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## Introduction

—Sharon Marie Ross, Associate Editor

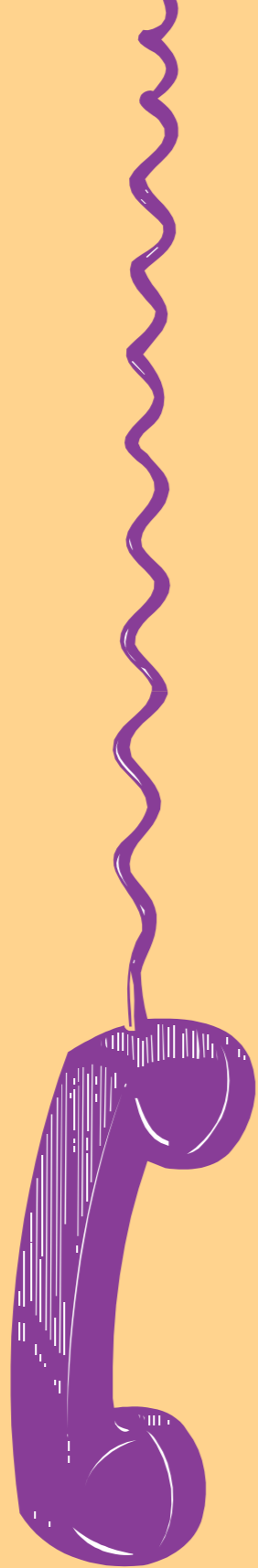
In this special bonus issue of IDMAA, we bring together three stimulating articles, each focused on a unique element of the role that digital technology plays in our everyday lives. While the world of the digital has become mainstreamed across the globe, we are still in an infancy stage, struggling to make the best use of what it can offer us as individuals and as members of various communities. One of the goals of the Journal of the International Digital Media Arts Association is to serve as a forum where professionals can work through the challenges and powerful potentials of this arena, and the authors of this issue do precisely that.

**Cynthia Wang** explores the world of Apple and its company control over the technological devices consumers have embraced. In a world of ever-escalating planned obsolescence, Wang examines the intricate structures of power at work with Apple's careful manipulation of what their devices "can do" and the ways in which digital natives skilled in technology have circumvented these limitations. You'll likely look at any Apple device you own in a new light after reading her narrative of struggles between corporate strength and hacker ingenuity.

**Jessica McDonald** also examines organizational structures and their interplay with individuals, focusing in her article on not-for-profit organizations' attempts to harness the power of social media. Exploring the concept of social capital, McDonald points to the ways in which NPOs (and scholars) often fail to re-imagine what political and social activism might look like in the 21st Century from the perspective of citizens. Her article sheds new light on how political activism can operate in the world of social media and the need to approach this domain with an open and creative mind.

Finally, **Angela Damos** offers us a brief think-piece on her experiences as an educator in the field of digital art and the possibilities and challenges of using digital media to teach about it. Emphasizing to students that digital artists need to embrace a future of constantly re-learning and re-conceptualizing, Damos describes her pedagogical approach and suggests methods that engender community, creativity, and technological rigor.

The editing team of IDMAA's journal is pleased to share these invigorating and thoughtful pieces with you and we look forward to your feedback through our website, at <http://www.idmaa.org/journal/>





**keywords:** active learning, andragogy, visual language, transient quality, expression, virtuosity, ephemeral



Angela Damos

Angela Damos is an Associate Professor in the Animation department, School of Media Culture and Design at Woodbury University, Burbank California. Damos enjoys introducing students to the application of digital media in a time-based reality and discovering new ways to expand students' creative processes. "I approach teaching as I do my creative practice in that I like to leave room for the growth of a personal visual language." Damos' personal work plays with the combination and juxtaposition of disparate elements. Coming from an effects animation and photography background and working within that ephemeral world of non-reality, she now finds herself caught up with the digital medium. Digital technology has allowed Damos to customize and further her craft and to incorporate the transient quality of the digital world into her work.

## Teaching Digital Media: A Hybrid Approach



Heartbreaker, three details from a series by Riley Riggen



Woodbury, by Amos Sussigan

Digital media is by definition a technology based investigation and as digital media's relevance grows in contemporary culture the tool, computer software and hardware, needs to be taught as part of a foundation of skills in the creation of a student's visual language, art making. The computer is a valuable tool for self-expression. The creation of digital media production has essential technical components. It is not enough simply to conceive; one must also be able to execute. Normally, artists throughout their careers pursue technical ability and helping the digital artist achieve eventual virtuosity is a major purpose of arts programs in higher education. My continual investigation of various teaching methods for digital media has allowed me to refine my approach of curriculum creation and arrive at learning outcomes that motivate, inspire and encourage the creation of a self-organized learning environment. These outcomes promote active learning to extend beyond the University.

Malcolm S. Knowles introduced the term andragogy as specific to describing adult directed learning. "Pedagogy-andragogy represents a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning and that both approaches to teaching technology based courses are appropriate with children and adults, depending on the situation."<sup>1</sup> The diversity of today's students, coupled with the continual updates and additions to software and

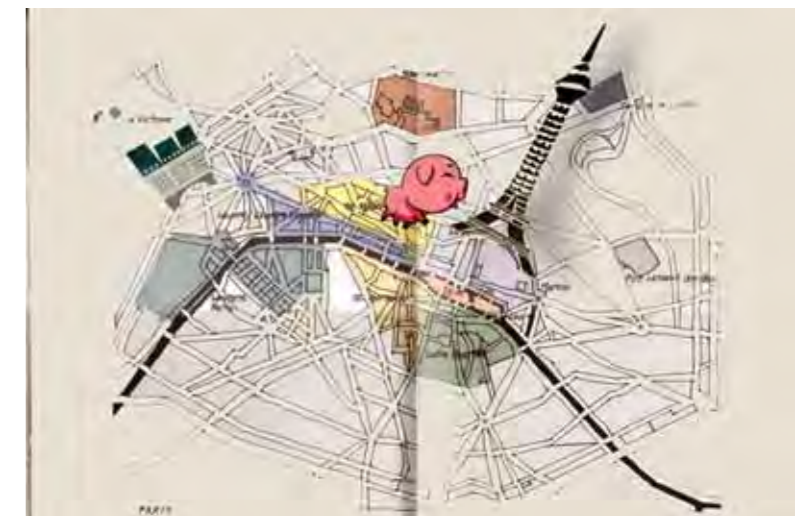
platforms, present a situation that calls for this broader approach to teaching digital media courses.

I find the most productive approach to educating students about digital media artistry is one that straddles the techniques of traditional pedagogy—teacher-driven learning—and andragogy—student-driven learning. Allowing for teacher expertise as but a starting point leads ultimately to students teaching themselves and each other. In short, a more holistic classroom strategy encourages the student artist to produce their own best methods for learning, and to see constant re-learning as central to the digital media artistic process.

The course introduction into digital tools starts with a teacher directed introduction and, with the first assignment, becomes student directed. Although the first assignment allows for students to access their creativity, the assignment is structured in such a way as to limit the software choice, format and rendering of the final form of the first assignment. As the course progresses the assignments, while still promoting conceptual freedom, leave the digital tools more to the discretion of the student. As the students become more familiar with the capacities of various software applications, the idea of using digital tools in more creative and unique ways is encouraged. Students are engaged by seeing their colleagues' work

and become inspired to explore different techniques and applications for their self directed inquiries as they develop their creative visual language. The precepts of andragogy — active learning — set forth by Knowles<sup>2</sup> are then enlisted to construct courses to enhance creativity through digital and time-based media.

