Age and Social Media Behavior Predict Social Activism

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the largely unexplored relationship between chronological age, displays of activism on social networking sites, and differences in orientation toward engaging in future social activism. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the Activism Orientation Scale (A0S; Corning & Myers, 2002), and the Online Social Activism Scale (OSAS). Two regression models were used in the prediction of participants' orientation toward conventional activism behavior and high-risk activism behavior by chronological age and displays of ac-

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tivism on social networking sites. Both models were statistically significant. The data revealed that increased displays of activism on social networking sites were associated with a decreased orientation toward future conventional and high-risk activism behaviors. Increased age was associated with a decreased orientation toward high-risk activism behavior. Findings from this study highlight important considerations related to the expansion of activism participation from social media based platforms.

Social movements have been an essential component of the sociopolitical environment since the development of sovereign states (Faia, 1967; Goldstone, 2003). Advocates and activists have utilized social movements for cultural, legal, and political change. Historically, major social movements were developed through relationally based social mobilization (Kiang, Raghu, & Shang, 2000). Relationally based methods of mobilization involved building relationships on an individual level. Fostering small networks led to frequent communication that established a common language and a collective vision (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). However, with the introduction of social media, society is transitioning from relationally based methods of mobilization to a technologically driven interface. Consequently, the way that social movements are conceptualized and implemented has changed. The impact of such changes and the viability of social movements propagated in a technology driven society are still being assessed.

Social Movements

A social movement is a collective effort to enact or prevent some form of social, political, economic, or environmental change (Thompson, Hickey, & Thompson, 2016). Key characteristics of social movements include a collective mindset, ideological framework, and fluid boundaries of membership (Della Porta & Kriesi, 1999). Early social movements in United States history such as the colonial tea parties of Boston and Edenton and the labor movement (Lee & Friedman, 2009) were characterized by strong social ties and relationally based methods of organization and mobilization. Without the benefits of modern technology, these movements relied on connections propagated from small networks of individuals. This strategy encouraged planning, organization, consensus, and participation. Movements from the 19th and 20th century emphasized the legislative power of collective action and overt displays of activism (e.g., meetings, lobbying, demonstrations and non-violent resistance) as seen in the women's rights, civil rights, anti-war, environmental protection, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) movements (Burns, 1990; King, Cornwall, & Dahlin, 2005; Tilly & Wood, 2015). Many of these movements have continued into the 21st century. However, the tools and tactics they relied on have changed considerably.

Social scientists rely on theories to conceptualize the formation and progression of social movements. Classic theories of social movements focus on how subjective experiences motivate individuals to rebel against the established social structure (see Bell, 1956; Buechler 2016; Gurney & Tierney, 1982). More contemporary approaches to studying social movements focus on the creation of col-

lective identities, political avenues, and mobilizing structures (Ritzer, 2007). Introduced in the 1970's, resource mobilization theory has emerged as a significant paradigm in the study of modern social movements (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). This theory contends that the success of social movements is contingent upon the effective mobilization of various resources, and the use of political avenues (Edwards & Gillham, 2013; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). A combination of ingenuity and legislative tact is used to incite change in the sociopolitical structure of society. Although, some theorists have discounted resource mobilization as an antiquated approach, it is impossible to ignore the utility of social networks in mobilization efforts. In a world that is saturated by digital media, this approach to studying social movements has new meaning (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011).

Social Media

Social media is a novel resource that can quickly foster communication and disseminate information (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). This modern asset builds and strengthens ties among activists, and publicizes social movements. Drawing media attention to the progression of movements that would otherwise be overlooked gives isolated segments of the population a platform. Consequently, the introduction and wide spread use of social media has irrevocably altered the nature of advocacy and the progression of social movements (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). Social media's reach, immediacy, and interactivity have eclipsed traditional mobilization techniques. A Pew Research Center survey reveals that across different demographic groups, 72% of adults in the U.S.

use social networks, with the majority reporting they use them in some fashion, several times a day (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016. Presently, Millennials (individuals born between 1981-2000) are the most active age group on social media sites. Social networks have emerged as the prevailing platform for activism and socio-political change for millennials (Rotman et al., 2011). The shift from past relational based methods is in part due to social media's unique ability to circumvent limitations of social stratification and financial capability (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014).

