POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS ON FACEBOOK: AN EXPLORATION OF PRACTICES

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Jennifer M. Young, B.A.

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Jennifer M Young, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Professor Diana Owen, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other site, according to Nielsen. As people play out more aspects of their lives on the site, it makes sense that their political identities and actions would also find a home there. While many studies have focused on the effects of Facebook use on political engagement, there have been very few on political conversations on Facebook internally to users' friendship networks. Using the framework of boyd's networked publics, this study takes on these conversations as its main focus, inquiring into the practices of political conversation on Facebook. Three aspects of political conversations are of particular concern to this study. Who people talk to: since most connections formed using social media are to people users already know, it is important to study political conversations in the context of those social networks. What they talk about: political conversations in the context of friendship networks are surrounded by the mundane conversations of everyday life – these are not sanitized, politics-only spaces. What technological affordances do they use: Facebook enables a site specific practice of political conversation given its technological affordances and infrastructure. The intersections between practices, context, and impact of the political conversations under study here become evident when grounded in the framework of the networked public. To analyze this phenomenon, I conducted an online social interaction and content analysis. Twenty-five

Facebook users who commented on news articles on the Facebook pages of major news organizations were recruited as participants. After an entrance survey all content on their walls from January 4th 2012 to January 20th 2012 were coded for social interactions, and posts regarding political or social issues were coded for their technological affordances used and topicality. The data was analyzed for the level of interaction of posts, the spread of posts across topics, and whether using affordances such as including commentary on links increase the likelihood of conversation.

Keywords: Facebook, research methodology, digital citizenship, public sphere, social networks, civic culture, content analysis

To my adviser, Professor Diana Owen: your calm guidance kept me going.
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Introduction

In August of 2011, Pew Internet and American Life Project released a report saying that 65% of American adults use social media (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011). Only a few weeks later Nielsen released their "Social Media Report," stating that Facebook had received over 140 million visitors in May 2011, and that American spend 53.5 billion minutes on Facebook a year (Nielsen, 2011). Facebook, put bluntly, can do a lot. From its most basic function of enabling a person to maintain a collection of friends to posting updates and even entire photo albums, Facebook is a center for all sorts of social interaction. It makes sense, then, that the site also has the potential to house our political identities and conversations as well. Included in the growing scholarship on social networking sites are many thoughts and studies on the political implications of Facebook – especially in the wake of the 2008 election season, during which social media were extensively used by both the campaigns and the public. (see Williams and Gulati (2009) or Vitak, et al. (2010) in regards to the 2008 campaign). Missing from the literature, however, is an exploration of the conversations that people have internally to their own Facebook networks on political and social matters. This thesis studied the political and social issues conversations of 25 participants on Facebook in order to explore the civic practices of conversation that emerge. These conversations are analyzed to uncover the social interactions involved, technological affordances used, and which topics are discussed. I found that these practices and conversations are rooted in the digital technological landscape and locate their civic value differently than the idealized expectations of the public sphere – though those theories are still important for understanding

the role of political talk in a democracy. Through the posts the participants engaged in topic areas simultaneously of importance to them and to the public at large, and they developed politically relevant social capital by orientating content for their networks.

Political talk is central to theories of the public sphere, and the public sphere is in turn central to a healthy functioning democracy. The common thread found in the many theories of the public sphere is that the public talks and deliberates, this deliberation synthesizes into public opinion, which in turn influences policy and governance (Calhoun, 1992; Habermas, 1989; Tarde, 1901). But at the ground level what makes the public sphere work is people talking - something so ordinary and fundamental to our human nature that we sometimes overlook its importance (Walsh, 2004). While there have been many studies on the political impact of social media, the focus is often on the linkages between political use of social media and direct political engagement (Vitak et al. 2010; Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Political actions such as voting or rally attendance are certainly critical to democracy, but the political conversations people have with each other are also important in their own right. These conversations are where people learn about new issues or persuade others to take on their point of view. In turning its full attention to these conversations on social media this study aims to understand the current nature of these basic building blocks of our political culture.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study seeks to answer this question: what are the practices of conversation dealing with politics or matters of social importance internally to users' networks on

Facebook? Specifically, what technological affordances are people using in the creation of this content?

From these two questions come a series of hypotheses derived from three areas of importance to the main research question: with whom do people converse, what do they talk about, and how do they talk about those matters (what technological affordances do they use?)

To whom do we talk?

H_1: More actors[a] in the participants' networks will engage in main post liking than interacting with the post.

H_2: There are more actors engaged in interactions in regular posts than there are political or social issues posts.

H_3: Actors that interact with political and social posts will also interact with regular posts.

All three hypotheses in this section were supported, but the level of interaction on political and social posts was not much less than the level of interaction on regular posts. Furthermore, actors who interacted with political and social posts also interacted with regular posts. Taken together, these findings indicate that political and social posts are not treated very differently from regular posts by actors in the participants' networks.

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[a] The word actor here is meant as anyone in the participants' expanded network on Facebook. This could include their Facebook friends, friends of friends who can see their posts, or subscribers who follow the participants but have not established a friendship link with them on Facebook.

What do posters talk about?

H_4: Political and social posts make up a minority of posts collected.

H_5: Posts on social issues will outnumber political issues posts.

H_6: Participants will focus on particular topics.

H_7: Those topics that received the most attention in the cross-tabs created for H_6 will be the most likely to start interactions on posts.

The first three hypotheses in this section were supported, but support for H_7 was not attainable because there was no discernible pattern in the data. While it could be pre-supposed that political and social posts would be a minority of posts on the participants' timelines, the deeper question was in regards to the topics that participants would engage with on their timelines. The findings indicate that political and social issues posts internally to most participants' timelines fall into three or fewer categories. Since each participant's topic categories were different, it was not possible to test which topics were more likely to start conversations.

What technological affordances do people use?

H_8: More photos will be reshares than direct posts.

H_9: When users post links to political or social issues news articles they add their own thoughts in personal commentary.

H_{10}: Posts with commentary will be more likely to start conversations.

All three of these hypotheses were supported. More posts –including but not limited to links to news articles – included poster commentary. The inclusion of commentary was a strong predictor that a post would see interaction, especially for links. Text posts also were strong predictors that actors would interact with a post. These findings indicate that conversations are more likely to start when posters contextualize or comment on the item they are posting.

These research questions and hypotheses are derived from a theoretical framework that, taken together, encourages a full understanding of both the context and practice of political conversations on Facebook.

Theoretical Background:

1. **The importance of locating conversations in networks**

Three major ideas underpin this study's design and analysis. The first is that it is important to pay attention to who people chose to discuss politics with in their lives. To assume a mass, all-encompassing public might be nice for theoretical envisionments of the public sphere, but it doesn't do much good for focusing in on those conversations that actually make up our civic culture. People talk to other people – and who they chose to talk to matters. Previous studies of political use of Facebook have focused on political candidates' walls or other groups that are dedicated to politics (see Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, and Neely (2010) for example). Social media offers the opportunity to create these spaces, and people can and do use them. However, examining only those spaces is limiting since it

engenders the belief that the people Facebook users are connecting with and are content to talk with are strangers to them. In reality people use social media more to connect to people they already know (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Donath & boyd, 2004). If previously formed connections are the most important ones maintained on social networking sites, then it elevates the importance of studying political conversations in the context of those connections. Furthermore, these networks are the point of origin of social capital and the necessary trust to discuss politics. Therefore the assumption underlying my own research is that political conversations on Facebook that are tied to people's own networks on that site are of significant consequence.

2. **Political conversations in friendship networks are situated in the context of the mundane, everyday conversations that are a part of life**.

The second underlying concept is tied to the first: political conversations on social media, when taken in the context of friendship networks, are situated in the larger context of conversations that occur in daily life. Consider for a moment the image that Oldenburg (1991) conjures in his writings on Third Spaces: a group of neighbors and friends gathering together at the local pub for drinks and easily flowing conversation that hop-scotches from topic to topic, with thoughts on current affairs and the world interspersed amongst jokes and catching-up. What Oldenburg (1991) is describing is a rich and true to life conversational context for the political conversation – one that does not just contain rational-critical debate, but also the fullness of life. Katherine Cramer Walsh (2004) also examined informal gatherings and how they shape our identities and political talk. She sees these group

gatherings and conversations as events where social identities are constructed and reproduced – sometimes to the detriment of democratic tolerance (2004). Dahlgren's (2000; 2002; 2005) update on the concept of a civic culture takes on this broader view of political discourse situated in the context of everyday life. By focusing on everyday practices and cultural preconditions for participation, he encourages a view of the public sphere that is not limited to rational-critical debate. A person's Facebook profile is a presentation of their identity online, and one can only expect that all aspects of identity the user is willing to share will be presented there – not just their political identity. Facebook users' walls are by no means sanitized spaces utilized only for political debate. Politics and public issues might be brought up in the posts and other items, but they are surrounded by all other conversations that people would normally have within their friendship networks on Facebook – whether this is discussing daily life problems or celebrities. Furthermore, this expanded understanding of the context of political conversations enables a broader view of what can be considered an appropriate contribution to the public sphere: a person dealing with an issue in their own lives (such as with their economic situation, or any other aspect of their lives) might not immediately link that personal event directly to broader social concerns, but by discussing those issues with their friends they have cause to reflect on shared experiences and social values.

3. The technological affordances and network infrastructure of Facebook enable a site specific practice of political conversation.

It is necessary to understand the architecture of Facebook in order to understand the nature of political conversations on that site. Understanding Facebook as a technological architecture means seeing the site as a structural environment that can shape interaction and use (boyd 2011; Papacharissi, 2011). It also pulls us away from a deterministic outlook on the interaction between social media and our politics and refocuses our attention on the agency users have to use technological affordances on sites to potentially engage in substantive interaction (Papacharissi, 2011). For example, social networking sites allow for the maintenance and display of social ties, and users mostly interact with people they know on the site rather than communicate with strangers (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Donath & boyd 2004). This is one aspect of how the site's infrastructure is utilized that should play a role in how political conversations on the site are analyzed. The theoretical framework of networked publics encapsulates not only the importance of technological affordances, infrastructures, and communities on social network sites, but also the practices that users develop. Developed by authors including danah boyd (2011), Mizuko Ito (2008) and Zizi Papacharissi (2009), networked publics inquires into the intersections of these elements and examines the communities and spaces that arise from them. The intersections between practices, context, and the impact of the political conversations under study here become evident when grounded in the framework of the networked public.

Networked publics are neither audiences nor consumers but publics that are able to achieve new levels of complexity through the use of technology (Ito, 2008). These technologies lower the cost of engagement and communication with small and large networks (Ito, 2008). Convergence culture shapes the mentality and practices of networked publics (Russell et al. 2008; Papacharissi & Easton, forthcoming). Through their engagement in networked publics, people converge technologies, spaces, and content (Papcharissi & Easton, forthcoming). When posting news links or political videos to their Facebook timelines and discussing them with their networks, the participants in this study are practicing civic habits as part of a networked public that is informed by convergence culture.

Study Design

In order to investigate the practices of political conversation on Facebook, 25 participants were recruited so that the author could perform an online social interaction and content analysis on their Facebook timelines. Users who had commented on news articles published to the Facebook pages of major news organizations were contacted, and if they agreed to participate, they took an entrance survey upon signing up for the study. The survey covered the participants' social media and political habits, and also gathered other basic background information. Most importantly, the responses to the survey provide this study with a baseline understanding of how the participants use Facebook for political purposes. Later, this baseline can be compared with the actual interactions observed on the walls of the participants. A content analysis was performed on all items appearing on the participants'

Facebook walls from January 4th, 2012 to January 20th, 2012. Beyond basic meta-data such as the time of the post and who posted it, the content of the post and the technological affordances used to make the post were also coded.

Outline

Chapter One is a review of the pertinent literature to this project. While many of the most relevant terms have been introduced above, the literature goes into more detail and broadens the context into which the research questions are embedded. The theoretical framework of networked publics for this project is reviewed in depth in Chapter one, as well.

Chapter Two explains the study design, detailing the participant pool, survey, and content analysis portions of the thesis. It also defines key concepts and terms used in this study, as well as the operational definitions necessary for working with those concepts.

Chapter Three provides an analysis of the survey results and describes the data from the online social interaction and content analysis.

Chapter Four describes the findings of the study and discusses their implications.

Chapter Five offers a conclusion and suggests areas for future research.

Literature Review

My research will explore how people use SNS, specifically Facebook, to discuss and engage in politics, and Facebook's implications for our public sphere. Under specific study are the practices of political conversation internally to people's friendship networks on Facebook. There already is a growing literature covering both the political use of social networking sites and how SNS use affects political engagement, and these studies provide context on how SNS such as Facebook can be part of our political culture. However, this study is more focused on conversations located on the site in question than in how those conversations affect offline action. There are a variety of fields that contribute to this study's understanding of political conversations, guided by the three underlying principles outlined in the introduction to this thesis: the importance of locating conversations in social networks, understanding the expanded context of those conversations to include the everyday and the mundane, and the role of the site architecture and feature set of Facebook in shaping the conversations that take place there. Theories of the public sphere create a generalized groundwork as their focus is also on political talk, and I locate this study in that larger field of work on the public sphere. Past research on social capital and how social networks affect political discussion and participation is vital for understanding how conversations internally to a person's friendship network – such as the ones displayed on social networking sites like Facebook. Peter Dahlgren's conceptualization of civic cultures in turn situates political discussion and political culture in the larger framework of lived experiences, recognizing that political culture is part of a larger fabric of daily practices. Finally, Mimi Ito (2008), danah boyd (2010) and Zizi Papacharissi's (2009) notion of 'networked publics' offer ways of

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exploring how these conversations on architectures such as Facebook operate in the public sphere.

Political Uses of Facebook

Much research on the Facebook, especially in the realm of political engagement, utilizes surveys to uncover how these sites are being used in political engagement (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Steger, Williams, & Andolina, 2010; Vitak et al.; 2010; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010)[b], including Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe's (2007) study on social capital and youth use of SNS used surveys. There are some notable exceptions in methodology, however even these studies focused on candidate Facebook profiles or user generated Facebook groups. Robertson, Vatrapu, and Medina (2009) performed a content analysis of Facebook user posts to candidate Facebook walls during the 2008 election in order to study the links that people posted to those walls. They found that 54% of links collected went to ten top domains. Of those links in that pointed to the top ten domains, 43% of links went to YouTube and 19% pointed to Facebook content. Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver (2010) and Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, and Neely (2010) both examined user-generated political Facebook groups using content analysis. In both papers the focus was on the level of activity of the groups, and the tone and focus of the posts. Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver (2010) did not code wall posts. Instead, they focused their efforts on the group information pages and descriptions, and they call for future research to

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[b] Research on Facebook was for the most part exclusively used. This is because each SNS affords different things for its users and might be used in different ways – in much the same way that SNS are quite different from the internet as a whole.

investigate Facebook group wall posts in order to better understand user discussion. In contrast, Fernandes et al (2010) did code the Facebook wall posts of nine Facebook groups supporting candidates in the 2008 election campaign. They found that using these groups were focused on the political process and that they provided a space for youth participation. Furthermore, users involved in those groups actualized the "media-related interactive potential of such SNSs" by posting links to other content (Fernandes et al, 2010).

Missing from the current literature on politics and Facebook are studies on the use of the site internally to pre-existing user networks. Furthermore, much of the pre-existing literature is intent on uncovering how Facebook use leads to offline engagement or political behavior such as voting. Overall, however, the research on Facebook and political engagement has uncovered some interesting ways that people are making use of Facebook politically. Robertson, Vatrapu, &Medina's study of people's use of links on candidate Facebook walls found that people had many different uses for posting links in their discussions with other people on those walls (2009). Vitak et al.'s examination of youth use of Facebook during the 2008 election found something of a mixed bag. Youth did use Facebook to participate, but often in a shallow manner. However, the authors contend that this is nothing to dismay – this shallow level of activity in youth might be a way of becoming civically educated for greater participation later (2010).

The Public Sphere

In much of the past research discussed above regarding politics and Facebook, the focus is on civic engagement or political participation, and not theoretically backed by

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notions of the public sphere – one notable exception being Robertson et al (2010). In other words, there is a focus in these studies on the dynamic between online participation and offline participation behaviors such as voting (see Vitak et al, 2010 for example). My research is in the school of thought on the public sphere because of its focus on these conversations in their own right.