1. Adults need to know the reason for learning something. The adult learner asks: What can I do? What is possible? What have others created using this technology? Examples and demonstrations are utilized to assist students in answering these questions. Knowing what is possible by seeing what practiced professionals are creating in the field of digital media inspires the student as to the many ways that digital media can be used to answer a student's creative questions. Creative processes are encouraged and the student is increasingly active in discovering new skills.
2. Experience, including error, provides the basis for learning activities. Problem solving in a way that is fault tolerant encourages students to explore the capabilities of the various technologies. I employ tutorials for direct experience of various software packages. If the students are not concerned with perfection in the tutorial project (I do not ask to see the tutorial results) they are more inclined to make mistakes or to try an application that may not be a direct result of the tutorial given. Exploration is encouraged; "coloring outside the lines" is a valuable asset. This allows the process to inform the final product — discovery through trial and error, iteration is a valuable tool in active learning. Students are engaged with this process and explore on their own and with each other new techniques they have discovered.
3. Adults need to be responsible for their decisions on education and be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction (self-concept, critique). The concept of each particular piece is influenced by the choices the student makes and need to fall within the parameters established by the unique goal of a particular work. It is important that students identify their concept and
4. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their work and/or personal lives. While it is useful for students to explore and experience business applications in technology, we do not want to limit our students to specific applications or job categories, as is the case with for profit institutions or trade schools. Reinforcing the idea that technology itself is an ongoing, ever-evolving tool and that creativity in application is what is valued promotes the idea that learning resources and opportunities are ongoing. To remain viable over their lifetime careers, students will need to maintain their ongoing knowledge as digital media content creators.
5. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. Students become engaged by developing the creative voice, and a unique idea as a problem to solve. Problem-creation is asking a really interesting question and then seeing how one goes about answering that question visually through a digital media practice. The student demonstrates "habits of mind that foster integrative thinking and the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another — achieved and demonstrated through advanced



My Piggy In Paris, by Lilit Atshemyan

the choices they make need to be articulated in relation to their concept. Understanding how the visual can communicate the essential is a valuable tool. This enhances accountability, as they are responsible for the creative content of each piece that they produce. They receive immediate feedback from group critiques and are also involved in higher order thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation).



Abstract, three details from a series by Ka Yan Ho

research and/or creative projects in which students take the primary responsibility for framing questions, carrying out an analysis, and producing work of substantial complexity and quality.<sup>3</sup> This method engages not only the student but also the rest of the class as they relate to each other's visual statements (questions). Multiple levels of knowing and analysis are reinforced through the group critique process.

- Adults respond better to internal versus external motivators. Self-motivation encourages exploration. The student learns by doing – exploring, integrating and sharing knowledge. The computer lab is a laboratory for learning and students sitting next to each other often ask, "How did you do that? Show me how!" The student is the innovator and achieves confidence and success through their exploration of various software to facilitate their problem solving strategies. Learning how to learn is acquiring the skills of self-directed inquiry.

The holistic pedagogy promotes a self-organized learning environment that is focused on the student as the innovator. Digital media culture encourages self-exploration and creates a learning environment that promotes students who are oriented towards a future of continued learning. The student draws from experience to develop concepts that are engaging and self-realized. Student projects are focused more on expression than technology so that meaning is never compromised. A community of learning is formed; the students exist not in a vacuum but are fostered by the relationships and shared learning experiences of the classroom.

This hybrid approach to teaching digital media reinforces the idea that the tutorial is a means, not an end. The self-directed projects introduced from the start of the course become progressively independent of teacher input and encourage explorations into applications not directly taught in the classroom. The outcome of employing this method for teaching digital media has allowed me to hone my classes so that students develop life-long learning tools and culminates in final projects that stimulate student's creativity and motivation to explore further the digital realm beyond the classroom.



Ang Huai, three details from a series by Aileen Ung



## Notes

- Sharran B. Merriam, Rosemary Caffarella, and Lisa Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 87.
- Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, 3rd Ed. (Houston, Gulf Publishing: 1984), Appendix D.
- Barbara D. Wright, *Our Students' Best Work: A Framework for Accountability Worthy of Our Mission*, 2nd Ed. (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

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- Wright, Barbara D., *Our Students' Best Work: A Framework for Accountability Worthy of Our Mission*, 2nd ed., Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008.

**keywords:**

nonprofit, gamification, meme, social transformation, advocacy, social capital, online activism.



**Jessica McDonald, MA**

McDonald is the Director of Community for SuperBetter Labs, a San Francisco-based company that creates radically different social games designed to solve real-world issues. She works on the company's first game, *SuperBetter*, which seeks to help players achieve health and wellness goals. Jessica earned undergraduate degrees in international politics and Japanese at The Pennsylvania State University, and a Master's degree in administration and digital media at the University of Denver. She has worked for political campaigns, think tanks, international nonprofits, and professional associations. Her research interests lie in technology as a social transformation tool, gamification, and online behavior.

# Fans, Followers, Friends, and Subscribers:

## Effective Use of Social Media for Nonprofit Organizations

**Abstract**

In 2004, the web evolved into what Tim O'Reilly termed "Web 2.0," offering increasing opportunities for information sharing and collaboration. People built online networks using social media platforms, and provided researchers with an opportunity to examine the benefits derived from these digital relationships. This paper discusses the connection between social capital, defined as a resource that emerges from human relationships, and social media, specifically in the context of nonprofit organizations.

The goals of this research were to discover how users engage online to create participatory and bridging social capital, and to understand individuals' perceptions of online advocacy via social media platforms.

Data were collected from 133 self-selected participants using an online survey tool. The results exposed considerable differences in perceptions of social media between users and organizations, and allowed for conclusions to be drawn as to how nonprofits could improve their social media tactics.

It is hoped that these findings will illustrate social media users' behavior and attitudes toward online advocacy, and offer insights into effective methods for social capital formation via the social media platforms. Previous research on the Internet and social capital has revealed that social media users tend to have larger offline and online networks than non-users, and that Internet usage correlates with an increase in a particular type of social capital, called participatory capital. Simply put, people who are more engaged online tend to be more engaged offline. Additionally, social media usage, particularly on Facebook, has proven useful in creating bridging capital, the form of social capital best suited for message dissemination and identity generation. Bridging capital, described by Putnam, is more valuable than other types of social capital for creating awareness and action. Additionally, social media users tend to have more trust in others than non-users—a key component in developing social capital. Research also shows that social media, a tool designed to connect human beings to one another, is a natural fit for nonprofit organizations, given their emphasis on relationships.