Cyberactivism is an umbrella term for web-based forms of advocacy including online awareness campaigns, web based marketing for specific causes, and hacking (Pepper, 2009). Well known examples of cyberactivism in the United States include the 1999 "Battle of Seat-tle" (Maccaughey & Ayers, 2013), the WikiLeaks disclo-sures of the U.S. State Department (Beyer, 2014), Kony 2012 (Meikle, 2014), and the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclero-sis (ALS) Association's "ice bucket challenge" (Donguines, 2014). The rise of Cyberactivism highlights the shift from past forms of activism that relied heavily on meetings, let-ters, and public demonstrations (e.g., sit-ins, speeches, etc.) to more passive displays of support on social network-ing sites including "liking" and "sharing" content that have become commonplace in technologically driven social movements (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). Such passive displays of activism involve minimal cost to the participant and still provide the positive feelings associat-ed with engaging in helping behavior (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). Smith (2013) found that younger and older adults are equally engaged in a range of political ac-

tivities, but younger adults (ages 18-29) are more likely to be politically active on social networking sites. Younger individuals are also more likely to limit their social and political activism to social networking sites. Differences in the sustainability of emerging social movements as compared to those of the past raises questions about whether millennials are less inclined than past generations to engage in overt social action (Gladwell, 2010).

Activism Orientation

Corning and Meyers (2002) defines an individual's orientation toward engaging in social action as a "relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, and problem-solving behaviors. These behaviors span a range from low risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors" (p. 703). This orientation is shown to persist for long periods of time but may be affected by external influences (Corning & Meyers, 2002).

Corning (2002) identified a number of potential predictors for activism orientation including the ongoing socialization process, action taking, life experiences, intergenerational attitudes, propensity to act, and direct physical repression. Introduction to new social environments (e.g., universities), biographical availability, and past activism behavior are also potential predictors of activism orientation (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Klandermans, 2004; McAdam, 1986; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Snow & Rochford, 1983; Vecchione et al., 2015).

Active forms of activism enable two-way communication by utilizing features of interaction or mobilization (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Passive forms of activism are

perpetuated through one-way communication including actions like reading political news (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Consequently, activism orientation can be conventional, (including activities related to participating in formal social or political processes), and unconventional, (including risky actions like riots, confronting law enforcements, and engaging in violent forms of protest) (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015).

Although social media is an effective tool for promoting social movements, overutilization may lead to a decrease in the orientation toward higher cost engagement. It is unclear whether the same anonymous nature that encourages uninhibited self-expression online may lead to superficial and faddish connections to social movements. This ephemeral relationship to activism engagement may ultimately impede long-term engagement and the sustainability of social movements (Paulin, Ferguson, Schattke, & Jost, 2014).

In light of past research and social media trends, the purpose of this study was to describe the largely unexplored relationship between chronological age, displays of activism on social networking sites, and differences in orientation toward engaging in future social activism. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

> **R1:** Does chronological age and online social media behavior predict an individual's orientation toward engaging in conventional activism behaviors?

> **R2:** Does chronological age and online social media behavior predict an individual's orientation toward

engaging in high-risk activism behaviors?

Methods
Participants

The research sample included 145 participants from the Southeastern region of the United States. Five participants were identified as outliers with studentized residuals above 3.0 and visual inspection of scatterplots, and were removed from the sample; 26 participants were excluded through list wise deletion due to missing data resulting in 114 participants retained in the analysis. Missing data appears random and no systematic patterns among missing values were identified. For both samples, age ranged from 19 – 88 years. The mean age of the original sample was 41.22 (SD = 18.37) as compared to 41.43 (SD = 18.49) of the retained sample. Age data was missing for four participants.

