a kind of text. His poetic description and endorsement of urban walkers is an instructive case. Ordinary people are walkers, navigating an urban text. As they walk, they write this text, but do not know how to read it, nor do they aware it exists (93). The paths the walkers take are not legible, in the sense that they were not planned. And yet, they take on a significant portion of stuff and meaning in everyday life.

De Certeau's use of the practice of reading to illustrate these points is illuminating. De Certeau argues that an accounting of a 'politics of reading' may be founded on practices that, because they have been round and in effect for quite some time, politicizes them (173). One of the practices is to eschew reading the text for

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literal meaning, or for formal learning. “Sometimes, in fact, like a hunter in the forest, the reader spots the written quarry, follows a trail, laughs, plays tricks, or else like a gambler, lets himself be taken in by it” (173). This is reminiscent of someone following a trail of links and likes, from something serious into something funny, and vice versa. More than incidental exposure, it is a way of experiencing the social.[43]

There is a kind of “moving across” quality that De Certeau bestows upon reading. This is suggestive of the boundary transgressing nature of political action in the digital era. They—the externally located readers—"despoil” politics in other societies, in the pursuit of “enjoying it themselves”, in De Certeau’s words (174). They mix their own politics with local politics, creating a new kind of thing, but they never *own* that politics (174).

3.3 Networks and Communities of (Everyday) Practice: Crafting Political Agency from Collective Subjectivity’s Scratch

A community could foreseeably emerge through what Bourdieu calls the “symbolic work of *constitutions*” (Bourdieu 1998, 33). Agents become interested in creating a unified group my mutually recognizing each other and themselves as enrolled in the same project due to their “proximity in the space of social positions” (Bourdieu 1998, 33). That is, groups and communities are formed almost accidentally,

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unconsciously at first, through the discovery of common interests (both political recreational) or involvement in particular social or political projects.

This could very well occur through the constant encounter with others in networks linked through global communications networks and the social practices that follow (e.g. #hashtags, message boards, Facebook groups, or comments on blog and local newspaper items). Social media technologies, specifically, their affordances, are crucial in determining the character of collective subjects and the role that they play in how those entities become self-conscious. Social networking sites (social media) are "an ensemble of material, or material causes, around which conventional and innovative civic activities [are] structured" (Papacharissi 2013).

When breaking news—or extraordinary events—occur, the knowledge acquired by tacit learning tells the (although it truly goes without saying) social media user that *this is simply what they do:* they share things (e.g. Couldy 2003; Liebes and Curran 1998).[44] Worse, they feel (unconsciously) they are resisting the official strategies of powerful actors by engaging in these practices (Bourdieu 1977, 49), so they do not reflect upon the possibility that they are acting as unwitting actors. Altogether, the outcome could be the disruption of an election (Tang & Lee 2013),[45] but it could also mean increasing awareness of the dire post-hurricane situation in Puerto Rico, getting out the vote, requesting a favorite song on a countdown show, or

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[44] Practices that seem innocuous on the surface may become part of the fabric of a community, a group, a network. These entities, in the digital era, form haphazardly and unintentionally. Sharing things online becomes a kind of ritual that may be interpreted in multiple ways.

[45] Some memes generate enough attention to disrupt the meaning of political events, redirecting public attention.

participating in a hashtag conversation about *The Bachelor.* It is important to pay attention to how practices are produced, and the ways in which the relevant 'world' is internalized and externalized in everyday activities. The articulated[46] function of various digitally-mediated networks would be differentiated by the digital *habitus'* distinct mode of generation (Bourdieu 1977, 78).

3.3.1 Theorizing the (Normative) Actors of a Networked Politics: Linking (Practice) Action to Identity

Putting the social movements literature into conversation with communication and media politics literature can shape an understanding of the kind solidarity that may bind together a collective subjectivity. Encounters between people on social media creates an emotional (affective) tie that encourages people to retweet and share content because there is a sense that what happens elsewhere can affect even those quite distant and detached from a particular event.[47] Until somewhat recently, the social movements literature had not yet considered communication processes themselves as particularly significant (McDonald 2015).

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[46] The activation of social networks in an ad hoc fashion to spread information about or apply public pressure to solve social or political problems (Theocharis 2015, 5) suggests there may be no 'real' subjectivity—that is, one that is stable and filled with normative statements, goals, and values.

[47] An activist quoted in Bastos and Mercea, 2016, put it: "it's an immersive experience and suddenly it's impossible for your brain to separate yourself from what is happening on the ground. It's an emergent collective identity that binds us all together. When someone from London or Brussels or Madrid feel interconnected, they'll give support and organize protest and do solidarity acts. It's more than just retweeting and going to be. You're doing that because it affects you whether you're there or not" (2371-2).

Actors form via digital interaction to act in common. “Collectivities” may form as a result of (mostly) digital interaction (Couldry 2015). The term community is quite unstable in a digitally-saturated era, a ‘vagueness’ that is the result of a lack of understanding of citizenship and democracy, today (615). At base is the claim that social media make collectivities and make them readable (621). Social media make more readable available particular cognitive and cultural frames to particular people amenable to various political or social goals.

The mediation of everyday life exposes people to various ideologically-informed domains (Chadwick 2013). This allows people to “feel their way into politics”, should they desire to (Papacharissi 2015, 25). Exposure to the affective—and potentially political—experiences of others on social media networks generate a desire to experience a sense of participation (25). As Chadwick argues, although this is a deviation from the deliberative ideal, social media effectively democratize the political through its affective experience (Chadwick 2008, 32). People become “actors” to the degree they are “affectively attuned” when passing along or creating and sharing information on social media (Papacharissi 2015, 25). The idea is that we should recognize people’s mundane actions on social media as “indicative of civic intensity and thus a form of engagement” (25) precisely because it indicates affective commitment.

Couldry (2015) argues that these actors must articulate themselves as a “chain” of networked action. Articulation allows for ‘potentially-interested others’ to be drawn in. Potentially-interested others can be thought of as people sharing similar dispositions and values who receive information from people connected to them via weak ties as a consequence of their otherwise mundane or gratifying use of digital

media. However, as through mechanisms of incidental exposure, they may be convinced to enroll themselves in a movement or cause (Tang & Lee 2013; Theocharis 2015, 5). Articulation (as an entity) is also a path to recognition by "powerful" actors (Couldry 2015, 615). Bennett & Segerberg (2013) argue articulation can occur from personalized invitations into networks and the distribution of information on social media.

The concept of identity, when put in the social movements framework, can help us to theorize community and agency–that is, actors act in the name of their identity (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). McDonald argues that the rise of "digitally-mediated action" potentially problematizes the central role of collective identity as a concept that explains other actions (McDonald 2015, 969). Bennett and Segerberg also draw attention to the role that digital communication can play in personalizing a connection to a social movement, bypassing traditional notions and sources of (the need for) social solidarity. Real actors were responsible for this individualization to take root, however, and their discursive work–especially indymedia, according to McDonald, in particular–has driven the internet-democracy discourse.

Though a decade has passed since the movement's heyday, the online activities of Occupy Wall Street illustrate the consequences of individualization in social movements. For example, participants took care to emphasize the individual nature of their membership, by proclaiming that *I* am the 99%, not *we* are the 99% (although later on this distinction became less clear; McDonald 2015, 977). The expression of individuality complicates the task of cultivating solidarity. People were drawn to Occupy, in part, because they found an environment where their *singular* life story

would find import.[48] The common practice of posting pictures of handwritten text telling individual stories would later emerge into the more mainstream political consciousness when individuals began posting pictures of hand-written messages countering #blacklivesmatter with #allivesmatter, or #bluelivesmatter.

According to McDonald, Anonymous, the self-described hacker collective, emerged from an umbrella digital culture cultivated on 4chan.com—a site that has played a major role in the establishment of right-wing agency during the Trump years. Like Tufekci and others, McDonald hints at how the institutions/technical affordances of the site gestured toward a particular social activity. Social media *shape* things, rather than merely being tools (Milan 2015a). Namely, the fact that there is no archive on the 4chan website means people must invest in a culture–to refer to it, to remember it, to even create it in the first place–for it to live on. As such, 4chan, is a breeding ground for internet cultures. If no one responds to a post before it is pushed off the front page of the board, there is no way to find it again. Thus, 4chan breeds, among other things, a culture built around the *ephemeral.* It takes a lot of discursive, technical, and tedious work to create a sense of shared experience necessary for the generation of an identity. Not only this, but it breeds a sense of competition for attention; thus, it drives a culture of the extreme (McDonald 2015, 972). Any

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[48] This tendency to emphasize singularity is later manifested in the resonance that single stories carry for right-wing networks. While it may seem obvious to social scientists to not mistake a single case for a general rule, those steeped in the culture of singularity and the ephemeral come to believe that, "yep, that's me too," develop an affinity with those ordinarily extraordinary stories, such as an illegal immigrant murdering a white American citizen, a terrorist attack, or even a fake news story or photo. There is no need to refer to a long archive of events; it does not even occur to do so, because, in true 4chan fashion, it has already proverbially dropped off the page. Faint impulses drive this kind of community, even when presented with archival data.

collectivity emerging from 4chan will be marked by "excess, cruelty, misogyny, pleasure in transgression and its sense of humor" (McDonald 2015, 978).

Producing memes may be one such practice. A meme cannot stand on its own without the help of memes and practices put forth and carried out by others, and therefore, no one single person can create a meme from nothing. However, the encyclopedia of memes available to people situated in various groups/networks can inspire creativity. Some have, I suppose, *optimistically,* attributed the rise of memes to decline of consumptive culture and the rise of productive culture. Memes aid in the construction of a collective memory, as members of a group can generally readily recognize its meaning. This helps especially in the navigation of the culture of the ephemeral. Memes "connect across contingency…[and] through its circulation, the meme connections a group of people which are otherwise dispersed and unconnected" (McDonald 2015, 973; see also Knuttila 2011).

Thus, it is also reasonable to conclude that the linguistic conventions found on Twitter, such as hashtags, shortened links, likes, retweets, quotes and followers, may also be another set of practices that have significant structuring consequences on discourse and conversation (Milan 2015, 890). Touraine points communication scholars toward the conclusion that today's shared cultural orientations "are practices of memory and selfhood associated with digital communications" (McDonald 2015 979-80). This is, he says, not the quite the same thing as a social movement, but rather, an entity formed by digital collaboration.

Papacharissi leans more on the socially-constructed side, arguing that while technologies physically create networks, its narratives that provide meaning, and hence, do the actual connecting. Different media carry with them different medialities

that may make people feel they are a particular distance from one another. Social media possess particular "connective affordances" that connect publics together and enable emotional expression and information sharing that transform individual and collective visions of the world (Papcharissi 2015, 8).

Social media itself can therefore be recognized as a set of actors, in that they actually *do* something. Part of this claim is dependent on the observation that social media are controlled by actual people with distinct political values in internet corporations. They inscribe rules in the technologies they develop and deploy. But social media also takes on a causal role in the process by which people and/or a social action generate a sense of self. What people put on social media, across platforms (the combinations, for example), could challenge or enhance existing practices and, in doing so, challenge us to rethink (mediated) community. These practices provide people with ontological and epistemological grounding. Social media are said to *intervene* in meaning-making processes by virtue of the power bestowed to them by the algorithms controlling content (Milan 2015a, 888).

A collective *identity* bundles and binds together the collectiveness of any particular instance of collective action. The “persistence of collectivity” is a quality unique to digitally-mediated protest actions; without it, collective action would be impossible (Gerbaudo 2014, 264). These observations allow Milan to persuasively argue that social movement scholars—at least in what they tend think is most important and therefore write about—do not fully account for “what is in social media” that make them so important and useful for mobilization (Poell 2014).

Milan identifies a collective identity making process called the “politics of visibility” that is especially at work on social networking sites. She begins from the

premise that collective identity is the result of collective action, specifically communicative action, as it pertains to the age of social media. As micromobilization is mediated by social media today, they play a significant role in brokering activists' meaning construction efforts. The materiality of social media "amplifies the interactive and shared elements of collective identity" and "sets in motion a politics of visibility characterized by individuality, performance, visibility and juxtaposition.

Milan develops a new conceptualization of the collective actions taking place in the digitally-networked era, entitled "cloud protesting". The politics of visibility—partially standing-in for the traditional understandings of the politics of identity—puts the subjective and private experiences of individuals at center. This politics creates a new kind of actor—"individuals-in-the-group". This implies that people experience the collective individually, and that "the group is the means of collective action rather than its end" Milan 2015a, 887).

Although often overlooked, it seems somewhat obvious that media are critical in the process of the construction of collective identity (e.g. Gamson 1992; Mattoni 2012). Collective identities, for them to exist, must be "talked into existence" (Hunt & Benford 2004). Media enabling publication allow people to express private views, and, perhaps, find someone else who thinks or feels the same way.

Milan's arguments, here, augment my contention that the medium itself may have an effect on the kind of political agency that results from the use of social media, conceived as an everyday practice. Such an argument need not think of it deterministically (e.g. the internet is good or bad for liberal politics or sustaining the geopolitical order).

Appeals to self-expression and identity are frequently embedded as an approach to convince others to support a cause. But most scholars stop short of arguing that it can generate anything more than short-term, *ad hoc* action networks. The internet's organizational flattening and increased interaction capacity, according to the internet-democracy discourse, increases the vulnerability of institutions, leaving them more open to disruptions as time and space horizons expand. Longer term politics requires a reservoir of social, political, and material resources that help to sustain the (appearance of a) context and opportunity structure "in which individuals can *make sense* of devoting their scarce time and energies into a campaign" (Couldry 2015, 616). And here, political elites—even Kim Kardashian, say the Revolutionary Guard—may be able to take advantage of what the internet offers in order to perpetuate such necessary fictions (Chadwick 2006, 22).

One such fiction is that social media itself actively constitutes a group of people. And here, this is where the proper name of the social media matters. For example, while the rhetoric surrounding "America-/France-/UK- First" is ascendant, the populist-illiberal transnational movement's diffusions reveals that in Couldry's words, "we have 'us' now" rather than nations (2015, 620).[49] Pepe the frog, the unofficial mascot of Reddit.com, became an empty signifier (e.g. Gerbaudo, 2015) for members of the movement.

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[49] Online Trump supporters gathered on 4chan and Reddit, regularly claiming themselves as a vanguard 'meming' Trump into office. They readily claim affinity with ethno-nationalist movements in Europe, more so than they are willing to claim to belong to a group of people that includes liberals and minorities—namely, "America".

Another fiction promoted by various voices in the internet-democracy discourse is that "time spent on a social networking site is more 'special' than much offline time" (Couldry 2015, 620; Mejias 2013, 15). Networked space appears to posses magical properties that make it more important than mundane offline spaces. Powerful people, such as Mark Zuckerberg, perpetuate this myth by insisting that Facebook is a social fabric (un)like any other. This is part of why researchers have been more drawn to the digital activities of Egyptian Uprising and the Umbrella Movement.

These myths tie people together. But so do the ways in which they are together. Any social group organized around political action needs mechanisms that bridge disparate individual and group interests, craft institutions, and legitimate authority. In other words, what might be shared are the ways of interacting themselves.[50] We should pay attention to *how we gather* on social media platforms (Couldry 2015, 620). Interview evidence from Occupy protests shows that this is one way that a subjectivity (demos) was defined. Those who met with each other in the camps were defined by their experimental repertoires of participatory decision-making. Those participating and supporting the encampments digitally formed a different kind of demos based on information sharing and reinforcing solidarity (albeit overlapping). There is quite a bit of evidence to suggest that social media constitute

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[50] Ferguson (2012) argues that democracy depends on "some kind of commonality unifying the people" (4). National identity can fulfill this purpose, but, I argue, so do protest avatars and other memes. She argues that "the recognition that we have something in common must have some kind of psychological effect on us, such that it can generate affective connection where there previously had been suspicion and mistrust" (5). The commonality of sharing memes on Reddit, can confer legitimacy on the alt-right, for example.

spaces of appearance (Arendt 2013) where we might expect truly new political entities to emerge.

A key factor in distinguishing subjectivities (within larger collectivities) appears to be *how* one participates. Participating in social networks produces and reproduces a social order (Mejias 2013, 8). One might even say that people who use Facebook on a daily basis are distinct from those using it minute-to-minute. A "typical we" is very specific. Iranian fashion-models following in Kim Khardashian's footsteps are one such "we", as are self-professed members of the so-called alt-right on 4chan.org. To the extent digitally-mediated everyday practices of sharing information are deeply embedded in everyday life, we can see how they might refer to (more profound/deeply held) subjectivity.

A subjectivity may emerge, centered around practices. Instead of "we, the people," the call might be "we, the sharers." People may take pride in performance of sharing practices. This performance is the primary method for attaining some kind of goal, according to Bourdieu. The particular content attached to an instance of the practice changes, but the appropriateness of the practice itself is not questioned (such as having elections in a democratic society). The activation of social networks in an ad hoc fashion to spread information about or apply public pressure to solve social or political problems (Theocharis 2015, 5) suggests there may be no "real" subjectivity—that is, one that is stable and filled with normative statements, goals, and values.

Are practices more than disruptive (or inherently resistant), and truly political? Is sharing "fashion-modelling" photos on Instagram a political act? Theocharis argues that digital practices should be conceptualized as forms of political participation. Digital communication practices are then conceptualized as integral to political

participation (Theocharis 2015, 5).[51] Although merely "liking" a Tweet or an Instagram photo probably sets too low a threshold in being considered political participation, it is a symbolic practice with consequences. Sometimes a "like" or "share" is superficial or irrelevant, but context is everything (Tufecki 2014). A "like" is a gateway drug to more active participation. If Bennett and Segerberg (2013) are right, then the Revolutionary Guard expects to observe the 'self-expression' values (Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Everyday Iranians would begin to respond positively to personalized appeals and perhaps engage in the social media practice of individual expression. Sharing practices are exemplars of individual expression (Endersby & Towle 1996). Expressive behaviors that take a "more active, collective and networked quality in the online environment can be independent acts" (Theocharis 2015, 5; see also Hirzalla & van Zoonen 2011; Oser et al. 2013).

All this above is suggestive of the practices themselves constituting a (political) platform. I contend that (movement) participants largely "don't think at all" because they are doing the same unconscious practices that get them through their day. Generally symbolic acts of sharing—"I'm the kind of person who shares a pro-police meme", to borrow Tufekci's (2014) phrasing—can add up to something quite significant over time, even if they appear superficial or mundane in many contexts.

In this line of reasoning, what motivates everyday people to turn to social media with such ubiquity? Papacharissi (2015) draws attention to what people

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[51] Theocharis goes on to define digitally networked participation as: "a networked media-based personalized action that is carried out by individual citizens with the intent to display their own mobilization and activate their social networks in order to raise awareness about, or exert social and political pressures for the solution of, a social or political problem" (6).

experience when extraordinary events impinge on our everyday life. Papacharissi argues that the "networked digital structures of expression and connection are overwhelmingly characterized by affect" (8). She asks: "what form do publics take on as they materialize textually via the medium of Twitter? What are the tropes and modalities of civic engagements sustained via networked media? How do these inform the texture of publics that are called into being via networked media?" (28).

Papacharissi (2015) details a process of affective attunement, where the emotional experiences of political events—enabled in particular ways through different media—allow diverse publics to come together to align themselves, especially emotionally, with a movement (4). Instead of interpreting events abstractly, or through rationalist deliberative ideals, today, people *feel* like those experiencing the events directly (4). It is the affective response to these events that creates networked publics.

Social networks produce and circulate affect which binds people together. Dean argues that it is reflexive communication that creates this affect: "Every little tweet or comment, every forwarded image or petition, accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention that attaches to it, making it stand out from the larger flow before it blends back in" (Dean 2010, 95).

Papacharissi's (2015) use of affect makes the concept work as a useful link between action and identity. Affect is key to understanding how people internalize and subsequently behave in response to everyday experiences--linking thought to action or inaction (12). An affective response lies behind what we call a motivation, an intensity or "the body's power of acting" (Spinoza 1994, 154) to do something. Affect therefore

also contains a power of *potential* (Papacharissi 2015, 14; Massumi 2015), anticipation, promise, and hope (16).

Social networking sites, Dean (2010) argues, are primarily effective at "let[ting] us see ourselves being seen" (36). The snippets of information posted on Facebook or Twitter appear real partly because we see other people reacting to them. Seeing other people's responses to something posted on social media causes as affective response in us that makes the day's outrage or pleasure very real and important.

Like the scholars mentioned above, Papacharissi also argues that the affordances of social media shape affective political formations (2015, 9)—or, in my terms, collective subjectivities. Media are wrapped up in the production and commodification of affect. They sustain, transmit, and cultivate "feelings, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors" (2015, 22). Any technology possesses its own kind of *mediality,* which contains haptic, optic, tactile, and computational capacities (23). Particular mediality lead to particular affective attunement (2015, 23).

Affect is empowering, she argues, "at the point at which new formations of the political are in the process of being imagined but not yet articulated" (Papacharissi 2015, 19). Affective formations have power because they are, at least, unpredictable, but for sure, non-structured (18). The practices networked publics turn to are developed through affectively accessed power (19). Thus, on balance, there is a predictable side of political agency at work in collective subjectivities that emerge from the various features of social media, and a unpredictable side of a bourgeoning political agency—an unpredictability that gives it power—because of the nature of affect.

Narratives are crucial to the *creation* of affect, Papacharissi argues. Social media affect the narratives that can be told, and how the affect created by the narratives is amplified. The storytelling infrastructures of new media "invite people to *feel* their own place in current events, developing news stories, and various forms of civic mobilization" (2015, 4). The affective response, expressed through digitally-mediated practices such as liking, ridicule, or addition, to sometimes distant events detailed in media contributes to evolving narratives. As social media are the "storytelling infrastructures of a digital age" (7), it makes sense to focus on them as sites for analysis. The forms that these movements took in public were bound up with the content and practices of online platforms (8).

Affective publics have particular (new) characteristics that are "energizing a new political" (Papacharissi 2015, 5). While democracy scholars might be keen to identify more official-looking written statements or speeches, "the public displays of affect" often serve as political statements in contemporary movements (6). Papacharissi argues that the cascade of Occupy-style movements all shared a combination of online and offline solidarity and featured the display of *indignation* (2015, 6). In my terms, they were indignant about the lack of realization of liberal human rights within their societies. The affective displays of indignant publics were key to tying them across time, space and ideology.

In the bigger picture, these "new" aspects of politics went hand-in-hand with the retreat of political parties from the forefront of liberal democratic politics. Their decline—especially in terms of importance relative to material well-being—is at least correlated with the rise of subjectively produced social media content that promotes affective reactions towards political candidates (Papacharissi 2015, 27). Indeed, the

key “new” feature of social media was that it enabled people to “contribute to and become participants in the hyper-empirical realities were are tuning into” (Papacharissi 2015, 63). The emotional attachment that people feel toward candidates is (ostensibly) directly linked to how people use social media in their experience of the political.

Papacharissi’s observations, here, were slightly ahead of the curve, in that the coming “populist wave” and the decline of liberal-left and centrist-right parties in consolidated democracies around the world was just around the corner. The ubiquity of social media combined with the ease of use, access, and information diffusion aided “outsider” candidates with fewer ideological commitments—but more affective commitments—to gain prominence. People experienced the political increasingly on social media, meaning they engaged with and contributed to various, overlapping affective publics as they navigated Brexit, Trump, Macron/Le Pen, Bolsonaro, etc.

Of course, the social media platform of their choosing does matter in and of itself to some degree. Scholars in Science and Technology studies have developed a notion of collective identity that sits at the intersection of the “material of human-machine interactions and the symbolic of human action” (Milan 2015b, 2). The field recognizes the symbolic dimension—in the form of collective action and the attendant narratives—to dissent, itself. They take the medium as ontological, making STS distinct from other sociological approaches (Rogers 2013). STS does not avoid discussing the medium itself and its situatedness. Social media possess a materiality, they assume, which allows them to make strong claims about the effect that social media and digital communication have had on activism and everyday life. Farman argues, for example, that social media has “falsified the opposition between the ‘real’

and the 'virtual'" (Farman 2012),—a statement that more scholars should take for granted—while Milan argues that social media has "colonized the everyday, multiplying the occasions for experience the collective dimension of social action beyond irregular events like a demonstration" (Milan 2015a, 890). Both speak the pervasiveness of social media in our lives. Social media must, therefore, be a part of any analysis of collective identity, because it is these "human-machine interactions" that mediate the bulk of our experience of the political. As such, social media can be viewed as socio-technical and cultural-ideological (Van Dijck 2013, 57).

3.4 Do Social Media Generate the Wrong Social Capital?

Field theory's goal, as adopted and adapted by Bourdieu, is to explain regularities in individual action by recourse to position vis-à-vis others (Martin 2003). Each field—to the extent that it is autonomous—has a set of distinct and field-specific rules and norms by which actors are expected to operate. Fuerstenberg (1969), much like Bourdieu after him, stressed the importance of the norm system of a field being internalized. This process of value socialization, he argued, rather than differential ability, explains the success and failure or participants in a field.

From this perspective, social relations are best understood in terms of overlapping fields of play, each with a working consensus as to the nature of the game, in which actors compete for limited resources as well as power, influence and prestige. Turner refers to the field as "an ensemble of relationships between actors antagonistically oriented to the same prizes or values." And Martin refers to multiple overlapping "fields of organized striving" (Martin 2003, 21). Actors jockey for position in the many overlapping fields they find themselves in, navigating social relations and positions. Creativity is necessary for success, precisely because so many

agents are trying to reproduce and better their positions using the predominate practices—doing so goes without saying. Going beyond the unconsciously deployed practices is *felt* as a risk. Just as being a "good ally" at the UN is understood as a matter of fact (Pouliot 2015), so is passing retweeting network elites whose everyday production and dissemination of information largely defines the fields everyday people find themselves in on social media.

Individuals are increasingly dependent on social media and digital communications platforms in all aspects of their lives, and are in likely to be in close proximity to internet-connected devices at any moment (Turow 2011). Thus, they have immediate access to the many overlapping networks they may be a part of. It is their everyday experience with these technologies and networks that they develop the practical knowledge—a feel for the game—about what works for participating in a particular field and for generating symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977, 82-85). The resulting practical knowledge plays a decisive role in determining political effects of future action. Different types of practical knowledge produce different logical environments. For example, if there is shared knowledge about common ways of interacting cordially among a group of representatives of potential adversaries, such as common at the international level, then it generally serves to reduce tensions. At a lower level, if the knowledge concerns the means that people communicate and share ideas, it stands to reason that it may serve to change the way people view their own voice in a digitally-mediated public sphere.