### Social Capital and the Internet

While many definitions of social capital exist among economics, sociology, communications, and other disciplines, I use Coleman<sup>1</sup> to define social capital as a resource for organizations that emerges from the relationships among people, including trust, norms, and values. When those relationships change, they facilitate action. Putnam echoes this, writing that social capital “refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”<sup>2</sup> Putnam is primarily concerned with the relationship between social capital and civic engagement, and sees the decline of social capital in the United States as contributing to the decline in political participation. As evidence, he cites the dwindling

membership rates in organizations such as churches, unions, parent-teacher associations, and volunteer associations and notes that newer, larger organizations are on the rise, such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the National Organization for Women (NOW), and Sierra Club. These groups, which Putnam terms “tertiary associations,” are more impersonal and employ a more superficial, and therefore inferior, type of involvement: “The bond between any two members of the Sierra Club is less like the bond between any two members of a gardening club and more like the bond between any two Red Sox fans (or perhaps any two devoted Honda owners): they root for the same team and they share some of the same interests, but they are unaware of each other's existence. Their ties, in short, are to common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to one another.”<sup>3</sup> Although these “tertiary associations” do not create the same quality or quantity of social capital as their predecessors, Putnam also notes those that people who are involved in organizations tend to participate more in politics, interact with their neighbors, and to “express social trust” more than nonmembers.<sup>4</sup>

Wellman, et al. build on Putnam's work, dividing social capital into two types and examining the Internet's influence on social capital formation. The first type, network capital, refers to relationships with friends, neighbors, family, and coworkers that provide “companionship, emotional aid, goods and services, information, and a sense of belonging.”<sup>5</sup> The second type, participatory capital, involves participation in politics and voluntary organizations that “affords opportunities for people to bond, create joint accomplishments, and aggregate and articulate their demands and desires.”<sup>6</sup> To this they also add community commitment, which describes the idea that social capital is more than just a superficial involvement. “When people have a strong attitude toward community—have a motivated, responsible sense of belonging—they will mobilize their social capital more willingly and effectively.”<sup>7</sup> The authors' findings indicate that the Internet supplements social capital formation, and



Internet activity must be viewed in context of a person's life. In this view, the web neither increases nor decreases social capital, but reinforces the activities and inclinations a person already has. In other words, the Internet is “more useful for maintaining existing ties than creating new ones.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the Internet's ability to cross great distances with low cost, people still tend to communicate more with friends and family nearby rather than those far away. Reinforcing Putnam, the authors find that Internet usage correlates with increased participatory capital—people who are more engaged online tend to be more engaged offline.

A 2007 study by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe notes the results of a Pew Internet survey that found “online users are more likely to have a larger network of close ties than non-Internet users, and that Internet users are more likely than non-users to receive help from core network members.”<sup>9</sup> Their study shows that Facebook members primarily used the site to connect with people that were part of their offline networks—friends, classmates, someone that lived nearby, or someone they met socially. Moreover, the authors found that Facebook users considered the “primary audience for their profile to be people with whom they share an offline connection.”<sup>10</sup> Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe concluded that Facebook not only helped create

social capital, but also helped users maintain it. Facebook was particularly useful in creating bridging capital, a form of social capital characterized by “weak ties” and consisting of “loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another but typically not emotional support.”<sup>11</sup> Bridging capital, a term coined by Putnam, links together people from heterogeneous groups in a network that can provide different insights, disseminate new information, and generate new identities.<sup>12</sup> It is often viewed as more favorable than the other type of capital Putnam describes, bonding capital, and has potential to create action and awareness.

In June 2011, the Pew Internet and American Life Project released the first national survey looking at Americans' social networks and the impacts of social media services. The survey was a response to the fear that greater use of computer-mediated communication was diminishing human contacts and relationships, and may be increasing social isolation. Pew's results, though, revealed the opposite. Contrary to the perception of social media as a bastion of teenagers and college students, 59% of American Internet users subscribe to at least one social networking service, and the social media user's average age is thirty-eight.<sup>13</sup> These people, particularly Facebook

1. James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 304-310.

2. Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1, (1995), 65-78. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html> (Accessed online on March 11, 2010).

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*

5. Barry Wellman; Anabel Quan Haase; James Witte; Keith Hampton, “Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital?,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 45, Issue 3 (Nov. 2001): 437. (Accessed online on March 11, 2010.)

6. *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*

8. *ibid.*, 440

9. Nicole B. Ellison, Charles Steinfield and Cliff Lampe, “The Benefits of Facebook ‘Friends’: Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* Vol. 12, no. 4 (2007). <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/ellison.html> (Accessed online on March 11, 2010.)

10. *ibid.*

11. *ibid.*

12. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), 23.

13. Keith N. Hampton, Lauren Sessions Goulet, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, *Social Networking Sites and Our Lives* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2011), 8 <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks.aspx> (Accessed online on June 16, 2011.)

users, express greater willingness to trust others, more so than even general Internet users; they also have a larger, stronger social network both online and off.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Pew finds a portrait of social media users that rejects Putnam's concerned outlook for America: they have more "discussion confidants," defined as people with whom one can discuss important matters; they have greater levels of social support, receiving a boost from social media roughly equivalent to half of the total support received as a result of being married or cohabitating with a partner; and they are more politically engaged, with a higher likelihood to attend rallies, advocate for a candidate or cause, and to vote.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Pew found no evidence that social media users were less likely to join civic or religious organizations, and in fact, an increasing number of Americans belong to local organizations.<sup>16</sup> Pew's survey reveals that, rather than diminishing relationships and increasing isolation, social media services enrich users' lives by bolstering the support mechanisms necessary to social capital development. Instead of users withdrawing ever more into an online world, Pew found a correlation between higher frequency of use of social networking services and larger, stronger networks.<sup>17</sup> These findings support the notion that social media services particularly excel at creating bridging capital, in addition to shoring up strong ties. Pew offers evidence that the online and offline networks of social media users are larger, better formed, and contain more elements of social capital formation than those of non-users.



Through an extensive literature review, King describes

the benefit of social capital development for nonprofits, particularly in bridging capital. Discussing Granovetter, King writes that the "strength of weak ties lies in their ability to bridge different and new networks, thus bringing new resources and ways of thinking. These ties can be a valuable resource for both individuals and organizations."<sup>18</sup> Continuing on to Brass and Krackhardt, she distills practical advice for organizational leaders wishing to grow their social capital: developing and appreciating social networks, evaluating the organization's own network, assessing the distance between the organization and connected individuals, building authentic two-way relationships, and considering ways to connect with groups outside the network.<sup>19</sup> "The origins and operations of nonprofit organizations are aligned with the core dimensions of social capital: networks, relationships and trust, and shared vision and norms."<sup>20</sup> King concludes that nonprofits "represent the epitome of social capital in action; groups of people coming together voluntarily to meet a collective need," and that nonprofits offer the best place to meet the conditions necessary to form social capital.<sup>21</sup> King's work clearly shows that nonprofit organizations are a particularly well-suited place to create social capital, given their inherent emphasis on relationships. Social media, also based on relationships, should be a natural tool for nonprofits to use in building social capital.

### Online Activism

Nonprofits seek to increase social capital by capturing interest from the networks of supporters. Studies on nonprofits and social media are lacking, and those that exist do not address how these services might best be used to enhance social capital. If these organizations do wish to build social capital through social media, an examination of online activism provides insight into how this might be done. People need to believe that their actions have results, and online activism shows how social media can be used to effect change, but often people feel that no change has happened because they are looking in the wrong places. Bennett writes that "much of the attention to the Internet and politics has been directed at the places

where the least significant change is likely to occur: in the realm of conventional politics."<sup>22</sup> Political parties, unions, and advocacy organizations tend to adopt new communications technologies for the purpose of old types of activities and to serve an existing agenda. Because this is less a significant change and more an employing of new technologies for an old purpose, it is harder to see transformative change in this context "beyond reducing the speed or cost of existing communication routes."<sup>23</sup> In other contexts, where new responses are forming to emerging issues, new communication strategies and political action have the potential to create true change. He notes that the Internet and digital media have allowed ordinary users to create high-level content and to disseminate that content quickly, cheaply, and without regard to geographic distance. In this way, activists' messages can reach beyond their traditional circles that they previously reached through "old media" techniques (flyers, niche newspapers, speeches, etc.) and connect with new audiences. The Internet has created a permeability of both old and new media allowing messages to extend across time and space to reach large publics.<sup>24</sup> Kahn and Kellner offer support of this, with the examples of the large anti-war protests in 2003 organized by MoveOn, ANSWER, and United for Peace and Justice, which used the Internet to circulate information and organize participants.<sup>25</sup> These organizations achieved success by using the Internet to cross-pollinate many disparate groups, forming alliances, a common identity, and solidarity. The authors provide another example in the attention bloggers brought to racist remarks made by Trent Lott, then Speaker of the House. Communities of bloggers publicized the remarks, generating interest that then spread to the mainstream media, and eventually led to Lott's removal from office. "Bloggers are expanding the notion altogether of what the internet is and how it can be used. Increasingly, bloggers are not tied to their desktops, writing in virtual alienation from the

world, but are posting pictures, text, audio and video on the fly from PDA devices and cellphones."<sup>26</sup>

