

Social Media Activists: Analyzing the Relationship between Online Activism and Offline Attitudes and Behaviors

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Abstract

Token support for social causes has been increasingly studied and commented on in recent years. Campaigns such as the Livestrong bracelet, the pink breast cancer ribbons, the KONY 2012 video, the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, and the Facebook profile picture modifications for marriage equality and support for Paris after the 2015 terrorist attacks have been coined “slacktivism” and those who engage in these activities “slacktivists,” however, little empirical research has been done on the topic. This research explores the relationship so-called slacktivism, operationalized as various social media activities, has on

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social capital, cosmopolitan attitudes, and other forms of social cause engagement activities. The results suggest that the effects on social capital and cosmopolitanism are not significant. However, the strong relationship between slacktivism and other, “traditional,” forms of activism suggest that “slacktivist” may be an ill-fitting name for individuals engaged in this social cause engagement.

Millions of people around the world viewed and shared the *KONY 2012* video in the spring of 2012. Millions of people around the world viewed, participated in, and shared the ALS Ice Bucket challenge in summer of 2014. And millions of Facebook users have changed their profile pictures to show solidarity for marriage equality and for Paris in the aftermath of the November 2015 terrorist attacks. These campaigns are examples of slacktivism, defined as token support for a cause without intention to put forth additional effort (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013). Much of the academic literature on slacktivism frames these activities as driven by impression management, laziness, and social desirability (White & Peloza, 2009; Bal, Archer-Brown, Robson, & Hall, 2013). However, emerging research provides evidence that slacktivists are engaging in slacktivism in addition to other forms of traditional activism (Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011).

Nonprofit leaders operate with tight financial margins in pursuit of important missions and are dependent on donations and volunteers. If online activities can lead

to an increase in volunteer and activist engagement, which may lead to increased visibility and financial liquidity, leaders would be wise to adjust their engagement strategies accordingly. The Ice Bucket Challenge is one example of how slacktivism lead to an increase in giving and volunteer engagement (ALS Association, 2014). Is this an exception to the rule or can online engagement help organizations?

Research focused on social capital and the Internet seems to fall under either the dystopian view (Putnam, 2000; Kraut et al., 1998) stating that the Internet and technology diminish social capital, or the utopian view (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001) arguing that the Internet is a new frontier for social capital networks. Reality, however, is more likely in the space between (Hofer & Aubert, 2013).

The primary research question guiding this paper is: how does engaging in slacktivism relate to social capital, attitudes, and further social cause engagement activities. Specifically, how does engaging in slacktivism relate to a person's online and offline social capital, both bonding and bridging, one's cosmopolitan perspective, and broader forms of social cause engagement beyond, so called, slacktivism. The paper proceeds by first conceptualizing slacktivism and why it merits study, then reviewing pertinent literature on slacktivism, social capital, cosmopolitanism, and social cause engagement.

Slacktivism

Slacktivism has emerged as a popular form of social cause engagement with the proliferation of social media

and high profile campaigns such as ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and KONY 2012. Slacktivism lacks an established definition but has been conceptualized as “low-cost and low risk digital practices” such as signing petitions, “liking” a Facebook page, or re-tweeting a tweet on Twitter (Schumann & Klein, 2015, p. 308), and token displays of support online without intention or willingness to put forth significant effort in pursuit of social change (Kristofferson et al., 2013). The conceptualization of slacktivism in this research is social media activity to “raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity” (Rotman et al., 2011 p. 821). The former definition defines slacktivism as, necessarily, token and less valuable than other forms of activism. On the other hand, the latter defines slacktivism as having multi-faceted outcomes, including social change, awareness, or expressive. It is in this definition that we begin to see slacktivism, perhaps improperly named, as part of a larger body of activities for social cause engagement.

Slacktivism has traditionally been positioned in contrast to traditional forms of activism such as volunteering, staging a sit-in, donating money, or joining a campaign. Kristofferson et al. (2013) argue the primary differentiation between slacktivism and traditional activism hinges on the type of support behaviors offer a social cause:

“We refer to these types of behaviors as *token support* because they allow consumers to affiliate with a cause in ways that show their support to themselves or others with little associated effort or cost. We contrast token support with *meaningful sup-*

port, which we define as consumer contributions that require a significant cost, effort, or behavior change in ways that make *tangible contributions* to the cause.” (p. 1150)

Academic research (Schumann & Klein, 2015; Kristofferson et al., 2013; Rotman et al., 2011) has drawn differing conclusions about the impact of engaging in slacktivism on engaging in other forms of activism. Some research, however, does not position slacktivism as inferior to “traditional” activism, but as a part of a activism activities (Rotman et al., 2011). The purpose of this analysis is to examine the impact slacktivism has on the attitudes of so-called slacktivists in regard to social capital and cosmopolitanism.