Symbolic capital provides incentives to agents to engage in particular practices. In his discussion of state formation, Bourdieu refers to the traits associated with the nobility as something within culture that was valuable enough to be contested

and eventually coopted for state purposes (Bourdieu 1977, 85). Agents make an effort to aggregate symbolic capital to increase their in-group prestige and symbolic qualities of the capital they possess. Empowerment and promotion within a group is based on the cultural content of the space where the interaction occurs, and the activities associated with such movement often produce a discourse that justifies the existence of the community. Being as 'normal' as possible is a common pursuit that serves to reproduce the group's model of social order, even though that order and its values are "doomed to be violated" and everyone knows it (Bourdieu 1998, 98).

Social media users tend to feel an obligation to share things (news stories, images, tweets, videos, etc). On the one side, this can mean an individual learning what kinds of tweets might gain traction in the network and then emulating the 'best practices', amplifying particular kinds of information from trusted in-group sources, unconsciously reproducing the social order (Bourdieu 1998, 98).[52] From the other side, this can mean a powerful agent gaining footing in the social media field by consciously emulating the practices of individuals.

Users of social media acquire, for example, an intuitive *sense* of what tweets matter from which actors, and, in turn, which they should retweet, which they should @reply to, and which they should quote tweet. The retweet function of Twitter promotes the diffusion of information, and is especially prone to virality, the propagation of memes (Hansen et al. 2011). "Quoting" and "Retweeting" allows

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[52] The social order is "doomed" in the sense that it is limits are not objectively real. Bourdieu seems to imply that everyone is quite glib about this fact, acting with a smirk and a wink, that everyone is in on the joke. This is subversive and is a (set of) practice/tactic unmoored to any particular ideology.

people to include additional content that can endorse, contest, or increase the visibility of the original tweet. People purposefully retweet things in order to amplify ideas, start a conversation, and to announce one's inclusion as a listener (Boyd, Golder & Lotan 2010). To borrow language from the height of the blogging era, listening is a practice of *lurkers*--those who read but do not comment on or compose original posts. Quoting, especially, allows individuals and publics to cite the inspiration for their own thoughts, and one can see networks forming in reference to particular tweets. Mentions (using @) help people interact with specific others directly, to focus attention to a particular idea or link, or to garner the attention of the original tweeter.

The mundane trivialness of 280-character updates have a cumulative effect that produces a intuitive sense of the everyday lives and feelings of others. Expressing the mundane in writing moves it from the realm of experience to the realm of practice (Dean 2010, 97-98). This is different from being persuaded through formal means that these actors matter and should be taken seriously, as well as different from tasking the user with using their intellect to uncover the merits of what these important influencers within a given network are sharing. The ways in which people communicate online--especially their tendency to talk about lived experiences while dismissing those of others as mere opinion (Dean 2010)--perverts ideal deliberative practices.

3.5 Conclusion – The Contours of Collective Subjectivity

The framework for understanding the importance of everyday practices, when put into dialogue with sociological perspectives on technology and collective mobilization helped to better conceptualize collective subjectivity, one with political agency, in the contemporary period. The framework presented in this chapter addresses the ways in which everyday practices are constitutive of subjectivity. What

emerges is a notion that collective subjectivities are quite thin in terms of solidarity (in mundane times) and ideological content. Today, collective subjectivities often emerge through digital mediation. The framework takes this into consideration, ultimately arguing that these subjectivities mostly lend themselves to disruption.

My conceptualization of a collective actor differs from more institutionalized groups with more formalized organizing principles. Generally, a collective actor is understood to exist when individuals consider themselves members of a group with shared objectives, when there is agreement on the rule of decision-making and membership, and where there is a set of common identity attributes. Collective actors have the capacity to take intentional strategic action based on a decision-making process founded on the preferences of the members. To develop these attributes, collective actors form over time, emerging from more loosely coordinated collective behavior. They develop a distinct identity, consolidate through processes of institutionalization (which aid in social reproduction), and define power asymmetries within the group to provide a basis for difference-making action (Eder 1993, 42-62; Marwell and Oliver 1993; Dolata & Schrape 2016, 3).

Collective actors, in my own formulation, operate under a condition of *organized informality.* The everyday practices, which are—by their nature—informal, provide an organizing logic in themselves. People find themselves accidentally enrolled in projects of collective subjectivity building, and along the way, also become members of collective action networks more specifically engaged in particular political projects and disruptive political events.

Chapters 4 and 5 will present detailed encounters with these historically-situated momentous political events to push further and flesh out the arguments set forth in this chapter.

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Chapter 4

RETWEETING REVOLUTION

4.1 Introduction

As the insights of Bourdieu presented in Chapter 3 remind us, the practices associated with legacy political institutions and those associated with the individualized digital era are divergent, raising questions about the fundamental compatibility of digital media and established patterns of liberal democratic politics as well as international relations and order. As we have seen in earlier chapters—principally Chapter 2—the discourse about the digitalization of various social and political phenomena contains an ever-present tension: Promise or peril? While I seek to sidestep this question a bit, this and Chapter 5 show the answer to be "both and". States and other powerful institutions struggle to comprehend let alone contain everyday digital practices, but the collective subjectivities that come about through them are limited in their ability to drive lasting change.

In this chapter, I will apply the insights of Chapter 3's framework to the Occupy-style movements of the early 2010s with a more specific focus on the Egyptian Revolution and the Occupy Central (OCM) movement—known as the Umbrella Revolution—in Hong Kong. In doing so, I hope to reveal the emergence, operation, and effects of collective subjectivity. These events, I argue, show how digital everyday practices are constitutive of these instances of collective mobilization. Collective subjectivity based on everyday digital practices appears to oriented toward disruption. I also read these movements as a way to outline a kind of ideal-type of

digitally-mediated communication, a form that contains the typical practices with which people engage with when undertaking various performances and expressing collective subjectivity.

The chapter draws attention to the performative similarities of the movements. The transnationalization of collective subjectivities and everyday digital practices speaks to the notion laid out in the previous chapter that people tend to approach momentous events with an unconscious knowledge, a feel for the game, for what to do and how to perform on social media in order to contribute to political upheaval.

4.2 The Development of Digitally-Mediated Communication

Digital communication is constituted by almost countless actors—many of whom remain relatively anonymous—that interact irregularly, even spontaneously, without much that structures the frequency and argumentative & ideological content of their communications. The inherent and ambiguous ubiquity of the internet writ large poses difficulties for the formalization of a common code of behavior standards. Digital communication must engage with the community of practice called the internet, writ large, where the practices of trolling are quite successful at sustaining engagement through the conjuring of outrage in (imagined) audiences. Digital communication rests on a logic that stresses radicalization, polarization and, ultimately, divergence.

This section expands upon these insights in order to direct focus specifically to the ways in which people use social media to participate in the Occupy-style movements discussed in later sections.

As noted in chapter 1, the current era of digital communication is in many ways a continuation of the information revolution begun some three decades ago. The

first wave dissemination of computerized communicative forms—fax machines, modems, and emails—made people familiar with frequent communication with more widely dispersed others on a one-to-one basis. The second wave of technological innovation, or "Web 2.0," arrived in the mid-aughts, made the means by which people could publish information online more broadly accessible. People were increasingly able to post their opinions and experiences and to comment on and appropriate (or "remix") the work of their peers online without the explicit intervention of traditional gatekeepers. Granted, at this time, doing so required a substantial amount of technical knowhow—such as knowing what questions to ask about, for example, creating a website or weblog—and expensive internet-connected computers. It was the creation and diffusion of social media networks across platforms and devices, especially smartphones, that truly expanded interaction capacity by substantially increasing the number of people who could participate in digital communication on a daily basis.

The development of digital communications technology created a relatively horizontal and open space prone to activism and contention. But it is the daily encounter with the ubiquitous, frequent, and lightweight practices of receiving and sending information, images and videos, as well as friending, following and sharing, that contributes to the development of the ideal-type of digital communication. These practices—disruptive as they are—tend to produce a distinct political dynamic of outrage (e.g. Sojieraj & Berry 2011). Actors engaging in digital communication can promote liberal agendas like realizing human rights and the rule of law—and in particular contexts, doing so is disruptive and can be effective. But in other contexts, what is disruptive is the production and sharing of ideological content that attacks liberal institutions and ideology.

The rate of smartphone ownership and use of communication applications, along with the increasing sophistication of web platforms undergirds the reality of a constant connectedness to information. social media and connected devices, apps, and web platforms put (potential) actors in touch with one another and increase the frequency of interaction between actors and ideas. Digital communications networks have also fragmented the traditional (mass) media system, effectively empowering 'new' actors and multiplying the number of centers of power (Chadwick 2013). The social ties that constitute these new configurations, supported by the mundane activities of friending, following and sharing, contribute to the ongoing instability of established networks of authority and rule as well as the availability of new allies and coalition partners (Tilly & Tarrow 2015, 60).

The substantial number of actors that can (if they wish) participate in communication across borders, as well as their relatively horizontal arrangement, marks digital communication. The affordances of social media networks in use today (at least) ostensibly promote an equality of voices and configurations of actors, no matter their power-political position or ideological commitments. The increasing interaction capacity allows for the participation of various novel configurations of actors with (potentially) divergent and varied agendas. Thus, no one, and no topic, is truly off the table.

Consider the immediate and straightforward ways in which participants can gain access to information. Social media enable a near constant-connectedness to information, allowing for large numbers of people to react to news events and political developments in essentially real time. Of course, much of the information they see is tailored to their interests (or their consumer tastes) due to sorting behavior when it

comes to enrollment in different information networks. However, this state of informational and communicative connectedness lends itself to the acceleration of the conversation.

The resulting acceleration in the proliferation of information can create a lack of coherence in messaging. Part of this is due to the affordances of social media which encourage the rapid sharing of information with the goal of garnering attention from others. In today's participatory and fragmented media ecology, actors can broadcast to immense publics while citizen journalists and social entrepreneurs can document newsworthy events and generate viral "memes" and moments that often affect national conversations. Simultaneously, this proliferation of digital conversation and interaction has added to the glut of available information and hence has made the procurement of attention crucial (Tufekci 2013, 850).

Should an actor desire to promote a particular message on social media, it should be quick, short and sweet. Publishing attention-grabbing short messages and small collections of images is encouraged by the structure of social media. On the one hand, while messages become widespread, people who may be interested in passing along the information or adding on to it will not be as easily able to ascertain the larger program or goal underlying the original message. The result is a lack of coherence; brevity and lack of content may only dilute the intended message or confuse the imagined audience. On the other hand, social media affordances can lead to extreme message coherence, but the message will lack nuance and sophistication. That is, it can communicate clear but shallow political content. Short and simple messages may rapidly diffuse without the meaningful creative participation of an imagined audience.

A cursory familiarity with the production of political news and commentary on Twitter, for example, reveals the ubiquity of tweets that leverage existing sentiment, usually cynicism or sarcasm, to denounce or promote this or that idea as good or bad, but that's about the end of it—at least for the typically politically unsophisticated Twitter user. Thus, the process of digital communication may be marked by large numbers of coherent but shallow bits of information.

Common conventions found on Twitter, such as hashtags, shortened links to external content, likes, retweets, quote tweets, and lists are part of large catalog of practices available to people engaging in digital communication. Their repeated use has significant structuring consequences on the political discourse and everyday conversation (Milan 2015a, 890). The techniques become intuitive and help constitute the process of digital communication.

One significant technique is the creative use of memes across social media and messaging platforms where images are easily shared and viewed. Memes are small units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation (Dawkins 1976). Memes today are most commonly located in digital space, diffusing from person to person (or post to post), although they frequently "scal[e] up" (Shifman 2014, 18) into a shared social phenomenon that shapes, represents and reconstitutes shared understandings and "general mindsets" (2014, 4). Memes "connect across contingency…[and] through its circulation, the meme connects a group of people which are otherwise dispersed and unconnected" (McDonald 2015, 973; see also Knuttila 2011). Importantly, memes are useful for the generation of virality—the rapid spread of a single relatively unchanging cultural artifact—and diffusion, which involves complex forms of cultural agency and local adaptation (Shifman 2014, 157).

The practice of sharing memes may be appropriated by activists as expressions of dissent (Pfaff & Yang 2001). Together, these processes guarantee memes not only quickly spread across networks, but their potential effects on digital conversations and dialogue remains unpredictable and volatile.

It is what people actually do with social media, in combination with the platforms' affordances, that drives the process of digital communication. The rapid process of aggregating voices into an environment promotes immediacy, acceleration and adaptation. It is in this way that we can speak of actor constitution on digital platforms. The process of aggregating voices rapidly into various configurations occurs in an environment where there is little need to engage in persuasion let alone deliberation. There is no requirement that there be a coherent agenda behind the information that one comes across on social media before he or she (unconsciously) passes it along. Disruption, not coherence, seems to be the endgame of digital communication as currently imagined.

The multitude of actors and the speed by which the social media platforms are populated with content creates a digital environment rich in information. This wealth of information makes the procurement of attention all the more important. In turn, the fundamental practices associated with digital communication—sending and receiving information, images and videos—are ubiquitous, frequent, and lightweight and produce a distinct political dynamic that is often related to the economy of outrage (Sobieraj & Berry 2011; Castells 2015). Posting emotionally laden content is an effective way to enroll potentially interested others into a misinformation campaign. It is this logic that primarily informs the constitution of (politically oriented) entities

online. Social media technologies are crucial in determining the character of collective subjects and the role that they play in how those entities become self-conscious.

The gratification that participants in social media conversations feel—quantified in the numbers of likes, retweets, replies, etc.—is instrumental in the creation of a kind of mechanism that defines the logic of digital communication. On the one hand, the affective experience offered by engagement with social media can produce what I call a *spiral of radicalization*—a phenomenon of an ever-increasing contradiction between prevailing claims, programs, and self-description, and descriptions of entities and individuals (McAdam et al. 2001, 161). The incentives for radicalization, due in part to the vast number of potential audience members and the participant's location and social status within a given network, are such that the more extreme the viewpoint, the more attention said participant is likely to receive. Simply put, more attention means more gratification. And such an affective encounter means a participant is inclined to return to the well of radicalization, so to speak, time again.

A drive toward radicalization can also manifest while people engage in individual-level activities, such as *pwning* (e.g. "owning the libs"). In this context, pwning is doing or saying anything online that is perceived to upset an imaginary set of political opponents—especially centrists. Engaging in pwning is an effective way to foster collective identity (and, in turn, political agency) across networks and borders. In-group identity is strengthened by likes and friendly replies to the "owns" while references to those being "owned" strengthen a sense of in-group and out-group identities. In a situation where attention is craved, pwning creates a culture of the extreme. Any collectivity emerging from a social media site will be marked by its extreme attributes.

On the other hand, the acceleration of digital communication encouraged by social media affordances can lead to a what I call a *spiral of mundanity,* in which relatively vapid or meaningless bits of information or opinion can receive inordinate amounts of attention exactly because they are easy to understand (e.g. "dunking" on something using few words or emojis). This can lead to a divergence between configurations of entities and individuals as simple bits of information—which can also be memes or hashtags, incidentally—become a kind of cultural currently making little sense to outsiders. The enclaves these spirals produce, however, are not impenetrable. Rather, it is the very shallowness of the content produced and shared in the radical and mundane spirals that allows for members of one fluid configuration to (accidentally) find themselves enrolled in another's political project. That is, groups and communities are formed almost accidentally--unconsciously at first--through the discovery of common interests (both political and recreational) or involvement in particular social or political projects. This could very well occur through the constant encounter with others in networks linked through global communications networks and the social practices that follow (e.g. hashtags, message boards, Facebook groups, or comments on blog and local newspaper items). Facebook, among others, encourages the "sharing or linking and participating in predetermined protest actions" (Agarwal et al. 2014b, 336-7). Individual participants are generally acting on their learned predispositions to share information they "like" on social media, and not purposefully adhering to rules, norms and institutions of the larger political order. People experience the collective individually, and the lack of principled commitments lowers the stakes involved with sharing (counter)productive (mis)information.

4.3 Performing Liberal Activism

Contemporary networks of activists and participants are no longer tied to one another by geographic proximity. Venerable scholars of contentious politics view the emergence of digital media as a turning point in the trajectory of collective action (Almeida & Lichbach 2003; Bennett & Segerberg 2013). Today, episodes of collective action and protest can be global in scope even as they unfold hundreds or even thousands of miles apart. More importantly, the arrival of consumer-oriented social media platforms opened avenues for communication and participation in a digital public sphere to those otherwise unfamiliar with the technical aspects of the internet (Bohman 2004; Dahlgren 2005; Shirky 2008). Thus, it requires little training or expertise to become an effective organizer in the 21st century. Social media has democratized political action by removing much of the power of traditional gatekeepers and subsequently allowed for the unhindered evolution and expansion of democratic values (e.g. Karagiannopoulos 2012).

Digital communications platforms increased the number of linkages between allies and coalition partners, enabling the bundling together of various grievances into novel identity categories (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 138), even as their labels were quite unrestrictive. The prevalence of weak ties, for example, gave liberal activists the opportunity to extend their messages to a broader audience (Velensuela, Arriagada and Scherman 2014).

Social media (i.e. their affordances) support particular kinds of social interaction and, depending on the platform, have a particular kind of collective action baked-in (Milan 2015b, 4).

Depending on their creativity, activists have a limited number of effective ways to promote their agendas to their imagined audiences. For example, activists may

use the quote-tweet function to augment existing information in an attempt to extend and evolve the narrative frames that serve to sustain a movement or policy (Theocharis et al. 2015, 216).

People engage in a kind of performance when they engage in digital everyday practices of sharing information on social media. In retweeting and re-meming, they poach the property of others to craft a performance. The meme of Pepe the Frog reputedly assisted Donald Trump's election campaign for President, in part because its simplicity and relative shallowness was able to link disparate groups together in support of a populist candidate and campaign. The images of the character, V, from *V for Vendetta,* were useful in the process of quickly linking various opposition groups together in Egypt in 2011 (e.g. Herrera 2014; Gerbaudo 2015). The ubiquitous practice of posting images of cute cats was employed by ISIL to recruit people to their cause and humanize masked militants.

This section goes on to describe the process whereby individuals form transboundary political communities that I call collective subjectivities. I turn to the digital protest activities of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and the various Occupy movements of the early 2010s to reveal how a transnational liberally-oriented collective subjectivity formed as a result of digitally-mediated interpersonal communications. Local and transnational activists were able to enroll in causes across borders. Looking at these cases in combination with concepts associated with contentious politics literature illuminates how cooperation on issues like openness and human rights is more likely depending on the degree to which inter-societal or interpersonal ties to like-minded persons obtain in a particular transnational arrangement. Largely ad hoc, overlapping and cross-border political communities

often take on a networked or horizontal form populated by individuals bound by social ties as well as commitments to particular issues or norms. Yet, it is the character of their emergence and perpetuation—not their ambiguous organizational form—that is of greatest consequence for their behavior—disruption—and political effects.

I argue that the digital mediation of everyday practices affects the constitution and diffusion of idea about appropriate forms of governance, providing them—in the historical context considered, here—liberal inclination. Transnational flows of information and ideas can either be status quo reinforcing, or, more commonly—and in the cases presented here—revisionist in their effects. Drawing on Chapter 3, I present an account of the emergence of transnationalized and transnationalizable protest movements—formed around digital everyday practices—that informs the concept of collective subjectivity. By historically situating social media content historically during the protest events in Cairo and Hong Kong, I reveal a process whereby people form transboundary political communities around practice-based political agency.

More specifically, I argue that there are four key factors to determining the political orientation of a collective subjectivity character of and its perspective on change and disruption. First—what is the power-political position as perceived by its (potential members)?

Second is the prevailing normative environment. While the late aughts and early 2010s favored a neoliberalism that is in particular contexts emancipatory (by disruptive accident), there have been other historical epochs favoring other sets of norms. Indeed, the populist wave begun in the UK, US and Europe in 2015 rapidly

challenged neoliberalism's hegemony, the consequences of which will be visited in Chapter 5.

Third is that constitution of particular states or groups of states, especially in terms of forms of governance. One might imagine a continuum of states, where those with mostly liberal (officializing) institutions are located at one end and those with mostly illiberal (officializing) institutions located at the other.

Fourth is the character of societies more or less residing in these states. This is the environment where the potential and actual members of transboundary communities must engage in political action. While neoliberalism is prevalent at the international level, the same is not true across all societies, and these societies may often find themselves at odds with the "official" norms promoted by their governments. Although Rawls' formulation in "Law of Peoples*"* is not unproblematic, in terms of analysis it is useful to think of societies as either receptive or compatible (or not) to normative arguments or sentiments emanating from abroad.

The formation and political content of protest actions foregrounds an emergent (and increasingly effective) "unit" founded on "doing and making" things that challenges illiberal state behavior, intervenes in and transforms 'official' foreign policy, and formulates its own 'tactical' policy. I label these types of entities as "societies of sharing." In its ongoing attempt to account for the digital characteristics of transnational actors, IR may acknowledge the transformative potential of an emerging global civil society using linking and sharing practices as the basis for action. This action often occurs against the state.

4.3.1 Facebook Lies and Social Ties: Forming Political Communities through Global Communications Practices

Beginning in 2009, the Middle East, North Africa, parts of Europe and Asia, and the United States witnessed a cascade of contentious politics. The activities of liberally-minded and anti-capitalist groups led to policy reform, the formation of new political blocs, and the overturning of authoritarian governments. From Iran, to Egypt, to Occupy, a common feature was the combination of the occupation of urban spaces and the utilization of the Internet, specifically social media, to facilitate the actions. Media outlets hailed these events as Facebook revolutions, implying social media made the events possible, successful. Likewise, early scholarly investigations into the role of social media in these movements cited work in the transnationalism literature to support their claims that these were not in fact exceptional, nor cause for a discussion about a paradigm shift. In particular, social movements scholars were quick to point out that the ties created by social media were, if they even existed, weak at best. I argue that these ties—weak or strong—matter because of the ways in which information is distributed through social media. Specifically, it is distributed—especially when these movements were under way—in a liberal fashion, often with liberal ends in mind. Rather than privileging one type of tie over another, I focus on the distinctly political characteristics of the communication and information flows. Thin does not imply weak.

The social movements literature claims that preexisting ties, structural circumstances, ambitions and efficacy of leaders, opportunity structures, and willingness to take risks determine the emergence, structure, and success rates of protest activity. The transnationalism literature claims that the flows of people and ideas across societies was a necessary condition for the emergence of these

movements, protests, occupations and revolutions. Receiving support from state and interested supporters through appeals to the prevailing international norms is also important. The social ties literature argues that interpersonal transactions contribute to the development of identities and categories that determine contentious politics—altruistic or destructive. This section attempts to synthesize these two sets of propositions by considering social media evidence. It reveals how social media—its liberal character, in particular—helped to facilitate the spread of a think transnational liberally-oriented political agency that moved people to enroll in causes across borders.

Charles Tilly's (2005) work on social ties and contentious politics helps to illuminate some of the reasons *why* the kinds of coalitions came together in solidarity with the Arab revolutions and Occupy movements. His focus on interpersonal transactions, the basic components of any social process, is even more relevant in a digitally-mediated communication environment, where the costs to establishing these transactions are quite low. These transactions accumulate to affect identities, produce and change social boundaries, and, over time, aid in the construction of durable social ties.

Tilly takes up the concept of dispositions—individual and collective—to explain the different types of ties individuals and groups have with each other. Any number of factors are at work in affecting how these dispositions come about: incremental effects, indirect effects, environmental effects, feedback, mistakes, repairs and unanticipated consequences (2005, xiii). But Tilly insists that it is the nature of these interpersonal transactions are the mechanism by which various social processes

must be explained. The dispositions come about along the journey to social ties. In turn, these social processes affect the ways in which identities become salient, if at all.

Tilly argues that it is better to think of observing transactions, rather than relations (2005, 7). These transactions create "memories, shared understandings, recognizable routines, and alterations in the sites themselves" (7). Relations within and across boundaries constitute collective identity (8). Importantly, identities are not always stable, or easily identifiable, without look at the relations themselves: "the same individuals, groups, and social sites shift from identity to identity as they shift relations. Any distinctly political action or process entails an assertion of identity, and often an articulation of the us-them boundaries is included, usually in terms defining relations asymmetrically. Political institutions can help to stabilize certain identities to reinforce particular relations.[53] Regularities are then established. Thus, it stands to reason that an increase in cross-boundary relations, and their being digitally-enabled, may alter the ways in which collective identities are established in the contemporary era.

One of Tilly's projects is to show why people are willing to take on personal costs to help (or hurt) others. In part, he demonstrates how different groups make sacrifices on behalf of others. Altruism is a result of different relations between an actor, a target group and third parties. Thus, it is reasonable to think through the implications of when third parties are within instantaneous reach, especially ones who

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[53] Tilly goes on to add that "Struggles over and within political institutions therefore regularly involve conflicting claims over what political identities have public standing, who has rights or obligations to assert those identities, and what rights or obligations to assert those identities, and what rights or obligations attach to any particular identity" (2005, 9).

have a propensity to come to the aid of others. In particular, this one might posit that this means relatively well-off, northern liberal activists adept at social media techniques employed in local struggles across borders.

Moreover, if democracies might be thought of as 'trust networks', where individuals are obliged to depend significantly on the performances of others, then it would be beneficial to be involved in a larger network. For example, local activists might be willing to take more risks knowing that they have transnational actors on their side to exert pressure on regimes to alter their behavior. Together, these networks fight off state intervention, subvert state capacity, and employ what James Scott calls the weapons of the weak. For altruism, the relevant social processes occur through networks, shared stories, conversation and interaction (2005, 58).[54] He also emphasizes conversational interaction as the basis of social construction of relations and thus, identity.