Habermas and Tarde, two scholars who strengthened inquiry into the public sphere, describe processes by which public opinion is formed in the public arena (Habermas, 1989; Tarde, 1901). They put forth very particular ideas on what the public sphere is and what it should be used for – conceiving of it as a space solely for rational critical debate on issues affecting the entire public with the hope of affecting public policy (Calhoun, 1992; Habermas, 1989). Habermas conceived of an all encompassing "we" that would engage in the public sphere (Calhoun, 1992; Fraser, 1992). Fraser argues that there is room for multiple publics and public spheres and opens up the question of what issues can and should be discussed by those publics (Fraser, 1992). Dahlgren considers himself as on the "Habermasian trajectory," but he does not agree with the strict ideal separation of the informal social conversation and the formal public sphere that Habermas desires. Instead, Dahlgren (2002) believes the public sphere can be found in everyday life, noting that "talk among citizens does not resemble a philosophy seminar – nor should it" (8).

Zizi Papacharissi (2009b) has also challenged traditional understandings of how the public sphere should be viewed, pointing out that focusing on an ideal public sphere misses the reality of political and social issues discussion. Especially in the age of the internet, there is the opportunity for new ways of engaging civic participation and democracy, but they

might not align completely with what is expected of a public sphere (Papacharissi, 2009b).

Papacharissi (2009b) develops the idea of "civic narcissism" to describe our ability to

determine our own information environment. She uses the term narcissism to imply that

engagement is self-referential, but engagement can still be for the public good (2009b). This

is different from notions of the traditional public sphere where the self-referential and the

private are not valued in public deliberation and where the agenda for discussion is meant to

be broad based instead of individually created.

Social Capital, Social Networks, and Social Networking Sites

Our public sphere is built from our social networks and requires social capital to

work. Social capital, as a concept, can be highly explanatory, helping many theorists to better

understand what is causing many of the problems at the core of their fields' research (Portes,

1998). Putnam's definition of social capital (2000), as referring to "connections among

individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from

them," is best suited for the work ahead, given his focus on the impact and use of social

capital in democratic politics (19). He even compares social capital to civic virtue, which he

defines as active participation, trustworthiness, and reciprocity of civic gains (2000).

However, he states that "the difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that

civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social

relations," (Putnam, 2000, 19). There is one aspect of Putnam's conceptualization of social

capital that needs slight tweaking in order to make it relevant for research on political

conversations in social networks. Like Bourdieu, who saw social capital as ultimately

reduced down to economic benefits, Putnam sees the value of social capital in what it might mean for civic action (Portes, 1998; Putnam 2000). In other words, social capital is a means to an ends, a potential to be actualized in the form of civic participation in organizations or in campaigns. This view ignores the value that social capital might hold beyond being a kind of "capital" that can be "spent." Social capital in the public sphere can be the necessary held trust, respect, and system of relationships that enable political talk. A group of people lacking the ability to grow into a network with social capital – whether due to a lack of social trust or other factors -- will not be comfortable discussing political issues. They will not, therefore, be able to participate in the public sphere.

Other scholars, including Mutz, La Due Lake, McClurg, and Huckfeldt, have examined the role of social networks – especially discussion networks – on political participation and information sharing. Three important – and tightly bound - ideas should be highlighted from this body of research for their impact on my own study. The first is that political conversation stems from social interaction – this is how information flows and ideas are exchanged (McClurg, 2003). The second is that politically relevant social capital emerges from people's networks as a product of that network's political expertise and how often political interaction occurs (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). Finally, there are differences in effects of political conversations between those with close ties in a network and those with weaker ties: conversations with those a person is close to might be more likely to influence a person, but conversations amongst those who are more weakly bound bring a person into the larger opinion environment (Huckfelt et al 1995). These ideas are relevant to this study because political conversations amongst social networks are at its heart. Engaging in a

content analysis of the Facebook posts on the participants' timelines means watching how their social interaction and the flow of information between them and their strong and weak ties. Facebook displays these ties openly but also displays them all in the same way in a giant list, with the exception of user's defined family members. Understanding these networks as spaces for the growth of politically relevant social capital lends weight to the discussions held on Facebook

Turning more fully to social networks as they are enacted on social networking sites, the first thing that needs to be understood is that Facebook and other Social Networking Sites make social networks explicit – they enable a technology-based link between people (most often to those whom they have some connection to in real life) and make that connection explicit (Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2006; Donath and boyd, 2004; boyd and Ellison, 2008). Early research on the internet assumed that people would be connecting to people online who they had not yet met offline, but SNSs most often contain relationships that already existed offline (boyd & Ellison 2008; Donath & boyd 2004). What's more, SNS like Facebook enable users to maintain relationships which might otherwise have been latent or ephemeral. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe's (2007) study of social capital and friendship connections on Facebook discussed how Facebook enables the user relatively easy maintenance of an enlarged network of both weak and strong bonds, indicating that Facebook can become the site of social capital growth and maintenance. People can then populate that connection with comments, links, things they like, things they watch and read and believe (Donath and boyd, 2004; boyd and Ellison, 2008). danah boyd notes that Facebook and other SNSs don't create our social networks, but they do transform them with technological

affordances that enable us to engage with each other and ideas in different ways – users can

disseminate their thoughts to each other in broadcast and manage multitudes of connections

with ease (boyd, 2011). As a place of both connection, idea sharing, and talk, Facebook can

also provide a new platform for people to discuss important issues and express their opinion

on politics.

Practices and Architectures – A Theoretical Backing

　　　　Architecture as Metaphor, Affordances as Possibilities

　　　　When talking about new media and social networking sites, the word architecture

often is used as a way to convey how the structural environment can affect interaction,

cultural understandings, and usage of the either the entire internet or particular sites such as

Facebook. The term carries with it the disciplinary understandings of the field of architecture,

from its considerations on how different spaces house different functionalities to how spaces

and structures shape social interaction (boyd 2011). The design of structures and spaces can

empower people or control them – or do both at the same time (Papacharissi 2011).

　　　　Of course, web architecture is fundamentally different than physical architecture in

many ways. boyd (2011) notes that while physical architecture is built out of atoms, digital

architecture is built out of bits. Architecture built out of bits then take on the properties of

bits, especially in the emphasis on connections between bits rather than on the bits

themselves. She notes "the properties of bits regulate the structure of networked publics,

which, in turn, introduces new possible practices and shapes the interactions that take place"

(42). Therefore, the use of architecture as a metaphor for digital structures is a powerful one,

but it does require a base understanding of what it means for a structure to be digital, including how networks operate and the spread of information through digital technologies.

Papacharissi (2011) argues that understanding technology as architecture will also remove the sense of technological determinism from our conversations on how technology will change our lives and politics since this will allow us to locate civic habits and issues in context. The technology-as-architecture framework recognizes that technology is an environment where the citizen is enabled to make choices for action, and that it is not technology itself that is wholly responsible for the shape of our civic culture or political outcomes, even as we also recognize that these architectures can be both social and political (Papacharissi 2011).

Seeing technology as architecture also opens up our understanding of how technology shapes interactions. Technology such as social network sites offer possibilities for interaction. These possibilities are "often understood as the inherent affordances of technologies, that is, intrinsic potentialities," which can be taken to mean that affordances are easier to use for some ends than for others (Papacharissi 2011 10). Affordances are contextualized within technological architectures, offering users choices which are in turn "further multiplied, adapted, or restricted by human action and reaction" (Papacharissi 2011 10). Indeed, all affordances represent tensions between autonomy and control – the options the user has and the choices that are constrained or restricted from them by the nature of the architecture and its underlying code (Papacharissi 2011). SNS civic habits and practices are developed through the use of affordances, and to be offered an empowering choice for potential interaction is to be situated in stacked layers of controlled choices.

Affordances can be broad – representing intrinsic potentialities that stretch across all digital technologies or all social networking sites, such as the four that danah boyd (2011) describes for networked publics in the section below. They can also be site specific. A technological affordance of Facebook is the ability to comment on posts made by others, or to post to other people's Facebook timelines. The ability to reshare posts, to like items, tag people in photographs or mention their names and have them receive a notification are all possibilities for interaction with others on Facebook. This is not to reduce technological affordances down to the features of a site platform, since the definition goes deeper than that to include understandings about choice and control, but those features are what enable interaction on those sites.

Networked Publics:

Two theories are fundamental to how I situate Facebook as contributing to the public sphere. The first is networked publics theory. Mizuko Ito (2008) gave a broad overview to the concept in the volume *Networked Publics* in 2008. She explained networked publics as what has grown out of people's engagement with digital media in the social, cultural, and technological realms – as a term for a collective of people, it is beyond audience or consumer, but encourages notions of engagement, complexity, and agency. She notes four themes that run through networked publics: accessibility, or the lowered cost of engaging in those networks; peer to peer and many to many distribution; value at the edges, the ability of people to take advantage of much larger and expanded networks of people, ideas and goods;

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and aggregation, the networks of knowledge and culture that grow out of the networks of content and people.

danah boyd (2011) further fleshed out the concept of networked publics and gave it a deeper theoretical backing that can be employed in this study. She defines networked publics as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice," (2011, 39). She notes four properties of networked publics: persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability. Since interaction and content creation on digital media is automatically recorded and archived, it is persistent, and can also be replicated. Content can also reach new networks and is more highly visible, and so is more scalable, while also being easily found through search. All of this is tied to the larger architectures and cultural practices emerging from digital media use. Zizi Papacharissi and Emily Easton (forthcoming) identified a fifth structural affordance of networked publics that they call "sharability," which is the encouragement embedded in networked digital structures to share and spread information – thus giving networks their vibrancy. In the same work, the authors (forthcoming) suggest that networked publics are a new habitus turned into practice. They explain that "the affordances, or potentialities, of the structural environment form a social architecture that suggests a flexible set of choices for agency, which both advances change in the habitus of the new but also sustains a comforting familiarity" (9). Taken together, these broader structures – the habitus of the new – and the technologies where the structures are embodied "shape and are shaped" by users and producers, habits and practices.

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Convergences:

Given that networked publics theory is concerned with spaces and uses of technology, it is no surprise that it draws heavily from ideas on convergence culture. Henry Jenkins (2008), who helped bolster the concept of convergence culture, sees it as a cultural shift, more rooted in our practices and ways of thinking than in any particular technology or medium – but the practices of convergence make use of mediated spaces and the new digital technologies that are rich with affordances that grant users broad agency. Russell, Ito, Richmond, and Turters (2008) center convergence culture at the heart of networked publics; the practices of networked publics are intertwined with those of convergence across technologies and content. Furthermore, as Papacharissi and Easton (forthcoming) suggest, "the dynamics of new media rest upon technologies of convergence, which collapse boundaries and combine the means through which individuals socialize (convergence of technologies), but also the physical and imagined architectures social individuals transverse (convergence of spaces) and the continuum of activities that shape and are shaped by a converged technological architecture (convergence of practices)" (9). While Russell et al (2008) was focused on convergence of content, and Papacharissi and Easton (forthcoming) was focused on convergence of spaces, technologies, and practices, Walther, Carr, Choi, DeAndrea, Kim, Tong, and Van Der Heide (2011) also point out that in the confluence of technologies, spaces, and practices, there is also now a convergence between interpersonal and mass media. Social networking sites don't fit as either/or – Facebook can be just as easily used to broadcast a message to the many as to the few or the singular. Networked publics cannot be separated from the broader cultural milieu of convergence culture.

Site Specific Practices:

Inquiring into the architecture of the networked public is key to understanding how these networks shape interaction (Papacharissi, 2009). Technological affordances shape the architecture of the networked public – they provide the environment within which people engage with their network (Papacharissi, 2009). Each SNS has its own set of affordances, and reasons why people chose to use them. Facebook allows users to create groups or pages for anything from advocating for the environment to posting funny pictures. In order to understand the practices that occur on these sites, it is important to understand that differences in architectures lead to differences in uses of these sites (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). Therefore, uses and gratifications based literature on SNS, and especially Facebook use, is important to include in this study as research from that field can illuminate how certain features are used and why. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), under the framework of uses and gratifications theory, inquired into why college students use Facebook. They found that information sharing and self-expression were the most powerful predictors of Facebook use. They also noted that being socially active on Facebook can allow users to "reap the social benefits of Facebook, and employ it to increase bonding and bridging social capital" (224). Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011) took Papacharissi and Mendelson's (2011) work as a broad overview of why people chose to use Facebook, but they inquired deeper into why particular features of Facebook are used. Importantly, they conceive of Facebook as a toolkit of features – features that make up the practices of conversation and sociability on Facebook. Two of their findings are of particular note here. First, expressive information sharing was the most relevant motive for posting status updates,

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but habits and the desire for a pass-time more strongly governed posting on other's walls.

Second, the use of groups was negatively predicted by a desire for social interaction, which

the authors interpret "to mean that Facebook users view Groups as sources of information,

not locations for social interaction," and that since Groups often contain people without prior

social connection, they run against the overall use of Facebook as a platform for maintaining

previously built social connections (2327). This has implications for the differences between

my study and the content-analysis studies of political Facebook groups explored earlier. By

locating discussions on people's Timelines, I am focusing on an area that is used for both

expressive information sharing and social interaction.

Civic Culture:

Dahlgren's concept of civic cultures provides the second theoretical foundation for

this study. He deliberately sets out to update Almond and Verba's (1963, 1980)

conceptualization of the term, differentiating himself as "constructionist and materialist,

rather than systemic" (Dahlgren, 2000, 336). Dahlgren (2000) defines civic culture as

pointing "to those features of the sociocultural world that constitute everyday preconditions

for all democratic participation: in the institutions of civil society, engagement in the public

sphere, and involvement in political activity broadly understood" (336). Furthermore, he asks

that "we treat political discussion not just in terms of its rational communicative qualities, but

also as a form of practice integrated within more encompassing civic cultures" (Dahlgren,

2005, 157). He considers what the cultural factors are behind the absence or presence of

participation, and locates the motivations for participation in the lived experience of

everyday life of people. As with networked public theory, Dahlgren's civic cultures

encompass the myriad ways we might engage in society, culture, and identity in our

discussions (2005). It looks to the actual practices we engage in that support democracy

while not limiting itself to deliberative communication. Dahlgren specifically sees the

internet as a space where people can enrich (and be enriched by) civic cultures and enable a

continuing evolution of our political communication and public sphere (2005). Facebook is

increasingly a part of our daily practices and provides a platform for our conversations. It

logically follows, then, to question how it might become or is part of our civic culture.

Research Rationale and Questions

　　　The development of the networked public also means the development of the

practices and spaces in our civic culture. Networked public theory's emphasis on the role that

the architecture of technology plays in structuring those practices adds an important

dimension to the exploration of the networked public as civic culture. The choices for action

and engagement that the environment engenders in turn shape the sort of content and

conversations that are produced. The importance of technological architecture to these

conversations is similar to the importance of urban architecture to civic life, public behavior,

and the public sphere found in earlier works by such scholars as Goffman (1963), Simmel

(1964), and more recently, Urry (2001) and Oldenburg (1991). Each of these scholars placed

great emphasis on how the physical structures that form urban life also form the daily modes

of thinking and doing of the people who inhabit those structures. How the architecture of

social networking sites, in this case Facebook, (re)structure the public is the focus of both

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networked publics theory and this research study. The content that people create and share on social networking sites is part of the convergence culture that digital media inspires and which networked public practices carries out. These discussions, the content that people rework, share, and post, become the basis for our civic culture on Facebook.

Two research questions to be engaged in this study embody these notions of technological architecture, practices, and content in the public sphere:

RQ1: What kinds of practices have people developed for engaging in political conversations and other forms of content on Facebook?

RQ2: What technological affordances are people using in the creation of this content?

Methods

Consider, for a moment, the complexities of studying a real-space conversation between two friends. Scholars in fields as diverse as gender studies, social linguists, interpersonal communication, public sphere, urban studies, and many more fields could take an interest in different aspects of the conversation. They have different approaches to gathering data from this conversation, as well in how to approach the conversation in the first place. Should the researcher engage in participant observation? How should he or she gain informed consent from the conversational partners? How should the conversation be captured? Was the conversation started by intervention – that is to say, did the researcher initiate the conversation or did the conversation naturally arise? These questions have different answers depending on the interests of the researcher. Those answers in turn will guide the researcher in the transformation of the conversation into meaningful data and variable categories for the data collection process. A researcher interested in the settings of friendship conversations might write a rich description of the café and its patrons, another might be interested in interpersonal turn-taking behaviors and would have variables for the number of times and how long a participant spoke or listened. Body language, diction, and topicality are all involved in even the simplest conversation.