The literature on slacktivism is contentious with two “camps” emerging. In the first are those who are optimistic about the potential of slacktivism to have positive impacts on social causes and lead to more sustained social cause engagement (Brigham & Noland, 2014; Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011; Davis, 2011; Schumann & Klein, 2015). The second argue that slacktivism is motivated by self-presentation, group identification, and narcissism motivations and is potentially detrimental to broader social causes (Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Kristofferson et al., 2013; Lim, 2013; Morozov, 2009).

Kristofferson et al. (2013) found a moderating role for private / public token support in testing impression management motivators for engaging in slacktivism (Saxton & Wang, 2014; Lim, 2013; Budish, 2012; White & Peloza, 2009). They found support for these motivations; private token support predicted likelihood to engage in subsequent public support while the opposite held for ini-

tial token support that was public. Alternatively, Lee and Hsieh (2013) found that, after controlling for demographic variables, individuals who engaged in slacktivism were more likely to write to their government, and Schumann & Klein (2015) found that slacktivists were more likely to attend a discussion or sign a petition, but were reluctant to engage in more demanding offline activities. As is clear, the theoretical and empirical scholarship on slacktivism is emerging, but lacks clarity and depth.

A different set of findings emerged from a study by The Center for Social Impact Communication (2011) at Georgetown University. Their study, termed *The Dynamics of Cause Engagement*, found that slacktivists participate in twice as many activities, are twice as likely to volunteer their time, four times as likely to contact a political representative and equally as likely to donate money when compared to non-slacktivists (Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011). This reinforces previously mentioned results from Schumann and Klein (2015) and Lee and Hsieh (2013) both of which found small relationships between slacktivism and offline activities. This evidence paired with the recent success of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and KONY 2012 campaigns signal a potential for slacktivism to generate social change and contribute to broader social cause engagement activities providing support to the notion that activities that have been termed slacktivism are part of a broader range of activism activities. Though this paper focuses attention on pro-social online activism, it should be noted that slacktivism, as any other form of activism, can be used for more nefarious means. For example, ISIS and other groups who promote agenda's of violence and repression use the same online

methods to promote their agenda.

The virtual nature of slacktivism also calls into question the impact of engaging in slacktivism on an individual's attitudes about the world. Two of these attitudes, perceptions of social capital and cosmopolitanism, are discussed next.

Social Capital

The emergence of social media has generated a new space for people to connect with each other and form community. As a result, social capital researchers have developed an interest in understanding how social capital functions in online networks. Putnam (1995) defines social capital as the “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 66). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) describe it as “networks and relationships” that “constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs” and “as a resource for social action” (p. 243). While others, focus on social capital as a means to gain access to structural resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998; Schneider, 2007). This paper uses Halpern's (2005) definition of social capital as “social networks and the norms and sanctions that govern their character,” and noted that social capital “is valued for its potential to facilitate individual and community action, especially through the solution of collective action problems” (p. 6). This value, and the demonstrated application to both online and offline networks, (Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2015), make social capital a noteworthy variable in relation to slacktivism.

Social capital can be broken down into two types:

bridging and bonding. Putnam (2000) describes bridging as looser connections, or weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) that may be leveraged for information, perspective, resources, differing racial and ethnic backgrounds, and provides individuals with expanded social boundaries but lacks emotional support (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Johnston, Tanner, Lalla, & Kawalski, 2013). Bridging capital represents the availability of a heterogeneous network. Social media networks offer the potential for a high degree of bridging capital as users can interact with others around the world, in different economic classes, and of different cultural backgrounds (Johnston et al., 2013). One, so called, slacktivist, may find convergence with another on a particular issue, capturing Joseph Kony for instance, while they may disagree of many other issues, and be of different racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic status. Slacktivism, then, has the potential to coalesce people from different places and backgrounds around a specific cause, thus bridging online networks. However, we do not know if this online convergence transcends the virtual space into offline networks. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between engaging in slacktivism and online bridging social capital.