Procedure

The retained sample included 76 females (66.7%) and 33 males (28.9%). Two participants identified as transgender (1.8%), two participants identified as other (1.8%) and one participant preferred not to say (.9%). Of these participants, 95 identified as Caucasian (83.3%), 10 identified as African American (8.8%), one identified as Asian or Asian American (0.9%), one identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.9%), five identified as "other" (4.4%), and two preferred not to say (1.8%). When asked about marital status, 53 participants indicated they were married (46.5%), 48 indicated they were never married (42.1%), five indicated they were widowed (4.4%), four indicated they were divorced (3.5%), one indicated they

were separated (0.9%), two preferred not to say (1.8%), and one of participants did not provide a response (0.9%). Furthermore, 96 participants identified as heterosexual (84.2%), six identified as homosexual (5.3%), six identified as being bisexual (5.3%), two identified as asexual (1.8%), one identified as "other" (.9%), and three preferred not to say (2.6%). Finally, when asked about education level, five participants reported they graduated high school (4.4%), 13 reported some college (11.4%), 10 reported a two-year degree (8.8%), 32 reported a four-year degree (28.1%), 33 reported a Master's degree (28.9%), and 21 reported a Doctorate degree (18.4%).

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher informed adult volunteers from a community in the Southeastern region of the United States, age 18 and older, of the research study and they were invited to participate. The researcher also recruited undergraduate and graduate student volunteers and faculty members from a Southeastern regional university for participation in the study. The researcher used availability sampling to recruit participants that were easily accessible with some aspects of purposive sampling to recruit older participants. The researcher contacted volunteers by telephone, email, or in person to request participation. Family, friends and acquaintances of the researcher also provided referrals for individuals that may be interested in participating in the study. Finally, undergraduate and graduate course instructors assisted in recruiting student volunteers for participation in the study. In obtaining consent, the researcher explained in detail the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation to volunteers. The researcher ex-

plained the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study to participants and they were informed that they could choose to not answer research questions or may discontinue participation at any time. Finally, the researcher explained to participants the procedures used to ensure the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of the information. The researcher either distributed counterbalanced survey packets to participants individually in classroom type settings, or through the web based survey program, Qualtrics. Participants completed the survey packets in 15-20 minutes.

Measures

Survey packets included a demographic questionnaire, the Activism Orientation Scale (A0S; Corning & Myers, 2002), and the Online Social Activism Scale (OSAS). The demographic questionnaire is a self-report measure designed to obtain important information relevant to the study including age, race, gender identification, marital status, sexual orientation, and educational level.

The AOS (A0S; Corning & Myers, 2002) is a 35-item scale designed to measure an individual's orientation toward engaging in activism behavior. The scale measures varying forms of social activism on a continuum and differing ideological views on political and social involvement. The scale offers a general measurement of activism behaviors as opposed to an issue specific measurement of activism behaviors (Fietzer & Ponterotto, 2015). Participants were asked to rate the likelihood of engaging in a specific behavior (i.e., How likely is it that you will engage in this activity in the future?) by utilizing a Likert scale from 0 ("Extremely Unlikely") to 3 ("Extremely Likely"). Scores

Table 1

Variable Coefficients [and 95% Confidence Intervals] Predicting Conventional (Low-Risk) Activism Orientation

Predictor Variables	M	SD	B	β	t	p	Bivariate r	Partial r
Age	40.64	18.29	-.13 [-.27, .02]	-.14	-1.78	.08	.08	-.17
Social Media Behavior	90.58	33.39	-.34 [-.41, -.26]	-.67	-8.65	<.001	-.62	-.63
Conventional Activism (DV)	62.54	16.87						

can be derived from the entire 35-item scale or as in this study divided into two sub-scales that measure conventional and high-risk activism. The conventional activism subscale is a 28-item scale that measures an individual's orientation toward engaging in activities that are considered relatively low-risk (e.g., volunteering for a campaign, wearing a button that supports a particular cause, and attending political discussions). The high-risk activism subscale consists of seven items, including items 5, 14, 16, 17, 21, 28, and 35, which measure an individual's orientation toward engaging in activities that are considered overt or aggressive forms of activism (e.g., an illegal act as part of a political protest). The AOS scores are obtained by summing the scores across items, with higher scores indicating greater willingness to engage in behaviors geared toward social activism. Scores can range from zero to 105 for the entire scale, zero to 84 for the conventional activism subscale, and zero to 21 for the high-risk activism subscale. The AOS scale is theoretically grounded and has demon-

Table 2

Variable Coefficients [and 95% Confidence Intervals]
Predicting High-Risk Activism Orientation

Predictor Variables	M	SD	B	β	t	p	Bivariate r	Partial r
Age	41.11	18.32	-.06 [-.08, -.03]	-.26	-3.69	<.001	-.14	-.32
Social Media Behavior	91.66	32.48	-.06 [-.08, -.04]	-.53	-6.64	<.001	-.49	-.55
High-Risk Activism (DV)	9.61	3.48						

strated excellent internal consistency with coefficient alphas falling between .87 and .97 (Feitzer & Ponterotto, 2015). Within the current study, tests of internal consistency demonstrated excellent reliability for the full AOS (α = .960), conventional activism subscale (α = .956), and high-risk activism subscale (α = .902).