I began with this illustration to help the reader understand the difficulty in designing a methodology that can encapsulate "Facebook conversations" – of any sort - and their relevant technological affordances. Given how much data can be gathered and interpreted from the rich context of the physical world, it should come as no surprise that our online spaces are also rich contexts that can still present the researcher with an overwhelming amount of data.

In a single Facebook post, there can a wide range of activities and ideas present in both the post itself and in the comments. A Facebook post is any content appearing on a Facebook timeline, placed there by either the user who the timeline represents, by another Facebook user, or by a Facebook application such as the *Washington Post*'s Social Reader. The goal was to transform the dense thicket of technological affordances, ideas and interactions present in Facebook posts into usable data I could analyze to create a picture of the practices of political conversations on Facebook. In order to do this, 25 participants were recruited by contacting Facebook users who commented on links to news articles appearing on the Facebook pages of major news organizations. The participants took a brief survey and allowed me to perform an online social interaction and content analysis on each post appearing on their Timelines from January 4th through March 1st, 2012. This project uses data from January 4th through January 20th. The online social interaction and content analysis tracked the meta data and social interactions internal to all posts, and the use of technological affordances and topicality of posts that were about politics or social matters.

Participant Recruitment:

Participants were recruited via Facebook message. Beginning December 8th through January 1st, I visited the Facebook pages of the Washington Post, New York Times, Time Magazine, and Newsweek. Some of these news organizations also have subpages, such as the Washington Post and New York Times' specific Politics pages. On each article posted since the previous day, I would message every fifth commenter using Facebook messenger. Facebook users that did not explicitly state (on their public profile information under their

names) that they lived in the US were not messaged, as I needed to have familiarity with the topics discussed in the posts. If I did not hear back from a user with either a positive or negative response in a week, a follow up message was sent out, this time including the link to the survey. Over 800 unique Facebook users were messaged. Facebook would pull up any previous contact I had with a user if I tried to send them a message, which enabled me to tell if I had already messaged them with the initial recruitment message or not.

If a user responded positively to my inquiry after having their questions about the study answered, I sent them a link to the survey if they did not already have it, and asked them to read over the informed consent document contained within, indicate their consent, and complete the survey. Once the survey was complete, I sent the participant a friend request on Facebook. Once that was accepted, the participant was fully entered into the study.

This method of recruitment of course means that my participant pool is already predisposed to at least having exposure to important news sources, if not having a heightened interest in political and social matters. Indeed, looking at the survey results from the participants, my participants are at least somewhat interested in politics - they scored a mean of 1.48 on that question, where 1 is very interested and 3 is not interested at all. Since this study presents a new methodology for the study of political conversations on Facebook, the participants' predisposition for discussing politics or at least following the news on Facebook is not necessarily a bad thing. This predisposition provided some assurance that they would engage in the kinds of behavior I wanted to study. However, this does not mean that there was an initial expectation that the posts on the participants' timelines would heavily favor

political or social issues. This is for two reasons. One, since the participants were discovered

through their comments on public Facebook pages related to news and politics, it could

indicate that they talk about politics on Facebook mostly in those types of spaces, and not on

their own personal Facebook timeline. Secondly, as will be discussed further later, a person's

timeline contains all the posts that the user makes or receives from their friendship network.

In other words, their timelines can be expected to include far more than just their political

behavior.

Survey

      The participants were asked to take a survey upon entering the study for three main

reasons. The survey served as the way to gain the informed consent of the participants,

providing them with information about the full range of the study and giving me a convenient

way to collect their electronically signed informed consent documents. Second, the survey

provided a means to gather background information on the participants, such as their political

and party identification, education level, age and gender. While much of this information is

available on the participants' profiles, I chose not to use that information. For one, the

information on the participants' profiles has many gaps – a person might not choose to list

their birth year, for example, or put their political beliefs on their profile. People don't always

tell the truth when filling out their profiles, either, perhaps due to privacy concerns or just as

a joke. Michael Zimmer (2010), in his dissection of the "Tastes Ties and Times" study

conducted at Harvard from 2006 to 2008, notes that when a researcher chooses to gather

information on a Facebook user from their profile they are on shaky ethical ground, since this

provides no mechanism for the user/participant to either correct the data or chose not to

provide data. By not using the profile data and turning to a survey, I enabled my participants

with a means to provide me with accurate background information while also allowing them

a way to opt out of providing information as they saw fit. Finally, the survey contained

numerous questions pertaining to the participants' internet and social media habits, with

particular attention on their political use of social media. The participants' answers on these

items can be used to illuminate their actual political uses of Facebook in the online social

interaction and content analysis portion of this study.

The survey was conducted on Survey Monkey using the professional platform. The

questions were derived from a much larger survey entitled the Georgetown University 2011

Media and Politics survey which was conducted in May 2011 over Mechanical Turk. I added

questions related to the political use of Facebook and "resharing" behaviors such as resharing

a link or photo on Facebook. The dataset was available to download directly into SPSS

format. A complete copy of the survey I conducted is available in the Survey Appendix to

this thesis, and particularly relevant data points are analyzed in the Descriptives chapter.

Facebook Timeline as the site of study

It is important to discuss the actual site of study for this project. As mentioned

previously, I gathered data from the participants' "timelines" – a new way of organizing the

Facebook user experience and profiles that began rolling out in January 2012. Throughout

the course of this study, not all the participants had switched to the timeline system – some

maintained the older system that utilized the Facebook "wall." In order to maintain

uniformity, only those items that would be visible under the Timeline system were collected and analyzed in this project, for reasons described in depth below.

With the switch to Timeline came a change in not only how information gets presented on a person's Facebook profile but also what information gets presented and prioritized. Prior to Timeline, Facebook was heavily conversation orientated, with the wall being the space for posts made by both the user and his/her social network. Any activity that the user performed would also appear there – including comments they made to posts made elsewhere. In effect, the stories on the wall were markers of all the conversations and actions a user was engaging in all over Facebook. These posts and other items were presented in reverse chronological order. Timeline shifts the focus away from conversations and towards an aggregate presentation of identity based off of posts, likes, actions, photos, and all other profile information. While somewhat linear, the emphasis on presenting information in a visually appealing format that combines data into relevant categories means that not every action appears along the timeline precisely when it took place. This is especially true for likes, photos, and app activity, all of which can appear in specialized boxes.

However, the Facebook profile - now manifested as the Timeline - is still the page most closely tied to the user. It is the space where the user can present their identity on Facebook, even though Facebook chooses what kinds of content appear on the timeline within the boundaries of general rules set by the user. There can also be no guarantees this is where the user will spend most of their conversational efforts.

Posts made on other Timelines or comments or likes made on posts outside of users' own profiles no longer show up consistently on the users' profile, which means that the

entirety of content on the Timeline is information directly tied to the user's profile – whether put there by the user or by somewhere else. Content that is tied to other profiles, which includes comments on other users' posts, does not appear on that user's Timeline. The only content that appears on the Timelines is the content users push there themselves or accept from others – either by making the post directly, by resharing content from elsewhere, or not deleting posts made by others to their timeline.

It is very important to remember that when a user visits Facebook, the page they first enter is their news feed. This is where the user can encounter their friends' status updates and other content, and also receive content from other entities they chose to receive updates from – such as magazines, groups, pages for politicians or their local garden club chapter. They can then choose which posts to interact with while still on the news feed, even though each of those posts is tied to different profiles. From the user's perspective, all of their interactions are mixed in with all the content from the profiles they have chosen to pay attention to, with everything streaming in reverse chronological order. The only actions that will make it back to their own profile, however, are status updates or posts the user makes, or re-shares of status updates or other content.

The data set developed for this study then has a limitation. Timeline only presents a limited view of a user's interactions on Facebook, since anything they do that is tied to the posts of their friends or subscribed Facebook pages are excluded. However, newsfeeds of other users are inaccessible to the researcher, but a user's timeline can be made accessible by creating a friendship link to that user, which is precisely the action undertaken for this study. It could be argued that the content that makes it back to the user's profile is the content that

the user finds most engaging, or at least the most desirable to present to their social network. Through their choice of links, photos, status updates and other content, the profile is shaped by the user's active decisions on what to present about themselves. Therefore, while it is certainly limited in granting the researcher access to all political conversations a user engages in – since many of those conversations could be happening elsewhere – the timeline still presents an intriguing site of study since it is so tightly defined within the infrastructure of Facebook. Since this project is concerned with those conversations that are situated in users' actor networks, the Timeline presents the best-case scenario for monitoring how a user displays their political identity through content choices and then engages in conversations regarding those choices with their friendship network.

Data Collection

The dataset contains all posts made by the participants to their own timeline, all posts made by other users to the participants' timeline, and all other content appearing as a separate item on the timeline and that enable commenting and liking. This includes, for example, changes in profile pictures, link recommendations from outside websites, and a small subset of Facebook app activity that appears as separate posts. As mentioned previously, this does not include the participants' comments on other users' timelines (although comments on links sometimes do appear on timelines) or their "liking" or app activities, as both of those get collapsed into monthly activity boxes. For example, a participant might use the Washington Posts' social reader app or the Yahoo news app. Those applications track which stories they read and list them in box on the participant's timeline by each month. Because

the date on which the participant read the article is unclear and other users can't always interact with that timeline activity, that kind of data is not collected. In contrast, if a participant reshares a link from the Washington Post's Facebook page or recommends a link from CNN.com, those activities appear as separate, dated items on their timelines, and enable other users to interact with those items, and so those activities are collected and analyzed.

With this in mind, the data collection process can be described. Each participant was assigned a unique number identifier (1-25). Three files were created for each participant. A Word document was created to contain the screen captured posts. A Google Documents text document held the list of identifiers that corresponded to the actors that interacted with the posts on the participants' timeline. Finally, a unique Excel workbook coding sheet where the data would be recorded according to the coding book was created for each participant. All three documents were used in the data collection and recording process.

When engaging in the data collection process, the author would open one of the participants' timelines (or, in the case of those participants that had not yet switched over to the timeline system, their wall). Then, the first post made on January 4th, 2012 was located. Depending on how often the participant posts, it was sometimes necessary to use the Timeline navigational tools that appeared while scrolling down. By clicking on the "2012" button, the timeline's focus would switch to the end of January. However, what would be displayed was not the full set of posts from January, but what Facebook had determined to be the highlights of January's Facebook activity for that user. A different button would then appear at the top of the screen reading "highlights." Clicking on that button, other options

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would appear, including "January" and "all stories."[c] By selecting "all stories," Facebook would call up all activities that occurred in January and display them in reverse chronological order. An example of the buttons that would be seen at the top of the screen can be seen below:

Figure 2.1
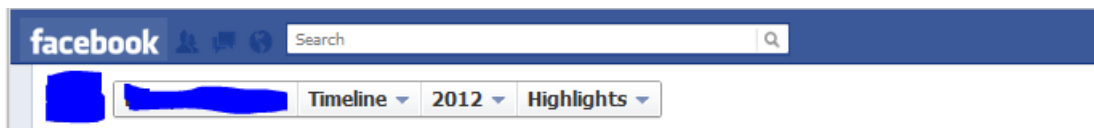
After finding the first post occurring on January 4th, 2012, the Word document would be opened and a post number would be noted followed by the date of the post (in this case, January 4th). Then, using Windows Snippet tool, the post would be captured. If necessary, the comments were expanded out by clicking on the talk-bubble. On occasion, if the post contained a picture it would be partially obscured while in the timeline format, and so the entire post would have to be opened up in another tab or browser window so that the content would be expanded. This could be done by clicking on the date under the name of the poster.

Once the post and its comments were captured, it would be scrubbed of personally identifying information. This included names of non-public figures, identifiable profile or other pictures, locations related to the poster or the actors in the comments (including street names, local restaurant names or places of interest), and any other information that could potentially locate and identify the participant or members of his/her network. This was not always an easy task; there were a number of difficult choices to make in regards to what

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[c] It should be noted here that Facebook refers to the expanded range of activity items that can appear on a wall or a timeline as stories. While I do include items that belong in this expanded definition, my dataset is limited to the kinds of content described in this chapter.

ought to be scrubbed. For example, one participant carried on an active discussion of the New Hampshire primary the night it was held. Some of her Facebook friends discussed going to vote in the primary. Should the entire comment be blurred out? Ultimately it was decided that state names were to be left alone, but any further narrowing of a geographic area needed to be scrubbed.[d] This included the names of local TV news stations, radio stations, and newspapers. Each of these media refers to a rather set geographic area. It should be noted here that while I did not collect background information from the profiles of the participants, a general idea of where they lived would become quite evident from their posts, especially if they used any location-based apps or if they turned on the Facebook setting that would list where the post was made from next to the date of the post. Therefore, I knew what locations to scrub out of their posts on the whole.

Once all personally identifiable information was scrubbed from the post and all the comments, the post was copied as an image into the prepared Word document. Below the image, the actors that liked and interacted with the post would be listed. Those who engage with a post are called "actors" and not "friends" because it cannot always be accurately determined if the actor is or is not the participants Facebook friend – depending on the participants privacy settings, the actors who take part in a post might be friends of friends or even members of a wider net beyond that if the post is public. Facebook also allows users to "subscribe" to other users, meaning that they see all that users' updates in their newsfeed without having to form a friendship link with them on Facebook. When recording posts, likes

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[d] Note that if an organization the participant is active in includes only the state name but is located in a particular town or area of a state, the state name would be blurred out to make the organization harder to identify, as there are often other iterations of those organizations in other states.

would be on one line, and interactions listed in order on another. Interactions included

resharing the entire post and liking particular comments.[e] An example post followed by a

detailed description of how actor identifiers were created, maintained, and recorded is

available in the Data Collection Appendix.

Interactions were recorded in the order they occurred on the post, with the exception

being reshares which were always recorded first. Reshares were included in interactions and

not their own category because they require a higher level of interaction with a post than just

liking it (a person can like a post with just one click, resharing a post requires at least two and

the decision to pull the post onto one's own wall), but they do not occur often enough to

constitute their own category of actor involvement with a post. A reshare would be recorded

by the actor identification number of who reshared the post followed by the annotation

(reshare). Then, comments to the post would be listed in order of appearance on the post. If

someone liked a particular comment, that would be recorded as the actor identification

number of the person who commented followed by the actor(s) who liked the comment in

parentheses. After all likes and interactions for a post are recorded in this manner, the post is

ready to have its data analyzed and put into the coding sheet.

Ethical Considerations

Strong caution must be taken by the researcher in gathering and using data from

participant's timelines, considering that the timeline is the Facebook space most likely to be

tightly tied to the participant's identity. Furthermore, given that the methodology captures

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[e] Who made a reshare could be viewed by clicking the note pad icon next to the talk-bubble for comments. A
list of who liked a particular comment could be viewed by clicking the thumbs up symbol in that comment.

other actors' interactions on the participants' timelines, those actors' needs for privacy need to be considered as well. The ethical reasoning behind the survey has already been described; here, I will describe the ethical reasoning behind the data collection process, which also draws on the lessons the scholarly community learned from Michael Zimmer's (2010) review of the Tastes, Ties, and Time study.

First, and most importantly, the informed consent of all participants was obtained. The study process was detailed to them, and they were given opportunities to ask for clarifications and questions. They were also informed that the study's focus was on political and social conversations and that all data would be kept confidential, while there still could be some risks to their privacy. They were told that I would be gathering any items that appear on their timelines from January 4th 2012 to March 1st 2012. In the Tastes, Ties and Times study, the participant group included the entire freshman class at Harvard, but the only entities to give consent to the study were Harvard, Facebook, and the dormitory RAs. The other students were tracked and data was collected on them by friending the dormitory RAs, without ever asking them if they'd consent to this data collection. By gaining the informed consent of all the participants in this study I know I have willing participants, and I know that the participants understand what the study entails and the risks that might occur.

The second major ethical consideration has to do with the actors whose interactions I am observing on the posts. This is because while the participants themselves have given me permission to watch their timelines on Facebook, the others in their network have not. Gathering information on them without their permission poses ethical challenges. I handled this by restricting what is collected about them to just what appears on the participant's

timeline. Other than their names, which were necessary for the creation of unique identifiers for the actors, I did not collect any personally identifiable information about them. Their timelines were never visited. The only data collected for these actors was whether or not they liked or interacted with posts, and for political/social posts the tone of their interactions.