Land, though, notes that broad mobilization and deep participation are inversely related. Her model of networked activism addresses the tension between professionalization and shared participation that creates this relationship. Networked activism relies on the Internet to provide opportunities for various far-flung communities to collaborate and coordinate. She notes Putnam's emphasis on "active and involved membership," and that "participants who take part in determining a group's goals and methods are more likely to make significant contributions, to contribute in meaningful ways, and to involve other individuals from their social network."<sup>27</sup> If an individual only signs up for a cause online, he may just as easily disengage later. For example, a very small percentage of users on sites like Avaaz or Amnesty International attend events, donate, or contribute to online discussions. These people are removed from having any influence over the group's goals and priorities, and are thus only superficially involved. Networked activism addresses this by utilizing small groups located within a larger network. These small groups foster the benefits of participatory models of activism, such as more trust, producing reliable material, and collective identity, but avoid the pitfalls of decentralized organization. Land's model also encourages organizations to allow individuals to interact with each other, to take initiative and ownership of the cause through their own actions. Land suggests that organizations should provide tools for group formation and offer the appropriate level of guidance regarding what actions individuals should take, which she says is "either quite a bit or none at all."<sup>28</sup> Organizations should also strive to create a context for these actions and a sense of common culture or interest, which bolsters users' investment in the organization and its goals.

14. *ibid.*, 23, 33.

15. *ibid.*, 24, 35, 39.

16. *ibid.*, 37-38.

17. *ibid.*, 23.

18. Nancy K. King, "Social Capital and Nonprofit Leaders," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 14, no. 4 (2004), 473.

19. *ibid.*, 480.

20. *ibid.*, 482.

21. *ibid.*, 483.

22. W. Lance Bennett, "New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism," in *Contesting Media Power*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran (Rowman and Littlefield:2003), 5. [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&ct=res&cd=1&ved=OCBEQFJA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fciteseerx.ist.psu.edu%2Fviewdoc%2Fdownload%3Fdoi%3D10.1.1.101.3969%26rep%3Drep1%26type%3Dpdf&ei=tbiZS9KIKYqusgPr3aGfCw&usq=AFQjCNEXKqWDE8J9M6Tdg1-ayS0yxTt\\_5w](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&ct=res&cd=1&ved=OCBEQFJA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fciteseerx.ist.psu.edu%2Fviewdoc%2Fdownload%3Fdoi%3D10.1.1.101.3969%26rep%3Drep1%26type%3Dpdf&ei=tbiZS9KIKYqusgPr3aGfCw&usq=AFQjCNEXKqWDE8J9M6Tdg1-ayS0yxTt_5w) (Accessed online on March 11, 2010.)

23. *ibid.*

24. *ibid.*

25. Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "New Media and Internet Activism: from the 'Battle of Seattle' to Blogging," *New Media & Society* 6, no. 1 (87-95).

26. *ibid.*, 92

27. Molly Beutz Land, "Networked Activism," *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, Vol. 22 (2009) <http://harvardhrj.com/2009/09/networked-activism/> (Accessed online on March 11, 2010.)

28. *ibid.*, 236.

Zhang, et al., discuss the connection between social network usage and political participation. They note a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey that found 40% of social network subscribers had used the sites to engage in some form of political activity in the 2008 presidential primary season.<sup>29</sup> Echoing Bennett, however, the authors also state that the Internet's greatest impact is not on elections or government, but rather in the social and civic sector. People learn about ways to participate by communicating with others, and social network sites offer a diversity of opportunity through group and cause pages. The authors contend that it should not be surprising that social media lends itself better to civic participation rather than political, as these services are "geared toward maintaining relationships with their friends and can have the potential for stimulating community involvement."<sup>30</sup>

Lim and Kann argue that technology is not in and of itself a causal agent of social change. It can facilitate change and be used as a tool by activists, but the change itself must originate elsewhere. The authors stress that most forms of online activism are imitations of offline methods of engagement, such as petition. While online mobilization efforts have been successful, such as with the Zapatistas in Mexico and the "Free Burma" movement, it is more a reflection of the low cost and high impact of mass communication rather than some new form of participation. Nonetheless, the Internet "allows activists themselves to frame their issues and shape their identities," rather than having their messages and identity shaped for them by outside sources.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the Internet offers an amplification effect for movements, allowing activists to reach large numbers of people and gain influence. Lim and Kann note that there is a downside to this amplification, though, in that "online mobilization is always in danger of being too fast, too thin, and too many."<sup>32</sup> Scholz underscores the idea that the Internet is a means to an end, writing that the web, at its core, is about "networking humans through technology."<sup>33</sup> He states that online

activism is in some ways an act of faith, and that people have to believe that gestures mean something. Scholz also notes that social media replaces the disappearing public sphere in the physical world, although it may offer a feel-good type of activism that lacks any real-world effects. "The failed war in Iraq, the disaster of Darfur, the world AIDS crisis—all these many struggles call for our engagement beyond the cathartic couch experience of watching blockbuster films like *An Inconvenient Truth*."<sup>34</sup> Social media can provide a much-needed access to voice, but often action still must be taken offline to create change. Scholz is also critical of the social web with regard to privacy and rights over content, and encourages further activism on this front.

### Nonprofit Organizations and Social Media: Failures and Challenges

Many nonprofits encounter problems with expanding support through social networks and translating that support into tangible action (e.g., attendance at an event, more volunteers, letters sent to officials, donations, etc.) One issue is the difference between the way organizations and individual users perceive social media. A study by Seo, Kim, and Yang found that for a majority of nonprofits, the most important purpose for social media efforts was to promote the image of the organization, followed by providing information to journalists, and then interaction with the public. "This indicates that for NGOs, which generally operate under a tight budget, their online public relations are geared toward enhancing the organization's image and tapping into current and potential sources of funding."<sup>35</sup> The authors note that for the nonprofits in their study, "providing information to journalists was more important than that of interacting with publics."<sup>36</sup> This indicates that many nonprofits still see social media as a one-to-many form of communication, or as a type of collateral media to be used in press relations. They do not value it as a relationship-building tool, because that would require a loss of control over

29. Weiwu Zhang, Thomas J. Johnson, Trent Seltzer and Shannon L. Bichard, "The Revolution Will be Networked: The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Political Attitudes and Behavior," *Social Science Computer Review*, 28, no. 1 (2010), 75.

30. *ibid.*, 87.

31. Merlyna Lim and Mark E. Kann, "Politics: Deliberation, Mobilization, and Networked Practices of Agitation," in *Networked Publics*, ed. Kazys Varnelis (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 89.