Getting people to help others across border involves getting the altruistic actors connected to local groups. Tilly claims that in practice, one observes a target actor—"a cluster of previously connected persons among whom have circulated widely accepted

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[54] "Closely observed, however, the same humans turn out to be interacting repeatedly with others, renegotiating who they are, adjusting the boundaries they occupy, modifying their actions in rapid response to other people's reactions, selecting among and altering available scripts, improvising new forms of joint action, speaking sentences no one has ever uttered before, yet responding predictably to their locations within webs of social ties they themselves cannot map in detail. They tell stories about themselves and others that facilitate their social interaction rather than laying out verifiable facts about individual lives. They actually live in deeply relational worlds. If social construction occurs, it happens socially, not in isolated recesses of individual minds" (2005, 59).

stories concerning their strategic situation" (2005, 61). Previous relations with other collective actors affected the generation of the stories that they converse about.

Actors, then, "consist of networks deploying partially shared histories, cultures and collective connections with other actors" (2005, 61). This is because identities are not 'things', but more like networks; having an identity "means to bear a relation" (61). This relates to the social media solidarities as well, where the constant connectedness of friends constantly presents the possibility for identity transformation and adoption, altering the ways in which solidarities are formed and emerge.[55]

Keck & Sikkink (1998) translate the insights of the social movements literature from the domestic to the international level. Transnational advocacy networks are a particular organizational form—a network of *purposive* activists and NGOs—that also strategically found their activities and claims on principled ideas or values. Opportunities arise from the institutional/hierarchical structure and (normative) content of the *world political system* and the timing and nature of domestic problems and institutions. The network form-as-political-space enhances ability for two-level linkage, and the framing processes of the principled ideas taps into human rights and other legitimate discourse with the aim of changing the behavior of states and IOs. The case of human rights networks in Latin America showed how *opportunistic* TANs were able to serve as *alternative* 'unofficial' sources of information on the *bodily-harming* activities of *the vulnerable* Mexican and Argentine governments, *persuade* powerful actors to *leverage* policy changes, and *socialize* the states as norm violators

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[55] One might say that Tilly has a notion of subjectivity when he talks about the conditions under which one might consider an identity explicitly political—that is, when problems of the common good emerge in identity based struggle. More specifically, they become political when public debates and private identities interact; when people "make public claims on the basis of those identities, claims to which governments are either objects or third parties" (62). The key, therefore, is the relation to the state.

turned compliers. Changes in the practices and understandings of states transforms the meaning of sovereignty to differently situated people (215).

Advocacy networks are an important source of new norms and identities in the international system. Often, they seek to 'hold the feet to the fire', so to speak, to inspire state actors to adhere to the principles they espouse in public. In other words, these 'new ideas' (Keck & Sikkink 1998, x) may actually mean asking actors to conform to liberal behaviors, to conform to the logic of appropriateness. The alternative channel of communication that networks provide create a feedback loop from the target country, to the international arena, and back to the home country. If a local activist group can enroll the help of a transnational network, it can greatly benefit from an increase in political resources.

This perspective implicitly emphasizes the primacy of Northern transnational activists. They write, "for less powerful third world actors, networks provide access, leverage, and information (and often money) they could not expect to have on their own; for northern groups, they make credible the assertion that they are struggling with and not only for, their southern partners." (Keck & Sikkink 1998, 12-13). But it does show that connections across borders can be beneficial for reform movements. In the case of the Arab Spring, they helped to bring information to the local activists, and brought awareness of the activities on the ground to the international public. In Occupy, the external observers helped generate media and political sympathy, for example.

Transnational actors are part of an emerging global civil society populated by local advocacy and civic groups and organizations, and international organizations. This global civil society is founded on a thin layer of liberal norms and values that

inspire action (Boli and Thomas 1999; Finnemore 1996; Keck & Sikkink 1998; Klotz 1996; Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999; Wapner 1995). Transnationalism is thought to be something qualitatively distinct because it does not take place within a contained liberal system, but it is often functionally analogous to domestic processes of politics.

Global civil society can be said to govern, and therefore, shift the location of authority away from potentially illiberal or illegitimate rulers, due to its ability to bring public and private actors together in a common space. Increasingly complex interactions between supranational and subnational state actors are occurring promoting the formation of governance networks among state and non-state actors (Betsill & Bulkeley 2006, 144-9). While NGOs are often credited with being the first movers, individuals as well as states can begin processes of change through civil society as well, and none alone is sufficient to affect the public and foreign policies of states or to solve particular transnational issues (Wapner 1997). Global civil society governs horizontally while situated in the middle level of a hierarchy of governance spanning from individuals to states (66). Motivated NGOs can politicize its institutions and mobilize the material and ideational resources of power to take action themselves or pressure states into making policy changes (79-81).

Tilly further details a list of mechanisms by which altruism could come about. Four are worth mentioning in the context of the Egyptian revolution (per the interview evidence presented by Gerbaudo 2012). First, the "public enforcement of fair treatment within networks of potential activists" was seen in the pleas for leaderlessness, inclusivity and unity in the conversations in the public and digital spaces. Second, "guarantees of mutual support among network members" could be observed in the work of third party transnational activists. This includes the guarantees

that Twitter would not lock activist accounts, and the institution of the innovative ways to publish tweets. Third, the "signaling of determination among potential participants in risky actions" was certainly seen in the internal discourse among activists on Facebook. For example, the early social media presence of the Egyptian revolution implored people to come to Tahrir, no matter what, and that those not going were not serious about Egypt's future (as reported in Gerbaudo 2012). These proclamations helped to make the possibility of collective action more realistic, even in the absence of hard evidence that there would be more than a few dozen people bold enough to show up. Finally, the "activation of shared stories with which defection is incompatible" could be seen in the invocation of a desire for dignity and accountability in the government and the market. These unifying calls helped to enroll activist networks abroad concerned with human rights, international law, and liberalism, generally.

The next section presents some secondary evidence from the Occupy movements and the Egyptian revolution. It focuses on how the groups, movements, and transnational communities came together with an eye toward the emergence of a collective political subjectivity oriented toward disruption and liberal revolution.

4.4 The Arab Spring and Occupy-Style Movements: Forms, Practices, and Performances

Many scholars have investigated the Arab Spring and Occupy protests from a variety of perspectives. For the most part, comparative studies have stopped short of offering specific causal arguments about why the movements diffused and why they were similar in nature across very different structural situations. The literature generally agrees that the movements were similar in three ways. They were leaderless

& horizontal, organized into networks, and were focused on themes of dignity and anti-corruption. The revolutionaries themselves were for the most part middle class, relatively well-educated but underemployed, leaderless and digitally fluent youth (Hussain & Howard 2013, 49). Also, each local society in which the movements took place had a relatively highly developed Internet infrastructure[56] that made a real difference for organizing capacity and as a training ground for activists and participants alike.

When the Arab Spring began in 2010-11, commentators in the West, seizing upon the example of the Green Movement in Iran, labeled the uprisings 'Facebook revolutions' or "Twitter revolutions". The implication was that social media platforms were a new independent variable that made the protest movements successful where others had failed in the past. The first waves of scholarly work focused on the power that social media had in its ability to reduce the transactions costs of mobilization. Instead of focusing on the magical properties of social media to induce unprecedented changes, more agency was given to the local activists who used Facebook and Twitter and SMS to make their movements work. A second wave of work on the Arab Spring

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[56] According to Kavanaugh and colleagues (2011), only 19% of Tunisians are Facebook users, as of 2010. While these are seemingly low numbers, it is important to remember that the vast majority of Facebook users are young adults who make up a significant proportion of the population in Middle Eastern countries (2-3). These numbers are also bolstered by the penetration of cell phones. As of 2009, Tunisia had nearly full adoption (95%), with Iran at close to 71%, while Egypt had 67% of their population with cell phones. Libya also had 78%. While proxy servers were useful in enabling some users to get around government blockages of particular websites, cell phones are especially useful in such circumstances and are especially useful for purposes of organizing protests and demonstrations, especially through the use of SMS and Twitter.

connected it to other protest movements occurring around the world, under the broad umbrella of Occupy. What they described was a diffusion of a liberal protest politics. As we move further away from events, there is more evidence available about the content of the uprisings. And while the early pronouncements of Twitter and Facebook revolutions were premature, bringing the transnational back into the analysis reveals how the ideas and organizing modes were aided by the activities of publics across borders. And it was these activities, these practices, themselves that served as the foundation for the nascent platforms that overthrew regimes.

For example, while all of the Occupy movements were frustrated with the economic situation to some degree, jobs and butter were not major motivations. Instead, in Egypt, activists were inspired by Western and Asian media: video games, Internet memes, Youtube mashups, and Hollywood Films. The movie *V for Vendetta* was a major inspiration for Arab youth, as were Noam Chomsky's lectures and interviews available on YouTube for Hong Kong youth. The rapid culture of sharing present on digital platforms meant the quick appropriation of whatever content was available; it either did not bother local activists that Western popular culture would grease the revolutionary gears, or, more likely, they had no choice but to mobilize on common frames. Crafting a new indigenous political identity and associated performances was too much work in the fast-paced digital era. These protesters were and self-proclaimed revolutionaries were seeking a liberalizing moment, more than an overturning of their respective political systems. This section goes on to explain the connection between intrasocietal politics, the use of global popular cultural artifacts, and the diffusion of protest politics thin on values and demands but heavy on action.

4.4.1 The Movements and Leaderless and Thematic, not Programmatic

From Egypt to New York, the members of the movements claimed there were no leaders. This became the source of much frustration on the part of news media, pundits, and government officials who wished to engage with the movement. The discourse of these groups—both in the streets and online—was formulated impersonally: "We are Tahrir, we are all Wael Ghonim, we are Facebook,' and 'We are the 99%." While there were of course savvy strategists behind the construction and promotion of the leaderless theme, or what Gerbaudo (2012) called "choreographers", each group *claimed* to be following the motif.

In terms of their content, the movements were loosely quite similar in their demands, specific or not. They wanted to be afforded basic dignity, meaning more avenues to political and marketplace participation. Often this included appeals to (liberal) rights regarding non-discrimination, inclusion, etc. But that was about as far as each movement went in terms of presenting specific demands or a political platform or program from the outset. The idea was to first come together as a people, then figure out the plans through loosely democratic participatory practices. These heterogeneous groups were tied together, also, through an emotional appeal, to, in Castell's words, *hope.* Including personal action frames that are inclusive of different personal reasons for protesting a situation in need of change is beneficial. But using communication technologies to share these inclusive themes is just as crucial (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012: 744). The highly inclusive nature of the theme also eschewed the imperative to create a united "We" (748). This enabled participants to keep participating in their own way, maintaining the movement's momentum.

Moreover, studies of movements' organizational structures show that the most successful ones were careful to keep conventional organizations from becoming too

involved. The *los Indignados*, or the 15M movement, in Spain, was a "personalized" movement (as opposed to institutionalized). Conventional organizations like political parties were not very visible. In a survey of 15M protesters, only 38% recognized the involvement of organizations with physical addresses and offices. And those that were cited by the respondents were on average less than three years old (Bennett & Segerberg 2013, 741). Even so, they were able to communicate, without these connections to major civil society organizations, with the larger public, in large part thanks to their social media practices.

In turn, the movements have been described as *horizontal.* The significance of this description was that any particular participant was just as important as the next, and that—in theory—every participant was a *leader,* while at the same time only speaking for themselves. This is what Gerbaudo called an "irreducible multiplicity" (2012). The idea is there is less need to gather people together around something they share in common with each other, which encourages spontaneity and swarm behavior. In these movements, social media demonstrated a capacity to enable collective action in the absence of a long process to construct common identities. Castells argues that democracy "was present in the experience of Internet networks in which horizontality is the norm, and there is little need for leadership because the coordination functions can be exercised by the network itself through interaction between its nodes" (2012:, 129). The organizational form of the Occupy and the early days of the Arab Uprisings were inextricably tied up with the affordances of social media.

The horizontal form used in local instances of the movements went hand-in-hand with the movements assuming a network form. The properties of networks helped the movement spread rapidly from Tahrir to Sinai, from New York to

Cleveland, from Madrid to Barcelona. The movements gained momentum by tapping into existing social networks formed around soccer (Egypt) and photo blogging (Singapore), as well as those populated by longtime activists. Networks also allowed for flexibility in the face of state intrusion, and the acquisition of necessary physical resources like food and shelter for the continued occupation of public space.

The movements used specific social media in specific ways. While Gerbaudo notes that "it is not really a matter of technology, efficacy, or quality of service, but a question of the social and cultural practices through this new medium" (2012, 154), some social media and their uses are distinctive.

For example, Facebook was a place for recruitment. It had an ability to tap into already existing social networks and forge necessary weak ties. Notably, a fan page for a soccer club was the first catalyst in the Egyptian revolution. It becomes a rallying point for identity construction and therefore has a large role to play in Tilly's contentious politics. Activists used Facebook to recruit people and train them; these efforts were most needed and successful for reaching the largely unpoliticized youth (Gerbaudo 2012, 144). Facebook catered to the culture of images an instantaneity; it makes it easy to share and pass along a sentence or a picture. Facebook was the way to help participants make the leap from online sympathizing to actual presence in the streets. Twitter was a place for internal coordination. It helps with the emotional part of the movement, especially in being able to connect those observing from afar with those on the ground. Twitter's emphasis on textual information makes conversations more specific.

The participants themselves grasped the important role that the internet played in the protest movements. After the events of the Arab Spring, Facebook users

reported that they thought Facebook was primarily used to raise awareness about social movements (31% in both Tunisia and Egypt), to spread awareness of the social movements to the rest of the world (33% and 24% in Tunisia and Egypt), to primarily organize protest actions and mobilize participants (22% and 30% in Tunisia and Egypt). The use of Facebook for entertainment was thought to be almost negligible. Social media was reported to be the most common source of information about the social movements, with other forms of international and state-sponsored media lagging far behind (88-94% to 58-40%). Moreover, in Egypt and Tunisia, the state's blocking of the internet was seen as a positive event for the social movements, as it was thought to inspire activist creativity (Lynch 2011, 74).

The movements, especially in their form and basic normative orientation, diffused from Tunisia in 2010 to Iceland's Kitchenware Revolution, to the Egyptian Revolution, to the Arab Uprisings in Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain, to the *Indignadas* in Spain, to Occupy in the United States. They all network, and they all occupy urban space. Moreover, they all function globally and locally simultaneously. The Movements are viral, following the logic of Internet networks. That is why, Castells (2012) argues, they diffused. This is a different story than one that would be told by the transnational activist network literature, where norm entrepreneurs would be doing most of the work. According to this framework, they diffused because of demonstration effects: If it worked over there, it could work here, too.

Hussain & Howard (2013), generalizing from the evidence drawn from the Arab Spring, generates a phase theory of regime change, in which a few steps involved the use of digital communications technology 1) preparation phase "involving activists' use of digital media across time to build solidarity networks and

identification of collective identities and goals" 3) protest phase "where by employing offline networks and digital technologies, small groups strategically organized on large numbers" 4) international buy-in phase, "where digital media networks extended the range of local coverage to international broadcast networks" 6) follow-on information warfare phase, "where various actors, state-based and from international civic advocacy networks, compete to shape the future of civil society and information infrastructure that made it possible" (49). This is a fairly standard understanding of how it worked in each local context.

In looking at tweets containing the hashtags #jan25 #cairo #egypt #elbaradei, Kavanaugh et al. (2011) found that about half emanated from within Egypt, while the remaining were sent from outside the country. After Khaled Said was allegedly murdered by police for videotaping police abuse and corruption, a highly popular Facebook page was created by Wael Ghonim to inspire new activism. Interestingly, the page was in English, presumably to reach both larger educated audiences in Egypt and abroad. Finally, compared to other cases, a much larger proportion of the tweets using the above hashtags emanated from Egypt, with London, Kuwait, and the US lagging far behind.

Although Twitter was integral in the Egyptian revolution, especially after the government restricted web access, outside observers dubbed the events in Egypt a 'Facebook Revolution'. Social media was particularly important in the early stages of the revolution, especially in its ability to facilitate coordinated protests across many cities (Karagiannopoulos 2012, 160). The protesters were most able to take advantage of external efforts to help them. During the week of Internet restrictions, Google and Twitter offered a new 'Speak-2-Tweet' service that allowed users to call a phone

number where they could post and listen to Twitter messages. This service did not require direct access to the Internet (Khamis & Vaughn 2011). According to Lynch (2013), social media "played an outsized role in shaping global narratives" (63). Egyptian activists were supported by efforts from abroad while simultaneously influencing global public opinion.

I argue there remains a lack of understanding as to *why* the protests diffused so rapidly across borders, even as the contexts were quite different. The particular processes of diffusion, in this case, digital practices, most effectively explains the similarities. This is different than an argument about the persuasive power of the rhetoric itself (e.g. dignity and human rights are good for everyone). The digital practices were familiar to potential transnational participants. They were easily able to observe and even contribute to protests across borders. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue "personal action frames do not spread automatically. People must show each other how they can appropriate, shape and share themes" (746). The techniques they engaged in were easy to understand. Facebooking cats is strikingly similar to Facebooking protests.

4.4.2 Summary

There is a link between a collective subjectivity that is bourgeoning across borders and what people do everyday (e.g. everyday digital practices). People find themselves among like-minded others. The tasks they are engaged in are not "liberal" in a strict sense, but rather, they are engaging with the construction of a collective political subjectivity that is more or less oriented toward advancing liberal democracy (or not). I use liberal and illiberal as shorthand in the tables, here.

We see evidence of the diffusion in the content of what was shared in each context, with a steady progression from mundane forms of transboundary sharing and communication to more radical forms as the occupation or uprising nears. This gets at the question of how much (if any) these events are a result of the transnationalization of protest politics. Going directly to the individual and their actions is one way to assess whether the transnationalization of performative liberal revolutionary everyday practices is an important factor.

Although there are three main factors that explain the emergence of the uprisings, the first—the presence of transnational flows—is constant. As such, the other two factors—the character of the governance and the propensities of the concomitant society—generate four different possibilities, as shown in the classic two-by-two table below. This chapter ends up focusing on the second and third expectations as these fit most closely with the Egyptian Revolution and OCM.

The second scenario is that, if a transnational public links with the liberal minority, the theory predicts contention at the domestic level. The contention leads to a mobilization challenging "official" doctrine of domestic politics. This process will have a relatively large liberalizing and pacifying effect between societies. There will be little, if any, observable effect in foreign policy. The increased cooperation across societies becomes possible due to the possible opening of society—the lifting of blanket censorship, for example. This process is a result of the inherent liberal properties that go along with transnationalism, especially regarding dignity and openness. In other words, contention occurs at the domestic level when digital practices form a transboundary community where people in an illiberal society

experience liberal society by proxy through the content they see shared to them and pass onto others.

The third scenario is that, if a transnational public links with a (large minority) liberal society, the theory predicts cooperation at the transnational level. The cooperation leads to the largest, liberalizing, and pacifying effects, both between states and across societies. The increased cooperation is due to the possible or actual revolution or regime change. The change in foreign policy is also an effect of public opinion. In other words, contention forms between a society and its government.

Table 4.1: Effects of Protest Activity in Different Societies and Governments

	Liberal government	Illiberal government
Liberal society	Strengthening of liberal norms, holding government accountable for illiberal policy	Potential regime change
Illiberal society	Perceived potential for regime change	Intrasocietal clash leading to reforms (liberal or illiberal)

Note: The implied constant is the diffusion of the activity via information and sharing practices.

Table 4.2: Cases

	Liberal government	Illiberal government
Liberal society	US, State Department change re: Egypt	**Egypt**
Illiberal society	U.S. far-right; ISIS in UK and France	**Hong Kong**

Note: The implied constant is the diffusion of the activity via information and sharing practices.

4.5 Egypt: From Digital Spaces for Youth Culture to Regime Change

There were at least four reasons why the observers should not have reacted with such surprise to the Egyptian uprising. First, liberal sentiments had been stirring for about a decade. Before the protest activities began, a poll by Pew reported that a majority of Egyptian Muslims felt that democracy was a better form of government than any alternative (Kavanaugh et al. 2011). Generally, the public did not accept Mubarak's mid-2000s democratizing reforms as constituting actual democracy (Karagiannopoulos 2012). The lack of true liberalization was the regime's major downfall.

Second, Egyptian society had also had relatively extensive experience with the internet and cyber-activism (Faris 2013). The government actively promoted the use of the Internet in order to establish a strong telecommunications industry and information society (158). This followed the same kind of adoption rate as satellite dishes just a few years prior, which in some ways, primed Egyptians for the rapid incorporation of Internet connected devices like PCs and mobile phones. The Internet was relatively liberalized in terms of access, penetration, and access cost, and therefore, led to an increase of online communities that were critical of the Mubarak regime. For the most part, the Internet was used for recreation, not business. It competed with satellite TV for the eyes of Egyptians. Egyptians joined Facebook in order to connect with family and friends. In sum, there was a sense that the internet could remain innocuous and largely apolitical under an authoritarian regime.

Third, before the revolution, bloggers had established a robust culture online dedicated to exposing corruption, police brutality, and other hypocritical and

undemocratic practices (Karagiannopoulos 2012). The 2010 elections were a turning point for these bloggers, as they were not independently supervised and were held amidst crackdowns against independent media and the organized opposition parties. Chargers of unfair balloting procedures were widespread. [57] Once Facebook became widely adopted, people were incidentally exposed to information spread by political activists.

It seems clear that Egyptians actively sought information emanating from other societies online, and were able to learn about other political cultures and other political systems, and their experience with human rights. The longtime, or perhaps, "professional" activists played a significant role in shaping the limited programmatic demands. Indeed, observers of the Arab spring argued that global communications networks are a strong mechanism for spreading political rights and responding to limited demands for human dignity (Lynch 2013, 79). The development of the Arab Public Sphere (Lynch 2013) also prepared potential allies of the revolution for political change. Its presence allowed social media to play a significant role in the rapid diffusion of the movement across the region.

The fourth and most controversial reason were the actions of transnational activists and international actors. They reached out to potential dissidents and provided support in quasi-official ways.

During the final years of the Bush Administration, "cyberdissident diplomacy" began in earnest in Egypt. Following a 2003 White Paper on the subject, the U.S. State

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[57] Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Systematic Crackdown Days before Elections," November 24, 2011, http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/11/24/egypt-systematic-crackdown-days-elections

Department aided cyber activists directly. The thinking was that, if these largely young, underemployed societies failed to liberalize and/or become friendly with the neoliberal consumerist capitalist order, the US could very easily find itself facing several Islamist states in the region. The connected youth were viewed as a way to halt the rise of "radical Islam". The concurrent unpopular U.S.-led Iraq War made the public diplomacy route all the more urgent.

The State Department put very high-ranking officials on the case (including Anne Marie Slaughter), creating the Alliance of Youth Movements (AYM)—a quasi-civil society entity meant to engage in public diplomacy (Herrera 2014, 32). AYM reached out to partner with and subsequently train dissidents from states that were longtime allies with the West. This meant that public diplomacy was actively seeking to undermine the regimes with which the U.S. had cooperative relationships. The fascinating contradiction was not viewed as such as State increasingly outsourced the cyber aspects of the initiative to Silicon Valley.

Later, the National Endowment for Democracy supported the more mainstream pro-democracy movements El-Ghad. State also launched initiatives with several quasi-civil society groups, such as the Aldeson Institution, which was responsible for the creation of Cyberdissidents.org. Taxpayer money began to fund ways to circumvent Internet censorship after the successes of innovations during the Green Movement in Iran. To top it off, Hillary Clinton gave a major speech on net freedom in 2010.

On the activism side, State tapped Howcast Media to make how-to videos, viral style, on being a dissident. As Hererra argues "AYM, by packaging politics in a way that's fun, cool, and creative, tries to attract youth to adopt a brand of politics that is liberal, pro-business, and that reinforces the global system of power" (2014, 39).

The goal was to “brand” the youth. To do so, it launched the Alliance of Youth Movements (AYM) which held a summit in New York in 2008 (35).[58] State white papers were explicit about marrying activism with consumerism. Herrera (2014) worried this strategy risked depoliticizing the protests (36). At the very least, it successfully de-radicalized the first waves of protesters.[59]

Activists had organized protests against police brutality on January 25th for many years before 2011. As such, they had not expected it to be much different from other years, with only the most politically engaged citizens showing up. But Facebook had been made available in Egypt in 2010. It changed the game because it was open to ordinary people. According to Ali, an Egyptian activist, “people who showed up in Tahrir weren't just your friends, they were your Facebook friends” (Tufekci, 2017). Facebook helped to reduce pluralistic ignorance—"not knowing that dissent and discontent are common feelings in a country but remain unspoken” (Tufekci, 2017). Everyday people were able to share their political preferences to each other on social media, thus learning that there were many more reform-minded people than they would have otherwise known.

After Khaled Said was allegedly murdered by police for videotaping police abuse and corruption, a highly popular Facebook page, “We Are All Khaled Said”,

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[58] This summit was hosted by Whoopi Goldberg and was webcast by MTV.

[59] The concept of branding in part explains the lack of depth in the various Occupy movements’ political platforms. To be a bit unfair, one might say that all the digital activists wanted to do was continue their lifestyles of consumption (both the banal and de Certeau conceptualization). If revolution was the only way to maintain that, fine. All the better they could participate online, the way they did everything else. These depoliticized chickens came home to roost with Occupy Wall Street in the US.

was created by Wael Ghonim, a full time employee of Google, with the explicit goal of generating solidarity and anti-police state consensus. The page was created in English, presumable to reach larger audiences abroad and to appeal to more elite-educated audiences in Egypt. Before-and-after death photos of Khaled Said went viral the day after he was killed, and almost immediately, his life became a blank slate to tell stories. Ghonim and his fellow anonymous page admin, "Elshaheed", executed a master marketing plan perfectly as they used the Facebook page to start organizing and developing a new brand/ideology. The first actions were "silent stands", where activists dressed in black, protesting the permanent "emergency law" that enabled Mubarak to remain in power and his police to terrorize the poor, the youth, and pro-democracy elements.

The focus remained, all along, on ending police brutality. But the cyberdissidents had larger designs that came from their years they spent online, on TV, and in videogames. They appropriated and remixed pop-cultural content from the West and from East Asia. On the Khaled Said Facebook page, a typical commenter, referring to the common video game practice of "respawns" (a player's character is reborn after death so the game can continue), claimed that Egyptian youths had "died thousands of times" before defeating the "monster" and that they will not "ever get tired or bored" in fighting military rule" (Herrera, 2014, 74). Another quipped that "it seems like the SCAF (Supreme Council of Armed Forces) didn't play [popular Japanese-created zombie-themed 3rd person shooter] Resident Evil" (75). This kind of poaching occurred also with the widespread use of the narrative present in the Hollywood film, *V for Vendetta.* The activists explicitly referred to the movie as inspiration for their actions, including the march on Tahrir and their demands, and, at

times, wore Guy Fawkes masks a la the film's main character, V.[60] Another Facebook page admin, AbdelRahman Mansour believed that publics existed in spite of governments. He was also explicitly referred to the movie *Battle in Seattle* as inspiration.