The Online Social Activism Scale (OSAS) was created specifically for this study by the researcher to measure an individual's participation in online social networking behaviors specifically related to social and/or political views/issues. Such online social networking behaviors may include liking or sharing, making initial posts, commenting on posts, sharing links, joining online groups, and/or engaging in online protests through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Linked-In, Snapchat, etc. Political issues/views may include topics relating to or dealing with the structure or affairs of government, politics, or the state (e.g., gay marriage debate, the legalization of marijuana, gun control, border control and immigration, presidential party affiliation). Social Issues may include im-

portant causes or issues that influence a considerable amount of individuals in society (e.g., race relations, the diminishing middle class, body image, individuals affected by a disease or a natural disaster).

The OSAS is comprised of 21 items and asked participants to rate the degree to which they agree to each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Seven items on the scale, including items 4, 8, 10, 12, 15, 16, and 19, were negatively worded and reverse scored. Items on the OSAS include "I frequently "like" social and/or political posts on social networking sites" and "I seldom comment on social and/or political posts on social networking sites" (see Appendix for OSAS items). The overall OSAS score is obtained by summing the total scores across items. Scores on the OSAS range from zero to 147, with higher scores indicating a higher-level of activism behavior on social networking sites. Tests of internal consistency within the current study indicated that the OSAS has excellent reliability (α = .957).

Results

Preliminary analysis determined the proportion of missing data in the set was moderate but random. Participants with missing values on the variables of interest were not included in the analysis of data. Additionally, a case analysis identified five problematic outliers which were not included the data set. Assessment of violations of assumptions revealed that no serious violations of correct fit, constant variance, and normality assumptions were identified. However, because a non-random sample was used, potential violations of the independence assumption are

acknowledged. The analyses involved standard multiple regression to predict orientation toward conventional activism behaviors and high-risk activism behaviors using chronological age and displays of activism on social networking sites as predictor variables for all participants in the sample.

Predicting Conventional Activism Orientation

The model predicting participants' orientation toward conventional activism behavior by chronological age and displays of activism on social networking sites was significant, R^2 = .40, (F (2, 112) =37.94, p < .001. The effects of individual independent variables on orientation toward conventional (low-risk) activism behavior are summarized in Table 1. Of the two predictor variables, only displays of activism on social networking sites as measured by the OSAS (β = -.67), t = -8.65, p < .001 was significant. The data revealed that increased displays of activism on social networking sites were associated with a decreased orientation toward conventional activism behavior.

Predicting High-Risk Activism Orientation

The model predicting participants' orientation toward high risk activism behavior by chronological age and displays of activism on social networking sites was significant, R^2 = .32, (F (2,120) =27.61, p < .001. The effects of individual independent variables on orientation toward high-risk activism behavior are summarized in Table 2. In this case, both predictor variables, including chronological age (β = -.29), t = -3.69, p < .001 and displays of activism on social networking sites as measured by the OSAS (β = -

.56), $t = \text{-}7.20$, $p < .001$ were found to be significant. The data revealed that both increased age and increased displays of activism on social networking sites were associated with a decreased orientation toward high-risk activism behavior.

Discussion

      The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship between chronological age, displays of activism on social networking sites, and an individual's orientation toward engaging in future conventional and high-risk activism behaviors. Participants were given three measures including a demographic questionnaire, a scale that measures frequency of online social network based activism behaviors (OSAS), and a scale that measures the orientation toward engaging in future activism behaviors (i.e., conventional and high-risk; AOS). Two regression models were created to predict participants' orientation to engage in conventional activism behaviors (i.e., low-risk behaviors such as displaying a poster or bumper sticker, purchasing a poster, t-shirt, sending a letter or email about a political issue), and high-risk activism behaviors (i.e., high - risk behaviors such as engaging in physical confrontations, blocking access to a public area with your body, and engaging in illegal acts as part of a political protest).