32. *ibid.*, 100.

33. Trebor Scholz, "Where the Activism Is," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 363.

34. *ibid.*, 357.

35. Hyunjin Seo, Ji Young Kim, and Sung-un Yang, "Global Activism and New Media: A Study of Transnational NGOs' Online Public Relations," *Public Relations Review*, 35 (2009), 124.

36. *ibid.*

messaging and image. "Responding to an open-ended question about the disadvantages of using new media for public relations, the practitioners identified concerns about reliability, message control, and the scope of online audiences."<sup>37</sup> The problem is that social media services are inherently a many-to-many form of communication and do not fit well into the old public relations mold. It also demonstrates the difference in perceptions between organizations and social media users, and points out that this difference contributes to organizations' failure to expand their reach into social networks.

Organizations and individuals simply have different goals when they sign on to Facebook, and neither seem to realize the misalignment of interests. Mark Mann of Denvelopers, a digital media services company focusing on nonprofits, stated in an interview that many organizations use social media services as a means of fundraising. He cautioned against that approach, stating, "However, fundraising through social media has yet to really stand the test of time. It has been done in conjunction with multiple events in real life but solely raising money through social media seems to be a dead-end strategy right now. That's not to say it can't be done but I think the jury is still out."<sup>38</sup> Many nonprofits have not been proactive in discovering the feelings and capabilities of their supporters. There is a certain sentiment of "if I build it, they will come"—if an organization puts up a Facebook page, fans will flock to it. In observance of several nonprofits' social media efforts, though, it appears that their network reach is limited: most fans, followers, friends, or subscribers were people that were already directly involved in the organization, such as current or former interns and volunteers. What is lacking in some instances is a simple ask—encouraging supporters to reach out to their networks. Fundraising studies show that the number one reason people give to a charity is because they were asked to do so by someone they know. It stands to reason that the same would be true of social networks—if your friend asks you to join a cause, you are more likely to do it, assuming of course the cause does not violate some deeply held personal belief. The key here lies in Land's networked activism approach. Organizations need to reach out to their supporters and give them something to do.

37. *ibid.*, 125.

38. Mark Mann, e-mail message to author, March 2, 2010.

39. Richard D. Waters, Emily Burnett, Anna Lamm and Jessica Lucas, "Engaging Stakeholders Through Social Networking: How Nonprofit Organizations are Using Facebook," *Public*

Interactivity and giving supporters something to do sound simplistic, but many organizations fail to take advantage of the multimedia platform offered by social media services. Waters, et al. found that "interactivity was essential if organizations were to develop relationships with their stakeholders. Asking for email addresses and ways to donate online can increase interactivity, but organizations should provide a calendar of events or listing volunteer opportunities to involve stakeholders offline as well."<sup>39</sup> Related to this, organizations often do not take care to match their needs with supporters' abilities. While gaining more volunteers and donations is certainly important, focusing solely on those areas can alienate supporters and make them feel worthless. It is the organization's job to detail opportunities that supporters find meaningful, and to ask for feedback. It is the organization's job to provide a compelling reason for people to join its network.

Waters, et al., underscored this. Their study found that nonprofits did not offer many ways on their Facebook pages for their supporters to become involved. "The most common strategy used to involve the supporters was providing e-mail addresses to organizational representatives (71%)."<sup>40</sup> Only 13% listed volunteer opportunities on their Facebook page, and only 8% posted a calendar of events.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, nonprofits were largely not using Facebook to distribute organizational news, and even when they did, they did not take advantage of the multimedia tools available. They also failed to publicize their traditional public relations efforts, with only 20% providing summaries of their campaigns and only 5% posting news releases.<sup>42</sup> The authors conclude by stating that "nonprofit organizations recognized the rapid expansion of the social networking phenomenon, and they wanted to be on Facebook. However, they were not taking advantage of all the options the site had to offer their relationship cultivation efforts."<sup>43</sup>

When an organization is able to gain fans, followers, friends, and subscribers, it may find that despite an enormous social media presence, little has actually changed for the organization itself. This disconnect between offline and online support can be a symptom of

*Relations Review*, 35 (2009) 103.

40. Waters, 105.

41. *ibid.*

42. *ibid.*, 104.

43. *ibid.*, 106.

“slacktivism,” the idea that people become superficially engaged online through clicking a link or becoming a fan on Facebook, and then think that they have accomplished something. The fear of slacktivism stems from the belief that it diminishes offline activism, where real change can more easily be demonstrated. Slacktivism seems to sum up the worries of Putnam and Scholz that social media and the Internet are providing a proxy by which people think they are participating, but in reality they are not. Evgeny Morozov, probably the most outspoken critic of slacktivism, writes, “‘Slacktivism’ is the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation: why bother with sit-ins and the risk of arrest, police brutality, or torture if one can be as loud campaigning in the virtual space?”<sup>44</sup> He laments that “a significant portion of the activist population would be morally content with the ‘slacktivist’ option alone, preferring not to get too close to more dangerous activities that are likely to get them in trouble with authorities.”<sup>45</sup> Organizations should assess their own supporters to determine if they, like the organizations in Land’s study, have a large number of supporters that exist only in the virtual world, or if people are taking action beyond the digital realm as well. The problem relates back to interactivity and opportunity; online supporters may not know what offline opportunities for involvement exist, or they may not feel strongly connected to an organization that counts them only as a measurement of digital popularity.

An additional challenge is the sheer number of groups, causes, and pages on social media services. The “noise” created by groups like “I bet this pickle can get 1,000,000 fans before Nickelback” makes people tune out organizations, or worse, causes them to see organizations as illegitimate. There are also multiple ways for an organization to use Facebook. It could create an individual account, a group page, or a cause page. Many organizations rush to create all three, and then fail to integrate them in any meaningful way. The cause page is adept at raising funds, but poor for interactivity; the

cause page is not linked to the personal or group page; a member of one page may not realize there are two others to join, and if she does, may become frustrated at what is seen as disorganization by the nonprofit. Organizations may be tempted to attempt a gimmick to raise awareness, but this should be done with caution. One example was the Facebook “bra meme,” where female users were asked to post the color of their bra in support of breast cancer awareness. While the origin of the meme is unknown, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation has said it was not behind the meme but supported its actions, it gained international media attention.<sup>46</sup> Not everyone was amused, however. Blogs and comments were on fire with the perceived uselessness and even harmful effects of the bra meme. Blogger Allison Jones describes why the meme was ultimately a failure: “Cloaked in a joke with no information or call to action we’re left with a campaign that confused more than it inspired. The message was changed throughout the day with some people being told to examine their breasts (yet no instructions as to how) and others being told to share the color of their panties with no mention of cancer at all. And the vagueness of meme leaves it open to way too much interpretation for it to be taken seriously.”<sup>47</sup> Users can perceive this type of activity as true slacktivism because no outcome was desired, beyond spreading the message, and no ultimate result was ever achieved. These viral memes represent a large part of the traffic on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media services, and much like standing with a sign on a crowded street corner, organizations will need to take action beyond *just being there* to set themselves apart.

## Survey Methodology

A web-based survey, created in Survey Monkey,<sup>48</sup> was conducted from February 21–March 4, 2010. The key purposes of the survey were to examine users’ perceptions of online advocacy and how they used social media services in those efforts. The survey spread

44. Evgeny Morozov, “The Brave New World of Slacktivism,” *Net Effect* blog, posted May 19, 2009, [http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/19/the\\_brave\\_new\\_world\\_of\\_slacktivism](http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/19/the_brave_new_world_of_slacktivism) (Accessed March 11, 2010.)