The point of view of these other actors should be taken into consideration, however. Do they have a reasonable expectation of not being observed by people they don't know on someone else's timeline? Given that Facebook is used for the maintenance of all kinds of social capital, I believe that it is reasonable to assume that not all actors in a user's network know each other, as users maintain many links to actors in disparate groups – say their friends from high school versus their friends from college (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Even with the use of privacy filters, on posts which a user grants access to both groups, actors from one group can see actors from the other group's' interactions. While the situation of being observed for a research study is quite different, the data collected on the actors in the participants' space is highly limited. They are not participants in the project but are events observed to be occurring in the space under study.

Another issue with the Taste Ties and Times study was that it gathered such a startlingly large amount of personally identifiable information about the class under observation that it made re-identification relatively easy once the dataset was released. The people who reverse engineered the dataset were able to do so in part because the study collected a cultural taste map of the participants, which is unique data to an individual regarding their likes and interests. While interaction data was recorded for all posts in the

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current study, the only time the topics of the posts were recorded was if they were political or social issue based.

Finally, all data are kept on a password protected flash drive, with actor lists also stored on Google Docs. The data set will never be released. My hope is that future researchers who wish to examine similar questions or engage in the same type of data analysis will find my description of this methodology useful enough to refine it and employ it on their own.

Code Book Development and Content Analysis

The methodology of studying the Facebook posts for this project is an expansion on traditional elements of content analysis, which is why it is termed online social interaction and content analysis. This reflects the dual nature of this project – to collect data and understand not only the posts themselves but also the practices of interacting with them. In order to this, the coding book must reflect the complexity of the information collected itself. Divided into three major sections that reflect the three questions introduced in the Introduction Chapter, the code book covers the treatment of interactions with the Facebook posts, the topics discussed in them, and the technological affordances used in both the original post and in the comments. The content analysis is built upon a two-layer unit of analysis, with the first layer being the post itself and the second being the actors and their respective interactions with the post. Each actor that engages with has its own case number internally to the coding sheet. Information pertaining to the post as a whole, such as who

made the post, the type of post, and its topic are all copied across all the cases that belong to that post.

Interactions

Interactions were coded for 1) whether or not an actor liked a post or not, 2) how many interactions they had with the post, 3) the tone of their comments, and 4) their use of technological affordances in the comments. These information categories were only collected for posts that were political or social issues posts. If the post dealt with neither political nor social issues, then a simple notation of the presence or absence of liking and a count of how many interactions that actor had with the post was recorded.[f] If the post did deal with political or social issues, than there are also counts for how many of those comments were positive, negative, or neutral in tone and what kinds of technological affordances were used in the comments. The tone counts for the comments can be used to understand how much agreement or disagreement exists in posts related to political or social matters. Positivity and negativity in this study's coding practice was developed through use of examining the messages themselves and developing key term lists to enable coders to accurately label posts. This is similar to how Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, & Neely (2010) and Woolley, Limperos, & Oliver (2010) developed their coding for the positive or negative valence of facebook posts in their studies of political Facebook groups during the 2008 election season. Positivity is taken to mean agreement with either the main post or other commenters. I say either because early comments to a post are often just responses to the post itself, as are last

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[f] From here on, posts that deal with neither political or social issues will be termed "regular posts."

comments after Facebook collapses the comment thread and only displays the last few comments on the news feed. Furthermore, at any point, a commenter might ignore the rest of the discussion and just respond to the main post. If those comments are in agreement with the sentiment of the main post, saying things such as "Yes!" and "right on!" or "that makes me so mad, too," than they were recorded as positive comments. If the comments were in disagreement with the original post, saying things like "Nope, that's not right," or "I actually disagree," then they were recorded as negative comments. Off-topic comments – those not touching at all on the content of the post – or comments that contained elements of both positivity and negativity towards the original post were recorded as neutral.

While this covers comments that are in direct response to the original post, there are also comments that belong to discussions occurring between actors in the comments. In this case, comments were counted as positive if they were in agreement with the other commenters, negative if they made statements of disagreement with other commenters, and neutral if the comments agreed partially with both sides of an argument, were off topic, or were examples of moderating the post (such as asking other actors to tone down the rhetoric or to be kind to each other). Likes were not taken as positive expressions, as Tamara Peyton has pointed out that there are many different meanings and uses of "liking" anything on Facebook, and not all of those meanings are truly expressions of agreement or positive emotion towards an object (Peyton, 2011).

Technological affordance use in post interactions were for political and social issues posts as well. These affordances included resharing the post, including a link, photo or video into comments, tagging someone in comments (so that the person tagged receives a

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notification that they were mentioned in a discussion), or liking comments. The number of comments liked or where links and videos came from was also recorded. Maintaining a count of comments liked was especially important since this count went into the interaction count, and was used in a number of hypotheses.

Post topicality

Turning to the post itself, the codebook seeks to capture the topic of conversation presented in the posts. There were two levels to this. On a broad scale, posts were discerned to belong to one of three categories: political issues, social issues, or neither. Any post that mentions or deals with any level of government and any branch of government fell into the political category. This could include a discussion of FDA regulations of beef, problems with local law enforcement, or a court case. It also includes any discussion of elections and politicians. In contrast, social issues posts were about matters of importance to society but that did not involve government or other public policy apparatus. This could include discussions on the role of religion in society, the representation of women and minorities in the media, and protests of corporate denigration of the environment. Posts related to personal issues or anything that did not touch on social or political issues were labeled as neither political nor social. If a post was placed in this category, no further information would be collected on it.

Topics were then further detailed for political and social issues posts through the use of one of 23 topic codes, which included, for example, codes for gender, race, media, the environment, economy, taxes, politicians, parties/political organizations, and elections. While

most of these codes could be applied to posts falling either the political or social category, there were certainly topic codes that were exclusive to politics. The taxes code cannot escape its political nature, nor can the code for politicians and elections. There were two separate codes for handling events in foreign countries, one for anything that touched on American foreign policy, and another for stories in foreign countries that might deal with social issues (such as human rights) but where American foreign policy was not mentioned.

What is the Post?

Posts can take a variety of forms. The simplest form might be plain text, but even that can contain tags that link to other Facebook pages or users. Posts can also be personal pictures and video, photos and videos from elsewhere on the web, links to mainstream or alternative news sites or even other Facebook pages. A total of 11 codes for post type were developed, each detailing different kinds of content that can be posted to a timeline. These are described in the codebook appendix to this thesis.

How is the post made?

Generally, we think of a Facebook post being made directly to the Facebook Timeline – either while on the Timeline page or while on the newsfeed. However, Facebook now offers many ways of pulling in content from other sources – such as resharing content from other Facebook users or using the like or recommend button on outside websites. Posts can also be made by mobile app, or be imported tweets. Each of these methods of making a post is clearly visible on the post itself. Therefore, codes were developed for different ways of

making a post. There are separate codes for directly posting something, resharing something from another Facebook user, resharing something from a Facebook page/group/external website, posting a tweet via a mobile app or a service that reshares tweets from a user.

Commentary and Tone

When posting something other than text – say a photo or a link – Facebook enables a user to add their one notes and commentary. The tone of this commentary, if there was any, towards the post was also recorded. This was done for two reasons. First of all, including commentary as a separate variable enables testing as to whether or not the inclusion of commentary would incite more interactions with the post than posts without commentary. Second, by measuring the tone of the commentary in posts, whether or not Facebook users post things that they feel negatively towards or positively towards can be tested.

Measures of negativity, positivity, and neutrality work a bit differently here than in the comments, then. Here, even if the framing of the issue in the content of a post is something the user agrees with – say Think Progress' framing of the contraception debate for a liberal user – the user might still have negative commentary attached to their post of a link from that website, indicating that they are upset over aspects of the issue. In other words, to say that a user has presented positive or negative commentary is not to say that they agree with the content and framing of the issue embedded in the content, but that they feel positive or negative towards the issue at hand. Neutrality is marked by either just non-selectively quoting from the content (say, repeating the first sentence or headline of a link), noting that it

is interesting, or presenting positive and negative aspects of the different sides of the issue involved in the content.

Data preparation:

Data were initially entered into Excel and was entered into SPSS prior to statistical analysis. Any black spaces were replaced with 0s, and empty actor spaces for posts that received no interactions were replaced by the number 26. Comment liking behavior was separated out from the rest of the comment based technological affordances and given its own two variables – one for the presence or absence of comment liking, and the other for the count of how many comments were liked. The rest of the comment technological affordances were maintained in a single variable.

Concepts and Definitions:

A variety of variables were developed for both the survey and online social interaction and content analysis portions of this study. They are listed below, with the variables from the survey defined first.

Survey Variables:[g]

Political interest is conceptually defined as the participant stating they are very or somewhat interested in politics. The operational definition of this is the question variable Q1: "How interested are you in politics?"

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[g] Note that all operational definitions refer to variable names, and not the true question numbers from the survey.

System trust is defined as trusting that institutions (government, business) are acting in society's best interest. This is operationally defined as the participant answering that they at least "somewhat trust" on the question variables Q2 "How much do you trust the government to act in your best interest?" and Q40 "How much do you trust business to act in your best interest?"

Political knowledge is conceptually defined as knowing basic facts about current political players and institutions. A participant will be defined as politically knowledgeable if they answer at least three political knowledge questions correctly. The variables are: Q43 "What country has the largest economy in the world?" Q3 "Who is the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court?", Q4 "Which political party has the majority in the House of Representatives?" and Q5 "Who is the Vice President of the United States?"

News openness is defined as not searching out news that is in line with one's own point of view or that has a particular bias. News openness is operationally defined in Q11 and Q12 which ask "When searching for news, do you prefer news that…" but have different answer choices. A participant is defined as news open if they answer "doesn't matter" to Q11 and "no apparent point of view" to Q12.

Social media use is defined as using one or many social networking sites with regular frequency in order to engage in a variety of activities such as keeping up with friends, following political causes, or sharing information. A number of variables were designed to tap into this concept. They include: Q23 "What social networks or websites do you use?"; oftenvisit "How often do you visit these social networking sites?"; usesmost "of the social media websites you use, which do you use the most?"; Q24 "Why do you use social

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networks or social websites?"; Q27 "Using social networks, do you track, follow, or 'like' any of the following?".

Sharing is also part of social media use. Sharing is to post items to a social network site for any number of reasons, including the desire to share information, wanting to start a discussion, or to help people. Sharing is operationalized as Q25 "Do you ever post anything to social media websites?"; Q26 "Why do you post?"; Newsstories "Do you ever post or reshare/re-blog/retweet links to news stories on social networking sites?"; Oftenpost "How often do you post?"

Political use of social networks is defined as participating in political information sharing or gathering activities, discussions, or identity building on social network sites. There are a number of measures that tap into this conceptual definition, however it should be noted that this is nowhere near a full set and there is a bit of a gap between the fullness of the conceptual definition and the measures I have in the survey. That said, there are a number of measures to tap into political uses of social networking sites. Multiple parts of Q24 "Why do you use social networks?" tap into this concept, including parts b (to keep informed about politics), part c (to follow news), part e (to support a cause), part f (to become involved in a political campaign) part g (to become involved in community affairs). All parts of Q26 "Why do you post to social networks?" and Q27 "Using social networks do you track, follow, or 'like' any of the following?" parts c (politicians) and d (political movements).

Political ID is defined by a combination of which party the participant feels most aligned with and their self-identified set of political beliefs under broad labels such as liberal, conservative or moderate. In order to operationalize this definition an index was created to

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contain both the party ID (Q37) and ideological ID (Q36) of the participant, producing a measure on a scale from very conservative/Republican to very liberal/other party, with allowances for other party views as well.

Variables from the Content and Online Social Interaction Analysis

Liking is defined both conceptually and operationally as the presence of the indicator of an actor clicking the like button on either the main post or on comments. Given that many different motivations might be behind the actor clicking the like button, nothing else can be read into the presence of liking behavior (such as positive agreement).

Interactions are defined conceptually as all other means by which an actor can interact with a post. Operationally, this includes posting comments, liking comments, and resharing the post.

Technological affordance use is defined as the use by actors or the participants of features of the Facebook website. Technological affordance use was measured in the main post and in the interactions of a post. It is operationalized in both cases by the presence of use of features. For actors in the comments, this includes resharing the post, liking comments, and including links/videos/tags/photos in comments. For posters, this includes pulling in content from places external to the Timeline (resharing others' posts, recommending links, or using mobile or twitter tweet delivery apps). It also includes posting photos, videos, or even links to either outside websites, news sources or other Facebook pages.

A post's category is a broad way of defining the post's topic based on what issues it involves. There are three kinds of posts. Political posts are posts that deal with any level of

government, including federal, state, and local agencies and any posts that discuss politicians, elections and political parties. Social posts deal with social issues such as environmentalism, gender or race but do not mention or deal with government interaction. Posts defined as regular are personal posts, or anything that does not deal with politics or social issues.

Post topic is a narrower look at what issue or ideas the post engages. There are 23 different defined topics that are included in this concept. This includes gender, race, sexuality, drugs, local issues, environment, taxes, education, politicians, elections, political parties or organizations, foreign policy, international affairs, health care, social programs, crime, civil rights, intellectual property law, religion, media, economy, and other.

A post's content is what kind of information is presented in the post. There are a variety of content that can be displayed in posts. For this project, a set of eleven kinds of posts were defined. They include: text; text with tags; links from mainstream news organizations; links from non-mainstream news organizations; links from blogs, links from webcomics, links from other websites or Facebook pages; photos belonging to the participant, other Facebook users, or Facebook pages; photos whose authorship is unclear or are external to Facebook such as LOLCAT photos or posters with political messages, videos belonging to the participant, other Facebook users, or Facebook pages; and videos whose authorship is unclear or are external to Facebook.

Posting method refers to how the post appeared on the timeline. There are many different ways for posts to be made. Post can be made via mobile services, or services that import tweets or Tumblr posts, they can be via other Facebook pages, outside websites, or via other persons in the user's network. They can also be made directly to the timeline.

Descriptives

The participants took a survey prior to the beginning of the collection of data for the content analysis portion of this project. The data from that survey provided a picture of my participants and their social media habits. I then performed an online social interaction and content analysis on their Timelines' posts from January 4th 2012 to January 20th 2012. This portion of the study collected data on the type and topic of posts as well as the method of posting for all political/social posts appearing on the timelines of the participants during the timeframe of the study.

In describing the data used for this project, I will start with the survey data that describes the participants before moving on to describing the data gathered in the content analysis.

The Participants

The Basics

Who are the participants in this study? Their basic background data were gathered through the survey. The 25 participants are mostly female (16 women vs 9 men), and the average age is 48.[h] The age range was 24 to 68 with most over the age of 35. That my participant pool is somewhat older than what might be expected for a social media project might be because my choice of news sources that were used to recruit participants may have also had an effect as they were very traditional newspapers and news magazines.

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[h] There was one missing value for the age variable

Racially, my dataset skews white, but there are 7 participants who are non-white, including 3 African Americans, and one Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and other respectively. There was also one participant who skipped this question. The majority of the participants either had some college (9) or a 2-year degree or were college graduates (10). Only two had just a high school degree, and no participant had less than that.

The participants largely live in either an urban or suburban environment, with only 4 living in a rural area, but all participants had internet access at home, and a majority had a mobile phone with internet access (19 out of the 25).

Their Politics

A scale was constructed for the participants using the data collected on their ideologies and their party identities. The resulting index had 20 different values spanning from very conservative republicans to very liberal members of a third party. The median was very liberal Democrats, and 12 out of the 25 defined themselves as Democrats of some form, while 8 defined themselves as moderate of some form (1 moderate Republican, 2 moderate Democrats, and 5 moderate Independents). The mean score on the scale was 10.88, which falls in the moderate Democrat range.

Table 3.1: Participants Political Identities	
	number of participants
conservative republican	1
moderate republican	1
moderate democrat	2
liberal democrat	3
very liberal democrat	9
moderate independent	5
liberal independent	1
other party conservative	1
other party liberal	1

Interest level in politics was also measured. The mean for the participants was 1.48 (where 1 is very interested and 3 is not very interested at all). This mean indicates that the participants are very interested to somewhat interested in politics. I recruited participants by messaging Facebook users who commented on news stories on the Facebook pages of major news organizations, so their interest level in politics is not surprising. Since this study works with a new methodology, their high interest level was also desirable as it provided some assurance that the behaviors I wanted to study might be observable on the participants' timelines.