H2: There will be a positive relationship between slacktivism and offline bridging social capital.

Bonding capital, on the other hand, is the strong ties an individual has with friends, family, and other close associations (Ellison et al., 2007). These relationships tend to be with homogenous others and represent ties in-

ternal to an individual's economic, racial, and cultural background (Sajuria, vanHeerde-Hudson, Hudson, Dasandi, & Theocharis, 2015). Bonding capital lacks the diversity of background contained within bridging capital but is characterized by high levels of trust, cohesion, and reciprocity (Sajuria et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2013). This form of capital is a function of close ties and provides exclusive benefits not available to individuals outside of the network (Hofer & Aubert, 2013).

Bonding capital research tends to focus on membership in associations, particular associations with homogeneous populations (Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). The benefits of this type of bonding are significant and only available to the in-group. In fact, bonding social capital is often characterized by animosity toward the out-group (Williams, 2006). This form of capital is often pitted against bridging capital in terms of the positive externalities realized by each (Halpern, 2005). In terms of gaining access to resources and bases of power for groups that do not traditionally have them, vertical bridging social capital, often called linking social capital, is important while bonding social capital does not provide these benefits (Halpern, 2005). Additionally, Putnam (1993) found that communities and individuals with high levels of bonding capital engage in less civic participation. These comparisons may yield import distinctions for policy interventions, but mask the principal value of bonding social capital to individuals.

Bonding social capital provides care and support to individuals (Williams, 2006; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Associations, churches, online forums, and neighborhood groups are excellent examples of spaces for bond-

ing capital (Beaudoin & Tao, 2007). Members are able to seek support and care from people with shared experiences. These relationships are characterized by trust, cohesion, and mutual support (Beaudoin & Tao, 2007) and provide meaningful community for members. While individuals who seek support from these groups are seeking the benefits of bonding social capital it is unclear if slacktivists perceive their coalitions as sources of support (Lee, Kim, & Ahn, 2014). In fact, some evidence suggests that social media users do not see their relationships online as close ties at all (Hofer & Aubert, 2013), not to mention if any relationship exists between engaging in slacktivism and offline bonding capital. To answer this question, the following hypotheses are offered:

H3: There will be a positive relationship between engaging in slacktivism and online bonding social capital.

H4: There will be a positive relationship between engaging in slacktivism and offline bonding social capital.

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a derivative of the Greek *kosmos polites* (citizen of the world) and was developed by the Cynics in the Greek tradition. Cosmopolitanism, as a concept and the corresponding ideology, have been experiencing a revival since “in the 1960s researchers were motivated by the call to discover, map, and understand” Arendt’s (1958) notion of the human condition (Strand, 2009, p. 229). The proliferation of globalization, travel, and technology increased notions of a global social life and resulted in a corresponding turn to explore global citizenship, glob-

al justice, and transnationalism (Strand, 2009; Beck & Sznaider, 2006). Cosmopolitanism is, at its core, about interconnection between people living in different locations, and of different socio-economic, racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Holton, 2002). I use Strand's (2009) conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as "the idea that all human beings – regardless of national, religious, cultural, or political affiliation – should be seen as members of the same community and that this community should be cultivated" (p. 232). A cosmopolitan, then, is an individual who believes in and attempts to cultivate this community.

Cosmopolitanism, particularly as an outcome of education with a civic engagement focus, has been studied in the context of civil society and social capital (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2000; Gardner, 1998). In fact, cosmopolitan outcomes of education have been directly targeted through civic engagement programs characterized by bridging relationships between college students, faculty, and community members (Ostrander, 2004). These interventions, becoming more frequent in higher education, seem to attempt to institutionalize (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2000; Gardner, 1998) bridging capital to increase cosmopolitanism.