45. *ibid.*

46. Rob Manker, “Facebook Bra Color Question: Real Breast Cancer Awareness Effort, or Slacktivism at its Finest?” *The Chicago Tribune*, January 11, 2010. <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2010/jan/11/health/chi-talk-facebook-bra-colorjan11> (Accessed March 11, 2010.)

47. Allison Jones, “When Going Viral is a Waste: Learning from Facebook Bra Colors,” *Brazen Careerist* blog, posted January 20, 2010, [http://www.brazencareerist.com/2010/01/09/when-going-viral-is-a-waste-learning-from-facebook-bra-colors?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+brazencareerist+\(Brazen+Careerist\)](http://www.brazencareerist.com/2010/01/09/when-going-viral-is-a-waste-learning-from-facebook-bra-colors?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+brazencareerist+(Brazen+Careerist)) (Accessed March 11, 2010.)

48. Survey Monkey is an online survey tool, located at <http://www.surveymonkey.com>.

virally, after having been posted to various Livejournal communities and Facebook pages, and respondents were self-selected. The population of interest was anyone who used a variety of social media services. The survey included multiple-choice questions as well as one open-ended question. Responses to the open-ended question were calculated using a content analysis of the written answers, while responses from the multiple choice section were tabulated in Microsoft Excel. The sample size was 133 social media users, predominantly female. Additional information was gathered from participants in an informal discussion of online activism that took place on the Livejournal community *gradstudents*.

## Findings: Understanding User Behavior

The results showed that in contradiction to organizations’ emphasis on online fundraising, raising funds simply was not on the radar of social media users engaged in online activism. When asked, “What is the primary reason that you engage in online activism?”, 60% of respondents said it was to “show public support for a cause/organization I believe in.” Moreover, 47% of respondents felt either “somewhat uncomfortable” or “very uncomfortable” asking members of their social media networks to join a cause. One respondent commented, “I don’t do it and don’t respond, as a rule, to others asking me to join, though—I feel like my online social networks should not be used that way.” I did not ask how they felt asking people from their offline networks to join a cause, and more examination of this may be necessary. It could reflect a certain reluctance for people to recruit friends and family in general, or it may reflect an idea that social media services are a space where this kind of activity is not wanted.

The top four activities for online activism were “joined a cause on Facebook” (68%), “signed an e-petition” (66%), “became a fan of a nonprofit or advocacy group on Facebook” (56%), and “sent an email written by a nonprofit or advocacy group to a government official” (43%). The top offline activity was by far “donate to a cause” at 71%, followed by “attended an event” (42%), “volunteered for a cause” (35%), and “directly contacted a government official by letter or phone” (26%). The primary reason respondents gave for engaging in online activism was “show public support for a cause/organization

I believe in” (60%). This suggests that one considerable motivation for online activism is identity formation, allowing people to shape their online persona by showing support for causes and organizations. Additionally, 89% of respondents stated that their primary reason for using social media services was to “connect with friends and family.” 73% percent stated they knew all or most of the time where the online activism originated from, and 63% said they knew all or most of the time what the outcome of the activity was. This reflects a self-assessment however, and a controlled study would be needed to determine whether or not people actually know the origin and outcome of the activities in which they participate.

Despite 47% of respondents indicating that they were not comfortable with recruiting their social networks into a cause, 41% said they had in fact done so, with 56% of respondents recruiting between one and six friends into their cause. Nearly 10% (9.77%) had recruited ten or more members of their social networks into supporting an organization or cause. Understanding the question of comfort is key for effective social media networking by nonprofits. Facebook was by far the most popular service used by respondents (93%), followed closely by blogs (88%). A good portion of respondents also used Wikipedia (64%), YouTube (56%), photo sharing services (40%) and Twitter (35%). The majority of respondents (60%) spent between three and eight hours per week on social media sites, with 33% spending more than ten hours on these sites. 46% percent of respondents were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, and 84% were female. The overwhelming response by females could be a factor skewing the rest of the data, but it was an issue confronted by Ellison, et al. as well, where 66% of the respondents were female.<sup>49</sup> For both studies, respondents were self-selected, so this may show a higher tendency for females to use social media services, or simply a higher tendency to respond to surveys about social media.

The delivery method of the survey offers an interesting anecdote in the power of social media networking, however. I posted the survey on my personal Facebook, on my personal Livejournal, and on two Livejournal communities, denver and gradstudents. I also asked people to pass the survey on through their own networks, so that I might maximize my number of responses. Within a week, I had 133 responses, from multiple countries (as identified

49. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007.

in the open-ended questions.) This demonstrates how far and how fast a message can move through social media if users are inclined to spread it. (See Appendix for full survey results.)

I asked respondents to answer an open-ended question, “Do you think online activism, particularly through social media, is effective? Why or why not?” 63% percent replied they felt that social media activism was effective to some degree, implying that people generally do have faith in the power of online activism. This optimism was limited, however, mostly to the ability of social media to raise awareness (25%), and a belief that online activism is most effective when it can spur offline action or attract mainstream media attention (20%). Some people felt that social media was a good way to reach audiences that would otherwise not be exposed to the message. “Many people are online for reasons other than activism. While online those that may not be exposed in offline life to such an array of causes can be potentially reached.” Others noted that the speed and ease of use of social media allow people with busy lives to become involved in causes. Even if that involvement appears superficial to others, some respondents felt that simple acts of online activism were still important; “I’d argue that joining a [Facebook] group (and similar actions) is in and of itself a meaningful action, simply because it indicates conscious choice.” Many respondents noted the powerful ability of social media to spread information and coordinate offline activities, such as planning protests. Additionally, respondents returned to the notion of interactivity and the need for organizations to provide pathways for involvement beyond donations and “harassing” networks. For example, one respondent wrote, “I think most people are turned off [of activism through social media] because they expect the typical ‘donate here’ or ‘give us your email/address so we can ask for money that way.’” In an online discussion I began on Livejournal regarding online activism and social media, one commenter echoed this sentiment, writing, “So basically, if I’m a college student with no money, all I can do is join a f\*\*\*ing mailing list.”<sup>50</sup> She felt that nonprofits only wanted her to join their social media network of choice, recruit her networks into the organization’s cause, and donate. She felt particularly abused at the notion that money was the most important, and while she understood why, she did not feel that nonprofits provided

her an opportunity to participate beyond her checkbook and networks. This young woman’s frustration is very important for nonprofits to understand; they have to offer opportunities for involvement that people are capable of and willing to do.

Those who felt online activism through social media was ineffective primarily expressed concerns about slacktivism, stating that achieving true change through activism requires more work than is possible through online means. For example, one respondent wrote, “Not even a little bit [referring to the effectiveness of online activism]. I think it makes people feel like they are doing anything without ever having to put on pants and leave the house, much less do something like participate in a march that could get you arrested and/or beaten up. Our society is pretty dominated by laziness.” Another replied, “It can be, but I think that people feel like they are really doing something by becoming a ‘fan’ of a cause and never following it up with real action. It is a great way to publicize a need, but it can have a detrimental effect to direct action that is really needed.” Even some respondents with critical views of online activism noted that it can be an important component of an overall campaign, but that it cannot achieve results alone. The overall results, though, indicated that people were not simply lazy, superficial activists content to click a link and be done with it, but rather that a disconnect existed between their online and offline activities. 87% of respondents indicated they had participated in some form of online activism in the last year, and 84% responded that they had participated in some form of offline activism as well. When asked, however, if the online and offline activities had been for the same cause or organization, 74% responded either “no” or “not applicable.” This indicates that people are active both online and offline, but not for the same causes, and implies that nonprofits are perhaps not successfully translating online support into offline actions.