Questions on the survey also tapped into the participants' news reading habits, with one asking whether or not they chose news sources in line with their beliefs or not. The

participants responded with 28% preferring news to be in-line with their beliefs and 72% saying that it doesn't matter. No participant responded by saying they searched for news contrary to their beliefs. This would indicate that most of the participants don't directly seek out information based on their beliefs. Still, a sizable minority indicated that they do chose news sources based on the source being in line with their political beliefs.

Their social media habits

A large portion of the survey was meant to tap into the participants' social media habits, and just a few will be highlighted here. The majority (80%) often post or reshare/re-blog/retweet links to news stories on social networking sites, and 80% post to their social networking sites more than once a day. All but one of the participants post items to social networking sites to share with others, and all frequently visit their social networking sites such as Facebook. All also post in order to share information with other, and 92% indicated that they post in order to start a discussion or debate.

The participants in this study indicated that they use social networks or social websites to both follow news (84%) and to keep informed about politics and public affairs (92%). Most don't use social networking sites to become involved in political campaigns (68%) though. They do follow politicians (64%) and political movements (68%) on social networks. The participants were more evenly split on using social networks to become involved in community affairs (48%) and showing support for a political leader or candidate (52%).

What is reveled through these questions is that the participants use social network sites heavily and for a wide range of political behaviors. Not only do they share political information with their networks on these sites but they also chose to receive news and political information through these sites. The two biggest motivators for posting political items (information sharing and to start discussions or debates) are highly relevant to this study.

Before moving onto the Online Social Interaction and Content Analysis Data, it is worthwhile to take a moment to describe in qualitative terms the differences in how participants used Facebook. The participants used the site in different ways, had different posting strategies, and displayed different aspects of their identities through their profile's timelines. Three broad categories of use were observed. There were participants who treated their timelines like a constantly updated scrapbooking project, where a steady stream of posts were added throughout the day with things they had seen online, or pulling in content from other pages on Facebook. Other participants treated their timelines like an interactive diary, posting status updates once or twice a day and then engaging their network in conversation. There were also participants whose timelines displayed a variety of content, including links or photos they wished to share, items posted by other actors, and status updates.

Political content levels and treatment on the participants' timelines also varied. For most participants who engaged with political and social issues content, posts dealing with those issues were fully integrated into their timelines. The posts become part of the overall presentation of identity on the profile (boyd, 2011). Some participants' timelines had so much political/social issues content that regular posts were dwarfed in comparison. Other's

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had few or no political/social issues posts during the time frame that the study was conducted. One participant described in a Facebook conversation message with me that she didn't post anything regarding politics and social issues to her profile for fear of starting heated arguments with her network, but that she was actively involved in political discussion on the site – just on other pages and groups. While the absence of political/social issues content on some participants' walls cannot be fully determined in this study, the participants' survey answers regarding their social media habits hint that these participants might be participating in political conversations elsewhere on Facebook.

The Online Social Interaction and Content Analysis Data

The Online Social Interaction and Content Analysis Data portion of this study collected 1753 total posts. 692 of those posts dealt with political or social issues, with 384 dealing with politics and 308 dealing with social issues.

Interactions and Liking Behaviors

Data was captured for how many actors engaged with a post total, how many of those actors liked a post, how many interacted with the post and finally how many total interactions a post received. Below is a table displaying the means for each of these categories for all posts – both political/social and regular posts.

Table 3.2: Post Interactions on All Posts				
	numactors	numlike	numinteract	totalinteract
mean	3.38	2.05	1.7	3.69

This second table displays the same set of means, only this time for political and social posts only:

Table 3.3: Post Interactions on Political/Social Posts				
	numactors	numlike	numinteract	totalinteract
mean	2.398	1.35	1.27	2.83

These averages will be dissected in detail in the analysis section, but in the tables above it is plain to see that the averages are less across the board for political and social posts versus the averages for all posts.

Another area of interest for the interactions on posts were the technological affordances used in those interactions. The table below lists the frequency of each kind of technological affordance witnessed in the interactions.

Table 3.4: Actor Use of Technological Affordances in Interactions	
Affordance	frequency
liking coments	286
including a link	38
including a video	9
including a picture	5
resharing the post	59
tagging someone	12

Note that this was not constructed on a post by post bases, but on the expanded view of the data that held each actor who liked or interacted with a post on a separate case line, so that for political and social posts, n=1872. Liking a post is far and away the most used technological affordance in interactions – perhaps this should come as no surprise since the word like is clearly displayed under every comment to a post. Beyond that, there were 59 reshares of posts, and 38 actors included a link into their comments. Technological affordances were not used particularly often, even though the options to use them are always available.

What Was Posted

Table 3.5: Post Content Type	
Type	frequency
text post	89
mainstream news	123
non-mainstream news	83
blogs	23
website or Facebook page	179
personal photo/ authorship is known	30
external photo/ authorship uknown	78
external video	86
text with tags	1

As can be seen from Table 3.5 above, most posts consist of a link of some sort, but photos and text posts also make up a sizable portion of the pool of political and social issues posts. News links (both mainstream and non-mainstream) outnumber links to other websites and Facebook pages, and all photos outnumber videos that were posted. Interestingly, links to blogs did not see much play on the participants' timelines, despite their nature as another form of social media and many blogs political nature.

How Posts Were Posted

Posts could be made in many ways – they could be directly posted to a timeline, or they could be pulled in from another website or page, or a reshare of a post made to the

timeline of someone else in the participant's network. The table below lists how each post arrived on the timeline of a participant.

Table 3.6: Method of Posting	
Method	frequency
mobile	10
via another FB page or website	250
via another person	77
direct post	355

While direct posts make up just over half of all the posts collected, reshares (from pages, websites, or other actors) make up 47.2% of the posts, a hefty chunk in its own right. What is so interesting about how posts are posted is that it can provide insight into what sources a participant (or someone in their network) is paying attention to in a way that is distinctly different from directly posting a link. When a person reshares an item, they are at that point viewing it and then making the decision to push it to their own timeline, and then are clicking a button which will then make the item appear on their timeline. Reshares are deal more with the architecture of Facebook, and since the origin of a post is always given along with the post on the timeline it is "reshared" to, it becomes more possible to learn where a person encountered an item, and then where that item originated prior to the person encountering it. A participant can subscribe to organizations' pages or groups and receive their updates on their newsfeed, where a participant might see it and decide to reshare it. For an example, a photo may have been made by Time Magazine, be posted by Being Liberal,

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and then be reshared by a participant to their timeline. This project tracked where posts were

being reshared from, and notes were taken as to who reshared from where. Often, multiple

participants were seen resharing content form the same groups, or from similar kinds of

content creators. Table 3.7 on the next page lists some of these places where multiple

participants reshared content from.

Table 3.7: Origins of Reshared Content	
Name of group/page/kind of content	How many participants
Americans against the tea party	5
Move On	3
The Other 98%	2
Being Liberal	3
The Christian Left	3
George Takei	2
Causes	4
Occupy (multiple different pages)	4
Major News Organizations (multiple different pages)	8
Local news organizations	5
Non-mainstream news	6

Eight of the participants reshared content from a page related to a major news organization,

and 5 from a local news organization. Interestingly, five of the participants reshared content

from the same page: Americans Against the Tea Party, and four reshared content from some kind of a page or group related to the Occupy movement.

Conclusion

These descriptive data from the survey and the online social interaction and content analysis provide some initial ideas about the practices of political conversations on Facebook. The survey data not only describe the participants' backgrounds but also their social media habits. For example, it is useful to known that 80% of the participants say they often post or reshare links to news stories, and that 92% of the participants say they post items in order to start a discussion or debate. The online social interaction and content analysis data described here, display the many different kinds of Facebook posts that were observed over the course of this study. These data will be analyzed further in the next chapter.

Analysis

Three questions guide this project's exploration of political conversations on Facebook: who do we talk to, what do we talk about, and how do we talk about these matters. These questions address the technological affordances employed by the users and the topics and interactions involved in discussions. The hypotheses derived from these questions are tested and analyzed here using the original data collected from this study.

To Whom Do We Talk?

This series of hypotheses examines interaction levels and liking behaviors on the Facebook posts collected for this study. These behaviors are signs of engagement between the actor and the participants. The first hypothesis below examined the differences between liking and interaction behaviors on posts.

H_1: More actors in the participants' networks will engage in main post liking than interacting with the post.

The number of actors liking a post (numlike) was compared with the number of actors interacting with a post (numinteract) using a t-test.

Table 4.1: Comparison of Number of Actors Liking a Post to Number of Actors Interacting With a Post			
	mean	t	sig
numlike	2.05	22.745	0
numinteract	1.73	26.685	0

I ran a test using all the posts, regardless of whether they were about politics, social issues, or neither of those categories. The test shows that there is a difference between the number of users who like a post and the number of users who interact with a post (statistically significant at p= 0.00). However, it is important to point out that the difference between the two means is small – around .32, and so certainly less than the equivalent of a user in difference.

In order to see if there would be a different result internally to posts on politics and social matters, posts in the "regular" category were filtered out, leaving the 692 political and social posts. The t-test was then run again.

Table 4.2: Comparison of Number of Actors Liking a Post to Number of Actors Interacting with a Post			
	mean	t	sig
numlike	1.35	14.711	0
numinteract	1.27	15.019	0

Here again, the difference between the number of actors interacting with a post and the number of actors liking a post is significant, even though the difference in means is very small (0.08). Furthermore, neither of the means here for just political/social posts is very different from their corresponding means in the expanded set of all posts.

Differences in interaction levels between political/social posts and regular post will be examined in the next hypothesis:

H_2: There are more actors engaged in interactions in regular posts than there are in political or social issues posts.

As with the first hypothesis, the variable analyzed indicates the number of actors that interacted with a post, that is to say the actor engaged with a post beyond liking it. A binary variable was constructed of the political/social/regular categorical variable to group together political and social posts against regular posts. This new binary variable was then used in an independent samples t-test with the number of interactors the variable of interest.

Table 4.3: Comparison of Number of Actors Liking a Post to Number of Actors Interacting With a Post for Political and Social Posts			
	mean	t	sig
political/social	1.27	-5.906	0
regular posts	1.99		

The mean difference, at 0.72 is less than one interactor, however the test was significant at the 0.00 level.

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Next, I considered the following hypothesis:

H$_3$: Actors that interact with political and social posts will also interact with regular posts.

In contrast to H$_1$ and H$_2$, which were concerned with whether or not more actors would interact differently with regular vs political/social posts, the question here is whether or not the actors involved in political/social posts are also members of the set of actors that engage in regular posts. In other words, are those who interact on political and social posts a separate set of actors? In order to test this assumption, the following relevant variables were entered into Matlab, and a loop code was run in order to create an array for the complete set of actors: the post number, who posted the post, actor, like, interact, and political/social/regular. Tallies were created for how many times each actor interacted on political/social posts and how many times they interacted on regular posts. Then, selecting only those actors that interacted on political and social posts (n=434), a t-test was run between the two tallies.

Table 4.4: Comparison of Number of Interactions Per Actor on Political/Social Posts to Regular Posts			
	mean	t	sig
political/social interactions	2.0207	8.697	0
regular interactions	2.6083	6.781	0.000

As can be seen from Table 4.4, the t-test was significant – but it was significant because the mean for regular interactions outweighed the mean for political/social interactions. Thus the indication from this test is that the actors who participate in political and social issues conversations do also participate in regular conversations and in fact their level of interaction on regular posts is higher than their level of interaction on political/social posts.

However, this is not the full picture. The level of interaction on posts had a large range, with some users frequently interacting with posts and others not nearly as often. Some of the actors who engage in both political and regular posts heavily outweighed the others. The original hypothesis that actors who engage on political/social posts are also actors on regular posts might not be supported then, since there might be many actors who don't interact on both types of posts but who are masked by actors who have heavy interaction levels. In order to check this assumption, frequencies were run on the actors who had interacted on political/social posts in order to see how many actors interacted on both kinds of posts and how many engaged just on political/social posts.

Table 4.5: Number of Actors per Post Category		
Actors interacting with…	Number of actors	Percentage of actors interacting w/ political/social posts
political/social posts	434	100%
both political/social posts and regular posts	284	65.40%
political/social posts	150	34.60%
political/social posts and have only 1 recorded interaction	126	29%

Out of the 434 total actors who interacted with political/social posts, a majority (65.4%) interacted with both political/social posts and regular posts, which is supportive of the hypothesis. One note of interest from Table 4.5: of those 150 actors that only interacted with political/social posts, 126 have only one recorded interaction. This result may be due to the short time-frame of the study, where a number of actors were encountered just once.

Implications:

When Facebook users interact and like other users' posts they are adding to their connection with those users (Donath and boyd, 2004; boyd and Ellison, 2008). As can be seen from these tests, the number of interactors is smaller than the number of actors who like posts in both the full set of posts and the set of posts that deal just with political/social issues. This indicates that more users like than engage in interactive behavior with the post, but the

difference in means between the number of actors liking and actors interacting is relatively

small. This can have positive implications for political/social discussions on Facebook,

meaning that there aren't just a large number of people liking a post and a disproportionately

smaller number engaging in more substantive interaction. As McClurg (2003) notes, social

interaction is the basis for political conversation. Solely regarding interactions, there is a

difference between the number of interactions on political/social posts and on regular posts,

but again this difference is small. This, too, is satisfying, as the difference isn't so great as to

cause alarm a lack of political discussion on Facebook. Political and social posts aren't being

dismissed by actors in the participants' networks.

This implies that, as a space for interaction, there is a significant difference between

the treatment of political/social posts and regular posts on Facebook, but that difference is

not astronomical. Politics and social issues don't interest everyone, so it is reasonable to

assume that posts about everyday life or other items will overall attract more actors. But the

finding that the decrease in the number of actors engaging on political/social posts is not

large could mean that those posts are not seen as terribly distinct from other posts appearing

on a timeline. The fact that political/social posts compel nearly the same number of actors to

engage could mean that these posts are seen as normal – part of regular practices of posting

and engaging in Facebook use. Similar to Walsh's (2004) descriptions of how political

conversations come out of larger informal conversations, the participants' political and social

matters discussions are woven into the larger informal conversational space that their

timelines represent. The findings also imply that the social capital held in displayed bonds

on Facebook is being invoked on regular posts and political/social posts by close to the same

number of actors. This can be important since a network's politically relevant social capital is in part based on how much political interaction happens (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998).

It was also interesting to examine whether or not actors on political/social posts also interacted with regular posts. If actors only interacted with political/social posts it would mean they are focusing their connection to the participant on the political/social issues discussed. Actors who interact with both political/social posts and regular posts were building a broader connection to the participant during the data collection process for this study. The findings from H_3 show that most actors who interacted with political/social posts also interacted with regular posts, including political/social issues discussions along with daily life issues in their connection to the participant.

What Do Posters Talk About?

In the following series of hypotheses, the participants' level of engagement with political/social posts as a whole and with particular topics is explored. The first hypothesis describes the amount of political and social posts compared to regular posts.

H_4: Political and social posts make up a minority of the posts collected.

H_5: Posts on social issues will outnumber political issue posts.

As can be seen in Table 4.6, political and social posts combined make up 40% of all posts (total 1753), and so are a minority of all the posts collected. What's more, there were 4.3% more political posts collected than social posts. It is gratifying to see that combined, political and social posts are not in so much of a minority as to be negligible. However, it

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must be kept in mind that the participants were gathered from commenters on news articles on the Facebook pages of major news organizations, which could imply that they are already predisposed to discuss political and social issues on Facebook. Even with this predisposition, ten of the 25 participants had under a quarter of their posts regarding politics and social issues and even five out of these ten had under 10% on politics and social issues.

Table 4.6: Number of Posts Per Category			
Category	Number of Posts	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
politics	384	21.9	21.9
social	308	17.6	39.5
neither	1061	60.5	100

I tested the following hypothesis next:

H_6: Participants will focus on particular topics.

The question here is whether or not participants' posts are spread out across the topical categories or if they group into particular ones. In order to explore this, a cross-tabs relationship was run between the participants and the topic variable. Initially, the full set of participants and topics were run. However, certain topics were hardly ever discussed and a number of participants had less than 10 political/social posts. Given that the objective of this hypothesis is to understand the spread of participants' posts across topics, keeping those hardly touched topics and infrequent participants out of this analysis makes sense since those

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categories and participants would not have many posts to see spread out or cluster. Therefore, 15 participants were chosen based on how many political/ social posts they had on their timelines, and the cross-tabs was run again with any topics those 15 participants interacted with that had fewer than ten uses dropped, as well.[i] The chi-square can't be computed because 88.5% of the cells had an expected count less than 5. In some ways, this extreme level of cells with tiny expected counts is a finding in itself. There are 15 rows by 18 columns to the cross-tabs table, with a valid case count of 628, meaning that if these valid cases were distributed completely evenly over all possible cells, the count in each cell would be somewhere around two to three. Instead, 11.5% of the cells have over 5 posts pertaining to them.