The Internet, generally, and social media, specifically, provide interesting spaces for interconnectedness between people of varied cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds. In fact, McEwan and Sobre-Denton (2011) argued, "cosmopolitanism can be facilitated through mediated spaces in which people can transcend cultural boundaries" (p. 253). They also note the potential increased bridging social capital as a result of online social networks

connecting people of differing backgrounds. Cosmopolitanism promotes an ideal, perhaps utopian, way of being in which everyone is a member of a global society, individuals are willing to engage with “others,” and collective action is encouraged (Brancati, 2014; Saran & Kalliny, 2012). Given the potential to engage with people of different backgrounds and perspectives, slacktivists, seemingly, have the opportunity to increase their levels of cosmopolitanism. However, the lack of strong ties created on social media (Hofer & Aubert, 2013), may moderate this opportunity. Thus, we must ask if slacktivism influences cosmopolitanism.

H5: There will be a positive relationship between engaging in slacktivism and self-reported levels of cosmopolitanism.

Social Cause Engagement

Social cause engagement is conceptualized as more “traditional” forms of activism such as donating money, engaging in advocacy, volunteering, or joining an organization. These activities are differentiated from slacktivism in two ways. First, the acts of support are not deemed “token” (Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Kristofferson et al., 2013). Secondly, it is assumed that individuals who engage in traditional forms of activism do so over time, while slacktivist activity is assumed to be fleeting (Budish, 2012).

The pervading negative descriptions of slacktivism and assumptions that it is a fixed space are offered in contrast to a study by the Center for Dynamic Social Cause Engagement at Georgetown University (2011). This study found that slacktivists engage in social media advocacy and other, more traditional, forms of advocacy. That is,

slacktivism is an additive element to activism not a fixed space for most “slacktivists.” This empirical study provides evidence that invalidates voices that argue slacktivists are simply motivated by impression management, peer pressure, guilt, and other selfish motives (Lim, 2013; Budish, 2012). The few empirical studies of slacktivism (see Kristofferson et al., 2013) do not ask questions about additional forms of social cause engagement or attitudes toward political, social, or other forms of change. Those empirical studies that do ask these questions find evidence that slacktivists are engaged in other forms of activism in addition to slacktivism (Schumann & Klein, 2015; Lee & Hsieh, 2013). The omission of such questions, calls into question the validity of the implicit, sometimes explicit, claims that slacktivists are either only engaging in social media activism or simply engaging in it for selfish reasons. This study seeks to provide additional evidence to the Dynamic Social Cause Engagement study (2011) and provide empirical evidence that slacktivists are more activist than slacker. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited.

H6: There will be a positive relationship between engaging in slacktivism and engaging in other forms of social cause engagement.

Methodology

Data Collection Procedures and Participants

A total of 513 students at two large Mid-Atlantic Universities in their communication courses were recruited using a cloud-based participant management program called SONA Systems during the first four months of the fall semester. Participation in “research” is a required component of some of the courses and was offered as extra

credit in others. The SONA system allows students to select a variety of research studies to complete and receive course credit for without collecting individual identity markers within the survey. Students use the online SONA interface to click on a survey they wish to take and are then directed to a Qualtrics survey to complete. The sample was cleaned and the resulting sample size was 503.

Students in the introductory communication course are primarily first-year students with some second year and transfer students. The population of these two universities is heavily Caucasian and middle to upper class. The respondents were mostly first-year students (90%), mostly white (82%), mostly middle and upper class (89%), and overwhelmingly female (83%). A sample this homogenous is an important limitation of this research.

Measures

Slacktivism Engagement was operationalized by the frequency (1=Never to 5=Very Frequently) with which a person engages in slacktivism activities such as liking, favoriting, or sharing social media messages, while *social cause engagement* was operationalized by the frequency (1=Never to 5=Very Frequently) with which a person engages in traditional forms of activism such as donating money or joining an advocacy organization (Muzaffar, Chapman-Novakofski, Castelli, & Scherer, 2014). Reliability for *slacktivism engagement* ($M=9.47, \alpha = .89$) was strong, and moderate for *social cause engagement* ($M=6.76, \alpha = .76$). These operationalizations are consistent with research asking respondents to self-report on their behaviors (Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007; Rhodes, Macdonald, & McKay, 2006).

Social capital was operationalized using William's (2006) measures of both online and offline bonding and bridging social capital (a total of 4 scales). All four scales consisted of 10 Likert items (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) that assessed respondent's level of agreement with the statements. Williams (2006) found construct validity for the measure of social capital and other researchers have used it with success on different samples (Ellison et al., 2007). The statements were adjusted to be appropriate for college students when necessary. The full version of this scale is in the Appendix. Consistent with previous research (Williams, 2006), online bonding ($M = 27.37, \alpha = .84$), online bridging ($M = 35.34, \alpha = .92$), offline bonding ($M = 39.57, \alpha = .81$), and offline bridging ($M = 39.05, \alpha = .93$), yielded strong reliability.