One interesting outcome arose from the respondents with a negative view of online activism. Multiple people indicated that they did not know the results of online activism, and therefore thought it to be ineffective. This suggests that organizations could do a better job of publicizing the results of these online activities to, as Scholz said, give people faith in their gestures. The group “Demand Justice for Buddy” on Facebook serves as an example.

50. Catherine Bell, comment on “Survey Please?” Denver Livejournal community, comment posted February 24, 2010, <http://community.livejournal.com/denver/2032237.html?thread=13127533#13127533> (Accessed March 11, 2010.)

“Demand Justice for Buddy” was formed in response to the 2009 death of Buddy, a German Shepherd dog who was stolen from his owner by Melissa Lockhart and then dragged to death by Steven Clay Romero, Lockhart’s brother. The event occurred in Colorado, but through the Facebook group, an e-petition began to circulate social networks, demanding that Romero be sentenced to the maximum for his crime. On January 26, the *Denver Post* reported that Gary Sherman, the person behind “Demand Justice for Buddy” and the first e-petition, printed out and delivered over 100,000 electronic petitions signed by people from all across the United States and over 100 other countries to the judge overseeing Romero’s case.<sup>51</sup> This development, however, which concretely shows the outcome of the online activism, was not reported on the “Demand Justice for Buddy” group page. A news update from February 27, 2010, stated that Romero’s trial date had been postponed and that the U.S. attorney prosecuting Romero intended to seek the maximum penalty, but contained no information about the results of the online activism. On July 30, 2010, news that Romero received the maximum sentence for his crime was updated to the group’s information page; “Demand Justice for Buddy” administrators did not send news about the petitions, the U.S. attorney’s decision, or Romero’s sentence as a message to members, and instead posted it on the group’s information page where a person would have to actively seek it out. By simply changing the method of communication, the “Demand Justice for Buddy” administrators could have shown supporters the outcomes of, and thus increased their confidence in, online activism.

### Limitations

Limitations to this survey include the fact that it was done online, and respondents were self-selected. This could skew the data to a slightly younger audience already more inclined to both offline and online activism. I did not collect data on location, income, or education level. These factors and the small sample size all restrict the extrapolation of the findings to the larger population of social media users. Because I posted the survey on Livejournal and Facebook, the results on which services respondents use could also be skewed. Additionally, more research is needed to understand comfort levels of social media users in spreading activism through their online and offline networks, and the role that online

activism plays in identity formation. A controlled study is also needed to determine whether respondents’ perceptions on online advocacy activities are valid. Case studies on organizational use of social media were drawn from research conducted in 2009. Given the extremely fast pace of change in the digital world, new case studies on organizational behavior are also needed.

### Conclusion: Building a Connection Between Nonprofits and Users

This research helps to understand the challenges facing nonprofit organization in using social media to build social capital, and offers a foundation from which to derive solutions for those challenges. The most evident solution is for organizations to better understand how people use social media, and to align their online activities with those behaviors. This requires a shift in thinking from the traditional one-to-many style of communication, to one where the organization must learn to let go of its message and allow supporters the freedom to engage in ways they find meaningful. Organizations must strive to offer compelling reasons for supporters to engage, using the multimedia-capable and interactive nature of social media. They must also learn to tie online action to offline results, and offer pathways for involvement that go beyond fundraising and sharing of networks.

The survey results indicated that people generally believe social media activism can be effective, but expressed concern and frustration over the ways organizations have used social media services. These results, coupled with the literature, provide a foundation upon which to form conclusions about possible solutions to the disconnect between organizations and individuals. By returning to a focus on relationships in social media efforts, organizations can achieve the successes that they have so far been missing. Organizations can begin to build a connection with users and improve the effectiveness of social media usage by implementing elements of networked activism. As Land demonstrated, they must let go of their message, and allow users to interact and take ownership of the cause. Networked activism encourages nonprofits to support small group formation, and allow people to meaningfully contribute to the organization via feedback, by writing articles for the website, blog, or group page, and providing insight for goals and decisions. The key

51. Annette Espinoza, “100,000 petitions call for severe penalty in Buddy the dog’s dragging death,” *The Denver Post*, January 26, 2010. [http://www.denverpost.com/ci\\_14256200](http://www.denverpost.com/ci_14256200) (Accessed March 11, 2010.)

here is not to limit their actions, but rather permit users to be creative and implement ideas on behalf of the cause. Organizations need not devolve into mob rule, but without that sense of ownership, users will not develop a deeper commitment to the organization (this holds true offline as well).

The main point underscored by the previously presented research is that organizations simply do not understand their audiences. Larger organizations may perform analysis on their target publics, but much of this analysis remains in the realm of psychographics. Smaller organizations may not have the resources to perform this research, and thus remain unaware of who their publics really are. Particularly for social media, organizations need to make efforts to understand the viewpoints and motivations of their supporters. The survey results showed a considerable level of discomfort with recruiting social networks into a cause, and organizations should take care to respect those feelings. Similarly, organizations need to provide pathways for involvement that meets their supporters' capabilities. If a user feels that he cannot contribute beyond his networks or money, the research shows he may likely turn away from the organization. Basic actions such as publishing available volunteer opportunities on social media sites, and asking supporters if these opportunities represent at least one way for them to participate, can help organizations address this challenge. Likewise, asking supporters, through polls or open-ended

posts, how they can and want to contribute both utilizes the principles of networked activism and helps organizations understand their audiences.

The research also points to the need to tie social media to offline action. Organizations should empower a few dedicated supporters to become "online leaders," and offer them the ability to post discussion topics, organize offline activities or design new online activities, plan house parties, social gatherings, etc. Not every event needs to have a request for donations and not every event needs to directly apply to the cause; instead, organizations can use the power of social networks to increase "weak ties" and to create a foundation of action so that when the organization calls on online supporters to volunteer, to recruit a friend, or to spread a message, they will have developed a culture of participation. They will feel that they are an integral part of the success.

One of the most common themes in the survey results was frustration among supporters about not knowing the outcome of activities. A simple solution to this problem is for organizations to publish results. Nonprofits should let people know the outcomes of campaigns, even if they are bad. Information should tie online action to concrete results, and should be easy for supporters to find. Organizations should take care to publicize these successes in the most visible way, so that supporters are not left wondering what happened, especially as the



mainstream media moves on to other stories. For example, in the previous example of "Demand Justice for Buddy," the administrators should have posted status updates or sent a message to all members with news regarding the case. Organizations need to include links to news articles if at all possible. When news articles are not available, such as in the case of members contacting government officials, the organization should keep current on the issue, and let members know what is happening (e.g., the bill is still in committee, the panel will vote next week, etc.).

Too many organizations view social media in the old public relations model of one-too-many messages, and fail to employ multimedia applications, publish campaign summaries and press releases, and strive to create interactivity on their site. Social media in its essence is a many-to-many communications tool, and should be used as such. Encourage users to take action of their own, such as sending in a picture, creating their own video on YouTube, posting discussion topics or articles, or suggesting ideas. Organizations can even create mini-contests to recognize user-submitted content. Interaction between the organization and its supporters is important, but interactivity among supporters should also be encouraged. People will naturally tend to do this, replying to comments or posts they find interesting, but organizations have to create the opportunity for them to do so. Publishing campaign summaries and press releases on social media sites conforms a little to the one-to-many style of communication, but it also increases transparency and provides information not only to supporters, but to journalists and casual browsers of the site as well.