Table 4.7: Percentage of Top Participants Who Discuss These Topics								
gender	race	sexuality	animal rts	local	environment	education	politician	election
66.70%	40.00%	33.30%	26.70%	40.00%	40.00%	46.70%	100.00%	46.70%
political org	non domestic	health care	civil rights	ip law	religion	media	economy	other
60.00%	46.70%	53.30%	60.00%	60.00%	66.70%	40.00%	86.70%	73.30%

Table 4.7 shows the spread of participants across topics, and it shows that only a third of the topics involve more than seven of the participants. This indicates that there is a decent spread of participants across topics – in other words, all of the participants aren't all taking about the same topics, but instead some are talking about animal rights while others are talking about

[i] Foreign policy and international affairs were recoded together, as well.

the election, and still others about health care. Interestingly, each of these top 15 participants discussed a politician at some point, and 13 had at least one post talking about the economy, but only seven addressed the election. This is particularly interesting because the economy is a long term issue – the current economic issues are nothing new and are not going to resolve anytime soon, but the topic still managed to garner the interest of a supermajority of the heaviest political/social participants. However, as Iyengar and Kinder (1987) point out, mass media communication influences how citizens decide what is important in politics, and so the economy's continued inclusion in the mass media agenda might be why it is also was a topic in so many of the top participants' Facebook timelines. Meanwhile, local issues only appeared on the timelines of five of these participants, perhaps indicating that local issues aren't on the attention radar of many participants.

Table 4.8 describes the topics across participants, and it answers the original question: whether or not participants post mostly in particular categories.

Table 4.8: Spread of Topics Across Participants

Participant	gender	race	sexuality	animal rights	local	environment	education	politician	election	political org	non domestic	health care	civil rights	ip law	religion	media	economy	other
1	7.40%						22.20%	37.00%			18.50%			37.00%		11.10%	11.10%	11.10%
5	8.90%	5.90%									28.90%			11.90%	10.40%	8.90%	8.90%	11.10%
6	3.40%		3.40%			41.40%	14.10%	6.90%	10.30%			3.40%		3.40%	3.40%	6.90%	6.90%	10.30%
9						10.50%	6.90%	21.10%	7.90%	31.60%		2.60%			13.20%	10.50%	10.50%	2.60%
10	1.40%	8.50%	2.80%	2.80%	2.80%		19.70%	19.70%	1.40%	1.40%	19.70%	2.80%	2.80%	2.80%		18.30%	11.30%	8.50%
12	1.80%	4.00%	0.20%		4.80%	25.50%	0.50%	16.50%	6.20%	0.20%	3.50%	7.50%	2.00%	7.80%		3.20%	6.00%	10.20%
15	2.90%					5.90%	32.40%		2.90%	20.60%	20.60%		1.50%	8.80%	17.60%	8.80%	8.80%	7.00%
16	9.90%	3.30%	7.00%				25.60%		4.40%	4.40%	1.50%	1.80%	4.40%	4.80%	18.30%	6.20%	6.20%	7.00%
17	1.50%	22.70%	4.60%	53.80%	7.70%		4.60%		4.40%	1.50%	1.80%			10.80%	3.10%	0.40%	6.20%	7.00%
18	7.60%	22.70%	2.00%	16.70%	16.70%		21.20%					1.50%	1.50%	16.70%	16.70%	6.10%	23.50%	6.20%
19	29.40%		0.70%	0.70%	18.30%		9.20%			2.00%		0.70%		6.50%	23.50%	4.50%	4.50%
21			2.00%	0.70%	18.30%	10.60%	3.10%	9.20%	0.60%	14.40%	2.00%	0.60%	6.90%	14.40%	6.50%	13.10%	8.10%	21.20%
22		3.30%			1.10%		65.20%		2.20%		19.60%	16.30%		13.00%	13.10%	37.00%	7.80%
24							17.40%		4.30%	8.70%			8.70%		13.00%			3.30%
25			1.40%	1.40%		20.80%	19.40%	19.40%	4.20%	1.40%	8.30%	2.80%		1.40%		34.70%	2.80%

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For all 15 of these participants, at least half of their posts fall into three or less categories. There is quite a bit of clustering of the majority of each participant's posts into a small number of categories, with much smaller percentages doled out to the other topical categories. While the motivations behind the participants' engagement in particular topics of discussion is not known, the constant use of particular topics by particular participants can be an indicator of what interests or is important to them.

Next, I considered the link between topics and interactions in the following hypothesis:

H_7: Those topics that received the most attention in the cross-tabs above will be most likely to start interactions on posts.

Returning to the full list of participants, a binary logistic regression model was run in order to test this hypothesis. The original variable that contained the number of actors who interact with a post (numinteract) was transformed into a binary variable, where 1 indicated the presence of some interaction occurring, and 0 indicated that no interaction occurred on that post. Then, the topic variable was parsed out into its constituent topic areas, minus those that received fewer than 10 posts (leaving 18 topic areas).[j] Neither the Wald statistic (1.48, p= 0.224) or the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test (Chi-square 0.000, p=1.00) were supportive of a good model fit. In fact, none of the variables were significant, either. Table 4.9 below lists their Bs and their significance levels.

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[j] including gender, race, sexuality, animal rights, local, environment, education, politician, election, political party or organization, non-domestic, health care, civil rights, ip law, religion, economy and other

Table 4.9: Binary Logistic Coefficients for the Top Topics		
variable	B	sig
gender	0.297	0.586
race	0.154	0.786
sexuality	-0.405	0.584
animal rts.	0.154	0.809
local	-0.357	0.536
environment	-0.26	0.56
education	0.442	0.508
politician	0.292	0.502
election	-0.053	0.921
political org	-0.657	0.257
nondomestic	0.154	0.774
healthcare	0.701	0.2
civilrights	-0.405	0.494
ip law	-0.069	0.889
religion	0.154	0.762
media	0.76	0.236
economy	-0.04	0.932
other	0.301	0.55
constant	-0.154	0.695

The lack of significance – either for the model as a whole or for each variable – is due to the variance of posting behavior by the participants. Considering what was learned in the last hypothesis analysis, the lack of significance of this model is unsurprising. Different participants focused on different topics, so there is not a discernible pattern in the data. It is also why this model is non-significant – the logistic regression model cannot tell with any certainty any topic that will, across the board, start conversations. Even with topics such as "politicians" which saw use by all the top participants, the level of involvement with that

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topic ranged from 3.1% to 65.2% of their political/social posts, and the top participants only

constituted 15 of the 25 participants. Ultimately, determining what topics start the most

conversations cannot be answered with these data, but this model does add support to the

insights that were highlighted in the last section regarding the spread and variance of

participants across topics and how participants' timelines see concentration of posts in a very

few topic categories.

Implications

The ideal public sphere described by Habermas (1989) and his followers is meant for

conversations that affect everyone. To enter the public sphere is to leave personal history

behind and to elevate discussion towards a true all-encompassing public good (Habermas,

1989). However, as scholars such as Fraser (1992) and Papacharissi (2009b) have pointed

out, this is not realistic. Not only is it impossible for any single person to focus on all things,

but no single person would want to do that (Schudson, 1998). As Schudson (1998) has

pointed out, the citizen in the 21st century lives in such a saturated, fast paced media

environment as to make keeping up with all aspects of politics impossible. Furthermore,

there are issues that simply don't interest us or touch our lives in politics or in the social

realm. Someone living in the cornfields of Iowa might not be particularly moved by the

debate over federal ocean fishing regulations, and an artist living in Arizona might care a lot

about water policies but not a lot about farm subsidies. People have topics that interest them

more than others, as well, and their reasons for getting involved in those issues need not be

any more complicated than "I like nature hikes" for the environmentalist or "I love my dogs"

for animal rights. So long as citizens remain on guard for trouble areas, and remain informed on those issues of importance to them, democracy can survive (Schudson, 1998). Instead of idealizing one type of "Good Citizen" there should be a more fluid definition that accepts a wide range of behaviors and engagement (Schudson, 1998).

Issues that are sometimes considered private, such as religion or reproductive choices can become public issues on a massive scale, and indeed ten out of the 15 top posters on political and social matters discussed religious issues and ten discussed gender issues – a topic category which contains numerous issues which while now considered widely political have an element of the private sphere to them such as reproductive health choices or sexism in relationships. Fraser (1992) reminds us that under the Habermasian ideal, anything of a private nature is relegated out of the public sphere, but this relegation means that many issues of deep concern to citizens might be left out of the public sphere, or that dominate groups can simply ignore alternative voices and maintain hegemony. What the data from the hypotheses in this section show is that the participants do engage in discussions of these issues, perhaps indicating that they see them as legitimate areas for concern for the public sphere or marking their own, personal interest in those topics.

Papacharissi (2009b) takes a somewhat different tack, but she is describing similar concepts in her discussion of civic narcissism, which is the ability of users to organize information to suit their needs and desires. She ties civic narcissism to self-expression values which can certainly be civic, since they can play a part in questioning authority and a desire

for independence.[k] Narcissism is "a preoccupation with the self that is self-directed but not selfishly motivated," (237). She goes on to explain that while this describes the kinds of content seen on social media such as blogs, and that these venues are lack the coordination necessary to make a significant contribution to the public sphere, engaging in civic narcissism encourages pluralism and opening up the political environment. Internally to this study, participants focus on particular issues of interest to them, so they are self-referential, but their discussions on those issues are not self-absorbed but still linked back to a greater networked public, where they are both audience for media, links, images and videos, and content collaborators, sharing those pieces of media with their networks to engage their interest, as well.

What Technological Affordances Are Used?

In the final series of hypotheses the posting of different kinds of content and the use of technological affordances are explored. The first hypothesis in this series is:

H_8: More photos will be reshares than direct posts.

A condensed version of both the variable for what a post is and how a post was posted were constructed. This variable for what a post is combined text posts and text posts with tags into one category, the two photo options into another, all links into a category, and the two video options into a final category. The condensed variable for how a post was posted first stripped out the ten cases that were via mobile (thus making the n for this

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[k] Self-expression and information seeking are some of the primary motivations behind Facebook use, as Papacharissi own research with Mendelson (2011) shows. Ellison, Lampe, and Wohn (2011) also found that expressive information sharing was highly explanatory for posting status updates.

analysis 682 instead of 692), and then combined any method of resharing an item into one category, and left direct posts as its own category. Then, these two variables were entered into a cross-tabs. The chi-square (71.795) was significant at the 0.00 level. The table below lists the percentages within the reduced what the post" is variable for each kind of posting across reshares and direct posts.

Table 4.10: Method of Posting for Different Kinds of Content		
	reshare	direct post
text post	27.50%	72.50%
link	44.10%	55.90%
photo	83.30%	16.70%
video	40.70%	59.30%

$$X^2 \text{ p}=.00$$

It can be seen from the table that the percentage of photos that were reshared dwarfed the percentage of photos that were direct posts, and so the hypothesis is supported. Another point of interest from the table is that while photos were more often reshared than directly posted, videos are more often directly posted than reshared. This is particularly interesting since they are similar kinds of content – distinguished from links in that a person doesn't have to leave a timeline to fully take in the media, whereas with a link someone has to click and read it in another window. In other words, the question of difference here is in how a person encounters videos versus photos. If most photos are reshares, that means that the poster is encountering them from either someone in their network, or from one of the pages they

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subscribe to, and then can reshare that item to their page without leaving the Facebook ecosystem. Meanwhile, if more videos are being directly posted than reshared, that might indicate that the participants were encountering political/social videos in a very different way than photos, and that they might be encountering them outside the Facebook ecosystem and then posting them to their timelines.

The next hypothesis analyzed is:

H_9: When users post links to political or social issues news articles they add their own thoughts in personal commentary.

In order to test this, a cross tab was run between two binary variables. The first was created from the variable for commentary attached to original posts by the poster, with a 1 standing for any commentary presence, no matter the tone, and a 0 indicating that there was no commentary attached. There was also a binary variable created to separate out links to newsarticles from all other kinds of posts. Only those posts that were political or social in nature were selected to be used since they were the only ones that noted what kind of post was made. The cross-tabs were then run.

Table 4.11: Inclusion of Commentary for Links to News Sites			
listed: percent w/in newslink	commentary presence		
		no	yes
newslink	not a newslink	42.80%	57.20%
	newslink	28.20%	71.80%
total		38.40%	61.60%

$$X^2 \; p \leq .00$$

The Pearson Chi-Square was 13.109, which was significant at the .000 level. As can be seen

from the table above, the hypothesis was supported – more newslinks were posted with

commentary than without commentary. What is even more interesting, however, is that in

looking at the total percentages for the columns, it becomes clear that this does not just hold

true for just newslinks, but for all kinds of posts – 61.6% of political or social posts contained

some form of personal commentary added by the poster, whereas only 38.4% did not.

The final hypothesis to be considered is:

H_{10}: Posts with commentary will be more likely to start conversations.

The inquiry here is whether or not interactions are more likely to start on a

political/social post when the author of the post adds in some personal commentary along

with the item posted, or if plain links, videos, and photos garner more attention from actors in

a participant's network. Now, there is an immediate problem with the very question at hand,

since text posts are not attached to another piece of content and can be conceptualized as pure commentary. Therefore, their effect on the level of interaction should be included in this analysis. Text posts are the baseline to which all the other kinds of postings will then be compared for their effect on interaction levels, so the analysis will start there.

A model was run to see the effects of text posts compared to photos and links on the total amount of interaction a post received. Since my dependent variable was continuous an OLS linear regression model was chosen. The model was significant at the 0.01 level (F=4.024), but interestingly, the only the constant and the variable text posts were significant at $p \leq 0.01$.

Table 4.12: OLS Regression of Total Number of Interactions per Political/Social Post on Different Kinds of Content			
variable name	Beta	t	sig
constant	2.282	2.96	0.003
link	0.024	0.416	0.677
photo	-0.011	-0.219	0.827
textpost	0.138	2.72	0.007

$$R^2 = .018$$

Not only is text posts the only significant variable in the model, but the beta is much stronger in comparison to the other variables and positive, indicating a positive effect on interaction.

With this knowledge about the effects of text posts in mind, analyses were run to examine the interaction effects of commentary presence and the different kinds of postings on interaction on political and social posts. First, interaction effects variables were created

between photos, videos, and links and commentary presence. Then, a separate discriminant

analysis was run between each interaction variable and its corresponding full variable.

Discriminant analysis is used to analyze which characteristics better enable us to correctly

categorize a case. Here it is being used to determine whether the presence or absence of

commentary attached to content allow us to best predict whether a post will see interaction or

not.

Link/commentary*link

Both the Box's M (13.99) and the Wilks' Lambda (.974) were significant at the 0.00

level. The canonical correlation was 16.2. The coefficients are listed in the table below:

Table 4.13: Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients for Links	
link w/ commentary	1.387
link all	-1.17

As can be seen from the table above, a post that is comprised of a link with poster

commentary will be more likely to inspire interaction than a link alone.

Photo/commentary*photo

The Box's M (F approx.. 11.052) was significant at the 0.00 level. The Wilks' lambda

approached significance (0.992) at 0.065. Given that the Box's M was highly significant, it

was decided to continue with the analysis. The canonical correlation was 0.089. The

coefficients are listed in the table below.

Table 4.14: Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients for Photos	
photo w/ commentary	1.423
photo all	-1.011

Again, as can be seen from the table, a post that is comprised of the item at hand (in this case

photos) and commentary from the poster is more likely to see interaction than all photo posts

when looked at as a general category.

Video/commentary*video

The Box's M (F approx.. 42.49) was significant at the 0.00 level, but the Wilks'

Lambda (0.996) was not significant (0.260). The coefficients are listed in Table 4.15

Table 4.15: Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients for Videos	
video w/ commentary	-2.469
video all	2.495

Here a reversal can be seen of the trends found in the previous two models. The signs are flipped in this model, with the item under question (videos) being more likely to start interactions without commentary than just those videos with commentary added to them by the poster. However, because the Wilks' Lambda is not significant, it is unclear whether these coefficients add to our understanding about how video posts act with or without commentary on interaction levels.