      Both models significantly predicted the criterion variable. As expected, because the focus of this study was to identify specific relationships between variables of interest, the amount of variance explained by the models was small to moderate (R squared ranged from .32-.44). To improve the overall predictive power of the model, oth-

er variables shown to be related to the criterion variable in past research (e.g., biographical availability, gender, past activism history) could be added to the model.

Chronological Age and Activism Behavior Orientation

In evaluating the contributions of individual predictors within each of the models, age was significant in predicting an individual's orientation toward engaging in future high-risk activism behaviors. Younger participants reported a greater orientation toward engaging in high-risk activism behaviors than older participants. This finding is consistent with past research in which McAdam (1986) found that biographical availability (the absence or presence of personal constraints) plays a significant role in an individual's susceptibility to engage in high-risk activism behaviors. Older individuals are more likely to have personal constraints that inhibit participation in high-risk behaviors. These constraints may consist of personal commitments including marriage or children, professional commitments such as full time employment, and education related commitments (Park & Einwhoner, 2015; Petrie, 2004; McAdam, 1986).

Age, however was not a significant predictor of orientation toward engaging in future conventional low-risk behaviors. These non-significant findings remain relevant within context, and the practical implications remain important. Many organizations and social movements focus exclusively on inciting lower risk displays of support (i.e., purchases of branded merchandise, monetary donations, garnering political votes, etc.) as opposed to higher risk displays (i.e., illegal acts and violent displays of opposition). Larger organizations work extensively with adver-

tising agencies and market research teams to find ways to provoke these lower risk displays in target demographic groups by predicting their behavior, patterns, and preferences. Age is a common way to cluster demographic groups with specific characteristics being assigned to Millennials, Generation X, Generation Y, etc. Finding that age did not predict an individual's orientation toward engaging in lower risk displays of activism challenges the idea that age is a useful distinction in making such predications.

Social Media Activism and Activism Behavior Orientation

Perhaps, the most striking finding from this study was that increased participant displays of activism on social networking sites predicted activism orientations that are less likely to engage in future activism behaviors. Participants who engaged in more online activism behaviors reported a decreased orientation toward engaging in both conventional and high-risk activism behaviors offline. These findings are consistent with a growing body of literature that asserts that engagement with a movement on social networking sites does not naturally progress to engaging in activism behaviors off-line (e.g., Kristofferson et al., 2014). Additionally, in a study of direct and differential effects of the internet on political and civic engagement, Xenos and Moy (2007) found that web-based engagement increased gaps in engagement offline. Current findings add to the existing literature by suggesting that for some individuals, social network activism may actually lead to a decreased orientation toward off-line activism behaviors.

Several contributing factors to such findings are reflected

in the literature and may include the effects of social observability, desire for impression management, and theories of social participation and token support. Kristofferson et al. (2014) found that social observability and the possibility of social judgment were primary reasons why individuals limited their participation to online activism behaviors. When the initial act of token support is made in a setting that is high in social observability (i.e., social networking sites), users may be less likely to follow up with more meaningful displays of support than if the initial act of token support was made in a setting with low social observability (e.g., Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Jeong & Lee, 2013; Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Winterich, Mittal, & Aquino, 2013). Additionally, when the environment of token support is highly observable to others, an individual is more likely to engage in impression-management behaviors. The show of token support satisfies the motivation to appear a certain way to others (e.g., virtuous, altruistic, socially engaged) thereby reducing the desire to engage in subsequent displays of support (Kristofferson et al., 2014). Token support in less observable environments was found to create consistency motives which subsequently increased perceived value alignment between self and cause (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza 2014. Aligning oneself with the cause and making a more personal connection were identified as motivating factors that led to a greater willingness to provide meaningful support in the future.

Implications

Decreases in the orientation toward future behavioral displays of activism (both low and high- risk) associated with participation in online social activism pose im-

portant considerations for non-profit organizations, chari-
table groups, and political groups. Presently, an excess of
advertising and recruitment efforts are directed toward
social media based platforms (Saravanakumar & Sugan-
thaLakshmi, 2012). However, researchers are yet to deter-
mine whether the factor(s) that lead some individuals to
engage more meaningfully with a cause while others limit
their participation to social media based displays are uni-
versal and replicable, or individual and personal.