Wael Ghonim did not support the revolutionary desires of the Facebook group. However, the successful example of Tunisia made the revolution cascade almost inevitable. January 25, 2011, was proposed as the day of action. The Khaled Said Facebook page created a Facebook event titled, "The Revolution of the Egyptian People", the invitation for which reached over 500,000 within 12 hours. On January 25, protests occurred across Egypt, but tens of thousands poured into the streets in Cairo. On the 26th, the regime arrested many activists. The "Friday of Anger" on the 28th was what caught real, sustained international attention, as hundreds of thousands protested across Cairo and other cities. The police were withdrawn from the streets in favor of the military. A curfew was imposed on the 29th, which protests widely ignored as they occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo. Mubarak offered several concessions on February 1st, but refused to leave office. Throughout the next week, the military increased its control over the country, and Mubarak addressed the populace, saying there would be a military coup.

The Mubarak regime shut down internet access during the Tahrir occupation—January 28 to February 2—not only in an effort to prevent organizing, but also to flood social networks with pro-Mubarak messages, hoping that they could fight sharing with sharing. When the internet came back online, it became a war of virtual

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[60] When Ben Ali left Tunisia, the image that went viral was a picture of V with a Tunisian flag in the background.

memes, played out online, and there is evidence to suggest that the Mubarak regime made up for its losing the battle in virtual space by taking to the streets, violently (Herrera 2014, 119). The violent crackdown backfired and the SCAF announced Mubarak's resignation on February 11th. With Mubarak's removal, the phase of transnational digital activism ended.

During the lead up to January 25, members of the pro-democracy 6th of April movement convinced the cyberactivists to incorporate messages about the dire state of the economy in their demands—bread, freedom, social justice (Herrera 2014, 113). For the cyberactivists, however, finding culprits of a bad economy was more difficult than finding those responsible for police brutality.

Although the U.S. was involved in liberalizing youth in Egypt for instrumental political reasons—to discredit the Muslim Brotherhood—Egyptian cyberactivists were able to alter the "official" directives, effectively engaging in *poaching.* Regardless of the initial motivations, the outcomes happened to be altruistic, largely due to the transnationalization of support from other publics.

4.5.1 Discussion

The Egyptian uprising reveals how a transnational public can enroll itself in an ongoing struggle in a (thinly) liberal society to aid a contentious politics strong enough to overthrow a regime. It also helps to show how a collective subjectivity emerges and evolves in relation to the individualized collective actions of countless people and reactions from official state actors.

Adapting Tilly's arguments from earlier in the chapter, there are several ways in which altruism on the part of transnational actors may emerge, four of which are germane to the Egyptian case. First, the "public enforcement of fair treatment within

networks of potential activists" (Tilly 2005, 69) was seen in the pleas for leaderlessness, inclusivity and unity in the conversations in the public and digital spaces. Second, "guarantees of mutual support among network members" (Tilly 2005, 69) could be observed in the work of third-party transnational activists. This includes the guarantees that Twitter would not lock activist accounts, and the institution of the innovative ways to publish tweets. Third, the "signaling of determination among potential participants in risky actions" (Tilly 2005, 69) was certainly seen in the internal discourse among activists on Facebook. For example, the early social media presence of the Egyptian revolution implored people to come to Tahrir, no matter the cost, and that those not going were not serious about Egypt's future (as reported in Gerbaudo 2012). These proclamations helped to make the possibility of collective action more realistic, even in the absence of hard evidence that there would be more than a few dozen people bold enough to show up. Finally, the "activation of shared stories with which defection is incompatible" (Tilly 2005, 69) could be seen in the invocation of a desire for dignity and accountability in the government and the market. These unifying calls helped to enroll activist networks abroad concerned with human rights, international law, and liberalism, generally.

While scholars initially worried about overstating the role of Facebook in the Egyptian revolution, the emerging consensus is that the revolution could hardly have occurred without it (this is confirmed by the professional assassination of at least five Facebook page admins following the resignation of Mubarak [Herrera 2014]). The "We are all Khaled Said" and similar Facebook pages were rallying points for identity construction. Activists used Facebook to recruit and train fellow activists; these efforts

were most important for successfully reaching the largely unpoliticized youth (Gerbaudo 2012, 144).

In 2011, Facebook's desire to cater to internet cultures centered around images and instantaneity made it easy for activists to view and pass along something as brief as a sentence or a picture, posting to their personal timelines. Facebook's pages feature, in particular, helped participants make the leap from online sympathizing to actual presence in the streets. After the events of the Arab Spring, Facebook users reported (Mourtada & Salem 2011) that they thought Facebook was primarily used to raise awareness about social movements (31% in both Tunisia and Egypt), to spread awareness of the social movements to the rest of the world (33% and 24% in Tunisia and Egypt), or primarily to organize protest actions and mobilize participants (22% and 30% in Tunisia and Egypt). The use of Facebook for entertainment was thought to be almost negligible. Social media was reported to be the most common source of information about the social movements, with other forms of international and state-sponsored media lagging far behind (88-94% to 58-40%). Moreover, in Egypt and Tunisia, the state's blocking of the Internet was seen as a positive event for the social movements, as it was thought to inspire activist creativity (Lynch 2011, 74).

What makes the age of social media activism possibly unique is the speed with which an image and story can evolve and diffuse in the guise of a meme and travel over space, as it did with Khaled Said. This means little time for fact checking or for careful reflection on the meaning of a movement. Online activists faced a challenge in balancing the benefits of spontaneity with careful planning (Hererra 2014, 99-101). The logic of sharing disrupted normal social movement political processes. In the end, they settled for spontaneity.

As for explicit transnational assistance, the protesters were most able to take advantage of external efforts to help them. Just days after Mubarak fell, Al Jazeera created a TV station meant to prop up the message of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—something the company had done in Tunisia. During the week of Internet restrictions, Google and Twitter offered a new Speak-2-Tweet service that allowed users to call a phone number where they could post and listen to Twitter messages. This service did not require direct access to the Internet (Khasmis & Vaughn 2011). The movements further reveal that, "at least for regimes deemed authoritarian by western standards, such as those of Iran and Egypt, western social media corporations try their best to prevent censoring of communications in order to serve free speech values" (Karagiannapoulos 2012, 166). This is a trend that did not last very long.

The presence of Western powers and their proxies in virtual spaces made local societies susceptible to conspiracy theories regarding the Arab Spring (Herrera 2014, 146). For example, leading Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan has written that the U.S. and its information technology companies were at the top of wide-reaching conspiracy to overturn regimes across MENA. Wael Ghonim was a full-time employee at Google while he was also the catalyst of the Khaled Said Facebook page. While these circumstances dampen the hopes of local activists and the global left, the Egyptian revolution moved the needle in the liberal direction in civil society—if not at the upper levels of government.

While Facebook was used extensively for discussing the normative content of the revolution, Twitter was a main site for both sharing the news and connecting entities interested in the outcome of the protest movement. During extraordinary events, ordinary people take on journalistic practices (Papacharissi 2015, 43). But they

also took to Twitter to "simultaneously access and release both personal and communal aspirations" (Papacharissi 2015, 57).

4.6 Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution

The Occupy Central Movement (OCM) launched officially on September 28, 2014. But its roots were growing for years in advance. Law Professor Benny Tai, Sociologist Chan Kin-man, and Religious Priest Chu Yiu-ming are credited as the founders and leaders of OCM, but it was a larger group of students' storming the government's headquarters in the Admiralty on September 26, 2014, that made the occupation and protest an imperative. The OCM's political philosophy called for a just political system and had only three demands: 1) election of a chief executive in HKSAR, 2) universal and equal suffrage by 2017, and 3) widespread civic deliberation and participation. It also stipulated nonviolence. The occupation lasted 79 days, with hundreds of thousands joining the protest at one time or another. The Occupy Central movement rapidly transformed from a tightly scripted political mobilization to a more organic, grassroots, and participatory occupation.

Like other Occupy sites around the world, Hong Kong had evolved from a society of widespread equality to one of massive socio-economic inequality. Shortly after HKSAR joined China, the Asian financial crisis wiped out middle class wealth. More people found themselves living in slums with little government support—something that was promised by incorporation into the PRC. Housing became too expensive and housing reforms benefitted the capitalist class. And HKSAR citizens were not hesitant in connected the commencement of Beijing rule to social problems. As a result, they started participating politically more frequently as they came to learn

how much leverage Beijing could exercise over them—an unexpected instance where postcolonial domination is much worse than its preceding colonial version.

OCM was only the latest and most successful mobilizations designed to bring attention to Hong Kong's unjust political system. Hong Kong citizens were under the impression that constitutional reforms had to be approved by the people before they could take effect on politics. The Hong Kong Federation of Students began organizing in 2012, along with Civic Passion—a group advocating for civic nomination. Both groups were staunchly pro-Hong Kong and aimed at resisting mainlandization. Civic Passion established Passion Times, a new media platform, in the same year. It presented a localist viewpoint against the perceived dominance of the Mainland and party-centric sentiments in mass media. Its major function was to critique ideology.

As in other Occupy sites, the state opened the neoliberal playbook, opting to encourage tourism with the hope it would stimulate the economy. This had the unintended effect of pitting mainland Chinese against HKSAR citizens. There were widespread perceptions that birth tourism represented a real problem to the viability of the Hong Kong welfare state. Mainlanders are regularly referred to as "locusts" in the same breath as the hatred for the "government-business collusion" (Lo 2015, 111).

These socioeconomic conditions precipitated the rise of the democratic left in the Legislative Council elections that took place in September, 2012. HKSAR government finds itself in a typically precarious postcolonial position: it is weaker than its new metropole, Beijing, and also weaker than its civil society, and is thus particularly sensitive to incursions from either entity. At the same time, the PRC sees this Hong Kong civil society as a threat to the legitimacy of the HSKAR governance, but also to governance more generally. The National Security Commission formed by

Xi Jinping in 2013 to confront various forms of insurgency groups classified OCM as a threat (Lo 2015, 113).

4.6.1 Occupying Hong Kong's Political Spaces

The manifesto of OCM was developed over several years and specified concrete proposals regarding the electoral system. And while electoral reforms—more specifically, making reforms more democratic and transparent—was the major sticking point, OCM hoped to promote democracy while simultaneously educating the public about politics. This desire was reflected in the four practical steps that were also outlined in the manifesto: dialogue, deliberation, citizen's authorization, civil disobedience.

Events transpired at a more rapid pace than the original leaders expected or hoped. For example, deliberation proper requires basic political knowledge and tolerance. According to Lo (2015), the citizenry were fairly adept at talking about politics but were lacking a widespread commitment to reciprocity—the police intervened to halt quarrels between OCM supporters and anti-OCM citizens.

The three student leaders, Joshua Wong Chi-fung, Alex Chou, Lester Shum maintained that the so-called Umbrella Revolution was not really a revolution. It was first and foremost framed as a movement to accelerate the pace and enlarge the scope of democratization in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). [61]

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[61] In turn, significant portions of the manifesto were controversial due to their explicit reference to international standards regarding the justness of a political system. This challenged longstanding notions about Hong Kong's possessing its own political identity and, in turn, its own kind of democratic way. OCM supporters, according to surveys, have a relatively strong self-identification with Hong Kong (as opposed to "China"). Lo, 2015.

The events began when electoral reforms were handed down on August 31, 2014. By September 22, the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and Scholarism called for a boycott of high school classes. On September 26, a protest outside the central government offices resulted in a small number of students to enter the building, some of whom were subsequently arrested. The OCM officially launched on September 28, and the occupation began, complete with a reactionary press conference from the Chief Executive of HKSAR. A few days later, protesters gathered around the chief executive's office and asked to open a dialogue with the government. On October 3, anti-OCM protesters gained momentum, and clashed with some OCM supporters in Mongkok; the police acted as peacemakers in this instance. A few days later, the government formally began a dialogue with HKFS regarding electoral reforms. Throughout the following week, anti-OCM supporters strengthened in numbers, leading them on October 13 to dismantle barricades set up by OCM outside the government offices. Dialogue continued over the next week, with the government stating it would produce a report on public opinion.

Negative events began to pile up. On October 28, the Hong Kong Bar Association issued a statement that mass disobedience challenged the rule of law. By November 3, anti-OCM group—Alliance for Peace and Democracy—presented a document with a 1.8 million signatures claiming OCM negatively impacted their social and economic lives. Xi Jinping met with Leung on November 9, pledging solidarity with Hong Kong authorities ("one country, two systems"). The next week, HKFS leaders attempted to travel to Beijing to express their concerns, but had their travel documents invalidated the same day. Rumors about changes to copyright laws—a traditional hot-button issue of Internet activists—led some youth to storm the

legislative building, but these actions were not supported by HKFS and Scholarism. On November 30, leaders called for more decisive action, specifically to block access to the central government offices. Clashes broke out between protesters and police. Subsequently, a few members of Scholarism began a hunger strike. On December 3, the three leaders of OCM turned themselves in at the central police station with the hopes that OCM would retreat, reflect, and reform. Instead, the occupation continued. On December 11, 209 people were arrested as injunction issued by the High Court expired. OCM ended on December 15.

4.6.2 Learning from the Occupy Central Movement

OCM ended quite quickly—79 days—as public opinion turned against it, and through its inevitable hijacking by radical elements. OCM had a difficult time explaining why the vague concept of democracy would lead to a just society (Lo 2015, 112). The population wanted more concrete solutions, such as housing reform, passed directly following OCM. Soon an anti-OCM umbrella group—Alliance for Peace and Democracy, the Silent Majority for Hong Kong—emerged. Like in Egypt, this reflected the power of the deep state, as these organizations had ties to civic organizations in Beijing.

The rapid pace under which events unfolded meant fighting rumors about OCM was crucial. As anti-OCM organizations were state-sponsored, the Facebook pages meant to dispel rumors[62] are an example of everyday people using tactics to counter official strategies. Lee and Chan (2016) emphasize that this did not involve

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[62] The Occupy Central Myth Killer page, and the Myth Terminator page, were among the most common nodes for dispelling rumors (Lee and Chan 2016).

much effort. It was mostly about simply forwarding information and other materials to skeptics.

Lo (2015) argues that the contradiction of not-breaking-the-law-while-breaking-the-law was too complex and contributed to the negative turn in public opinion. OCM believed that by following Beijing's wishes, HSKAR is counterintuitively failing to defend the rule of law—an appeal to an absolute. OCM opponents, for their part, believed that respecting the rule of law meant obeying the law, and obeying the law meant respecting order over disorder. The OCM did not win over the hearts and minds, so to speak (122).

In Hong Kong, as in Occupy Wall Street, a mismatch of values (but largely not tactics) existed. Although older generations sympathized with the small business owners in the Mong Kok district that were disturbed by the student-led protesters, the gulf between a comprehensive but inoffensive emancipatory platform (older generation) and the equally inoffensive but vacuous movement platform (younger generation) was the most potent source of intrasocietal conflict. The older generations, the majority of the population, were more willing to view Beijing with less animosity than they were with the protesters.

As in Cairo, the activists in Hong Kong made good use of images and symbols. But these images were more likely to appear in both digital and non-digital settings. Instead of crafting a narrative responding to police brutality and other injustices perpetrated against the people, Hong Kong protests centered around a narrative of broken promises regarding electoral processes in the newly created Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. They organized around the personal action frame of "I Want A Genuine Popular election" (Lee & Chan 2016). What was the same in Hong

Kong was the presence of a youthful, highly connected, tightly-networked and "impatient Facebook generation that demanded instant and quick access to information" (Lim 2015, 87). As a precondition, the youth, like in Egypt, engaged in a generational bonding process through sharing elements of global culture with each other, be in pop music, anime, Hollywood movies, Jpop, and so on.

There were very specific ways in which OCM members blended offline and online participation. Frontline supporters occupied space, confronted police, erected blockades, and handled counter protests. Those providing support donated money or organized activities in solidarity (Lee & Chan 2016). But both engaged in digital practices. Those camped in the occupied areas used digital devices to gain access to information. Social media and other communication apps were used to recruit friends to participate. Digital media were also helpful in coordinating frontline activism.

Lee and Chan (2016) found evidence that the vast majority—60-85 percent--of OCM supporters and occupiers frequently forwarded information or images about the movement online. Almost 70 percent of occupiers said they changed their profile pictures—empty signifiers—to show support (11). Moreover, those using mobile devices—those most likely to experience and immanent connectedness—were more likely to share information via smartphone *as well as* more likely to be engaged in frontline activism. Importantly, those using mobile devices were also more likely to have mobilized others. Another associated behavior was the formation of group chats to discuss the movement—a form of internal deliberation. Those who perceived digital media as an important source of information were more likely to spend time in the occupied areas than those who perceived the mass media as a more important source (15). Mass media appear to be less effective in generating the emotional outrage

necessary to mobilize people to leave their desks. But digital practices are a gateway drug to offline activism. It should be no surprise some of these practices would (successfully or unsuccessfully) manifest in offline forms.

Lim (2015) suggests that this aforementioned impatience, this collective disposition for rapid information sharing, meant it necessary to eschew a comprehensive ideology or platform for action. The values had to be highly truncated, like Egypt's "vemes" to catch fire. This included the importation of "other" popular culture (notably, Western symbols) to be used as a shortcut to organic articulation. Videos of Noam Chomsky discussing student debt were circulated, as were renditions of *Le Miserables'* "Do You Hear the People Sing?" Woodstock-style peace signs were replaced with umbrellas (Lim 2015). The everyday Hong Kong citizens were able to identify with these mashed-up values[63] without having to mull over complex political topics (and the authors suggest that the Hong Kong public exhibited relatively low levels of political knowledge). And so, even though this process was not the ideal that the first leaders envisioned, it was *necessary* for mobilization. The protesters' use of images and symbols from other popular cultures allowed them to appropriate and put to use the protest politics that worked well in other contexts, while at the same time, allowing them to reach out to a global audience (Lim 2015, 97). Just as de Certeau highlights, they were able to *do* something by consuming popular cultural products. In fact, Lim speculates that this low-content, high-courage mode of protest will become "routinized and internalized in Hong Kong's political culture" (2015, 87). Lo (2015) agrees, arguing that OCM signals a "new style of political opposition, challenging the

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[63] These values, although mostly foreign in origin, are identified as "mainstream" Hong Kong values by the author (Lim, 2015).

traditional mode of thinking" (104). Instead of a set of political values and goals, the political culture is to be founded upon action for action's sake, fortified by rapidly appropriated and shared Westernized symbolic imagery. The new generation of pro-democracy activists are without a consensus leader (like OWS) (Lo 2015, 133). OCM was a boon for political knowledge in OCM due to the conversations that took place on the streets. The movement and occupation forced citizens to think about politics in ways they had not before.

Lo also argues that Hong Kong has a strong identity that is centered around liberal values and human rights. What is particularly interesting, however, is that the school curriculums (before they were changed by the PRC) were based on discussing current news. This means that, according to a survey conducted by Lo, that some 68 percent of students learned about politics over the Internet and not, presumably, in secondary or university classrooms. Not only did they learn politics online but they took on liberal values, because these same students also increasingly articulated themselves, Hong Kong, as a "nation" (Lo 2015, 132).

Table 4.1. Matching the Framework to the Events: Summary Findings

Framework Claims	**Egypt (January 25 Movement)**	**Hong Kong (Occupy Central Movement)**
People gain practical knowledge of how to exert a voice in the public sphere.	Protesters gained knowledge of the means of communication (Internet and social media) and the tactic of occupation through contact with others abroad.	Protesters gained knowledge of the means of communication (Internet and social media) and the tactic of occupation through contact with others abroad.

Tacit learning (gleaning a feel for the game) is a form of social participation, where people learn from often mundane activities and interactions.	Dissident voices on Facebook took to the streets as well.	As one of the relatively late Occupy movements, OCM protesters were able to learn how the sharing logic could work to enroll themselves and others into a protest movement. Creating and sharing Western style symbols was the "natural" thing to do.
Cultural practices become habits.	Using the Internet, whether for gaming, social life, or consuming entertainment media, became a ubiquitous practice in Egypt, thus enthroning the connected lifestyle.	Accessing information about international politics occurs, by necessity, through the exchange of emails with overseas Chinese. Thus, accessing transnational information was more a habit.
The type of practical knowledge determines political effects.	The knowledge of how to communicate digitally translated into an effort to bring about the same communication and information environment in other spaces (that is, to create a traditional public sphere).	Knowledge about successful tactics of occupation and the creation of simple, popular demands abroad led to liberalizing effects in public, and, in turn, in electoral reform policy.
Performances as method to attain goals, but appropriateness of the practices itself is not questioned.	Cyberactivism was deemed important on its own. Creating vemes and memes online and occupying urban space were the tactics of choice, "without question."	The tactic of occupation was chosen, and it became so important that, when leaders decided it was no longer helping, the protesters continued to occupy the streets.
Transnational activists take action, form coalitions, and enable their activities to impact their own societies.	Activists across borders, in aiding struggles abroad, exposed their home societies to the power of liberalizing	In the most recent 2019-2020 iteration of Hong Kong protests, the US and EU took stronger

	protests, with eventual effects on foreign policy. The US changed policies midway during the revolution.	rhetorical stands against the Chinese government's crackdowns on press and political opponents
Interpersonal transactions are the mechanism for social change.	"We Are All Khaled Said" created "memories, shared understandings, recognizable routines, and alterations in the sites themselves" (Tilly, 2005: 7). This step was necessary for establishment of collective identity.	Hong Kong citizens commiserated with each other over the encroachment of "mainlanders" and Beijing governance values, establishing a collective identity challenging "official" PRC nationalist identity.
The Internet spreads Western values from the North to the South by expanding a public sphere. Individuals exposed to democratic practices are more likely to engage in contentious politics.	The Arab Spring caused the authoritarian "levee to break" (Lynch, 2013), revealing the presence of Western liberal values in MENA societies. Exposure to U.S. State Department materials led activists in Egypt to engage in a protest politics.	Activists explicitly referenced the other occupy movements, many of which occurred in Western countries. Activists also referred to the liberal revolutions in 19th century Europe and ongoing reformist objectives in the United States.
Self- evident practices determine outcomes • Individuals seek to aggregate symbolic capital to be better group members	Sharing things online meant to be anti-Mubarak reinforced anti-Mubarak identity.	OCM supporters changed their social media profiles to umbrella symbols. Umbrellas, once they caught on as important symbols, were ubiquitous.
Dispositions of individuals and collectivities become the content of protest politics.	The disposition to be a sharer or deliberator, disposition to have a voice that at least expresses outrage or engage in dissident activities online constituted the debate about, as well as the struggle to	OCM supporters reflected widespread disposition to resist change, generally, which counterintuitively contributed to demands for change.

	define, what the movement should demand.	
The discovery of common political interests in other forums leads to willingness to express opinions. • Generates interpersonal trust • Incidental exposure	Facebook groups established for other purposes found themselves wrapped up in a network of free expression.	OCM supporters were able to gather supporters, for example, by discovering common frustration with changes in the liberal secondary education system. This generated trust for later solidarity/action.
"Making by doing" - The consumption of popular culture alters and appropriates the meanings of those works by putting them into a different context.	Egyptian activists used popular cultural images and referred to popular culture items that came from sharing across borders. These cultural items were solidly mainstream, reflective of the prevailing normative environment, especially in their appearing in civil society. - V for Vendetta became more than a subpar Hollywood film. Watching and "veming" it produced the space for a new kind of politics.	Hong Kong activists used popular cultural images and referred to popular culture items that came from sharing across borders. These cultural items were solidly mainstream, reflective of the prevailing normative environment, especially in their appearing in civil society. - Noam Chomsky Youtube videos, songs from Le Miserables, and symbols from hippie culture emerged online and in the streets. Divorced from context, these are nonsensical.
Individual and collective dispositions *explain the way*s in which identities become salient.	Anti-statist dispositions in Egypt meant sharing of anti-statist content online, which in turn led to the emergence of protest identities.	Hong Kongism meant the path to anti-Beijing identities intersected with the path advocating Hong Kong nationalism.

Behavior changes as a result of activists forming alternative communication networks that create a feedback loop from the misbehaving state to the international arena and back.	Information and resources (on how to be a good cyberdissident, neoliberal citizen/society, etc) flowed to Egyptian activists prior and during the revolution.	In Hong Kong, alternative communication networks brought popular cultural symbols that generated international attention that encouraged state restraint.
Groups are formed through the discovery of common interests among individuals in close proximity of social positions or involvement in particular social or political projects (Bourdieu).	In Egypt, this was a slow process of interpersonal transactions online, especially in Facebook and gaming groups. This discovery process laid the groundwork for the transnationalization of the protest politics.	In Hong Kong, the use of popular cultural symbols online and in the streets indicated the close proximity of social positions of local and transnational activists.
Everyday life is made possible by encroaching on the property of others (poaching) through everyday practices. • Poaching occurs through the use of tactics. • Tactics produce defensive, opportunistic, and creative moments of autonomy.	Protesters encountered the popular cultural artifacts because they were enrolled in a transnational digitally mediated network; that incidental exposure to neoliberal popular culture enabled them (in some ways) to navigate everyday life, while at the same time unconsciously challenging the status quo, bit by bit, until the cascade.	Protesters encountered the popular cultural artifacts because they were enrolled in a transnational digitally mediated network; that incidental exposure to neoliberal popular culture enabled them (in some ways) to navigate everyday life, while at the same time unconsciously challenging the status quo, bit by bit, until the cascade.
Official strategies determine when formal actions occur. They are actions that elaborate systems and discourse capable of articulating physical places where force is distributed (imposing	The U.S. State Department engaged in official activities that significantly altered the purposes of digital space, from a place of only consumption to one of contention. Counterrevolutionaries	Pseudo-civil society groups emerged from Beijing to provide an anti-OCM discourse, one emphasizing order, harmony, and the rule of law. This created the political environment that

spaces of domination).	entered the streets (although not as successful online) and killed or imprisoned activists.	made the recapturing of space and the removal of the protesters from the streets possible.
Final Claims	**Final Claims**	**Final Claims**
Interpersonal transactions themselves carry causal properties and reduce the importance of the content of particular dispositions in explaining social processes.	Interpersonal transactions (mediated digitally) bring experiences of empowerment and solidarity to individuals, and thus may change their orientation to the prevailing international norms regarding governance.	Movements based on collective subjectivities emerging through everyday digital practices are themselves constituted by them

4.7 Discussion

OCM shows that there is much content to draw upon to build solidarity between people loosely tied together in digitally-mediated social networks. Activists tap into these networks, poaching memetic signifiers from other movements and popular culture commodities, in order to enroll people in a cause. Dispelling rumors, changing profile pictures, and group messaging are practices that people understand. Potentially-interested others see themselves in the practices of activists. Because of the increases in interaction capacity offered by digital communications technology, the number of actors and their impact has increased. The carefully planned movement in Hong Kong was quickly overwhelmed by grassroots mobilization, showing that traditional political parties and institutions no longer dominate the political realm. By emphasizing the resistance capacities of practices, we may better comprehend the chaotic, disruptive, networked actors as a more stable entity—one based on an everyday commitment to practices—a collective subjectivity.