Finally, *cosmopolitanism* was operationalized using the measure resulting from Saran and Killiny's (2012) measurement study on the topic. Starting with interviews to assure the measure would accurately represent the construct, they generated 65 items, and then went through a measurement study using expert interviews, exploratory, and confirmatory factor analytic procedures to settle on 6 Likert (1 =strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) items representing cosmopolitanism. They reported an initial reliability of .78. Reliability in this study, for the measure of cosmopolitanism was strong ($M = 24.92, \alpha = .91$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Foreshadowing Results

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale statistics are shown in Table 1. Respondents indicated neutral responses to both measures, slacktivism and traditional, of

Table 1
*Intercorrelations, Descriptive, and Scale Statistics
 for Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slacktivism	--						
Bonding Online	.170**	--					
Bridging Online	.188**	.362**	--				
Bridging Offline	-0.019	-0.005	.312**	--			
Bonding Offline	0.068	-0.023	.319**	.531**	--		
Cosmopoli- tanism	.115*	-0.052	.377**	.525**	.534**	--	
Social Cause Engage	.644**	.142**	.136**	-0.001	0.077	0.077	--
<i>Mean</i>	2.37	2.74	3.53	3.91	3.96	4.15	2.25
<i>SD</i>	1.04	0.69	0.70	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.91
Cronbach's α	0.89	0.84	0.92	0.93	0.81	0.91	0.76

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

social cause engagement. Students reported high levels of online bridging, offline bonding, and offline bridging social capital, but reported moderate levels of online bonding social capital. This suggests that most students in the sample do not perceive their online social networks to be cohesive. Overall, students reported very high levels of cosmopolitanism, suggesting that they view interacting with other people with different perspectives very positively.

To answer the hypotheses multiple regression analyses were performed. Slacktivism was set as the predictor variable with family socio-economic status, student sex, age, race, political affiliation, and academic year as control variables in all of the models. The predictive utility results for slacktivism, the predictor of interest, for all of the models is available in Table 2.

Hypothesis one predicted that slacktivism would have a positive relationship with online bridging social

Table 2
Regression Results for the Predictor Slacktivism Engagement

Dependent Variable	B	SE	β	95% CI	% variance
Online Bridging	0.13	0.03	.19**	(0.066 , 0.185)	3%
Offline Bridging	-0.02	0.03	-0.04	(-0.077 , 0.034)	0%
Online Bonding	0.116	0.03	.18**	(0.058 , 0.175)	3%
Offline Bonding	0.03	0.03	0.05	(-0.023 , 0.085)	0%
Cosmopolitanism	0.05	0.03	0.08	(-0.002 , 0.105)	1%
Social Cause Engagement	0.567	0.031	0.65**	(0.507 , 0.627)	40%

** $p < .01$

capital. The model, with slacktivism and the control variables significantly predicted online bridging social capital ($R^2 = .074$, $F(7, 479) = 5.44$, $p < .01$). Only one of the control variables, political affiliation ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$), emerged as significant. As predicted, slacktivism engagement was a significant predictor of online bridging capital ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$), but only explained 3% of the variance in bridging capital. Thus, this finding is statistically significant, but not practically significant.

Hypothesis two predicted a relationship between slacktivism and offline bridging capital. The regression model with the control variables and slacktivism predicting offline-bridging capital was not significant ($R^2 = .03$, $F(7, 479) = 2.01$, $p = .052$) indicating that slacktivism does not have a significant relationship with offline bridging social capital. Hypothesis three explored the relationship between slacktivism and online bonding social capital. The model with slacktivism and the control variables was

significant ($R^2 = .048$, $F(7, 479) = 3.46$, $p < .01$). Slacktivism was the only predictor to emerge as significant ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$), but was not practically significant, accounting for only 3% of the variance in online bonding social capital. Hypothesis four predicted a relationship between slacktivism and offline bonding social capital. The model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .033$, $F(7, 479) = 2.35$, $p = .023$), but did not account for a practically significant amount of variance (3%) in bonding social capital.