Social media advocacy campaigns that pursue short
term engagement may result in ongoing competition to en-
gage capricious social media users, a lack of consistent fi-
nancial and practical support to sustain a movement, and
a lack of meaningful engagement with supporters. Groups
with a vested interest in securing long term engagement
are most vulnerable. These groups must identify ways to
arouse the same excitement associated with popular short
term social media campaigns, while still incorporating tra-
ditional forms of recruitment that inspire meaningful of-
fline participation and long term engagement.

Finally, social media participation and the political
process have become somewhat interdependent in that po-
litical candidates and groups embrace social media as an
integral component of a successful campaign. Within the
political arena, candidates are beginning to utilize social
media to connect with voters, spread awareness about
their political platform, and to informally issue public
statements. Many of these efforts are geared toward get-
ting these voters to contribute financially to the campaign
and securing votes during important election times. The
apparent disconnect between online displays of support
and offline participation could indicate that while some

social media users show incessant support for candidates and causes on social networking sites, they may fail to follow through in more practical ways including participating in the voting process. Without individuals willing to engage in more practical ways, there will be deficits within the field of advocacy and politics that affect the way movements and campaigns progress in an increasingly technological society.

Limitations

While this study presents considerations applicable to a number of settings, limitations do exist. One limitation of the current research involves the relatively small non-random sample. While the sample size appears sufficient to reliably test the number of variables included in the analysis (Cohen, 1992; Delice, 2010), a smaller sample size can sometimes undermine the reliability of a study and may make it less generalizable to the larger population (Field, 2013; Raudys & Jain, 1991). Limitations in generalizability may be associated with the demographic characteristics of the sample. For example, participants were recruited from Southeastern regions of the United States which tend to be more conservative than those in the northeast and upper midwest (Weakliem & Biggert, 1999). Additionally, a disproportionate number of females participated in the study when compared to males, (Steger & Witt, 1989). While some studies suggested that women tend to demonstrate higher levels of political participation and advocacy behaviors including 'private' activism (i.e., boycotting products for personal reasons, signing petitions) (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010), other studies noted no significant gender differences in social and political activism par-

ticipation on social media sites (Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013).

Individuals from minority racial groups were also underrepresented in the sample. This may pose a limitation as different patterns of activism participation in majority and minority groups were found among specific social or political issues (i.e., women's rights, institutional racism, environmental causes; (Logan, Darrah, & Oh, 2012; Marx & Useem, 1971; Smith, 2013).
Finally, this sample included a high percentage of individuals that reported having a higher education degree. Individual differences in educational attainment are associated with differences in both online and offline political engagement (Campbell, 2006; DiGrazia, 2014; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Smith, 2013). Political participation is most common with individuals who are highly educated and financially secure (Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013). Nevertheless, Americans that report being active in political and civic venues participate in a wide range of online, and offline activities (Smith, 2013). DiGrazia (2014) found that socially privileged individuals rely on conventional forms of protest including institutional politics. Conversely, participation in unconventional protest are favored by groups that are socially disadvantaged, and more alienated from the conventional political system. Conducting the analysis with a more representative sample may have yielded results that would be more generalizable and representative of the country as whole.

Other limitations are related to the measures used to gather information from participants. First, data included in the analysis relied on participants to self-report. As with any self-report measures, the answers partici-

pants provided are subject to a degree of bias. Additionally, participants may have reported differing levels of engagement when asked to report their general level of participation in activism behaviors as opposed to their level of participation with specific movements or causes. Neumayer and Svensson (2016) relayed that individual participants can display varying degrees of civil disobedience in different protests depending on the degree to which they relate to the cause. This is particularly evident in cases where an individual is directly affected by the outcome of the movement. They also noted the importance of considering situational and relational components when attempting to determine an activists' likelihood of exposing themselves to potential risks. Participants in this study may have responded differently to overall measures of potential activism behaviors if they were asked about specific causes, situations, and relational components. Lastly, this data is the result of cross-sectional surveys which are collected at a specific point in time. This model makes it difficult to discern generational, life-cycle, and period effects within the population (Norris, 2003).

Future Research

Empirical examinations of social networking activism behaviors are still in their infancy, (Kristofferson et al., 2014; Lee & Hsieh, 2013) and researchers hold differing opinions regarding how to conceptualize and investigate cyber-activism within the context of the changing socio-political structure. Tufekci and Wilson (2012) even suggests that online and offline activism may be different constructs and should not be studied on the same platform.