4.7.1 Collective Subjectivities Emerging through Everyday Digital Practices

The Egyptian case provides clues as to what kind of character a collectivity arising from Twitter might take on. Papacharissi's content and sentiment analysis of more than a million tweets about the Egyptian uprising in 2011 highlighted to importance and value of *instantaneity*—the ways in which events could be rapidly produced into stories--to the movement (2015, 44). Activists used Twitter to crowd-source movement elites, produce solidarity, and take advantage of an ambience of constant connectedness.

While Twitter was at first used by activists as a mobilization tool, it became an outlet for people to produce and share emotional news content when the major crackdowns occurred. Near instantaneous retellings of what people were saying "on the ground" were released into the digital sphere so that they could reach as many people as possible (Papacharissi 2015, 45). While mainstream media professional emerged as important nodes in the network of sorts created by #egypt, a second stream of extremely vocal opinion leaders, bloggers, activists and intellectuals with experience in online activism--notably, Wael Ghonim, Gig Ibrahim, Mona Seif and Mona Eltahawy--emerged with the amplification and diffusion of those following along with events from near and far. The words of these opinion leaders helped to connect various publics by providing meaning for what was happening.

Thus, social media can help enable a process of "networked gatekeeping" that creates a hierarchy within an emerging political entity--one that does not necessarily favor individuals with credentials from official institutions or hardened veterans from previous movements. These crowd-sourced elites are the articulators of a political agency. They use social media platforms to share their own personal experiences but are empowered by their "followers" to assemble information in ways that create

"bottom-up narratives" that become part of the historicized dogma of an event (Papacharissi 2015, 48).

The Egyptian also case reveals the process of an intersubjective reproduction of a particular feeling produced by a particular practice or the construction of a community of practice. Tweets from #egypt, according to Papacharissi, primarily engaged readers' emotions rather than their sense of reason. The repetitive nature of the tweets—telling the same stories over and over--served mostly to increase affective input on the part of interested others and to sustain "the feeling of news" (Papacharissi 2015, 58). Prominent Twitter practices--such as sharing links to stories about the uprising--were like digitally-mediated interpersonal communicative practices of "pointing, nudging, and affirming" (59). Repetitively engaging in storytelling about the news produced and sustained a we-feeling for an indignant and outraged public (62).

4.7.2 Implications for States

Collective subjectivities can come together over digital platforms in solidarity and in support of anti-regime movements. The transnational collective subjectivity at work in the Occupy movements took its cues from Internet cultures and practices, but the cultures and practices also take their cues from the latent liberal content—the prevailing logic of appropriateness—motivating government behavioral standards in the late aughts and early 2010s.[64] What is novel is that these groups network and

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[64] These same anti-corruption sentiments motivated a hens-coming-to-roost situation where right-wing populists took on the cause of anti-corruption to disrupt liberal democracies in the mid 2010s (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

support each other across borders inadvertently, at first, via the content that is shared, mashed-up and repurposed online.

As so much of our lives are performed online, states must recognize the balance between authoritarian and liberal rule online as well as offline. The movements further reveal that, "at least for regimes deemed authoritarian by western standards, such as those of Iran and Egypt, western social media corporations try their best to prevent censoring of communications in order to serve free speech values" (Karagiannapoulos 2012, 166). But we shall see how these values can be turned on their head in Chapter 5.

The individual actions of people aid the emergence of a collective subjectivity that can challenge the state and its recognition of state-based citizenship. The above discussion of the Occupy Central Movement illustrates how practices present a particularly striking challenge to the state; the resistive tendencies emerge simply from the ways in which people live their lives. In another telling case, Sweden has set forth significant sums to money to support cyber-activists in the pursuit of democratic goods (Christensen 2011). While Sweden does arguably not reside in the upper echelons of international power politics; it is telling how the so-called Twitter Revolution affected state policy in a positive liberal order-orienting direction. Although the linkage between democracy and the Internet—a causal relationship between the specific form of technology and the expansion of rights along with other forms of economic and social development (Christensen 2011, 237)—can be rightly problematized, what is important is that liberal states feel the need to promote the Internet *in toto* while illiberal states only want to preserve its instrumental benefits. This is important because it seems that in the digital age, liberal-individualist

conceptions of order and justice are not perceived to be in conflict with global order, more generally.

The influence of diplomacy is reduced when information flows at the individual level are frequent and sustained, something we saw in the emergence of the movements discussed in this chapter. Castells, while claiming that the "Internet embodies the culture of freedom" (2015, 231), viewed these movements as fueled by individuation rather than collectivization; the projects of an individual are the basic organizing principle. He implies that the more time people spend using the Internet and social media, the more autonomous they get. If we back away from the normativity implied in the concept of autonomy, we could reformulate his mechanism to state that, the more people engage with social media, the more autonomous they become from legacy media institutions and information systems, which, in turn, makes them more comfortable with disruptive practices. These disruptive practices became the basis for the Occupy movements, and the government response was often to try and shut down the spaces in which they had the most effect—the streets and the internet.

In another telling example, during the Egyptian Revolution, the U.S. Department of State lost all control of the situation, officially preferring Mubarak to remain during a period of managed transition, but the sheer volume and pace of information flows meant that diplomacy did not matter, and could not serve its vital function. In the end, the State Department threw up its hands and begrudgingly joined Twitter, effectively reducing itself to a single voice equal to any other. This episode highlights the contradictions between official elite diplomacy and public diplomacy. The risk of losing "official" control, relative to the targets of such efforts, is much

greater in public diplomatic channels. While states try to utilize everyday people for their own selfish ends, local activists have the freedom to alter techniques and messages for their own ends.

While the bulk of this dissertation has ended up exploring fields where optimism has ebbed and flowed with regard to the incorporation of digital media, there are still a few traditional politics fields yet to be fully saturated with digital practices, leaving room for optimism. One of these is diplomacy, where practitioners and scholars alike tend to argue it is possible to make lemonade where others have failed. Diplomacy, the short story goes, is communication, and the more communication there is, the likelier diplomacy is to flourish. Digitally-mediated communications tend to make communication easier—both within the diplomatic corps and from states to publics—and so crafting social media presences is a no-brainer. There could hardly be any costs to doing so.

A rather optimistic narrative on the role of the internet in politics forms the basis of the meaning of the internet to IR and diplomacy. It relies on the argument that "cyber-optimists emphasized how digital technologies and global interconnectivity rendered the Internet a new public sphere, spearheaded by social media, in which transformational politics and democratic values evolve unhindered" (Karagiannopoulos 2012, 151). The Internet is viewed at best as a crucial element in political struggle, and at worst an accelerator of inevitable events of democratization. As Karagiannopoulous concludes in his investigation at the intersection of the Internet and political struggle:

> "The revolutionizing prospect of the Internet relies on the vast array of applications and digital media services that provide so many different, *interlinking* platforms for many users to produce and exchange information. The synergy between such platforms and applications

> *decentralizes* and propagates information exchanges on a *multidirectional* and synchronous level, forming a network in which social media are just one node of many" (163, emphasis added).

In other words, the Internet as a tool is quite adept to cross-societal, liberalized communication. While the recent scholarly work has focused on social networks, the most that they add is reducing the transaction costs of communication over the Internet. Moreover, following Castells (2009):

> "The power of the Internet, therefore, is not only or mainly vested in the emergence of new platforms, but also, mainly, in the *openness* and *interconnectivity* of a multitude of information-sharing and broadcasting applications and devices and *the will of users globally to assist in spreading information* and opposing authoritarian policies" (Karagiannopoulos 2012, 163; emphasis added).

The key to success in globalizing and popularizing struggles at the domestic level[65] is the Internet's ability to support many-to-many (as opposed to one-to-many) modes of communication. The openness and interconnectivity combines with the political will of a global citizenry and professional diplomatic regime to spread information. In such an age, it is difficult to accept that states have the freedom to do whatever they want or must due to the fact that the Internet was initially developed in order to maintain the ability to communicate in the face of nuclear war. As soon as states start to flex their muscles and block certain aspects of the Internet from their societies, people start utilizing the flexibility and decentralized capacities of the Internet to circumvent such restrictions.[66] Because so much of our social lives are

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[65] See, for example, Kensinger (2003), who argues that the Internet can be a tool in raising transnational global consciousness and solidarity. The study focuses on the spread of a feminist solidarity to Afghanistan via the Internet.

[66] Here, the dominant liberal order that professes openness and laizzes faire information practices is always lurking in the background, supportive of what on the surface seems and inevitability.

wrapped up by the Internet, it is very costly for regimes to simply shut it down.[67] It is therefore not inaccurate to describe this as a 'can't-go-back' world. The world seemingly has irreversibly changed.

Norris & Inglehart argue that we are living in an era of 'cosmopolitan communications', a term that implies the notion that individuals throughout the world live and interact in a *single* global community. It is through cosmopolitan communications that we learn about and interact with people beyond our own cultural horizons (Norris & Inglehart 2009, 8-9). While historically it was the institution of diplomacy that served this function, we have recently reached a tipping point in the practice of global communications such that the role of diplomacy is reduced relative to the information flows at the individual level. Information technologies have a transformational impact on the identities and interests of actors due to their ability to increase interaction (Singh 2013).

The merger of diplomatic practice and digital technology presents more challenges than benefits for diplomats who seek to connect with international publics via digital media. The open and unrestricted media environment that characterizes today's social media is (in many ways) incompatible with the practice of traditional diplomacy, understood as a centuries-old system of rules, norms and rituals meant to order the peaceful interaction of states and state-like units. The formalized and consensus-oriented communicative style of diplomacy is not conducive to the radically open and attention-oriented communication style pervading social media platforms. Instead of depending on diplomatic efforts at the state level, today,

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[67] It is estimated that the Egyptian economy took a $100 million hit for its single week of internet shut down (Karagiannopoulos 2012).

individuals and groups communicate across borders autonomously. At its worst, the attempt to adopt digital communication practices may distort and undermine the primary function of diplomacy by providing a strategic opening for the less savory, more disruptive bad faith actors described above that exploit the affordances of digital media for their own ends.

The case seems to suggest how digital communication goes well with actors and politics and a disruptive agency—the one that is inherent in digital communications practices—such as Russia's MFA in the UK. Normally, state actors would employ strategies within their own social field, adhering to a logic of appropriateness. But Russian actors, for example, by participating in digitally-mediated diplomacy and propaganda / information warfare campaigns could have internalized how the practice of 'social engineering' works, and, thus, how phishing for En Marche's and John Podesta's emails could work.

The logic of digital communication can lead to the formation of a segment of international actors—fluidly situated between the diplomatic and civil society realms—who engage politically, on social media. As these entities engaging in digital communication on social media coalesce into collectivities with comprehensive political agendas, they challenge our neat analytical distinctions between diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, and civil society and interest group advocacy. By performing *digital* diplomacy, official institutions will end up constituting themselves through disruptive digitally mediated practices such as pwning. Engaging in these communication practices means (at best, tacitly) accepting and legitimating an almost ideological commitment to transgression bound up in the logic of digital communication. This (negative) agency-without-a-desire-for-(positive)-agency

undermines the extant geopolitical order in ways that, without the affordances and ubiquity of social media, would be illegible.

4.7.3 Liberal Means, Liberal Values?

I argue there are several reasons to think of practices as "liberal", even as they are used to challenge the "official" order, liberal or illiberal. Rapid sharing means for a richer information environment that can lead to better group decision-making and more fair and just policy, both within the movement itself and the target society / political system. This implies a process of public deliberation in a non state-controlled public sphere. [68] Keeping track of what is shared and how it is shared can be a form of interest aggregation; although not everyone enrolled in one of these movements was physically present in the urban space, they could still make their opinion known. Thus, the communication patterns are ostensibly highly inclusive. Inclusivity was encouraged also by strategic appeals to the median voter, if you will, by broadening the messages, preaching togetherness and leaderlessness, and eschewing programmatic demands. Instead, the movements, especially in the Arab revolutions, appealed to the widely accepted discourse about basic human rights and dignity; although towards the end of the revolutionary period, the popular and uplifting

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[68] In Spain, they explicitly tried to move participatory politics into the urban space. They debated issues all the time and formed councils at various levels. These practices emerged from the online space, where the movements themselves were imagined (Castells, 2012: 116). It was in the urban spaces where they formulated their commitment to democracy, proposing to incorporate participatory deliberative democracy online into normal policymaking procedures. Occupy Wall Street also implemented a direct democracy model, famous for its leaderlessness, hand gestures, spokes councils, clusters, groups and caucuses. They tried to be as anti-assembly as possible.

messages gave way to mostly inflammatory ones as interested actors began debating what deeper ideological commitments should look like (Tufekci 2017).[69]

The movements themselves were for the most part non-violent—the most acceptable technique for contentious politics in a liberal system. Finally, the ways in which social media work—rapidly, in public, archived and searchable—helped make the movements quite self-reflexive, in that everything was up for debate and revision.[70] This is a commitment to a liberal principle that as tastes change, as goals change, as the political wind blows, decisions, policies, and institutions should change as well. The basic limitation to calling these digital communications practices only liberally-oriented is that in many cases, the movements did not only push for reform, but actually engage in revolutionary activity, often with the help of illiberal allies like the military and extremist groups. But, in principle, the activists in Tunisia and Egypt were trying to superimpose the liberal social system that existed online and on Al Jazeera onto the political systems of their respective countries. Liberal practices of communication, organization and decision-making moved from the digital realm, to the streets, to the institutions of government.

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[69] Tufekci terms this period a "tactical freeze", when a movement finds itself searching for the next thing to do after disruption or overturn. They "freeze" in the sense they do not move forward because they are trapped in an endless debate, enabled by social media, that keeps repeating itself, engaging in sloganism, etc. Hence, the limitations of a collective subjectivity. The tactical freeze in the populist disruptive MAGA Movement (Chapter 6) arguably led to the importation of white nationalism as an ideological anchoring point for sustainability and governance.

[70] Castells emphasizes the process, not the creation of an ideal society. At his celebratory best, he argues "the most revolutionary act is the invention of itself" (145). About Occupy Wall Street, he concluded that "they harvested the salt of the earth and became free" (217).

Lynch (2013) argued the Arab Spring caused the authoritarian levee to break, allowing liberal values to come into play. As a result, governments must be more responsive to public attitudes. We see in both Egypt and OCM that as individuals become more familiar with democratic practices via their connections to other countries, they are more encouraged to join reform movements in relatively illiberal or autocratic societies (Norris & Inglehart 2009; Hussain & Howard 2013). Norris & Inglehart (2009) found that increased levels of individual consumption of news media encourages the development of more modern cultural values and attitudes—including tolerance of foreign lifestyles and acceptance of gender, sexual, and religious equality. Moreover, they find that these conforming attitudinal changes are strongest in individuals that are regular users of the Internet; the effect is somewhat diminished if they are only regular users of newspapers and television (300-301). The state-level results also reveal a steady flow of these modern (read: *liberal*) values from global north to the global south.

Global communications networks are a strong mechanism for spreading political rights responding to limited demands for human dignity (Lynch 2013, 79). More specifically, the fact that the internet and to a lesser degree, mobile phones, were heavily used prior to the protest activity contributed to movement success: "the ability to produce and consume political content was important because it created a sense of shared grievances, and strong political efficacy that had not led to such sizeable, diverse, and quick mobilization before the Arab Spring" (Hussain & Howard 2013, 61). The development of an Arab Public Sphere allowed social media to play a significant role in the rapid diffusion of the movement across the region (Lynch 2013).

The specific impact of Twitter enabled the movements to take on a "cosmopolitan" character that diverse publics around the world could related to (Papacharissi 201, 50).

Across the political spectrum, from HK to Egypt, from Occupy to ISIS, from Spain to Iranian Fashion Model Instagram, everyday people identify with self-expression values. Being able to publish instantaneously, and access 'friends' and information instantaneously is what harbors transformative potential. It is not far-fetched to think demands for like goods will continue to be made upon governments. While scholars initially focused on the transformative potential of progressive digitally-mediated networks, the rise of an illiberal ethno-nationalist transnational collective subjectivity I describe in Chapter 5 may be yoking together far-right citizens across borders.

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Chapter 5

LIBERAL MEANS? ILLIBERAL ENDS: PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

5.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter dealt with the rise and fall of progressive movements, this chapter turns first to ISIL's recruiting efforts on social media and then to (far-right) "populist" communication on Twitter. In doing so, it pushes further on the idea that people engage in performative practices in order to maintain a relationship to the larger collective subjectivity. Today, people use everyday digital practices to do so. With the ISIL case, especially, we can see many of the same practices that were described in Chapter 4, at work. The importance of self-fashioning is especially evident due to the negative reputation ISIL enjoys.

This chapter also presents two different sets of Twitter data from the French far-right and the American far-right to help illustrate how people move from the mundane to the momentous, from the everyday to the extraordinary, with ease. People, in their performative sharing, take pains to appear as much a member of the group as possible. The resulting orientation of the collective subjectivity such performances reveal is politically extreme, but it also includes the kinds of idiosyncrasies one would expect to find in any other internet culture, i.e., only members can make affective sense of much of the content.

5.2 Performing ISIL on Social Media

As shown in Chapter 2, much of the literature tended to select cases, purposefully or not, that end up demonstrating the inherent progressivity bound up with emancipatory practices of digital communication. This section of the chapter looks at the ways in which everyday practices contributed to the constitution of an illiberal actor—ISIL. By interpreting the social media practices of ISIL, I illustrate a process whereby people form transboundary political communities around practices. I argue that this process resembles and challenges our conceptions of democratic action, especially as the outcomes are roundly viewed as detrimental to the liberal democratic project. The prevailing neoliberal discourse and its concomitant practices forces revisionist actors to turn to the very same tactics used by progressive activists—creating links across borders through information sharing and producing space for contention. I use this case to illustrate the theoretical and conceptual claims of this dissertation, especially the argument that liberal practices may aid in the creation of illiberally-oriented collective subjectivities. ISIL's use of everyday digital practices is evidence that it, as an organization, is not presenting a truly alternative to the neoliberal way. Rather, it is one option in a digitally-mediated neoliberal marketplace of subjectivities.

In 2016, a photo (Figure 5.1) was posted to Twitter by the account, @ISILcats. It showed a bearded man in army fatigues holding a kitten. Because it is a cute cat, the photo goes viral. Its caption reads "Maayyyy Mewjahadinz Protectz Me," as if the cat itself is saying it (Gowland 2014). The image, just one of many featuring cats and kittens—standard internet fare—is part of a vast media outreach project sponsored by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant designed, ostensibly, to attract recruits. The standard explanation for such social media activity stresses that using cute cats

humanizes ISIL fighters. Social media is a place where messages are unmediated, and, therefore, not subject to Western interpretations (i.e. highly negative) of ISIL's goals and actions. ISIL will be able to engage potentially-interested others in persuasive or deliberative forms of communication. Thus, the argument goes, using cute cats is yet another way to win an argument, to win supporters.

Figure 5.1: @ISILCats

The straightforward utilitarian explanation for ISIL's use of cute cats does not paint the whole picture, however. Rather than only engaging in a kind of persuasive dialogue across borders—one designed to humanize ISIL members and pushback against narratives focused on violence—I argue that ISILcats advanced ISIL's agenda by generating a thin sense of solidarity among its followers. Sharing pictures of cats is

performative normalizing in the sense that it's normal thing to do online. The practice of sharing cats is an affective reminder to followers and potentially-interested others that even ISIL turns to sharing practices to "get through the day"—to cope with everyday life.

ISIL used these everyday (digitally-mediated) practices to advance its agenda, just as other actors do when they attempt to advance progressive causes. They attract recruits, generate solidarity, and resist the officializing digital activities of states. The practices of sharing information contribute to the creation of an environment where sharing information is *all you have to do* to (often unconsciously) enroll people into a social movement or have them subscribe to an evolving collective subjectivity. ISIL engaged with these practices and, in doing so, constructed a kind of political agency adjacent to its one predicated upon violence. Mundane cuteness and horrifying violence were able to coexist.

People pick up anything nearby they can find: They *poach* internet culture—cute cat memes, in this case—and *official* communication infrastructures—the relatively unregulated and open social network of Twitter. It is not only about persuasion, but mostly about "simple" communication of feelings. Everyday people judge these communicative practices favorably, for various reasons discussed in the discourse about the Internet and democracy, but most importantly, because they are familiar and help them to navigate through their digitally-mediated days. People begin to associate their identity with the practices themselves, in that the ISIL others with which they are communicating, the communication itself becomes a part of their self-identity and sense of agency. Adopting some of ISIL's ideology—the normative content—is mostly a byproduct.

ISIL's social media activities illustrate the challenges that digital mediation poses to theorizing the construction of political agency in the liberal public sphere. Instead of promoting deliberation, they encourage shallow but continuous, diffused, and widespread forms of contention. Just because digital sharing practice are closely-linked to the neo/liberal discourse, it does not guarantee that they will be used to promote ostensibly liberal goals. Coders and their state and capitalist backers attempt to produce ideal online societies, but everyday people engage in sharing practices that generate an iterative, evolutionary process that reshapes identity.

My contention that collective subjectivities emerge from these practices and from these mixings of politics. As they develop political agendas, slowly, over time, they challenge basic the concept of state-based citizenship. Much in line with the expectations of global civil society and transnationalism literature, these groups do not often articulate their presence. The existing literature focuses on the diffusion of norms across borders, and occasionally imparts agency to social movements in the Global South. In the digitally-saturated world we live, newly powerful political communities do not appear in history at random, nor do they emerge as a result of coordinated action filtered through opportunity structures. And while they are very much tied up in narratives and texts, they do not establish themselves as an entity through speech or action in the public sphere. Rather, they are produced by everyday practices.

5.2.1 ISIL's Solidarity Generating Practices

Bourdieu's project directs our analytical attention to the "technical dysfunctions" of the "system" that aid us in understanding strategies social reproduction (Bourdieu 1998, 28). Therefore, it is important to examine the practices

and their consequences that do not match the expectations of the internet-democracy discourse. At first glance, ISIL's cooptation of digital communication networks and social media appears to fit this criteria for case selection. It is an example where the prevailing rationality of social reproduction in the digital era does not obtain.

How did ISIL actually go about using digital communications technology to advance an agenda? ISIL created links across borders through information sharing. I separate these practices into three types: friending, following, and sharing. Friending principally serves to expand the space in which a subjectivity can take shape, primarily through increasing the number of people implicated in such a process. The digitally-mediated communication is oriented towards building interpersonal trust and weak social ties—both important components of solidarity. Friending may generate enclaves that function as isolated "deliberative" public spheres, but it also gives rise to contestation—against official practices of state-based actors—as more voices are enrolled into the networks of interested others. The practice of following is a first step in forging links to potentially interested others. It is generally low intensity and involves paying attention to what is happening in the world through almost incidental exposure that comes about as a result of the condition of immanent digital connectedness.

Sharing is chiefly responsible for the spread of political content oriented toward appealing to potentially-interested others, but especially those already within the network. It inspires individuals to share and reshare, remix and memify, and to build some kind of consensus as to what the community *is,* although this consensus is highly contingent. Sharing mostly consists of passing things along. It may result in the viral diffusion of ideas and information. Disparate identities are thus yoked together

through the sharing of popular cultural items—selected intentionally for their particularly thin meanings—often subsuming political content in benign consumerist clothing.

ISIL was adept at *befriending* people online. The group hopes to turn ambivalent outsiders into interested, by establishing weak ties, or, even better, convincing them to join the cause directly by facilitating their journey to Syria. Experts estimated that during its peak of online outreach, ISIL controlled over 200,000 Twitter accounts.[71] IT experts estimate that 1,000 ISIL sympathizers used other, more direct forms of communication, such as Skype, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, to reach out to people on a full-time, more personable basis. These may be described as *tactics* because they use normal channels created by coders capital and state consent & direction. These channels were designed with 'neoliberal' forms of communication in mind, and yet, ISIL has resisted their officially encouraged functions. This is counter to the expectations found in the discourse on the relationship between the internet and democracy, where more exposure to more information should yield a higher understanding of cosmopolitan citizenship.

ISIL was known to target youthful and isolated individuals, no matter their origin or geographic location.[72] Most famously, they have reached out to the West.

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[71] Twitter altered its account deletion policy so it could target more ISIL-associated users. In February of 2016, the company claimed to have shut down more than 125,000 accounts. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/02/twitter-isis/460296/>.

[72] State Actors are well-aware of this. President Obama issued remarks suggesting that ISIL's social media outreach is designed to specifically target "young people in cyberspace." Barack Obama, Office of the Press Secretary (The White House, 18 Feb 2015). <http://www.whitehouse.gove/the-press-office/2015/02/18/remarks-president-closing-summite-countering-violent-extremism>.

Once young people demonstrate an interest in ISIL's activities, digital communications technology makes it relatively easy to connect with ISIL sympathizers online, as they are among the most active online participants. ISIL media experts engaged in a long process of further isolating their marks, pointedly discouraging them from attending local mosques or conversing with local Muslims, as these are potentially moderating sources of information.[73] These are scripts meant to contain interested others into a digitally-mediated enclave of ideology oriented to persuading them to travel to Syria to meet their new "friends". ISIL's social media outreach emphasized that joining the cause would give new recruits a sense of purpose—something they were lacking in their lives, previously.[74] Interviews with 49 ISIL fighters revealed diverse motivations. While defending Sunnis from Shiite forces was the top choice, it is telling to note that "rejecting Western culture" was the least popular response.[75] Insofar as Western culture is infused in digital sharing practices, one cannot outright reject the claim that the logic of sharing has altered their mindset.