Hypothesis five investigated the relationship between slacktivism and cosmopolitan attitudes among students. The model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .074$, $F(7, 479) = 5.57$, $p < .01$). Family socio-economic status ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .04$), student sex with women reporting higher degrees of cosmopolitan attitudes ($\beta = .163$, $p < .01$), and political affiliation with more liberal students reporting higher levels of cosmopolitan attitudes ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .01$) emerged as significant. Slacktivism engagement ($\beta = .18$, $p = .062$) was not a significant predictor of cosmopolitanism suggesting that, after controlling for the other predictors, slacktivism does not predict cosmopolitanism.

Finally, hypothesis six predicted that students who engage in slacktivism will also engage in other, more traditional, forms of social cause engagement. The results of this model were statistically and practically significant ($R^2 = .42$, $F(7, 479) = 51.16$, $p < .01$). Importantly, slacktivism engagement emerged as the only significant predictor, explaining 40% of the variance, in social cause engagement ($\beta = .645$, $p < .01$, $sr^2 = .40$). This finding supports previous research (Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011) suggesting that “slacktivists” are engaged in broader forms of activism in addition to “slacktivism” and that

slacktivism is part of a broader base of activism activities.

Discussion

Though the hypotheses of this study, with the exception of hypothesis six, did not demonstrate positive relationships between slacktivism and the outcome variables, this study represents an important step in studying slacktivism. First, this study sought to explore the concept of slacktivism both empirically and systematically. Most research on slacktivism lacks methodological rigor and empirical evidence. This project provides a start toward both. The study of slacktivism using other theoretical perspectives, social capital and cosmopolitanism, provides a systematic form of inquiry. This paper also examines the impact engaging in slacktivism has on cosmopolitan attitudes. The methodological rigor is not without limitations, however, the selection and operationalization of validated constructs here represent a starting point for future research on different samples.

The relationship between slacktivism and both bonding and bridging social capital did not turn out to be practically significant. It seems that one does not need to have either form of social capital to engage in slacktivism and reporting slacktivism engagement does not mean one has higher levels of either form of social capital. This represents an important finding in contrast to other forms of online activity that have been demonstrated to have significant relationships with social capital (Beaudoin & Tao, 2007).

This study provides evidence that naming people who engage in “slacktivist” activities, particularly via social media, a slacktivist is an inaccurate representation of

what those individuals are engaged in. It may be better to change the term “slacktivist” to “social media activist.” This finding weakens the critiques leveled at slacktivists as being self-obsessed and lazy engaging in activity that does not produce real enduring change (Lim; 2013; Budish, 2012; Morozov, 2009). It also provides insight into how college students engage in activism. Based on the evidence in this study, it would seem that online activism, or token acts, are part of a broader spectrum of social cause engagement activities. Future research should examine the differences in effect between online and offline forms of activism. Finally, this study provides a promising potential strategy for volunteer and social movement managers. Perhaps the most important finding of this research is that people who engage in slacktivism are also much more likely to volunteer and/or donate to a nonprofit organization, and to engage in activism or advocacy. This represents an opportunity for nonprofit organizations to cultivate supporters, volunteers, and activists in pursuit of their mission.

Despite several key contributions, this research is not without limitations. First, a cross-sectional survey design makes determining directionality very difficult. The researcher is left with logic and theory to drive the directionality arguments. Given this design, we simply do not know if people engage in other forms of activism as a result of their slacktivism or vice versa. Secondly, and importantly, the sample is overwhelmingly female, white, young, traditional college students. College students, however, embody an important potential base for nonprofit organizations, and, therefore, should be cultivated accordingly. The framework presented here can be applied to

other samples in other areas to strengthen the illustrative conclusions presented in this research. The final limitation is the use of self-report data. Self-report data is susceptible to social desirability bias, fatigue, and other sources of measurement error. However, self-report studies can fill an important gap in a field dominated by large database and economic data studies. The valence of this research is social media activity for positive social change. Admittedly, this is the perspective studied here. However, it should be noted that the potential online activism represents for positive causes is equally concerning for perverse outcomes as well. Subversive, racist, repressive, and other negative outcomes can be leveraged using the same forms of slacktivism that helped raise money for ALS.

Future research should continue to explore how is social capital formed and maintained through social media. At a more basic level, researchers should consider what social capital might look like online. Are the measures used for offline social capital appropriate for assessing online social capital? Is the Internet even a place where social capital can be cultivated, or is the concept of online community something altogether different?