Comparison across interaction terms: text post, commentary*link, commentary*photo

In order to compare how posts of items with commentary do in comparison to text posts, a final discriminant analysis was run with text post, commentary*link, and commentary*photo.[1] Both the Box's M (F 87 approx. 4.011) and the Wilks' Lambda (0.970) were significant at the 0.00 level. The canonical correlation was 0.173. The coefficients are listed in the table below.

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[1] Video posts were left as the reference category since their discriminant analysis was both not significant and the interaction term with commentary presence was opposite of the hypothesis.

Table 4.16: Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients for Different Kinds of Content	
textpost	0.742
link w/ commentary	0.954
photo w/ commentary	0.698

All the coefficients are positive, and they all indicate a strong ability to distinguish between a post having interaction or not. As can be seen from the table, links with commentary have the strongest ability to distinguish between whether or not a post will see a conversation started or not. Given that links made up the majority of posts (59% of all political/social posts), and that the majority of these links have commentary (70%), perhaps this shouldn't be so surprising – levels of interaction could be relatively normal across all posts and not induced by the presence or absence of commentary, and the coefficient reflects the fact that most posts are links and most links have commentary.

Text posts have the next strongest coefficient, followed by photo posts with commentary. Taken together, this final analysis addresses the original hypothesis in this section: Posts that include (or are comprised completely of, such as text posts) personal commentary do seem to make a post more likely to have interaction by other actors. With the exception of video posts, there is support for the hypothesis.

Implications

Discussions of what kinds of content are posted to people's timelines and how that content is posted all refer back to the same concept: convergence. It would be useful here to

take a step back from the specific analyses run above and re-evaluate and situate the participants and their timelines in the backdrop of convergence culture and networked publics discussed in the literature review. The participants are both audiences and (re)producers of the content that were posted to their timelines, and so exist as neither but as constituents of a networked public. The participants and the actors who engaged with their timelines (whether through discussions or by posting to those timelines) read articles, watch videos, and look at pictures, then they chose particular items to then reiterate to their own networks. This situates the content in terms of the identifying context built up by their timelines.

While convergence and networked publics, as concepts, do not refer to any one space or any one set of practices but the conglomeration of spaces, and practices that new media enables, this project took as its object of study one potential space for practices informed by convergence culture and networked publics dispositions to emerge (Papacharissi 2011). Instead of a broad, conceptual examination of convergences, this study takes on witnessed practices and that troubles some of the assumptions of convergence culture and networked publics as not belonging to any particular site but being a mindset or disposition that spreads across all media use – the very mindset that enables the convergence of the multiple media involved in current daily life. This is why this project understands the participants to be members of networked publics which are where the disposition of convergence culture comes into practice (Papacharissi & Easton, forthcoming).

Embedded in all of this, my hypotheses have focused on what sort of practices are being used to pull in content to the participants' timelines and engage in civic activity

(specifically, what sorts of practices elicit discussion of political/social issues). Facebook users can chose to reshare content from many different sources, from outside websites to other Facebook groups, or even other members of their network or people they subscribe to. H_8 found that different kinds of content arrived on timelines in different ways – photos, for example, were more likely to be reshares of either another Facebook user's photo or a group or organization's photo. While links, textposts, and videos were more often direct posts than reshares, there were still sizable portions of links and videos that were reshared content.

Even when making a direct post, though, authors of posts can include their own commentary. H_9 found that a majority of newslinks included post author commentary (and so did all other links, though that majority percentage was less than the percentage of newslinks with commentary). Making the choice to include personal commentary when posting links might then be considered part of the site specific practices of networked publics as they exist on Facebook that go along with the convergence informed practice of pulling in content (in the form of links to mass media news organizations and smaller news organizations). In H_{10}, it was found that not only was the ability of each kind of post to incite discussion enhanced by the inclusion of post author commentary (with the exception of video posts), but that links with such commentary outperformed other kinds of posting in starting conversations.

Including commentary along with posts might then be considered a civic practice of political and social discussions on Facebook. The inclusion of commentary becomes a way to color convergence – instead of just a wild mesh of mediums and content, the post author contextualizes and situates the item being pulled into the participants network by way of their timeline. This can provide cues for actors in the network as to how it should be reacted to, or

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why the item is of interest – if not to a grand public than to in a self-referential way to the

participant's network, who are the reason the actors are paying attention to begin with.

Conclusion

Our political conversations are symbol and substance of our democracy. That we engage in political and social issues conversations is a sign that our democracy is healthy. The conversations in turn are the fuel of democracy, driving the policy and social discussions that shape our perceptions of the issues, how we vote, and how we act in the civic arena. This is nothing new. Past study of the public sphere placed great value on communicative action and developed an ideal for what the public sphere should contain (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1992). That ideal focused on deliberative democracy, with the public sphere as a space where citizens left personal interests, history, and identity behind to engage in coordinated discussion of topics that concerned the entire public. This is a highly formalized ideal that likely never existed as reality, as Zizi Papacharissi (2009b) noted. Beyond all the cultural and philosophical shifts that have occurred since the time period public sphere scholars such as Habermas (1989) and Tarde (1901) were writing about, the sites and practices of conversation have changed as well. Social networking sites provide a new site for discussion for many people, and it is no surprise that political/social issues discussions have emerged on these sites. This is why it is now so important to re-evaluate the practice and place of political conversations, so that a firm understanding of the reality of our political conversation practices takes hold. This thesis took on the practices of political and social issues conversation as its main focus, and examined conversations on those matters internally to 25 participants' Facebook networks in order to understand the practices under pinning political and social issues conversations on Facebook. Specifically, the study's goal was to uncover the kinds of social interactions that occur on these political and social issues posts, which

topics were discussed, and the use of technological affordances. To that end, hypotheses were developed to provide insight into those three key concept areas.

To Whom Do We Talk?

When Facebook users engage in political and social issues conversations with actors in their networks they are developing politically relevant social capital. This is why it is important to measure whether or not political and social issues posts are followed by interactions with the participants' network. More actors liked than interacted with posts, and regular posts saw more actors engaged in interactions than political and social issues posts. However, the difference in means between the number of interactors on regular posts and the number of interactors on political/social posts was, while significant, not terribly large. This indicates that political/social issues posts are not treated very differently from regular posts on a user's timeline. Both kinds of posts see somewhat similar numbers of actors engaging in interactions. Those actors that do interact with political and social posts largely also interact on regular posts – though there are a significant number of political/social interactors that only have one recorded interaction, and that was on a political or social post. This indicates that the interactions witnessed on political/social posts were performed by actors who are not exclusive to political/social posts – they interact with the full range of posts on the participants' timelines.

Both of these findings have implications for our civic culture. That close to the same number of actors engage on regular posts as on political/social posts can be taken as an indication that political/social posts aren't being treated very differently when they appear on

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participants' timelines – they receive roughly equal treatment as conversation pieces. Political and social conversations are woven into the larger context of the timeline.

What Do Posters Talk About?

This study found that people talk about political and social issues less than other topics. Forty percent of the posts dealt with political or social issues. Posts on politics outnumbered posts on social issues, but only by 76 posts. These posts on politics and social issues were also coded for their topic choice so that the interaction between participants and topics could be analyzed. In an examination of the 15 heaviest political/ social issues participants and the 18 most used topic categories, I found that each participant's timeline tended to focus posts on 3 or fewer topics. Participants post across a range of topics, with only a few topics seeing involvement from more than 7 of the top 15 participants. While the participants focus on particular topic categories, those topic categories are not the same across participants.

Contrary to the expectations of how political conversations operate in the idealized public sphere, these findings indicate that people don't engage in every issue possible but chose a few that are perhaps most relevant to them. Practices of conversation more closely resemble Schudson's (1998) concept of the "monitorial" citizen and Papacharissi's (2009b) "civic narcissism," where people engage in what they can or what interest them. People are self-referential internally to their timelines, posting and interacting with content to start discussions, share information and express themselves and not necessarily in order to engage in a larger framework of civic engagement or a broader public sphere. This does not degrade

the value of these political and social issues conversations, it just means that their civic value is formulated differently than previous notions of the public sphere that desire broad, non-interested engagement may have expected.

What Technological Affordances Are Used?

There are many different kinds of content that can be posted to a Facebook timeline. These include text, photos, videos, and links. A majority of text posts were directly posted to a timeline. In contrast, a majority of photo posts collected were reshares from other pages or Facebook users. At the point of posting or resharing a piece of content, a user has the ability to add commentary. A majority of the posts that were links from news sources contained such commentary. In a series of discriminant analyses, I found that text posts and posts with commentary are more likely to see interaction. Having some form of text from the author of a post, then, has bearing as to whether or not a post becomes a conversation or not.

Analyzing what kinds of content are posted to a timeline, or how they are posted, deals with notions of convergence and networked publics. In looking at how picture posts are made, the underlying concept is whether participants were immediately drawing in content from other sources, pulling pictures from other users, pages, and websites and resituating them in the context of their timelines. The addition of commentary to a post deals with another kind of technological affordance provided by the architecture of Facebook, one that enables the poster to provide information, thoughts, or reactions to an item about to be posted. Posters engage in practices of convergence when they add commentary to an item to

be posted, reworking that item into the space of the participants' timeline, meshing spaces, content, and mediums.

Limitations

This study engaged an innovative methodology and is not without its limitations. It was limited to the collection of content that would appear on a Facebook timeline. This meant that the participants' comments on other pages or users' timelines were not collected. Some participants may have kept their political identities relatively quiet on their own timelines but could have been highly engaged on other pages. While the choice of the timeline as site of study was done for ethical and logistical reasons, it is important to realize that this choice constricts what can be observed of a participant's discussions on Facebook.

This study gathered data from January 4th, 2012 to January 20th, 2012. This is a rather limited time frame to gather data, even though a large number of posts were collected during just the 17 days under review. It is especially troubling given that some actors observed in interaction with the posts only appeared once. In future studies, a longer time frame should be considered, although extra coding help might be necessary in order to achieve that result.

Future analysis of political conversations, then, might seek out ways to ethically gather more data on all of a participant's conversations on Facebook. It might also be worthwhile to examine the Facebook timelines of multiple actors in a primary participant's network in order to better understand the flow of conversations, content, and information among Facebook users.

A New Methodology

Focusing more on the actual practices of political and social issues conversation on SNSs such as Facebook requires the observation of those conversations. Understanding the quality and the implications of those conversations needs to be a part of the scholarly conversation, but until now, it was methodologically difficult to work on these topics. Beyond the specific analyses and findings this project provides a new and reasonable methodology for studying political and social issues behaviors on social network sites. Termed online social interaction and content analysis, the methodology enables the collection of data on both the interactions observed on social network sites and the collection and coding of the posts and content under study. Because it collects both, the effects of the kind and sources of content on interactions can be analyzed. The methodology, then, enables the collection and understanding of incredibly rich sources of data in ways that have not been done previously. Due to its high level of sophistication and complexity, future studies would do well not only to refine the methodology overall, but to tailor it to their own observational needs.

This Study in Context

At the core of this project has been a focus on actual practices instead of the idealizations of earlier public sphere theory. Using Mimi Ito (2008), danah boyd (2011), and Zizi Papachariss and Emily Easton's (forthcoming) notions of networked publics as a theoretical framework encourages a focus on practices through its emphasis on engagement, complexity and agency while also requiring an understanding of both the wider context of

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convergence culture and the site specific structures that shape interaction and use. Networked

publics theory is also heavily informed by public sphere theories (boyd, 2011). However, its

emphasis on practices and the way technology transforms publics also opens up the

possibility of moving beyond traditional idealizations of the public sphere and into new

understanding of our collective civic culture that are better suited for our digital age. The

practices of political/social issues conversations observed and analyzed over the course of

this study don't fit comfortably into ideas of the public sphere, but they do work well as

networked publics.

     The idea of the public sphere does have a few basic requirements, namely that public

sphere discussion is public and engaged with a broad agenda.[m] The posts analyzed for this

study are not public but are orientated towards a particular network stemming from the

participants' timelines on Facebook. They are situated within those particular networks, even

if there is a steady in-stream of content links to mainstream news organizations, politicians,

and other public sources of information and discussion. In the survey, the participants

indicated that the desire to start a conversation or to share information were main motivators

for posting political content. However, the conversations and posts are still self-referential in

that they represent objects the participant or whomever made the post found insightful or

interesting or funny enough to share with their network on Facebook but they are not

necessarily directed towards coordinated public conversation.

     Therefore, Schudson's (1998) framing of lived citizenship, or the monitorial citizen

and Papacharissi's (2009b) "civic narcissism" makes more sense than public sphere

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[m] Fraser allows for the concept of subaltern counter publics, but even these are often in direct oppositional
relationship to the hegemonic public sphere (1992)

participation in this context. These concepts also tie in nicely with Dahlgren's writings on civic culture which looked to the ways civic practices ingrained themselves into daily practices and lives. The conversations under study in this project certainly have civic value, and demonstrate what Papacharissi (2009b) means when she says "online technologies enhance democracy in ways tangential to, but not directly connected with, the public sphere" (239). The conversations have value because they encourage the development of politically relevant social capital and engage users and their networks in political and social issues. When we reevaluate our expectations of the preconditions and institutions necessary for participation in democracy, and recognize how digital technologies such as social media have changed the cultural factors behind participation, we can better understand the place and shape of political talk in our larger civic culture.

I approached the study of political talk on Facebook through a focus on the actual practices of conversation. Encouraging a more practice-focused understanding of the role of political discussions in democracy does not mean lowering expectations of what those conversations entail or of their impact - it does mean moving our mindset regarding what those conversations will look like, their syntax, and their spaces of practice closer to lived reality. At the same time, we need to find new criteria for evaluating political talk that work with our current civic culture. As was done in this study, examining which practices of conversation draw in the most actors or start the most conversations might be a strong starting place; future studies should consider the substance of conversations on SNS such as Facebook. Eventually, we will as a public need to discuss reformulating what we want and expect to see from political talk as we become aware of how our practices of use on such

sites as Facebook and other digital trends and technologies are transforming our civic culture. If we don't, we run the risk of either completely dismissing civically valuable practices of engagement at worst, or we will find ourselves lacking the knowledge and language to describe and bolster what is valuable in our political conversations online.

Figure 5.1

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Jan 5
24

Like:24, 24.05
Interactions: 24.06(reshare), 24.07(24 , 24.05), 24, 24.08, 24, 24.08(24), 24, 24.08, 24.08

Explanation:

As can be seen above, the first three items involved in data collection are the post number (5), the date (Jan 5), and who made the post. In this case the participant made the post, so their identifier of 24 is recorded – if someone else made the post, their number would be recorded. If the post had been a reshare that the participant had made of one of their Facebook friend's posts, this line would also record that, stating "participant number via actor number." Actor numbers were both unique to each actor and contained in a set for each participant – the participant's number starts off each actor number, and then after the decimal a unique number, the first of which is .01. Once the identifiers go into the triple digits, multiples of ten were skipped since they would be indistinguishable from identifiers without the third digit 0. Thus, there can be no 24.110, and the next available identifier is 24.111.

When recording the likes and interactions for a post, a Facebook user who liked the post would be noted, and that name would be scanned for in the Google Doc. If the name was found, it's unique identifier was recorded in the data collection document, in the likes row if it was a like, or in the interactions row if it was an interaction. If the name was not found, it was assigned the next available identifier.