Another of ISIL's approaches was to encourage individuals to carry out "lone wolf" attacks against civilian populations. ISIL uses social media to persuade people to give up their state-based identity to pursue an alternative subjectivity. It is sold as a way to pursue their calling as a religious warrior. The enclaves, intentionally created

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[73] Rukimi Callimachi, 'ISIS and the Lonely Young American', *The New York Times,* 27 June 2016.

[74] Uri Friedman, 'An American in ISIS's Retweet Army', *The Atlantic,* 29 August 2015.

[75] Patrick Tucker, 'Why Join ISIS? How Fighters Respond When You Ask Them', *The Atlantic,* 9 December 2015.

or not, were an effective site for the formation of new identity categories, and, in turn, overlapping subjectivities.

ISIL relied on the *following* to build awareness of formal and potential group members. As the Internet-Democracy discourse generally argued, echo chambers were common. Members of ISIL self-selected into interconnected bubbles, isolating them from external persuasion. [76] This tendency was exacerbated by Twitter's increased efforts to suspend and remove explicitly ISIL-related accounts. [77] A study revealed that the average ISIL-supporting Twitter account was significantly more active and had many more followers than the typical Twitter account. A small number of highly active accounts made up the bulk of day-to-day social media posts, with the average elite account tweeting around 50 times per day. [78] Around 20 percent of ISIL-supporting Twitter accounts were tweeting primarily in English[79]—one way to help forge weak ties to potentially interested others.

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[76] Richard Barrett, 'Foreign Fighters in Syria,' *The Sufan Group,* <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Sria.pdf>. June 2015.

[77] J.M. Berger and Heather Perez, 'The Islamic State's Diminishing Returns on Twitter: How Suspensions are Limiting the Social Networks of English-speaking ISIS Supporters'. The George Washington University Program on Extremism, February 2016. Suspensions have had a higher than expected detrimental effect on ISIL's Twitter outreach because recreated accounts gather a small fraction of the followers they had before.

[78] Lauren Walker, 'Inside the ISIS Social Media Campaign,' Newsweek. 6 March 2015 <http://www.newsweek.com/inside-isis-social-media-campaign-312062>. Only four percent of ISIS supporting accounts had more than 5,000 followers.

[79] ibid

The practice of *sharing* is what spreads political and other forms of content around. Information sharing creates links across time and space. Sharing consists mostly of passing things along or contributing to the development and evolution of a cultural trope or meme. Ideally, from ISIL's perspective, sharing practices may result in the viral diffusion of ideas and information. Subsuming political content in benign cultural clothing can be effective since people find themselves tied together through sharing popular cultural items.

ISIL's social media activity suggested an understanding of the power and utility of developing sharing networks. They were willing to poach content and practices from adversaries to mobilize sympathizers and supporters into action. ISIL's principal publicity tactic was to encourage sympathizers to share content using a so-called manual retweet to thwart automated censorship from Twitter and state surveillance tools. This was especially true of messages released by influential leaders. ISIL even streamlined this process by developing an app allowing it to tweet on behalf of Twitter users.[80] Another tactic was to appropriate so-called trending hashtags—a common contentious and mundane everyday practice—and post them alongside pro-ISIL content, effectively spreading ISIL messages to people through mechanisms of incidental exposure.

As with the liberal activists involved in the Occupy-style movements, ISIL had no qualms with coopting Hollywood-style imagery. ISIL was known to draw heavily from the Marxist / libertarian / revolutionary film, *V for Vendetta,* to attract those

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[80] J.M. Berger, 'How ISIS Games Twitter,' The Atlantic. 16 June 2014. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/

frustrated with their political powerlessness. Experts in ISIL's online efforts also reported the presence of heavily edited video clips poaching scenes from movies *The Matrix, American Sniper,* and video games *Call of Duty*, *Mortal Combat X, and Grand Theft Auto* to make an impression. These properties are notable for their highly violent content or their depiction of Americans killing Muslims in war.

But, as noted above, ISIL also used other content to attract attention. AISILCats was part of a venture from Al Hayat Media Center—an office established by ISIL to attract Westerners to join ISIL, in Syria and abroad. A thin shared connection—an agreement that cats are cute, and that *V* is inspiring, for example—bring people into networks, and, in turn, tied together seemingly disconnected identities and dispositions, forming a novel identity configuration potentially serving as the foundation for a subjectivity. The culture of sharing, paired with the immanent connectedness, means the rapid appropriation of whatever content is readily and resonantly available.

Local activists are not concerned that sharing Western pop-cultural artifacts will break apart their networks. Digital connectedness means that political mobilization require much less effort, much less direction, and, therefore, much less control, when it comes to constructing a subjectivity. As such, these processes become much more disruptive, random-seeming, and incoherent than their historical antecedents.

5.2.2 Connecting ISIL to de Certeau

Like other actors emerging out the digitally-mediated era, ISIL was not shackled to institutional and legal constraints when it comes to what they do on social media. They do not have to engage with the kinds of officializing strategies that their

opponents were tied to (e.g. the State Department, the Iraqi Government, etc.). ISIL was adept at coopting neoliberal information sharing practices. They employed the very practices that reproduce the status quo for their own ends.

States have difficulty recognizing digitally-mediated everyday practices. As described in the Chapter 3, this is in part because they are inextricably tied up with the unofficial tactics of everyday life. Consider the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, 2016. It challenges 'official' as well as conventional ways of thinking about what it means to be connected to other. When Omar Mateen, the perpetrator, turned to social media during his attack, from this framework's perspective, he was in search of a way to connect his weapon and his material violence, to digital networks, and in turn, to ISIL. Aware that they were out there, immanently connected, he meant to link with interested others, many of whom had no knowledge of him. As such, state authorities were not able to identify a 'real' connection between Mateen and ISIL. Because he did not directly communicate with ISIL-proper, the FBI does not consider him a part of their network. But it also seems clear that Mateen turned to ISIL social media to 'get through the day'.

Law enforcement agencies have not been able to find any direct coordinating link between those responsible for other attacks, such as the truck rampage in Nice, France, and ISIL.[81] The FBI cannot find a link between the San Bernardino, California shooters and the group, either. It was the same in the case of the 2009 Fort Hood incident in the U.S. and Al Qaeda. Indeed, there is an ambivalence on the part of these

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[81] Kathy Gilsnan, 'ISIS and the 'Internet Radicalization' Trope,' The Atlantic, 8 December 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/isis-internet-radicalization/419148/>.

perpetrators as to which group they pledge allegiance to, despite sharp ideological differences. The same lack of attention to political content one finds in the sharing of memes and tweets is present, here, too.

The lack of direct communication and (not really alone) lone wolves pledging allegiance to the group and the inability for state actors to comprehend a connection highlights the ways in which digital communicative structures alter the ways in which official strategies and unofficial tactics come into tension. The *Brookings Institution* notes an emerging pattern in which ISIL releases videos encouraging action, and shortly thereafter, an attack is carried out. For example, ISIL released a video urging attacks against Europe 14 days before the attack on the Bataclan Nightclub; another a month before an attack in Lyon; and one month before the attack on the offices of Charlie Hedbo in Paris, ISIL promoted a video depicting young French citizens pledging their allegiance to the group.[82] These extreme events and the character they take on illustrate the power of social media generally, but also the ways in which specific digital sharing practices manifest themselves, and even inspire particular moments.

De Certeau explains that a space may be created by an act, even simple acts, such as walking. Because there is a set of possibilities available in each space, the everyday person is constantly engaged in a process of invention of new possibilities. Although there is one official version of how to use a social media platform or to

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[82] Javier Lesaca. 'Fight Against ISIS Reveals Power of Social Media.' Tech Tank (Brookings Institution). 19 November 2015. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/techtank/posts/2015/11/19-isis-social-media-power-lesaca>.

browse a webpage, simple acts possess an inherent liberating quality. The pedestrian, the reader, and the Facebooker make selections using unsanctioned logics, taking detours, shortcuts, etc. (de Certeau 1984, 98). By visiting Twitter, an ISIL sympathizer, for example, has the capacity to change that space into something else. Striking a balance between strategies and habits is key to ISIL's outreach efforts. The habits of those who were browsing along and just stopped by Twitter and happened upon a pro-ISIL tweet constitute an own style of sue. Over time, the style transforms the organization of the space, slowly, generating "something surprising" (de Certeau 1984, 101).

The shortcuts created by agents, and their visual or textual representation (de Certeau highlights memes themselves as well) come together in a "symbolic order of the unconscious" that fulfills certain typical processes expected by a subjectivity. The act of naming a community, or a practice (meme-ing, hashtagging, others), alters the "functionalist identity" (de Certeau 1984, 105) of a digitally-mediated activity. That naming "articulates a second, poetic geography on top of the literal" or officially hidden meaning (105).

While there is much to say regarding the motivations that people have when it comes to joining something like ISIL, these are based on some conception of rationality, one imposed by the researcher. De Certeau's work looks instead toward affect. The act of saying that one *feels more comfortable* in a particular place (e.g. Facebook group, message board, discord server), closing the cause and effect rational loop, imposes a *body* into the place. Doing so, even in a fleeting or mundane matter, even something as simple as liking a series of photos in a row on Instagram), has the status, according to de Certeau, of a "spatial practice" (de Certeau 1984, 108).

And this brings up one of the crucial difficulties with the argument that practices are fundamental to the constitution of collective subjectivity: The practices are not adequately deep or strong. Is retweeting @ISILCats enough? But if these everyday practices of sharing can be construed as communicative practices, there is more promise. In his observation about the Internet and collective action, Shirky argues that conversation is a form of cooperation, and that sharing is "easier" than cooperation. According to this formulation, sharing occupies a lower rung on the ladder of action than even conversation. But there is reason to believe that sharing might be a satisfactory basis for the establishment of collective subjectivities in the digital era: "Conversation creates more of a sense of community than sharing does, but it also introduces new problems. It is famously difficult to keep online conversation from devolving into either name-calling or blather, much less keep them on topic. Some groups are perfectly happy with those effects (indeed, there are communities on the internet that revel in puerile or fatuous conversation), but for any group determined to maintain a set of communal standards, some mechanism of enforcement must exist" (Shirky 2008, 50). Conversation, and anything more than that, is hard; sharing is easy.

Using the practices of friending, following and sharing, ISIL produced a space for contention—a space where they could poach from others, such as the tactic of using cute cats to embed a message. Their digital outreach activities took on the form of tactics that aid people in getting through their days. By paying attention to a practice-based logic of sharing, it is possible to better understand how liberal channels may be systematically (as opposed to spuriously or cynically) used for illiberal ends. ISIL's digital outreach looked like it was trying to persuade people to join the cause. But such analysis only applies when looking at particular, finished products: videos,

tweets, memes, etc. Instead, ISIL is mostly taking advantage of everyday practices, of what people do online on a day-to-day and minute-to-minute basis. The social media campaign promotes sharing for sharing's sake: There is little need to think comprehensively about the meaning of an image, as they appear so fleeting to everyday people. The unconscious element of digital sharing practices enables "illiberal" content to flow more easily. That is to say, everyday people tacitly enrolled in ISIL's networks were not necessarily certain of what they are "making by doing." Ideological diffusion and adoption is a byproduct.

5.3 Performing Collective Subjectivity Maintenance

How do people navigate moving from the mundane and everyday to the momentous and political? Papacharissi's (2015) findings on what people do on social media with trending topics support the conclusions I draw from my own research of right-wing Twitter accounts presented in this chapter. There is a lot of tweeting for tweeting's sake (i.e. *coping*), but important instances of self-experimentation that leads, collectively, to either a big waste of time—the spiral of mundanity—or radicalization that only leads to political disruption.

Papacharissi's reading of tweets containing hashtags from trending topics helps to fill in my conceptualization about a kind of percolation network constantly present on social media that keeps people peripherally connected to the social, political, economic and cultural realms. She argues that Twitter lets people *be* political through play and performance; absent Twitter's affordances--specifically trending topics--people would not engage in political performances. People's use of Twitter reveals a political located in "the everyday vocabulary of phatic rituals, habits, and utterances, allowing us to feel our way into a *personal politic"* (Papacharissi 2015, 100). Twitter's

default suggestion, like Facebook before it, when people approach it, is to share information. And so, when people engage in performances of the self on Twitter, they must do so through the sharing of information. Social media offer performative spaces where norms are reproduced and transformed through personal political performances.

Papacharissi found that tweets containing hashtags of trending topics that did not @mention other users were overwhelmingly common, and were meant, she argues, to represent the (networked) self in the context of an ongoing (networked) conversation--of which they may or may not empirically be involved in. These kinds of tweets were often individually and collectively aspirational (Papacharissi 2015, 105). This kind of *play* is essential to "maintain expressive autonomy" in the middle of thousands of tweets addressing the same trending topic (107). She also found that people engaged with tweets about trending topics by saying things in public that they would not ordinarily vocalize. But because other people were doing it, it reduced the inhibitions to contribute to the conversation. Sometimes, this could manifest in people using the topics to address social or political phenomena that would be considered taboo in other spaces (108)--a way to explore the ideal marketplace of ideas. More often, individuals used trending topics to "play out the fantasy of saying shocking or potentially provocative things in public" (Papacharissi 2015, 109). While she sees this as a "gesture of dissent" and a challenge to the dominant, and inherently politicized, narrative, the rise of trolling as an internet practice has led to several successes for regressive politics. Either way, she is right to note that appropriating trending topics is an act of claiming a "safe space" from which to engage with other topics as well as the immediate one (112). Twitter's architecture affords the efficient reproduction of and challenge to dominant narratives through personal and political performances (113).

Along these lines, it is the shared history that motivates the emergence of collective subjectivity is the sharing of information itself. It's a thin history, to be sure. And sharing information or making memes or commenting sarcastically on official tweets is the most important tactic *as well as* the only reference point that the group can agree on. The common thing that binds a group of interested others is a dedication to the everyday practices that become important organizational tools at first—"the initial moment when a slogan or demand or tactic brought them all out in the first place" (Tufekci 2017)—but eventually devolve into disruption being the principal mode of action.

5.3.1 Performing Populism: "We, the Pepes"

While initial access to digital communications technologies was enjoyed by wealthy citizens of postindustrial democracies who marshalled resources in support of like-minded liberal activists located in faraway authoritarian societies, the decade since the January 25th revolution in Egypt has witnessed digital technologies become much more widely available and lower in cost, meaning that many more people, groups and ideas can be vocalized in legacy and social media spaces. A side-effect of this development is an increasing presence of vocal counter-progressive actors within the liberal Western world itself (e.g. Phillips and Milner 2017). While this trend is well-established in the political communication and STS literatures there remains a need for political scientists to decouple digital communications technologies from Western liberal cultural frames. The notion that 'the West' developed these technologies, and, therefore, they will be inherently useful for the promotion of liberal agendas, is unrealistic.

5.3.2 National Flag Emojis as Memetic Signifiers

Tweeting out a national flag emoji is a low-cost endeavor. However, populists tend to employ language that suggests that those who share their political beliefs publicly are brave to do so, even as it is somewhat counterintuitive consider these assertions come from a group that claims to speak for "the people" who would by all account be understood as a majority of the population in a given territory. The affordances of social media expose this falsity, as the sheer volume of participants and incentives to generate social rewards through particular social media practices mount up, crowds or herds tend to form (Gerbaudo 2015, 925).

Entering into a right-wing populist herd, a participant learns how to transform regular, everyday mundane digitally-mediated interactions and practices into populist communication and digital activism. Even trivial acts can be forms of collective identity expression. While the vast majority of the individual personas (e.g. avatars, profiles, and communication styles) on the web tend to become monotonous in their individuality, by taking the step of articulating a connection to a populist cause or movement, such as by including a flag emoji in their username, their profile, or their tweets about politics, right-wing nationalist political tweeters may disrupt "the mainstream" through visual unanimity (Gerbaudo 2015, 215). As people are inevitably members of overlapping networks of users, the use flag emojis to signify to (potentially interested) others their membership, slowly yoking together a coalition of populist tweeters or facebookers, but they may also drive a wedge between themselves and their "friends" who disagree with the message of the flag emoji—those that may have never guess at the political values of the emoji user—and may threaten to break ties. By including a flag emoji into their political communication, people are wearing a what they consider to be badge of honor meant to draw people together.

These individuals, without much effort, find ways to act together in concert others without going through the trouble of negotiating shared cognitive frameworks, much less deliberating over who and what is included in any definition of "the people." People may begin to project their own identity against symbols of collectivity. A common goal—such as trolling Kamala Harris for losing support in the Democratic presidential primary campaign—emerges not "from painstaking negotiations, but from drawing hyperlinks among personal pronouncements" (Bakardjieva 2015, 985). While activist leaders may take pains to define what their movement stands for, it is of little import compared to the individuated expressions of potentially interested others when they, and *necessarily for the existence let alone success of a movement,* become enrolled in a cause, giving it a *viral* intensity.

Gerbaudo (2015, 920; Touraine 1988) argues that the evolution of social media activity reveals a move from "networked narcissism" to "the digital collective," where individuals are bound tougher in ways enabling them to be recognized through "expressive communication," by others as an actors, and to recognize themselves as having "unified intentionality." Social media sites, in allowing and encouraging users to build their profiles, encourage people to engage in practices of personal representation that can aid in the self-recognition process (Hogan, 2010; Papacharissi 2002; Keen 2007; Gerbaudo 2015, 920); that is, the process whereby individuals come to understand their place in a group.

Because the forms of identity and collectivity emerging today go along with the affordances of social media and digitally-mediated communications technologies (Gerbaudo 2015, 921), it is no surprise that populism would flourish. The ease of which people can adapt their social media profiles to signify membership in a group

also attests to the "spontaneously emerging yet rather ephemeral public" (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 5). This coheres with talk of nationalist-populist "waves" and the notions that populist politicians cynically manipulate the populations of the countries in which they emerge. What populist-nationalist and progressive collectivities have in common is that they are marked by volatility and spontaneity (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 5). The inherent lack of ideological content contained in the empty signifiers of avatars aids the capacity to be spread virally in and across networks. Flag emojis have the ability to travel across political values, goals and ideologies, and social media helps the individuals that make up crowds to come together as identities. Ultimately, what kind of identity do everyday populists construct with their online communication activities?

5.3.3 Performing Populism Over Time

How do people go about performing populism online? That is, how do they construct collective subjectivities and identities drawing from both populist and nationalist frames?

To explore the convergence of disruptive internet-based social practices—especially trolling—that have come to define the populist zeitgeist, I exploit a dataset of around one million tweets emanating from the 2017 French presidential election. The dataset suggests that tweets seeking to "own the libs" are instrumental in tying together overlapping networks of people with alike predispositions, but not necessarily political orientations. I also use the data to shed light on my claims that digital everyday practices themselves are a foundation upon which collective subjectivity can be built. I then go on to argue that the end result of this process is a transnational identity of people with an alike predisposition to create and share information

diverting attention from governance, policymaking and social reproduction. This agency without a desire for agency undermines the extant geopolitical order in uniform ways that, without the affordances and ubiquity of social media, would be quite difficult.

The tweets were gathered from accounts that included the hashtag "#MacronLeaks" 4 or more times in their own tweets over an 8-hour period on May 6th, 2017. While the hashtag "#MacronLeaks" was trending worldwide on Twitter, Macron's campaign confirmed that it had been hacked (Reuters 2017). Over 25,000 documents and emails were posted online. The hashtag #MacronLeaks itself emerged from alt-right enclaves on Twitter and 4chan. When "[c]ontacted by Reuters, Posobiec [one of the most prominent promoters of the leaks] said he had simply reposted what he saw on *4chan*." Data experts also noted an expansion of a comprehensive disinformation campaign to denigrate and discredit Macron, propagated by a combination of authentic people, sockpuppets, and Russia's bot army (Shaffer 2017).

First, I gathered roughly 90,000 tweets from Twitter moving forward in time from the approximate moment when #MacronLeaks became a worldwide trending topic. Based on the resulting dataset, I collected tweets from randomly sampled accounts that tweeted at least 4 times in an 8-hour period about the #MacronLeaks and eliminated those accounts for which I did not have data during the entire time period—an effort to eliminate bots and bias toward topics occurring at the beginning of the time period. In other words, we eliminated accounts that were hyperactive (i.e., tweeted more than 3,200 times in the previous month) and accounts that were not highly engaged with #MacronLeaks. The goal was to identify those users who were already active online and therefore potentially a part of a political sharing community,

one perhaps aligned with a decipherable collective subjectivity. This resulted in 215,803 tweets from 151 accounts—what I refer to as our panel—that I use for our analysis. I then collected over 600,000 tweets from these same accounts throughout the next 12 months, generating a longitudinal dataset. The data collection procedure is similar to Linvell and Warren's (2020), however, I assembled the panel organically (i.e. I did not rely on a list of accounts provided by a third party). I did, however, suffer panel attrition, as Twitter deleted several accounts for irregular behavior—an expectation in line with the evidence that up to 18 thousand bots had been engaged in pushing the hashtag (Ferrara 2017).

An effort that began with some Russian-style hacking, an as-of-yet anonymous but self-identified French citizen sharing a pastebin url with Sputnik on Twitter, and the promotion of the data as proof of Macron's corruption by the far-right American social media network led to the formation of a panel of twitter accounts dominated by White Identitarians, Euroskeptics, Trump fans and French nationalists. The longitudinal analysis reveals that, most of the time, the accounts were engaged in tweeting about the news of the day from a right wing and cynical perspective and engaging various trending topics. For example, three accounts participated in the infamous 2017 campaign waged by @carterjwm to get free chicken nuggets for life.[83] Nine accounts retweeted novelist J.K. Rowling's tweet criticizing Donald Trump for pushing his way to the front and center of the NATO family photo.[84] But in particular moments, they would come together and tweet about salient events in near unison.

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[83] RT @carterjwm: HELP ME PLEASE. A MAN NEEDS HIS NUGGS https://t.co/4SrfHmEMo3

[84] RT @jk_rowling: You tiny, tiny, tiny little man.

A few emblematic panel accounts are worth highlighting before getting into the weeds. @JeSuisDog's Twitter bio claimed, in 2017, that it was engaged in "Exposing media propaganda & lies, Soros Globalist agendas & Extremist Islam" and was a "Brit supporting Trump/Farage/Le Pen/Wilders, Brexit/Assange/Wikileaks." In 2018, the account bio featured the hashtag, #IAmTommy, indicating support for the far-right UK activist, Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennonwho goes by the pseudonym Tommy Robinson. In 2017, @JeSuisDog was actively promoting stories that called the Las Vegas mass shooting a "false flag"—an event purportedly staged by the government to create the conditions more favorable to radical action. The same allegations were spread in 2018 following the chemical bombing in Syria in violation of the Geneva Convention.

In 2017, the panel tweeted 8,886 times about "Wikileaks", 12,068 times about "posobiec"—the account fingered as the source of the viral diffusion of #MacronLeaks—, 48,345 times about "trump", 1,843 about "#LePen", 153 about "#Assange", and 183 about "alt-right". The relative lack of tweets containing "#MacronLeaks" (9,223) or "#MacronGate" (2,121) points to the flashpoint of interest in the subject, and to its viral character. Interest in Trump within the panel, as expected, is more robust—depending what topics become salient at which times.

I gathered the tweets from these panelists the following year, and conducted structural topic modelling analysis (STM) in order to compare what they were talking

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https://t.co/mP3mad6cMt

about from one year to the next, at scale.[85] I did this in order to ensure that the #MacronLeaks misinformation episode was not a one-off event that spontaneously leveraged an unwitting network of convenience constituted by PIOs.

Structural topic modeling is a form of computer assisted textual analysis (CATA) that combines statistical models with the aid of computer processing to group large numbers of documents (in this case, tweets) together according to the words with which they are most associated. While there were over 600,000 unique words in the largest dataset, the procedure conducted analysis on a little over 3,000 unique words that appeared across the various tweets. Structural topic modeling takes the document (tweet) as a whole, rather than individual words, into account. This can give us a better picture of the various topics about which the accounts are (re)tweeting.

In more general terms, STM works by grouping documents containing words that hang together, using the R packet manager. The statistical package (stm, with the help of others) assigns distinct probability values to each document for each topic. The words that constitutes these individual topics are the words most closely associated with a given set of documents that have, in turn, an assigned set of probabilities representing the chances that they are associated with these words.[86]

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[85] Using the stm package on R, our input parameters specified 20 runs, with the number of retweets on each tweet as the covariate. The output, as seen below, lists the top 20 most associated words (FREX) to each unique topic.

[86] To learn more about STM, see Benjamin Begozzi and Daniel Berliner, (2018), "The Politics of Scrutiny in Human Rights Monitoring: Evidence from Structural Topic Models of US State Department Human Rights Reports," *Political Science Research and Methods 6*(4): 661-677.

For the purposes of analysis, in the largely French dataset, I chose the number of times that a tweet was retweeted (as of data-gathering) and the time[87] at which it was published as covariates. Before analysis was conducted, we employed stemming procedures in each language, and removed all stopwords (e.g. “the”, “le”), punctuation, numbers, and URLs.

Researchers decide the number of distinct topics into which the computer should distribute documents and words. Confidence in a reasonable selection is increased by a relatively even distribution of documents that meet a standard threshold of probability to be associated with that topic.

Because I randomly sampled accounts tweeting about events using hashtags of #MacronLeaks, the datasets contained significant amounts of English, German, and French in each. Thus, I analyzed all three languages at the same time. There are tradeoffs involved in doing so, but there is no set-in-stone guideline as to which way is preferred in the CATA research community. I opted to keep the languages together due to my expectations about a transnational and translinguistic dimension to populist-nationalist communication. The disadvantage is that words in each language tend to be grouped together as “top 20 words”, but the documents the computer associated with these words are always of multiple languages, at least for these two datasets.