One would be naive to assume that these new patterns of interaction have not altered the way that people approach social and political activism. This level of technological engagement was not available to past generations, and it is a fundamental attribution error to assume that changes in levels of social action are simply due to internal characteristics associated with specific generational groups, while ignoring the external factors such as advances in technology. More research is needed to determine the true effect that social networking sites have had on the nature of activism, and whether these sites can serve the same function as more traditional forms of advocacy.

Activist behavior on social media is yet to be operationalized and there is some fragmentation within the literature regarding the classification of associated behaviors. A significant amount of the literature details the usefulness of social media for recruitment and mobilization purposes (Buechler, 1995; Tarrow & Tollefson, 1994; Wellman et al., 2003). However, there is no clear consensus about whether social media activity increases or decreases offline engagement (Boulianne, 2009; Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012; Xenos & Moy 2007). Bode (2012) suggests that the lack of consensus is likely related to an incorrect focus on frequency of social media use. The specific set of activities one engages in on social media sites drive the relationship between online engagement and various types of social and political participation (Bode, 2012). Consequently, to fully understand the relationships between online participation and offline engagement, researchers should work to operationalize activist behavior on social media and focus on understanding the implications of all

aspects of social media use (Bode, 2012). Additionally, in light of mixed and sometimes surprising findings, future researchers should attempt to overcome identified shortcomings in research and replicate results.

Future research should identify the characteristics, goals, and function of cyber-activism, while acknowledging strengths and limitations. Gaining this knowledge will identify viable methods for utilizing social networks within the context of a movement's larger goals and intentions. In order to identify the real effects of social media on essential fields, researchers must identify what motivates some individuals to become fervent long term supporters of a cause, while others fail to engage further with a movement after their initial display of online support.

Researchers should also assess how current level of technological connectedness have affected our ability to engage meaningfully with the individuals and information with which we are joining. Although, it is clear that social media and technology have altered patterns of interaction within society, the full effect of these changes on social advocacy movements is still unknown. These findings will aid in the development of sustainable methods of connecting with digital natives in an increasingly technological society. Additionally, understanding how to effectively initiate mobilization efforts when making the transition from online to off-line engagement will help individuals within the field of advocacy and politics learn new ways to garner the meaningful long-term support and resources they need to further their cause.

No doubt, social media has become an integral part of the sociopolitical environment. It is important to acknowledge that there is a degree of cultural lag associat-

ed with any innovation that alters the way that people connect and communicate. Studying these innovations may help remedy undesirable effects, and maintain the integrity of venerable practices that breed progression and reform. Findings from this study highlight important considerations related to the expansion of activism participation from social media based platforms.

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Appendix
Online Social Activism Scale (OSAS) Items

1. I frequently express my social and/or political views on social networking sites.
2. I have used social networking sites to make informative posts about a social and/or political cause.
3.   I frequently comment on social and/or political posts on social networking sites.
4. I rarely participate in conversations about social and/or political issues on social networking sites.
5.   I frequently post about social and/or political topics on social networking sites.
6. I frequently "like" social and/or political posts on social networking sites.
7. I often read social and/or political posts on social networking sites.
8. I seldom comment on social and/or political posts on social networking sites.
9. I often "share" or "retweet" social and/or political posts on social networking sites.
10. I rarely "like", "favorite", or "save", social or political posts from social networking sites.
11. I often update my status on social media sites with my views on current social and/or political issues.
12. I rarely initiate conversations about social and/or political issues on social networking sites.
13. I have joined or followed social and/or political groups on social networking sites.
14. I have made a financial contribution to a social or political campaign because of content from a social networking site.

15. Posts on social networking sites about social and/or political issues would not influence my decision to contribute financially to a campaign or cause.

16. I rarely use my social media accounts to show support for social and/or political causes.

17. I "follow "or regularly check profiles or pages that frequently post social and/or political content.

18. I often support social or political campaigns by sharing information on social networking sites.

19. I do not "follow" or "add" people/pages that frequently post social and/or political content.

20. I often participate in conversations about social and/or political issues on social networking sites.

21. I often initiate conversations about social and/or political issues on social networking site.