Researchers should also consider the impacts and outcomes of social media activism. For example, the KONY 2012 and the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge are often cited, pejoratively, as exemplars of slacktivism, but these campaigns both represented important policy and donor engagement victories for their respective organizations. It is likely social media activism can have important effects on its own without the complement of “traditional” activism. Future research should continue to empirically study cases of social media activism’s impacts and outcomes.

Further, future research should consider the tangible social cause outcomes of online activities. Investigating the effects of token activities in comparison with tangible activities and how they relate is an important area of study beyond the scope of this research. Finally, more research is needed to understand how, if at all, social media activism functions as a potential stepping-stone to continued information seeking, volunteering, donating, and other forms of engagement with nonprofit organizations, as well as, how social media activism functions as a part of a broader spectrum of engagement.

Arguably, the most important conclusion is that we should stop calling slacktivists, slacktivists, as this term does not fully represent the wide range of activities most individuals who engage in social media activism are involved in. Based on the findings of this one study, it's possible that so-called slacktivists are "more activist than slacker" (Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011).

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Appendix

Slacktivism Engagement

In the past year I have ...

Never – Rarely – Sometimes – Often – Very Often

liked or favorited an advocacy related social media post,
tweet, or Instagram picture

shared or retweeted social media advocacy or social cause
messages

joined an advocacy or social cause Facebook group

commented on advocacy or social cause related social media
posts

Social Cause Engagement

In the past year I have ...

Never – Rarely – Sometimes – Often – Very Often

engage in advocacy or activism

joined an advocacy or nonprofit organization

donated money to an advocacy organization, nonprofit organization, or social cause

Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neither agree nor disagree –

Agree – Strongly Agree

Bonding Social Capital Online

There are several people online I trust to help solve my problems.

There is someone online I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.

There is no one online that I feel comfortable talking to about intimate personal problems.

When I feel lonely, there are several people online I can talk to.

If I needed an emergency loan of \$100, I know someone online I can turn to.

The people I interact with online would put their reputation on the line for me.

The people I interact with online would be good job references for me.

The people I interact with online would share their last dollar with me.

I do not know people online well enough to get them to do anything important.

The people I interact with online would help me fight an injustice.

Bridging Social Capital Online

Interacting with people online makes me interested in things that happen outside my town.

Interacting with people online makes me want to try new things.

Interacting with people online makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking.

Talking with people online makes me curious about other places in the world.

Interacting with people online makes me feel like part of a larger community.

Interacting with people online makes me feel connected to the bigger picture.
Interacting with people online reminds me that everyone in the world is connected.
I am willing to spend time to support general online community activities.
Interacting with people online gives me new people to talk to.
Online, I come in contact with new people all the time.

Bridging Social Capital Offline

Interacting with people offline makes me interested in things that happen outside my town.
Interacting with people offline makes me want to try new things.
Interacting with people offline makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking.
Talking with people offline makes me curious about other places in the world.
Interacting with people offline makes me feel like part of a larger community.
Interacting with people offline makes me feel connected to the bigger picture.
Interacting with people offline reminds me that everyone in the world is connected.
I am willing to spend time to support general offline community activities.
Interacting with people offline gives me new people to talk to.
Offline, I come in contact with new people all the time.

Bonding Social Capital Offline

There are several people offline I trust to help solve my problems.
There is someone offline I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.
There is no one offline that I feel comfortable talking to about intimate personal problems.
When I feel lonely, there are several people offline I can talk to.
If I needed an emergency loan of \$100, I know someone offline I can turn to.
The people I interact with offline would put their reputation

on the line for me.

The people I interact with offline would be good job references for me.

The people I interact with offline would share their last dollar with me.

I do not know people offline well enough to get them to do anything important.

The people I interact with offline would help me fight an injustice.

Cosmopolitanism

I think it's good to spend time with people who are willing to talk and learn about other cultures.

I think I respect others' culture the way I respect mine.

I think if people have a positive attitude toward other communities, there would be less conflict in the world.

I think to be successful; one needs to be able to use materials, information, knowledge, etc ... from other cultures.

I am ready to learn about other cultures through listening, observation, thinking, and reflecting.

I think reading about world events is worthwhile.