One of the many advantages of employing STM—in addition to its ability to make the analysis of a large number of documents/tweets manageable—is to inspire confidence in internal validity. The output can help researchers to recognize the trees

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[87] I used day-level data to achieve this. Drilling down to the second-level quickly saturates physical and virtual memory usage on a prosumer grade PC (Macbook Pro Late-2017, Mac Mini Late-2018).

from the forest in large textual datasets, i.e., to see that the tweets and groups of tweets are more distinct than expert handcoders would recognize. This kind of mixed method design, in this way, challenges researchers to be more reflexive and/or conscious of the subjectivity of our expertise, or theoretical wagers, and the entire analytical enterprise. It is advantageous to place oneself at the beginning—data selection, data cleaning, and programming—and the end—the deciphering and labelling of topics. The computer takes care of the middle steps, but the researcher comes back into the picture to figure out what exactly it is that the computer is seeing that we cannot see for ourselves.

Table 5.1: STM Analysis Output of French Panel Tweets (6/1/17 to 5/22/18)

#	Top 20 Words (FREX)	Description
1	cest, bien, mond, merc, peu, trop, stalker, bel, surtout, monsieur, lamanifpourt, gagn, grav, vit, besoin, journ, tout, tous, beau, faudr	Right-wing brokers and political sloganism
2	forc, public, continu, organ, mod, propagand, cultur, arm, resist, terrorist, normal, explos, ridicul, sal, cond, real, victim, collect, barbar, occup	Resisting elite explanations of terrorism (English)
3	ciest, parl, peut, seul, jeanmessih, quiil, parc, font, chreti, arcole, blanc, ite, celui, discour, pir, juif, croir, vivr, quion, mec	Islamophobia and Anti-Elitism
4	droit, gauch, verlainedj, mieux, libert, laurentwauqu, gwgoldnadel, ditr, fer, wauqu, lesrepublicain, plutot, eciott, defendr, clair, manqu, sol, gros, fminuit, vai	Center-right politics (The Republicans)
5	apr, jour, avoir, bfmtv, avant, famill, pris, nom, sncf, franceinfo, ggrmc, gendarm, semain, cet, nddl, grev, lci, beltram, gerardcollomb, bloqu	Contentious domestic political news

6	twitt, islam, follow, van, german, vofeurop, brex, een, het, patriot, fall, christian, hel, david, protect, activ, niet, dont, serv, sur	Pro-Brexit rhetoric & anti-European/German sentiment
7	support, attack, kill, shoot, prisonplanet, gun, school, wom, prot, famil, childr, woman, murd, terror, isi, antif, cam, isra, nra, georg	Corrupt elites in league with violent others (Islamophobic)
8	voil, veut, port, republiqu, mair, ann, lislam, letat, ramadan, djihadist, interd, ven, islamiqu, retour, banlieu, lir, parol, krunchfr, castan, drapeau	French nationalist Christian identity (anti-veil rhetoric)
9	migr, pet, grand, valeur, march, ver, loi, cour, vis, gtgt, lefigaro, fronti, pref, supprim, invit, col, fandetv, nombr, net, limportantfr	Mainstream French political news (focus on En Marche, courts, and immigration)
10	fbi, jackposobiec, obam, report, break, clinton, muel, hillar, invest, campaign, thomaspain, hous, comey, deal, john, russi, spi, rel, fir, russian	Right-wing responses to American political scandals
11	coup, homm, soir, sort, appel, matin, etud, mil, maint, plein, sest, prend, leparisi, elu, jlmelenchon, vol, terr, gauchist, nuit, couteau	Sensationalist news topics (knife terrorism, #Fiona); extreme criticism of Macron from the left
12	zerohedg, realdonaldtrump, big, guy, happ, hop, friend, lov, even, end, pol, hey, storm, realjameswood, issu, got, day, wel, good, desp	Retweets of right-wing brokers
13	want, need, americ, countr, giv, iti, help, must, tak, believ, american, get, pow, fact, ever, think, back, way, ther, man	MAGA restoration
14	new, video, youtub, plan, fak, post, qanon, donald, merkel, lat, chin, sit, kor, naz, jerusal, f¸r, candid, pot, york, test	Right-Wing Rhetoric and conspiracy theories (English)
15	encor, islamist, moin, attentat, terrorism, mot, hain, nont, mesur, viv, pourt, etaient, chez, gouv, certain, marleneschiapp, merd, treb, cass, devenu	Blaming the Left (Marlène Schiappa) for inviting terrorists
16	dun, musulman, fdesouch, manif, enfant, mai, national, suit, lor, fill, tit, main, situat, jeun, prochain, allemagn, itali, lpldirect, mobil, tribun	FN anti-Muslim and immigrant messaging

17	macron, ministr, compt, retr, campagn, enmodemacaron, nouveau, pend, emmanuel, financ, selon, moi, affair, euro, candidat, holland, conseil, fillon, moy, sondag	Criticism of Establishment-EU axis
18	diun, pourquoi, condamn, souti, doit, dupontaignan, mal, arrit, melenchon, damienrieu, marin, lutt, limmigr, trait, tvlofficiel, critiqu, censur, repon, danielpilott, kimjonguniqu	Great Replacement (Anti-Media)
19	syr, europe, russ, guerr, peupl, etrang, fich, rtenfranc, raison, frapp, bravo, preuv, sputnikfr, veulent, fnofficiel, tant, americain, poutin, proteg, chimiqu	Russian Outlets on Syrian War
20	part, con, del, pos, per, htt, def, dang, voic, identitair, accept, generat, pixelart, cris, gamedev, favor, sen, journal, europ, suff	European identity as asserted by gamers

Defining the topic labels was a relatively straightforward task because the tweets come to take on a more general character as time goes on (i.e. they are not as context-dependent). Those in the French panel were quite interested in topics that indicated an anti-establishment perspective. This could be attributed to a long frustration with mainstream political parties muddling through the center and ostensibly going along with Europe. Politics had become so boring that the country had fallen asleep at the wheel, not realizing the country was changing and French nationalist identity at stake (in group superiority, e.g. topic 8). Moreover, when they talked about elites and engaged with Islamophobia as the same time, they tended to adopt a welfare state chauvinist opposition, where they elites for inviting allegedly violent others into the country to steal resources that belong only to true French patriots (Topic 7, Topic 18). It follows from this that they would also be angrily tweeting about the news media for not giving enough attention (or worse, accusing them of covering up) to violent crimes perpetrated by immigrant Muslims (Several

topics), adopting an anti-media and exclusionist stance. In summary, the panel believes they represent a true French national identity that has been covered up by corrupt and incompetent elites. They say they have conspired with the media to portray dangerous foreign others as worthy of French and European citizenship, even though this is clearly not the case, according to them, due to the prevalence of violence that comes with an open society.

The French-speaking members of the French panel are highly likely to include nationalist symbols and frames when performing populism. Often, the "true" French people are referred to in opposition to the culprit outsiders, namely, Muslims. For example, one member of the panel, @frlaborde tweets almost exclusively about "Islamists" and their corrupting influence on the French government and Europe. Moreover, he tweets about the contentious topic of "the veil" and expresses resentment toward what he perceives as chaotic urban centers. User @M_JeunePatriote's profile also reveals a concern with immigration, especially on the part of Muslims, while displaying the French flag on the banner image. Finally, user @maprnito's avatar depicts a woman crying French flag-colored tears. The profile also includes a banner image depicting the world "RESISTANCE" with a medieval sword occupying the "T".

Notably, the French panelists tend to also include the flag of the country to which they claim to trace their ancestral heritage or to signify solidarity with other populist movements in other countries. For example, @maprnito's profile description includes the flag emojis of five countries, in addition to France. This kind of online performance shows how tribal identity can be a vehicle for the transnationalization of populist sentiment and communication.

The French panel included many tweets in English, not surprisingly since the #MacronLeaks hashtag was promoted by right-wing brokers. Account @myjourneymyself was in the panel, and includes a flag emoji in its profile. The pinned tweet expresses distrust for the corrupt mainstream media but absolute trust in President Trump. The most recent retweet form the account (as of May 2018) claims that "evil" is working to hurt Trump, implying that he has been chosen by God to be president.

Within the dataset, several themes emerge that appear to be more or less continuously discussed by the panelists. In other words, they do not appear to be contingent on the current news events of the day. Several broad topics stand out: White identitarian sentiment, Anti-Muslim sentiment, anti-immigrant news stories, Donald Trump and other American far-right figures, the Russian election-meddling "hoax" and #FakeNews, general French political corruption, and Russia as a great power.

The STM analysis also provided a ranking of tweets most proportionately related to the topics. For example, some of the most proportionate tweets to topic 1 in 2017 mentioned the preference that Muslims be expelled from Europe. @NicholasBay, an FN (now known as National Rally) Member of the European Parliament, tweeted that those "flagged for Islamist radicalization" should be expelled from France and Europe, and that doing so requires reasserting the importance of sovereign borders. This was retweeted into the dataset by one or more of the panel members. Another highly proportionate tweet asked its followers to retweet if they agreed with this sentiment.

A related topic, Islamophobia, is exemplified in the tweets proportionate to topic 7. The most proportionate tweet is from a far-right broker who often claims that RT is telling the "truth" about French politics. His tweet that was retweeted into our dataset equates Muslims with terrorists and calls for the "expulsion" of the "scum" (see appendix). Other proportionate tweets call the veil a "Trojan Horse", and see Macron's efforts to fight anti-Semitism instead of Islamism as misguided.

Pro-Trump talk from American right-wing figures endures over time. For example, Topic 5 (MAGA / MS-13) in the French dataset sample captures talk defending Trump's ambiguous statement about immigrants being animals (Newsweek 2019). Charlie Kirk's tweet doubling down on the rhetoric was retweeted into the panel dataset a number of times. Other tweets favorably label Muslims in France and Israeli protesters (Summer 2018) as animals and highlight "gangs" that "gang rape."

White identity political talk is a final topic worth highlighting due to its ability to tie this network together. The most proportionate tweets associated with Topic 20 in 2018 explicitly refer to the latest French counterpart of the (white) nationalist movement in Europe known as *Les Identitaires*. One of these tweets expresses frustration that the Generation Identity movement were not allowed to assemble like a militia for the purposes of "defending" the French border in the Alps by highlighting a press release from the government saying they were not respecting the law. Others are outraged about the suspension of the movement's Facebook page.

The top 20 words also suggest that trolling behavior has travelled across borders and entered the communicative realm in two politics with distinct power-political configurations. That is, the French right is out of power and is claiming that they are the resistance to the Macron-led French government, while in the US, the

American far right is in power. And yet, because there are tweets in English and in French, it is clear that they not only discuss the same kinds of topics, but spend a significant portion of their tweets discussing the alleged corruption of those perceived as mainstream politicians and bureaucrats. For example, there is discontent across Dutch, German, French and English tweets. Moreover, the notion that liberals are dumb for having allegedly opened the border to scary Middle Easterners is widely shared across many topic areas.

Although these tweets were identified by STM analysis as the most proportionate to the distinct topics, they do not necessarily accurately reflect the discourse found within the dataset. For example, one concept that was tweeted about by several panelists was "#WhiteGenocide"—an explicitly racist and white nationalist concept meant to signal that "multiculturalism" and "diversity" is a conspiratorial zero-sum game white people are destined to lose without decisive political action. While most of the tweets containing #WhiteGenocide are crafted in English, several accounts in the panel tweeted about #WhiteGenocide in French. As of the 2017 data collection, several panel members included this hashtag in their Twitter bios. Panel member @Kailarichmond15 retweeted at tweet from @girlsofeuropa—an account dedicated to "Sharing pictures of beautiful girls from the great continent of Europa…[and] Stop[ping] #WhiteGenocide." The "Identity Evropa"[88] movement is a significant part of what keeps this network together. Many panel members, including @LaRochejaquelin and @bandeathcults, shared tweets from the account @ladyaodh,

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[88] The Southern Poverty Law Center rates the "Identity Evropa" movement as an extremist group. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/identity-evropa>.

an explicitly racist "evropa" account with 25,000 followers. Panel member @koukilook retweeted @LilyWhite_Girl: "#ThursdayThoughts #WhiteisBeautiful #Diversity = #WhiteGenocide I am a proud white woman. https://t.co/ghzuvwKA6Y". This account has since been deleted by Twitter for violating its hateful content policy.[89] Panel member @DavidARader retweeted "from Identity Evropa sympathizer @547George, another suspended account (as of writing). " #Whites of the West, vote #Identitarian #Nationalist from now on. https://t.co/DKHR0y482G." This hyperlink goes to a tweet from an account that explicitly supports neo-Nazis. Demonstrably bigoted and French language panel member @excalibur57 retweeted @whitegenociders. Panel member @femmpatrioteFR retweeted a now suspended account, @caucasionallure, (along with @547George), with a tweet containing #WhiteGenocide. Finally, one panel member, @georgechikovani, also retweeted prominent Ku Klux Klan leader @DrDavidDuke a number of times.

Finally, to what extent were these panel tweeters engaging in retweeting tweets attempting to "own the libs?" A cursory look reveals at that at least 350 tweets containing the words "libs" in the dataset could be considered trolling behavior, including at least 45 in French. A few accounts visibly retweeted with high frequency were @looneylibssuc, @Libs_r_demented and @Education4Libs. The tweets also show owning the libs means standing with Trump and Le Pen, no matter what happens, and discrediting his opponents and the media. The tweets convey a desire to

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[89] "You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories." <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy>.

be both the victim ("the liberal mob is attacking us"; Macron's policies are spoiling French identity) and the oppressor ("we are in power, suck it, libs!"; celebrating the successes of illiberal politicians abroad [e.g. Orban, Putin, Trump]).

Some tweets in particular help to tell the story. Remember: These were random accounts tweeting about the #MacronLeaks. And yet—

- The sarcastic tone of this tweet made it a natural fit with the panel tweeters: "RT @DailyCaller: Libs Freak Out When Trump Tells A Female Reporter She Has A 'Nice Smile' https://t.co/Parq5gyMsp https://t.co/HNA419XUXL";

- This tweet expresses concern that its possible to be owned *by the libs*: RT @lybr3: You know @SenBobCorker is a mccain wannabe when the libs are praising him. Lil Bobby feels so special b/c its the 1st time they'…"

- This tweet is literally trying to own the libs: RT @WayneDupreeShow: Libs called Mitt Romney a Nazi in 2012. Romney failed to fight back and lost. Now Romney is giving Trump advice

- It turns out that the libs are causing terrorist attacks due to their desire for political correctness: RT @skis416: @Rparisee That was my point. If they are willing to kill their mother they'll kill anybody. Libs=head in sand. #LondonBridge

- The libs lack compassion: RT @bradcrain: It's brought tears to my eyes seeing the ❤️ shown by @POTUS to the victims of #HurricaneHarvey. Watch & Learn, LIBS! https:/…

- Classic trolling of the libs: RT @bacon_texas: When Libs complain about the military parade remind them of this: Obama w/ the help of the DOJ funded #Resistance anti-trump groups. YES! If you gotta pay for their allegiance...it's not real

- And finally, a tweet from the infamous Jacob Wohl: RT @JacobAWohl: This week we learned that libs hate: Making fun of Kim Jong Un; Kids Mowing Lawns; Golf Gifs; Boobs

5.4 Performing White Nationalism: The Twitter-Based MAGA Movement

In order to ensure that the sample of American-oriented twitter accounts would contain both self-described right-wing populists and those we could label as such according to our theoretical framework on populist communication and nationalism, I randomly selected 400 accounts following Mike Cernovich (@cernovich). Cernovich, a self-described American Nationalist, is a right-wing conspiracy theorist known for his misogyny, his brief credentialed visit to the White House press room where he was photographed flashing a White Power gesture,[90] and his spreading of the Pizzagate

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[90] https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/two-alt-right-members-accused-of-flashing-white-power-sign-at-white-house-1.5466877

conspiracy theory. He also has a history of tweeting and blogging about the extremist myth of White genocide—a theme that was highly visible in some of the most frequently tagged Twitter accounts by the French and German panels' tweets. Although labeling Cernovich a "populist" himself might be fraught, it is plausible that, based on the topics he tweets about, his followers would be right-leaning, interested in politics, and constitute a network or group of like-minded tweeters.

The STM analyses together reveal a number of populist-nationalist topics and associated keywords that touch upon the theme that the "real" French, American, or European people are not properly cared for by their government and/or their elected officials. The elites are corrupt and "the media," *writ large,* opts to do their bidding rather than to relay the truth to the public. Culprit foreign others are also frequently said to be aligned with corrupt domestic elites (e.g. "Merkel's immigrants want to destroy German culture"; "Macron wants to dilute superior French values by siding with the unelected and unaccountable European Union"; "It is the Democrats and the Deep State that are the real colluders with Russia and the Ukraine."). To counter what they perceive as disturbing trends, populist tweeters take pains to assert that they are the true defenders and representatives of the nation, true patriots who are unafraid to display their country's flags, especially in their social media profiles and tweets.

Table 5.2: STM Analysis of Mike Cernovich's Followers

#	**Top 20 Words (FREX)**	**Description**
1	yang, dollars, wonder, imagine, real, videos, thehill, take, dbongino, leave, million, ewarren, hands, actually, paper, yanggang, ridiculous, seriously, donaldjtrumpjr, want	Yang & Warren's economic policies (especially from Dan Bongino and Trump Jr.)

2	god, maga, social, bless, aoc, kag, hate, history, qanon, thank, wwgwga, supporters, mainstream, worst, loves, believe, amp, kamalaharris, shut, knows	Q-anon
3	last, year, week, days, night, ago, girl, saw, digitalhealth, old, early, years, cancer, brain, got, short, check, sunday, friday, beautiful	Health
4	great, love, best, guy, name, hell, van, een, kind, fucking, met, dat, close, jesus, justintrudeau, rajukumar, niet, fans, enjoy, pray	Political commentary in Dutch
5	change, climate, water, global, wait, level, mind, ones, seen, age, ive, economy, data, worse, humans, cant, much, industry, keep, animals	Skepticism over climate change policy fixes
6	please, retweet, follow, canada, account, send, trudeau, twitter, followers, comment, welcome, back, bring, canadian, mark, red, spread, will, lets, tomorrow	Bot-like behavior (gain followers, fellow Q-anons!; vote in the Canadian election!)
7	video, china, youtube, freedom, states, united, religious, military, isis, antifa, group, fighting, iran, leader, syria, liberty, chinese, terrorist, hong, kong	Videos about violent conflict (China/HK, Syria, Antifa)
8	women, give, someone, men, children, ill, woman, child, following, hours, pulte, baby, abortion, parents, sexual, choice, babies, body, random, female	Women are the real rapists
9	game, big, play, season, playing, little, birthday, lufc, waiting, etsy, green, lady, chance, winning, ready, dream, league, win, looking, thanks	Sports and other mundanity
10	president, house, biden, congress, impeachment, dems, joe, schiff, office, ukraine, republicans, pelosi, son, whistleblower, adam, elected, speakerpelosi, process, rep, nancy	First impeachment
11	news, cnn, fake, toi, wow, hey, head, msnbc, que, foxnews, ban, google, cac, fox, boy, jackposobiec, khong, ong, sie, 😂😂😂	Vietnamese commentary on U.S. political news
12	illegal, school, gun, open, city, immigration, citizens, israel, sign, laws, guns, shot, mass, texas, california, students, immigrants, murder, shooting, aliens	Linking gun control laws and immigrants to mass shootings

13	forget, jobs, enough, plan, trust, less, sorry, egypt, food, workers, seems, worth, thoughts, move, strong, means, half, market, cost, lose	Contrasting Trump and Democrats on Economic policy
14	bitcoin, going, guys, really, lot, thing, things, well, get, pretty, good, haha, stuff, yall, work, cool, seeing, sometimes, shit, funny	Everyday talk
15	dead, epstein, system, face, times, known, powerful, current, likely, found, another, wanted, jeffrey, private, sad, companies, tried, behavior, reality, died	Epstein didn't kill himself
16	hillary, clinton, border, fbi, report, justice, russia, john, security, wall, mueller, former, deep, general, russian, criminal, james, comey, collusion, barr	Deep state collusion against Trump
17	looks, just, gonna, photo, shes, crazy, lol, never, right, maybe, yeah, posted, anyone, damn, guess, stupid, dog, hear, listen, know	Everyday talk (bot-like behavior)
18	tax, heard, already, ilhan, omar, true, brother, money, paying, idea, husband, job, taxes, light, cut, attention, class, trash, language, married	Taxes (and Ilhan Omar married her brother and she doesn't pay taxes)
19	party, bernie, democratic, debate, berniesanders, conservative, wants, run, left, brexit, agree, agenda, socialist, sanders, become, tulsi, harris, stage, voted, kamala	Democratic presidential primary debate
20	black, racist, liberals, opinion, theyre, ppl, okay, racism, realcandaceo, matter, feel, fear, isnt, people, talk, fine, bunch, problem, white, blacks	Pointing out racism is the real racism & it's okay to be white

A surface-level look at Cernovich's followers panel based largely in the American context reveals a similar commitment to performing nationalism and solidarity across borders in profiles and tweets. However, they are not as explicitly concerned with culprit foreign others as they are with corrupt domestic elites such as those located in the national capital and other urban centers and the mass media.

For example, panel member @PolitiKurd's pinned tweet refers to Hillary and Bill Clinton as "criminals" who are the ones ultimately responsible for the Turkish invasion of territory controlled by the Kurds in Syria. The profile description also contains an American flag emoji, the assertion that he or she is a "legal immigrant", while the banner image features an American flag. Panel member @TheDaytonian937[91] recently retweeted an account whose display name is "Proud American Veteran 🇺🇸." The tweet included no fewer than three ❤️ emojis, one 🦅 emoji and four 🇺🇸 emojis. That's a lot of national symbols!

As such, the American panel reveals a distinct tendency to engage in an implicit contest to be the most outspoken and proudest members of the group. @TheDaytonian937 also lauded actress, pin-up bikini model and reality TV star-turned-pundit Mindy Robinson for her tweet claiming that "liberals" are "offended" that she wore an American flag dress. Robinson's profile is almost too on-the-nose:

Figure 5.2: @MindyRobinson (as of February 2019)

[91] This account looked suspiciously like a "fake" account and has since been removed by Twitter.

American populist-nationalists appear to construct their identity in opposition to imagined groups of bleary-eyed liberals that (similar to the culprit Muslims for the German panel) they do no encounter in their daily lives. Nevertheless, these corrupt liberals are said to resent or hate that there are people sustaining a populist-nationalist movement.

STM analysis reveals that the people interested in tweeting about the American far-right rely less on nationalist frames and more on a combination of general and context-specific right-wing populist frames. Part of this has to do with the power-political context in the U.S. versus France and Germany: The right was empowered by the presidency of Donald Trump. Thus, we see, for example, that topic 10 which shows an effort to defend the president during the first impeachment trial. Topic 16, "deep state collusion against Trump", also reflects a desire to defend the MAGA movement from the establishment.

But there are several topics that overlap with themes from France. For example, there is a lot of ire directed toward the media throughout the topics and in the most-associated tweets. Cernovich's followers are highly exclusionary in defining

themselves as true patriots in opposition to liberals, especially liberal women (topic 8, topic 2, Topic 18) and minorities (topics 12; 18). They, like the French far-right also talk about how "crazy" the mainstream political parties and their policy platforms have become (Topics 1, 19). They see themselves as the only sane people in the country, a clear form of in-group superiority framing. Moreover, "it's okay to be white". Topic 20 is filled with tweets about white identity and white nationalism. The persistent use of white nationalist frames is a reaction to a reaction (politics these days…) in which the American far-right were pushing back against widely adopted notions that the Trump presidency and the MAGA movement was explicitly pro-white. Some of the most associated tweets blamed the left and the media, saying it was these labels of "racist" and "white" that drove MAGA to white nationalism. These kinds of sentiments have been seen before in anecdotal form when tweets get picked up by mainstream media or when they trend on twitter. But realizing that a computer program identified these frames as systematically distributed across accounts and over time is highly disturbing, indeed.

This dataset contained more topics that were not explicitly political. I believe this is a consequence of sampling followers from a single account. There are plenty of people who follow Mike Cernovich, but they may not be full-blown participants in political discourse. Thus, their tweets get thrown together into topics 3, 6, 9, 14, and 17 with relatively low levels of correlation. Seeing this, I might have opted to re-run the analysis with fewer topics into which probabilities would be distributed.

Together, the STM analysis reveals that, while there is a diversity of topics discussed on Twitter, especially those that could be considered particular to each domestic political context as well as a few rather mundane topics of conversation,

there is a distinct tendency to frequently name political opponent, demean those considered outsiders, play up the danger that corrupt elites and culprit foreign others pose to the pure national conception of identity and criticize the mass media for interpreting the events of the day incorrectly. Additionally, there appears to be a surprising amount—especially considering the affordances of the platform—of self-congratulatory activity (i.e. being brave enough to perform populism online) and effusive praise for Trump and Le Pen (although less so after her 2017 loss to Macron). In short, performing populism online includes a self-reinforcing mixture of projection and trolling—two sides of the same coin.

By collecting and analyzing about 3 million tweets across time and space, I distilled several distinct groups of tweets that fell along similar thematic lines, suggesting there is a transnational dimension to the information shared to mobilize supporters. The evidence, gathered from everyday people rather than elites, supports the notion that far-right populism owns several frames—especially Islamophobia, immigration, and skepticism of regional and global integration—that go hand-in-hand with nationalist frames about true national identity (e.g. in this case, *not* a multiracial democracy) and who counts as a legitimate citizen. Run-of-the-mill bigotry, racism and misogyny is found throughout and helps grease the communication machine. But the success of far-right populism rests on translating these grievances into nationalist terms in order to generate mobilization. And in a world connected by social media, every election season, every terrorist attack, and every global recession or pandemic is an opportunity to experiment, and in turn, evolve collective subjectivities.

Social media platforms allow people to imagine what it is like to be participating in faraway events (Papacharissi 2015, 4). Affective states may be shared

and therefore support states of empathy (Papacharissi 2015, 15). Social media enhance the affective reactions to these events, heightening processes of meaning making. Social media provide a linkage between sympathetic people—potentially interested others. They relate to the power-political situations that others elsewhere are experiencing a struggle against.

Affective news stories that play out on social media "sustain and mediate the feeling of democracy" (Papacharissi 2015, 32). Twitter, in particular, is effective in enabling distant publics to "listen in to events" and to create and sustain "a feeling of being there" through its narrative capacities (Papacharissi 2015, 32). Twitter promotes what we might call *the practice of listening.* The vast majority of Twitter users do not use it to Tweet, but rather, as a mechanism for information/public surveillance. Such listening can increase feelings of connectedness to others and even approximate formal conceptions of conversation (Honeycutt & Herring 2009. Solow-Niederman (2010) argues that the impact of Twitter on the so-called Green Revolution that took place in Iran in 2009 resulted from its ability to let more people listen in, rather than its ability to let more people speak.