Survey

Introduction

How interested are you in politics?
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not at all interested

How much do you trust the government to act in your best interest?
- Do not trust at all
- Somewhat trust
- Completely trust

How much do you trust business to act in your best interest?
- Do not trust at all
- Somewhat trust
- Completely trust

When searching for news, do you prefer news that….
- Is in line with your political beliefs
- Is contrary to your political beliefs
- Doesn't matter

When searching for news, do you prefer news with a…
- Conservative point of view
- Liberal point of view
- No apparent point of view

Political Knowledge

Who is the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court?
- Sonia Sotomayor
- John G. Roberts
- Clarence Thomas
- Antonin Scalia

Which political party has the majority in the House of Representatives?
- Republican Party
- Democratic Party

- Tea Party

Who is the Vice President of the United States?
- Hillary Clinton
- Dick Cheney
- Joe Biden
- Harry Reid

What country has the largest economy in the world?
- United States
- China
- Japan
- India

Who is the current President of Russia?
- Open ended

Online Engagement

How many total emails do you get a day, on average?
- Open ended

Have you ever signed up for an email newsletter from a political candidate or campaign?
- Yes
- No

Which social networks or websites do you use? (Check all that apply)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Tumblr
- WordPress
- Bloggr
- MySpace
- YouTube

Of the social media websites you use, which one do you use the most?
- Open ended

How often do you visit these social networks or websites?
- Frequently

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- Sometimes
- Rarely

Why do you use social networks or social websites? (check all that apply)
- To keep up with family or friends
- To keep informed about politics and public affairs
- To follow news
- To follow celebrities and entertainment
- To support a cause
- To become involved in a political campaign
- To become involved in community affairs

Do you ever post anything to social networks or websites to share with others?
- Yes
- No

How often do you post to social networks or websites?
- More than once a day
- Once a day
- Once every few days
- Once a week
- Once a month
- I don't post to social network sites

Why do you post? (Check all that apply)
- To share information
- To help others
- To start a discussion or debate
- To show support for a cause
- To show support for a political leader or candidate

Do you mostly check your social networking sties on a computer or on a mobile device?
- Mostly on a mobile device
- Mostly on a computer

Using social networks, do you track, follow, or "like any of the following? (Check all that apply)
- Companies or businesses
- Charities
- Politicians
- Political movements
- Celebrities or entertainment

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Do you ever post or reshare/re-blog/retweet links to news stories on social networking sites?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

How useful do you find the following resources when seeking information about a politician or political movement?

	very useful	somewhat useful	not very useful	not at all useful
emails sent by a politician				
emails sent by a political movement				
status updates on a social network				
information on websites				

How often do you comment on links or news stories found on social media sites?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

Your Background

How would you describe where you live?
- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

Do you have internet access at home?
- Yes
- No

Do you have a mobile or cell phone with internet access?
- Yes
- No

Do you visit websites on your mobile phone?
- Yes
- No

Do you regularly use email?
- Yes
- No

What is your age?
- Open ended

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

What is your race?
- Hispanic/Latino
- White
- Black
- Native American
- Asian
- Other

Which best describes your level of education?
- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college or 2 year degree
- College graduate (4-year degree)
- Graduate/professional degree

How would you describe yourself politically?
- Very conservative
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Very Liberal

In politics today, do you consider yourself…
- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other party/view

Code Book

I. Start with the metadata for the post.

    A.   Column A should be the post number, which is assigned by the order the post appeared on the user's timeline.

    B. Column B is the date of the post.

    C. Column C is who posted the post

    D. Column D is for the "actor" of the post – the person being traced on that row.

II. What did that Commenter do?

    A. Column E should be a 1 if the person liked the main post, and a 0 if they did not.

    B. Column F should be a count for how many times the actor commented on the post, liked a comment, or reshared the post, and a 0 if they did not engage in any of these behaviors. This is the last column to be filled out of the columns dealing with comments if the post is neither political or of a societal matter nature.

    C. Column G is be a count of how many positive (agreeing with other commenters or the main poster, or directing positive statements towards the other commenters) comments the actor left. Agreement might be signaled in the form of saying "yes," or "right on" or "well said"

D. Column H is a count of how many negative (disagreeing with other commenters or the main poster) comments the actor left. Negativity or disagreement might be signaled by saying "but___" or "not true," or "nope."

E. Column I is a count of how many neutral comments the actor left. This might be answers to questions that other's ask (such as if someone asks how many people live in the state of Iowa, or how many women are married under the age of 35, and the person answers), or puns/jokes that are strictly non-negative towards the other commenters/main post and their points, or off topic comments.

F. Column(s) J should note any technological affordances used in the comment. Put a comma between codes if the actor engages in more than one activity.

1. Enter a 1 if the actor puts a link into their comment. In Column K, state where the link is from.

2. Enter a 2 if the actor puts a video into their comment (this is normally a link, but it transforms into a video window if Facebook accepts it, only code as a video if there is the video window). In column K, state where the video is from.

3. Enter a 3 if the actor puts a photo into their comment and it shows up as a photo and not as a link in the comments

4. Enter a 4 if the actor likes any comments. In column K, enter how many comments they like.

5. Enter a 5 if they reshare the post

6. Enter a 6 if they tag a person in their comment (note who in next column)

III. Starting at Column L, the focus shifts to the nature of the post itself and not the comment section.

    A. Column L will denote whether the post is about politics, social matters, or neither.

        1. Enter a 1 if the post is about politics. A code of politics should be restricted to posts, links and other items that make explicit reference to, or describe the proceedings of, one of the branches of government. A link or post about a current supreme court case, a new bill in front of either a state assembly, local council, or the Senate, or a presidential action are what we are looking for here. Calls to action (asking people to contact their representatives), and posts regarding elections also fit into this category

        2. Enter a 2 if the post is about social matters. There are many matters that society deals with that are very much political matters but are not connected with legislative, legal, or executive bodies at all times. Gender, sexual orientation, race, elements of poverty, environmental matters, and corporate responsibility – all of these do not always at all angles wind up on bills before the House of Representatives but they do get discussed as society tries to work through its opinions and values regarding these issues. News stories about media representation

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of certain groups, demographic attitudes towards groups, complaints about organizational or corporate practices all belong in this category.

3. Enter a 3 for neither. NEITHER should be used for posts pertaining to daily life, friends, school work, celebrities, technology and gadgets, products, places, or other more purely entertainment items (celebrity weddings, etc). If a code of neither is given, no further codes for that post need to be entered anywhere on the code sheet.

4. *TWO IMPORTANT NOTES* One: It might be wise for the coder to go directly from this question to column J, since the answer will already be thought about while doing this one. Two: Foreign affairs might prove a bit messy, but follow these guidelines and it should be relatively clear: if the post or article related to international events makes any allusion to American foreign policy or foreign policy makers, then place it under politics. If it talks about events going on outside of the US but without a mention of US foreign policy implications or actions, it should be listed under SOCIETAL MATTER. Some examples: a post links to a NYT article talking about human rights abuses in the Congo – no mention of US policy actions are in the article, just a description of the events going on. This would be a SOCIETAL MATTER. Another post lists to an article on a blog talking about what the US should do about Chinese censorship – this would be POLITICS. A post links to a Newsweek article on Israeli

elections – no mention of the implications for US foreign policy are in

the article or in the poster's commentary – this would be a SOCIETAL

MATTER. Another from Time talks about how the elections will

change the US/ Israeli relationship – this is Politics.

B. In Column M, enter the code for what the post is about.

1. Enter a 1 if the post is about GENDER – the code of gender should be

used for status messages, links, and other forms of posting that deal

with an issue of gender in society. Female representation in the media/

politics, masculinity in society, equal pay issues, gender disparities in

the workforce and in education, anti-discrimination legislation,

stereotypes, feminism, and other topics that deal heavily in gender and

its role in society. Contraception, abortion, and family planning are

also listed here and not in HEALTH CARE

2. Enter a 2 if the post is about RACE – the code of race should be used

for status messages, links, and other forms of posting that deal with

race in society. Race and media/political representation, work and

education disparities, legislation that affects racial issues

(gentrification of neighborhoods often includes discussion of racial

issues).

a. Note for both GENDER and RACE: be careful not to allow

your own beliefs and assertions to affect how you code these.

Anti-feminist or racist rhetoric falls as much into these

categories as do articles from Feministing or The Root that support feminist or other minority communities.

3. Enter a 3 if the post is about SEXUALITY. This is a bit of a two-for-one code. LGBT issues and gay marriage certainly fit here, but so do any discussions on sex in society and the political aspects of it fit into this category. Abstinence education fits here, as do the economic effects of couples living together before marriage, etc. Sex comes into our politics more often than we think, and our sexualities are indeed political.

4. Enter a 4 if the post is about ANIMAL RIGHTS – anything to do with animal rights, policies about animals, or how animals are treated in society.

5. Enter a 5 if the post is about DRUGS. Anything to do with drug policies or drugs in society.

6. Enter a 6 if the post is about LOCAL ISSUES. In areas where there might be a potential overlap between LOCAL and another code, LOCAL takes precedence (so if there is link to an article about local crime, or a local politician, or if the poster complains about local rules on abstinence education, it is coded as LOCAL).

   a. Note I do not keep note of where my participants live. It has to be very obvious that what is being discussed is local to the discussants.

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7. Enter a 7 if the post is about the ENVIRONMENT. This includes anything pertaining to any aspect of the environment, its health or lack thereof, and our impact on it. ii.   Global warming and other climate change discussions, the use of particular fuels for electricity production or automobile consumption, corporate practices that affect the environment, population growth and the environment, lifestyle choices and their impact on the environment. Genetically modified foods, organic foods, vegetarianism and related issues also fall into this category.

8. Enter a 8 if the post is about TAXES. Discussions of the tax system, who should be taxed and how much, how tax systems should work, tax loopholes, where the tax money is being spent.

9. Enter a 9 if the post is about EDUCATION. charter schools, school vouchers, private vs. public education, education disparities, particular ideas for how to better educate young people or anyone else for that matter.

10. Enter a 10 if the post is about a POLITICIAN. status messages, links, etc that deal with one specific politician, and not necessarily related to what issues they are working on. Their campaigns, how they are doing in the polls, statements they give and reactions to them are more of what is sought for here. Please name the politician in the cell along

with the code. Reactions to Romney winning Florida, or Obama giving a campaign speech are examples.

11. Enter an 11 if the post is about ELECTIONS. General comments on the upcoming election or the primary process that do not pertain to a specific politician or party.

12. Enter a 12 if the post is about a POLITICAL PARTY OR ORGANIZATION. Dealing with a particular party and/or organization (such as a Super Pac) and its tactics, facts, or platforms are what is being sought for here.

13. Enter a 13 if the post is about FOREIGN POLICY. This is where the distinction between politics and societal matters is important. If it is a political issue regarding something happening outside of America, then the code is FOREIGN POLICY. If not, and the code for the previous box was SOCIETAL MATTERS, then the code here is INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

14. Enter a 14 if the post is about INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

15. Enter a 15 if the post is about HEALTH CARE - pertaining to health care legislation, or health care issues in the private sector. Medicare/caid/Children's health insurance/National health care act is included here and not under SOCIAL PROGRAMS. This category also excludes discussions of abortion and contraceptives, as those are listed under GENDER.

16. Enter a 16 if the post is about SOCIAL PROGRAMS – pertaining to social security, Pell grants, and other welfare or social programs.

17. Enter a 17 if the post is about CRIME. Crime statistics, the criminal judicial system, death penalty, at large and not pertaining to a local community for the poster.

18. Enter an 18 if the post is about CIVIL RIGHTS – pertaining to prolonged detainment, warrantless wire-tapping, other domestic spying issues, freedom of speech and other issues. This category excludes some traditional civil rights issues that for the purposes of this project should be covered under RACE, GENDER, or SEXUALITY since those have their own categories.

19. Enter a 19 if the post pertains to IP LAW. The SOPA or PIPPA Bills, or the ACTA treaty, or patent reform should go here. Discussions of remix culture, if they are cognizant of the cultural and legal issues surrounding remix. In the notes column, please note if the SOPA/PIPPA bills are discussed.

20. Enter a 20 if the post deals with RELIGION. Anything to do with religion as it relates to issues of a non-personal nature. So it can be POLITICAL – if discussing religion in politics, or the religion of a politician, or how religious groups affect politics, or SOCIAL in regards to beliefs of how religion should affect public morality, treatment of others, the environment, or other social matters.

21. Enter a 21 if the post deals with the MEDIA. It should be used only when the main point of what is posted is to criticize or praise how the media covers either political or social issues. An example of this might be a post that talks about how liberal NPR is, or how conservative Fox is. Positive examples include praising a particular journalist's intelligence or how accurately a source covered an issue.

22. Enter a 22 if the post deals with the ECONOMY. This can deal with economic philosophy, labor unions, the actions of corporations if they have an impact on the social/political welfare (for an example, big fraud scandals, corporate control of various industries, etc). Does not deal with taxes.

23. Enter a 23 if the post deals with anything else. Please note in the notes column what is being discussed.

C. What is the Post?

1. In Column N, a code should be put in that denotes what the original post contained.

   a. Enter a 1 if the post was just text

   b. Enter a 2 if the post was a link from a major news organization (BBC, NYT, Washington Post, TIME, Newsweek, Economist, NPR, FOX).

   c. Enter a 3 if the post was a link from a non-major news organization such as a local paper, alternative news sites, etc.

d. Enter a 4 if the post was a link from a blog

e. Enter a 5 if the post was a link from a webcomic

f. Enter a 6 if the post was from another website or Facebook page – and note in the next column where the link is from.

g. Enter a 7 if the post is a personally taken photo by the participant or someone in their network, or another facebook page

h. Enter an 8 if the post is a photo external to the network such as an LOLCAT photo or a poster with a political message.

i. Enter a 9 if the post is a personal video.

j. Enter a 10 if the post is an external video from Youtube or another service.

k. Enter a 11 if the post is just text but tags someone. Note in the next column who they tag

2. In Column P, indicate whether the post was made directly to the timeline or if it was via a reshare of the poster or via another affordance.

a. Enter a 1 if the post was via mobile. This is indicated by either the little cell phone symbol near a post or the symbol for a cell phone company.

b. Enter a 2 if the post is via a service that imports tweets such as Selective Tweets or Tweetdeck.

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      c. Enter a 3 if the post is via another Facebook page or website. If

          this is the case, enter the name of the website or page it's from

          in column Q.

      d. Enter a 4 if the post is via another person in the user's network.

          Enter the code for the person in column Q.

      e. Enter a 5 for it being a direct post.

3. IF the post is not strictly text, is there commentary? Facebook allows

    users who are posting a link, video, or photo to add their own thoughts

    along with the thing being posted, all in the same posting. Note: liking

    a link does not mean a person likes what is going on in the content.

      a. Enter a 1 if there is no commentary.

      b. Enter a 1.5 if the commentary tags someone. In the next

          column, note who they tag

      c. Enter a 2 if the commentary is positive towards the content

          posted. does it appear that the poster approves of what is in the

          link, video, or photo? Look for words such as: "Good" "YAY!"

          ":-)" "This is what we stand for!" "Finally!" "Wish this would

          happen more often"

      d. Enter a 3 if the commentary is negative towards the content

          posted: does the poster disagree or disapprove of what is being

          described in the link, video, or photo?" Look for words such as

          "ARGH!" "This makes me angry" "why do people do this?"

"We have to fight back" "this sucks" "I disagree with x" "We should do x instead of (what's being described in the article)"

e. Enter a 4 if the commentary is neutral towards the content posted: Is the poster perhaps just curious or perhaps describing what is in the item posted? Look for descriptions of events not marked by the presence of disdain or approval, or words such as "huh…" "well, look at that" "this was on NYT today" "Found this at x, had to share"

Sample Coding Sheet

Figure 5.2

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	NOTE M	N	O	P	Q	R
Post #	Date/Time	Who Posted	Actor	Like	Interactions	Pos	Neg	Neutral	Tech Affordances	what linked?	Politics/Social/ Neither?	What is the post about?	Notes for M	What is the Post?	String for what the post is	Direct Post or from somewhere else?	String for where its from	If not just text, is there commentary?

Intercoder Reliability

Four fellow graduate students and the thesis adviser participated in coding a total of 80 posts to determine intercoder reliability. A Chronbach's alpha test of reliability was run between my coding on those posts that each intercoder coded for all non-metadata variables. Table 5.1 reports the results from those tests. As can be seen from the table, the two biggest problem spots are in the commentary on the original post, and for one coder at least, determining neutral comments. At least one coder had difficulty determining which code to use for how a post was posted, and another had difficulty determining the presence of technological affordances in the comments. Given the complexities of the coding book, the fact that there were some difficulties with the inter-coder reliability index is unsurprising. As the code book further develops for future projects, the coding book can be clarified and better training materials developed.

Table 5.1 Intercoder Reliability Index

Coder	posts coded	like	interaction	positive comments	negative comments	neutral comments	technological affordordances in comments	count of comments liked	political/social/ neither	topic	what	how	commentary
1	9	1	0.991	0.994	zero variance	0.971	1	1	1	1	1	1	zero variance
2	12	0.937	0.978	1	0	1	0.058 ?		0.966	1	0.797	0.801	0.246
3	21	1	0.998	0.958	zero variance	0.246	0.903	0.983	0.865	0.82	0.845	0.446	0.85
4	12	0.979	0.999	*0	0	0	0	0	zero variance	0	0	0	0
5	26	0.985	0.983	0 zero variance		0.94	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

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