The findings also overlap with expectations laid out in Chapters 1 and 3 and previous work on digitally-mediated activism that suggests certain kinds of tweets, especially tweets that troll and induce outrage, are conducive to sustaining populist communication, especially right-wing communication, during an event saturated with overt left- and right- symbolism. Brokers can gain access to a network by promoting messages with high levels of cultural resonance. Contemporary right-wing populists are an excitable group with a predisposition to engage in outrage politics. On top of this, posting outrageous content on social media tends to attract the most attention.

Posting emotionally-laden content is an effective way to enroll potentially-interested others into a political campaign.

Trolls are adept at acting creatively through everyday practices, combining what they know to take advantage of opportunities. Trolls "scavenge the landscape for scraps of usable content, make a meal of the most pungent bits, then hurl their waste onto an unsuspecting populace" (Phillips 2015, 10). Networks of social media trolls use normal everyday digital practices and unofficial tactics of (information) sharing to undermine normal politics. In a large network, even marginal effects make a big difference at scale. Members of a right-wing populist social media network are prone to be outraged at the corruption of what they perceive to be mainstream politicians.

Generally speaking, the populist "master" practice of drawing distinctions between the "True People", corrupt elites and outside "others" lends itself easily to the appropriation by trolls and other everyday social media users who seek to mobilize and outrage online audiences on the right and the left.

5.5 Discussion: The Anti-Agency Machine that Undermines

Instead of declaring themselves a worldwide movement with an articulate platform, the thing these twitter users have in common, first and foremost, are the tactics they wield against "the libs"—those perceived to be in charge of the geopolitical order that that seeks to impose official strategies that make behavior more predictable. The horizontal nature of social media means that such kind of traditional articulation of a subjectivity that could exert agency is essentially impossible. But one thing they can all agree on is that the libs should be trolled, no matter the domestic power-political context.

Tufekci has argued that self-empowerment is valued above all else (Tufekci 2014). Today's movements are therefore *always* aligning themselves against established institutions. It is as if the modernization thesis has run amok: Self-expression values are too ingrained for traditional politics to function as they have in previous eras.

And, moreover, social media's agentic capacity to produce novel opportunity structures for collective action has meant a reduction in agency on the part of users. Social media *impose* configurations, strategies, mechanisms and economies upon users (van Dijck & Poell 2013). Social media may have *generative* properties. They produce a sense of real-timeness[92], publicity (everything is for the most part public or can be made so), mobility (smartphones and other devices alter the temporality, spaciality, and frequency of content production and distribution), datafication/dividuality (emotions and feelings are converted into cumulative numbers, forcing individuals to *play the [powerful's] game* and produce things that improve visibility), virtual/real co-presence (actors can use both presences to amplify their voices) and automated disruption (fake accounts and bots disrupt information flows and communication largely undetected) (Milan 2015a, 890). And it is here that we may come to perspectives, addressed elsewhere, that link the *content* of what comes into being on social media and the material infrastructure itself.

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[92] Real-timeness is more of a sense, than it is actually "real time." By that, we mean that social media may present the information as if it were real time, or linear according to the time of its publication, but, as content is subject to algorithms, "real time" can be programmed.

From the tweets, it becomes clear that, generally, participants—especially the most active participants—deeply distrust traditional politics and political participation. This coheres with Bastos and Mercea's study of 21 Twitter activists considered highly integral to the movements: only 3 reported that voting was important (2016: 2373). To these activists, electoral politics are considered hopelessly corrupt. Liberal democracy was considered "not much of a democracy," "unrepresentative," "increasingly fragile," "pro-corporations," "boring," "irrelevant," "lost," "dead," "outdated," and "totally owned by puppeteers and gangsters" (Bastos and Mercea 2016, 2737). Does this mean that they are professing a desire for a more meaningful, and, hence, less liberal, democratic politics? Maybe. Nonetheless, the present study and myriad others make plain that there no reason, that social media will inherently encourage a progressive politics. Rather, social media have inspired a *disruptive* politics, wherein the first groups of elites being the target just happened to be wealthy elites and autocratic regimes.

Social media have a particular *encoded* politics, by which they mean a particular worldview, and policy program that can, perhaps decisively, alter a situation—as in, a intervening variable especially in meaning construction. Technical infrastructures of the web have become "action-orienting and -structuring reference points for social movements and communities" (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 12). The internet is an increasingly significant place to inaugurate a new social formation. New technological tools lead to novel social formations, including norms, rules and values (Dolata & Schrape 2016, 12). We should therefore investigate what it is people do online to help us anticipate what these formations will be, and what impact they may have on our longstanding conceptualizations of democracy.

For better or worse, it is the posts, the links, the videos, the photos, and the memes that are very stuff of the construction of collective identity. People appropriate identity elements, as they always have, but social media makes this process much more efficient (if shallow). “Identity is the result of custom-built assemblages of available meanings and their recombination (Milan 2015a, 895). Identities are ‘placed together’ meanings that are produced by individuals (896).

And if the Pepes take electoral control—emerging from the social media field where trolling and owning the libs is rewarded—it is reasonable to think they will govern as trolls and draw even more people into retweeting their trolling content. In short, it’s the practices, not the (populist) politics, that can help us to account for the mainstreaming of right-wing demagoguery undermining the geopolitical order in the in the early 21st century.

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Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation visited the internet-democracy discourse and read it alongside practice theory and political communication literature that addresses mobilization and identity. A theoretical framework was introduced in chapter 3 that is based upon the concepts of poaching and everyday practices put forth by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau. It cobbled perspectives from practice theory, political communication, and democratic theory together in order to explore and develop the concept and historical emergence of collective subjectivity.

Chapters 4 and 5 then went on to apply the insights of Chapter 3's framework to extraordinary events in order to better reveal the emergence of collective political subjectivity and its operation and effects. Chapter 4, traced the outlines of collective subjectivity during the Arab Spring, generally and the Egyptian Revolution, in particular. It also looked at the ways in which digital everyday practices were integral to the disruptive effects of these movements. The chapter also addressed the first Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong with an eye toward revealing the performative similarities between it and the previous Occupy-style movements that had cascaded around the world a few years earlier. There appears to be a transnational dimension to the emergence of collective subjectivity when everyday digital practices are employed.

There also appears to be an indifference to normative orientation. There is no marriage between collective subjectivities that emerge with digital everyday practices

to progressive causes. In Chapter 5, an examination of ISIL's social media practices highlighted how the transnationalization of digital everyday practices could be utilized for the formation of collective actors that are ideologically and performatively oriented against liberalism and other progressive normative outcomes. ISIL's use of normal social media practices and appropriation of relatively benign social media cultures to attract recruits across borders showed how liberal communication means can be used for illiberal ends.

Arguably, this is dim view on the effects of social media is predominant today—a stark reversal from what the bulk of the internet-democracy discourse reviewed in Chapter 2 had expected. The big Twitter data exploration of far-right social media practices and populist performances reveals how and why collective subjectivities that emerge through digital everyday practices have a great capacity to disrupt normal politics. These networks of everyday people interested in French politics and the MAGA movement sustain themselves through iterated performances of populist communication. Structural Topic Modeling of more than 3 million tweets from 578 accounts over time reveals that they tend to share racist, misogynist and Islamophobic information, along with expressing anger at the mainstream media and mainstream political parties—especially those on the center-right—and political integration projects (free trade, the EU, and "globalism"). When extraordinary events render these discussions more salient, these networks tend to rise up or be appropriated by strategic actors at crucial moments to disrupt normal politics. Collective subjectivities emerging on social media are best oriented toward disruption. But the topics they turn to in order to maintain and sustain themselves may be

constitutive, leaving the question of whether a far-left collective subjectivity could emerge in a sustainable way.

This remainder of this chapter concludes the dissertation by revisiting the key arguments and observations, as well as discussing some implications of the work in light of more recent political events and future research.

6.2 Five Principal Conclusions

Specifically, there are five principal conclusions that emerge from the preceding chapters:

6.2.1 Collective political subjectivity can emerge around and be based upon shared practices.

Mundane practices are a way of organizing and developing collective political subjectivity. Throughout the previous chapters, I have focused on what people today do a lot of—sharing information on digital communications platforms, mostly social media. There is an unconscious nature to these practices, that sharing information with others is simply what people do to get through their day. Thus, people find themselves accidentally enrolled in projects of collective subjectivity building, and along the way, also become members of collective action networks more specifically engaged in particular political projects and disruptive political events. This perspective emphasizes the (paradoxically) individual nature of collective subjectivities, whereby massive numbers of individual actions lead to the formation of non-organized collectives that are yet imbued with agency. Communities emerging around everyday practices must be afforded the opportunity simply to keep *doing.* As such, it is imperative for them to maintain access to and familiarity with the evolving technological tools that are the ultimate material source of agency.

6.2.2 People poach performances across borders.

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of poaching continues to find relevance in the ways in which collective subjectivities emerge and coalesce. Chapter 3 discussed this concept at length, and in the context of digital communication practices. Chapters 4 and 5 augment poaching's conceptualization with performativity, in that people perform various poached identities and scripts they pick up from friends or acquaintances, even across borders. People perform to get through the day, and to the extent they couple that with poaching, positive affect is generated (de Certeau argues there is a small, inherent resistance and hence, empowerment associated with the act of poaching). The diffusion of the Occupy-style protests from the Arab Spring, through New York and to Hong Kong was predicated on people performing liberal protests in ways they (save for the movement elites) had unconsciously picked up previously. The ideological content and political orientation of any particular collective subjectivity is understood to be poached and performed.

6.2.3 Collective political subjectivity is disruptive and shallow, breeding mundane extremism.

Collective political subjectivity based around shared social media practices is shallow in terms of program and ideology and therefore likely to either 1) remain disruptive only 2) stalling out as people get interested in other things 3) devolving into extremist one-upping sloganism (e.g. trolling). The cases—especially the Occupy-style movements' stagnations and relative long-term failures bear out this argument. The success of the transnational far right's trolling is disrupting normal liberal politics and, when in power, governing poorly, does as well.

Communication processes themselves are politically constitutive. Political communication on social media reveals the presence of dueling spirals of mundanity

and radicalization. Collective subjectivities formed through the digitally-mediated communication processes we find on social media (i.e. mundane, everyday practices) are likely shallow in terms of programmatic or ideological content; and indeed, that is part of the appeal for potentially interested others to unconsciously enroll. This lack of thickness lends itself to continuity and/or circularity in terms of movement evolution. And most collective subjectivities remain in the spiral of mundanity, with the ever present potential to become a disruptive political force because of their mundanity. However, the flip side of the coin is the ever present potential for radicalization, where circularity and social (capital) media incentives work to reward members for increasing extreme communication practices (first step, e.g. trolling) and content (second step, attacking imagined existential enemies).

As such, a practice-based understanding of collective subjectivity helps to reveal that there are no distinctly progressive or counterprogressive aspects of the technological artifacts or communication processes themselves. My argument is that their liberal qualities—the tendency toward openness, horizontalism, relative anonymity, etc—privileges certain kinds of performances over others, in terms of their effectiveness and acceptability regarding the prominence of extreme political content. The affordances of various social media platforms alter the balance of these liberal qualities and affect the available repertoires of collective action across time and space.

And so, even as movements fade away and autocrats and liberals return to power and prominence in societies, I argue that the main conclusion to draw is that collective subjectivities, when their dominant practices align with performances in ways made salient by the power-political context, have significant effects. Chapter 4 shows that performing liberal revolution works. Chapter 5 shows that performing

illiberalism and far-right contrarian populism works. It is going to be hard to switch off the disruption machine.

6.2.4 States struggle to comprehend everyday digital practices, for now.

States are trying to do so, however, in spite of the fourth observation—demonstrated most clearly in the introduction to Chapter 1 and in Chapter 4—that states have trouble apprehending everyday practices occurring on social media. This follows from the analytical framework in Chapter 3, and specifically, the work of de Certeau and Bourdieu. While everyday people have the capacity to engage in poaching, *inverse* poaching, where powerful entities adopt and remix the practices of everyday people, has been revealed to be quite problematic. State and capital efforts are often easy to identify and ignore.[93] Modern conceptions of the logic of state power means that states cannot meet practices on their own terms, and therefore, settle for traditional means of exerting power, such as violence, shutting down the internet entirely and the legal means of detention and the forfeiture of assets. As the Egyptian revolution and the far-right populism cases highlighted, the transnational dimensions of collective subjectivities poses challenges to state-based conceptions of political agency found within dominant theoretical paradigms in political science and IR. This does not mean, however, that states themselves are not adapting. Rather, it is scholarship that ought to think about collective subjectivities (or relational analysis in IR).

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[93] And this is why the effort to discredit Emmanuel Macron through the #MacronLeaks (Chapter 5) was perhaps more effective than other more blatant ham-handed attempts to infiltrate everyday discourse because it went through everyday channels (pastebin, 4chan and Twitter) and was endorsed by legitimate brokers who would not immediately be recognized as stooges acting on behalf of Russia.

6.2.5 Can we build other democratic concepts upon collective subjectivity and everyday digital practices?

Finally, the conception of collective subjectivity put forth here offers a way to rethink what counts as a constitutive democratic practice. Focusing on collective subjectivity, I argue, helps to step beyond debates about whether the internet is good or bad for democracy, especially in the functioning of the public sphere. We ought to learn how a public sphere could function under conditions where collective subjectivities are prevalent rather than (only) making normative judgements about the structures under which and the behavior of citizens of democracy occurs. A conception of a practice-based public sphere may not satisfy everyone, nor perfectly cohere with other members of the conceptual family of liberal democracy. However, as argued in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, arguably "liberal" channels and tools of communication enable the emergent salience of everyday digital practices to democratic politics. Perhaps the ideological apolitical nature of all things liberal helps to explain why liberal practices lead to illiberal outcomes, as seen in Chapter 5.

6.3 From the Egyptian Revolution to January 6th

The events presented in this dissertation have spanned a decade. And yet, a multitude of tumultuous and significant cases could be added directly into its analytical framework. The insights offered, here, shed light onto the rise of right-wing populism the world over. Collective subjectivities emerging from everyday digital practices have made disruptive impacts in many places, and here, I would like to discuss the ways in which the events covered in Chapters 4 and 5 are connected to 2015 and beyond's Make America Great Again and 2017 and beyond's Q-anon movements, culminating with the January 6th insurrection and attack on the U.S. Capitol Building.

What happens when a collective subjectivity captures the state? To begin to answer this kind of question, we can turn toward the U.S. under the administration of Donald Trump.

When Donald J. Trump was announced the winner of the 2016 presidential election, things became different for the political right on Twitter. Members of this group went from the political margins to being in power—even if it took a while for the political class to become acclimated to the new configurations of power. Right-wing redditors, 4chan members, and twitter users had spent a little over two years having fun crafting memes, tweeting, and engaging in general trolling behavior with the primary goal of undermining Hillary Clinton's candidacy and the secondary goal of elevating Donald Trump by filling in the political void left by his campaign's lack of details on the most inspiring aspects of his candidacy (e.g. "drain the swamp," "build the wall," "lock her up," and "America First"). In doing so, they helped to downplay the much more detailed yet uninspiring policy platform containing typical bland Republicanism. In Trump, they had found a blank vessel to which they could attach meaning.

The people behind these digital movements against Trump's political opponents can be regular, everyday people. Some of them genuinely are acting on their political beliefs, harassing people on Twitter that they view as political or existential enemies. But others are people who are simply bored (Tufekci 2017, Chapter 7) and derive affective enjoyment from interfering in the lives of politicians, activists and journalists. This tends to be the day-to-day Twitter experience. The shoe can be on the other foot, however, as many Trump activists have abandoned Twitter as a space for spreading the pro-Trump message, preferring to post on Gab, Parler, or

Facebook, as they have been chased away from Twitter by anti-Trump activists. Political posts made by people with relatively large followings tend to attract the attention of large numbers of persistent digital abusers waiting to pounce on perceived ignorance with a few clicks and keystrokes.

Trump and "the internet", writ broad, were in many ways a perfect match. Counterintuitively, his long public record rendered him an extremely malleable character, a man whose life, character and politics were open to interpretation. He was willing to go with whatever policies, positions, and tone that would earn him praise. Trump did not need to win the presidency, and his digitally native supporters did not need him to become president, either, in order to be validated. Both Trump and his most faithful supporters were doing it for kicks.

Trump's twitter behavior before, during, and after the presidential campaign conveys just how normal his approach to social media was. In between railing against his political opponents and perceived enemies, he would see things he liked and share them. Often, this would lead to controversy, being that no one fully emerging from the digital communications realm had become president. For example, Trump's retweeting of a prominent right-wing troll from the UK caused quite the kerfuffle. Jayda Fransen—the deputy leader of the marginalized far right party, Britain First. Trump's retweets of three virulently anti-Muslim videos—proven to be inauthentic representations—came seemingly out of the blue. Under another president, the tweets would have been taken as an official policy statement about Islam and the UK government response to the existence of Muslims within its territory. But there was no immediate connection to a policy aside from the by-then defunct "Muslim Ban." And as the country was almost a year into his presidency, it was clear to most that, while

the content of the tweets was abhorrent, Trump was just tweeting like any other person—albeit on who had spent considerable time in a social media network populated by far-right trolls. Trump tweeted the videos, trolled American citizens, and disrupted the normal flow of diplomacy by drawing coarse language into the official discourse. In effect, Trump was "tricked" by the troll into "revealing a hidden reality" (McDonald, 2015). In this case, what was uncovered was Trump's personal contempt for Muslims. Trump, without thinking much about it, clicked the retweet button and moved on with his life, leaving his press secretary with the difficult task of explaining why he did it.

Trump enjoyed so much support from internet trolls, in significant part because of these kinds of tweets, that Dan Scavino was tapped as White House Director of Social Media and Assistant to the President after the election. He had made his career by scanning the 4chan, 8chan, and Reddit for campaign ideas and frames. Scavino was tasked with finding troll exemplars; he was an expert at doing so because he had lived in that digital world for years. In his role in the White House, he has continued in his roll as a troll and troll expert. During the early Trump years, before the ascendance of Q-anon and the more widespread use of Christian imagery to denote membership, one important sign was to adopt the cartoon character of Pepe the Frog as an avatar and the frequently use it in memes—especially the fan-crafted iteration of the Frog that featured Trump's signature hairstyle.

Due to the horizontal, open structure of the internet, these behaviors—these practices—travel across borders. Because of their relative success in the US, more-or-less right wing populist campaigns in other Western countries, such as France, these practices of trolling and 'owning the libs' did not stop with Trump's election. And

while the popularity of Pepe has dwindled, others, such as the nonplayable character (NPC), the tenor of the message has continued. Trump and his most fervent online supporters did not transform into dignified stewards of the state when the election was over. Rather, they continued to rail against who they perceived as liberals, elites, and members of underrepresented minority groups (i.e. anyone who is not sufficiently conservative). Importantly, they found common cause with right-wing movements in other countries. If they could win in the US, then certainly it was possible for them to win in France, the Netherlands, and Germany, to adopt policy frameworks borrowed from Hungary's Orban, Poland's Duda, and Putin's Russia, and to borrow activist tactics from European (i.e. white) identitarians. The various domestic power-political positions did not change their online practices. Something as seemingly simple as retweeting, reposting, and remixing memes can help explain how groups of formerly demobilized citizens in democracies worldwide might find common cause during salient, important events such as elections, terrorist attacks, and (counter)movements (e.g. countering #MeToo with the #CancelCancelCulture movement).

As described in Chapter 5, many of the most important (i.e. nodes) American right-wing Twitter users became interested in French electoral politics—and countless led others to become invested as well. Being exposed to (re)tweets and doing some (re)tweeting of their own meant that they, over time, came to view Marine Le Pen's presidential candidacy favorably, in part, because they were familiar with her tactics: She was trolling mainstream French and European politics (e.g. cosmopolitanism, liberal democracy, and openness) by making outrageous statements meant to enrage opponents (e.g. political elites) enough that they might inadvertently reveal the "truth" that they either wanted white Western society to be destroyed, or that they were

secretly white supremacists who were afraid to speak up because of political correctness. But this affinity is not necessarily based on shared ideological or policy positions. Rather, it was founded on an unconscious sense, a feel for the game, that these were the appropriate digitally mediated and social media-afforded practices to engage with in order to transform the international order.

De Certeau's conceptualization of the practice of poaching is especially helpful in shedding light on how almost anything—news events, elections, pictures of cute cats—can be turned into a meme aimed at "owning the libs." This can be viewed as a kind of resistance that obtain in everyday practices even as Bourdieu and de Certeau envisioned them as empowering and emancipatory in an authoritarian-capitalist structure. As such, it is imperative for the movement to maintain access to the tools that provided them the material source of the agency that brought them to power. From this perspective, it becomes clearer as to why Trump losing access to Twitter because of his role in the insurrection is so critical.

6.3.1 Trolling and the Ideology of Non-Governance

When the trolls come to power, they bring the trolling with them. They do not want to govern—in part because they do not "know" how to govern. But they also do not do well governing because their collective subjectivity that brought them to power is based on owning the libs. This collective subjectivity is oriented toward disruption, as are all collective subjectivities that emerge through everyday digital practices. Those who helped Trump into power and followed him into government—along with Trump himself—fell into what I have described earlier in this dissertation as a spiral of radicalization, where they were socially rewarded for increasingly extreme and creative ways in which to own the libs—their imagined political adversaries.

As inexperienced governors, but highly experienced in the ways of everyday digital practices (tactics), the thin MAGA political ideology was vulnerable to those with experience in wielding powerful institutional power (strategies). Rather than Trump's personal idiosyncrasies explaining the whiplash pinballing around of the administration's agenda, it may be more so that their collective subjectivity was as susceptible to stagnation as the Egyptian revolution, for example. MAGA's populist white working class platform was appropriated first by Russia and Julian Assange. Then by tax and welfare state cutting Republicans led by Mitch McConnel. Then by radical conservatives who envision the presidency as a monarch like William Barr. And finally by Q-Anon, Mike Lindell, and extremist anti-government groups like the Proud Boys. MAGA—the administration itself, but also their supporters and right wing media allies—was derailed over and over again, much like the Occupy style movements found in Chapter 4, I argue, because collective subjectivity that emerges through digital everyday practices is oriented toward disruption. In this case, it was trolling, pwning and outrage all the way down—until it explodes into a violent insurrection.

The Trump phenomenon is illustrative of Tufekci's conceptualization of *adhocracy,* where tasks are "accomplished in an ad hoc manner by whoever shows up and is interested" (Tufekci 2017). Networked movements in the social media era tend to operate this way by default. In the Trump case, governance was conducted rather haphazardly by a cast of characters that would come and go (excepting Trump's family) based on their personal interest in Trump and the Trump narrative.

The Q-anon conspiracy theory helped to fill in for actual governance. It was appealing for true believers in Trump to believe that while he publicly floundered as a

president, there was a secret plan in place to truly own the libs by putting a slew of prominent Democrats, celebrities and those working for the "deep state" in prison for treason and child trafficking. Keep tweeting, keep sharing things on Facebook, keep the memes coming, and keep the faith, and eventually, everything will magically work out.

Social media can help enable a process of "networked gatekeeping" that creates a hierarchy within an emerging political entity—one that does not necessarily favor individuals with credentials from official institutions or hardened veterans from previous movements. These crowd-sourced elites are the articulators of a political agency. They use social media platforms to share their own personal experiences but are empowered by their "followers" to assemble information in ways that create a "bottom-up narratives" that become part of the historicized dogma of an event (Papacharissi 2015, 48).

The concept of the "historicized dogma of an event" can play a significant explanatory role in the organizing of Trump supporters. A long list of crowd-sourced elites like Jack Posobiec (white nationalist internet sleuth), Ali Alexander (major organizer of the Stop the Steal rally on January 6th), and the person believed to be behind Q (Ron Watkins) created a factually false bottom-up narrative to explain Trump's lack of a popular vote win in the 2016 election--one so strong that it persisted well into 2020 and served to provide meaning to an attack on the Capitol Building of the United States on January 6, 2021. The definition of just who the libs were expanded so much that there were chants of "hang Mike Pence", the man they had voted for just two months before, during the attack on the capital. As noted above, Trump, his sons, and many of his closest advisors are far-right digital natives. They

listened to these crowd-sourced elites to such an extent that Trump himself came to believe that the election had been stolen from him, just as it had been stolen from Bernie in 2016's supposedly rigged primaries, just as the popular vote had been stolen from him in 2016 because of millions of illegal votes cast in California--according to the narratives, anyway.

Engaging in sharing practices during a protest may be as important as traditional organizing and protest actions (Marres, 2012; Milan, 2015b). The fullest expression of this sentiment and my general arguments may be the fact that the insurrectionists meticulously detailed their actions on January 6th. It is as if they could not engage in the violence on the ground without also sharing it social media (and therefore self-incriminating themselves), that they might gain standing and attention from their peers, and, in turn shaping the evolving collective subjectivity animating MAGA. If they had succeeded in finding Nancy Pelosi or Mike Pence and going through with the unthinkable, they would have filmed that too, just as ISIL did with American journalist James Foley, and when the lone wolves engaged in mass murders in Orlando and Christchurch.

De Certeau shows us that practices of consuming online content are rarely distinct from those of production. Some memes generate enough attention to disrupt the meaning of political events, redirecting public attention (Tang & Lee 2013). If numerous people participate in a digitally-mediated protest by hashtagging on Twitter, it is because it simply makes sense to them: “Having fun makes just as much sense as expressing dissent” (Yang & Jiang 2015). On January 6th, violently attacking the capitol made just as much sense as Q-anon.

While the Occupy-style movements and ISIL eventually succumbed to state power, this MAGA disruption machine continues to run. It has been hurt by Trump's losing direct access to Twitter but is bolstered by efforts to put movement members in places of political power outside of the White House. The mobilizing power of "I saw it on Facebook" endures.

Thus, we should continue to integrate what everyday people are doing into our analyses of extraordinary events. While focusing on elite communication and communities of practices is valuable, paying attention to the dynamics that link the everyday behavior of individuals--specifically their propensity to engage in the mundane but frequent digital practices of liking, sharing, and replying to content they encounter—is also valuable when it comes to understanding and explaining the to the political designs and behaviors of motivated state actors and their associates.

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