In their efforts to spread a message online, organizations should not approach social media as a race to gain supporters, but instead, give them something meaningful to do. However, organizations should avoid gimmicks. While gimmicks often sound fun and create "buzz," not all the attention is positive. The example of the Facebook meme to have women post their bra color to raise awareness of breast cancer created as many detractors as supporters. Many people were savvy to the fact that this meme did not actually do anything for breast cancer, and as a result, felt used or patronized. This meme was likely created by an individual, perhaps for simple amusement, but organizations may see how quickly and how far this message reached and be tempted to emulate it. A better tactic would be to tie the social media campaign to a concrete offline action, such as presenting an award,

unveiling a new research foundation, generating media mentions, or even raising funds. The message itself could be simple (such as a statistic, a quote, or asking users to respond to a question), but without any sense of outcome, users will not feel that their gesture has meaning. The bra color campaign failed not only on this front, but also ended up offending users as well with its blasé treatment of breast cancer.

Social media services are still a relatively new development, and we may not have yet realized their true potential. These services allow people to connect across time and distance with a speed and affordability not previously seen, and offer a powerful resource for organizations looking to build social capital. The effectiveness of social media activism lies within the way organizations implement it, and many nonprofits have failed to build successful campaigns. Often organizations view social media as another branch of public relations, relying on these services as method for one-to-many communication and thus do not create the interactivity necessary for successful social media outreach. While many scholars have examined social media's role in politics, more research is needed on the nonprofit sector. In particular, studying attitudes regarding recruitment from social networks, both offline and online, could provide valuable insight into developing better methods for building social capital. Politics and nonprofits differ in many ways, but the most prominent difference in terms of sustained support is that political campaigns have a definitive endpoint with a definitive outcome. On election day, either your efforts were successful and your candidate won, or they were not and he did not. Nonprofits often work on issues that are multidimensional, generational, and systemic. Poverty alleviation does not have an election day, and human rights do not have a "we won/we lost" type of outcome. Many social causes are about a multitude of battles, with the war happening over the course of lifetimes and often across great distances. Social media activism can help bridge time and space, but organizations must approach it in a way that makes users want to invest in the cause. Nonprofits need to be creative in keeping the attention of their supporters, because their campaigns are much longer than political ones. Organizations can create an avenue for involvement through social media by recognizing its many-to-many nature, improving interactivity, and by matching needs to users' capabilities. Despite the fact that social media development is an intensive undertaking that requires considerable time, it offers multiple benefits

to organizations if done effectively.

## Appendix

### SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

1. In the last year, have you participated in any of the following forms of online activism? (Check all that apply)

Sent an email written by a nonprofit or advocacy group to a government official

42.86%

57

Joined a cause page on Facebook

68.42%

91

Signed an online petition

66.17%

88

Became a fan of a nonprofit or advocacy group on Facebook

56.39%

75

Forwarded an email with a message from a nonprofit or advocacy group to family/friends

29.32%

39

Retweeted messages from a nonprofit or advocacy group

19.55%

26

None

12.78%

17

Other (please specify)

10.53%

14

(Answers for "Other" in Word doc)

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

2. In the same time period, have you engaged in any of the following forms of offline activism? (Check all that apply)

Directly contacted a government official (by letter or phone)

25.56%

34

Recruited other volunteers

14.29%

19

Donated to a cause

70.68%

94

Attended an event

42.11%

56

Volunteered for a cause

34.59%

46

Attended a governmental hearing, public debate, town hall

meeting, etc.

13.53%

18

Recruited other donors

9.77%

13

None

15.79%

21

Other (please specify)

4.51%

6

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

3. Was your offline activism and online activism for the same causes/organizations?

Yes

26.32%

35

No

51.88%

69

Not applicable

21.80%

29

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

4. What is the primary reason that you engage in online activism?

Show public support for a cause/organization I believe in

60.15%

80

Raise funds for a cause/organization I believe in

3.76%

5

Gain support among my networks for a cause/organization

6.02%

8

It makes me feel good

9.77%

13

I do not engage in online activism

12.78%

17

Not sure

2.26%

3

Other (please specify)

6.77%

9

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

5. What is your primary reason for using social media services, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.?

Connect with friends and family

88.72%

118

Networking

4.51%

6

Meet new people

0.00%

0

Hear about events

3.76%

5

Play online games (e.g., Farmville)

1.50%

2

Other (please specify)

1.50%

2

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

6. Are you aware of the origin of the online activities in which you participate?

Yes, all the time

21.05%

28

Yes, most of the time

51.88%

69

No

5.26%

7

I don't know

10.53%

14

I do not participate in online activism

11.28%

15

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

7. Are you aware of what the eventual outcome of the particular online activity will be (for example, delivering printouts of online petitions to a specific entity)?

Yes, all the time

19.55%

26

Yes, most of the time

42.86%

57

No

15.79%

21

I don't know

9.77%

13

I do not participate in online activism

12.03%

16

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

8. How do you feel about asking members of your social media networks to join a cause?

Very comfortable

14.29%

19

Somewhat comfortable

20.30%

27

Comfortable

11.28%

15

Somewhat uncomfortable

25.56%

34

Very uncomfortable

21.80%

29

Not sure

6.77%

9

**Total replies: 133**

**Response rate: 100%**

9. Have you recruited members from your online social networks for your causes/organizations?

Yes

40.60%

54



## keywords:

digital protocols, SDKs, democratizing effects of the Internet, subversion, hacking, jailbreaking, Panopticon.

### Cynthia Wang

Cynthia Wang received her B.S. from Northwestern University, majoring in Radio/TV/Film and Biological Sciences, and minoring in Asian American Studies. Upon graduating, and discovering that trying to make a living doing freelance filmmaking is, well, difficult, she climbed the corporate ladder at COPE Health Solutions, a non-profit health care organization. In 2008, Cynthia returned to school for her M.A. in the Media, Culture, and Communication department at New York University. Her Masters thesis explored the idea of "high" art/culture and the role of the "expert" on the Internet, looking specifically at the comments sections of live classical music performances on YouTube. Her research centers on how art, music, entertainment, and culture intersect with the Internet, the subsequent potential for democratization, and the role traditional frameworks of power have in the digital age. More recently, she has been fascinated with the idea of time, temporal capital, and the dynamics between work, leisure, and interstitial time given technological advances and the proliferation of mobile devices.

## Tinkering with the iPhone:

Subversion and  
Re-Appropriation  
of Power in  
Apple's World

### Abstract

Apple's iPhone thrives on the ability of consumers to download applications to customize their needs, while allowing developers to exercise creativity (with the hope of expanding their economic capital) when creating original applications to sell in the App Store. At first glance, this model of customization and creation seems to tap into the idea of the Internet as a democratic utopia. However, Apple maintains a strict control over the experiences of users and developers, revealing how structures of power govern digital media through both technological determinism and social/institutional determinism. This article looks at the practice of hacking ("unlocking" and "jailbreaking") the iPhone and developing and distributing iPhone applications in order to tease out tensions between the reinforcement of Apple's control and the subversive forces of "tinkerers," or those who seek experiences outside of Apple's authority. Apple ultimately refuses the ideals of liberal democracy, even as it publicly promotes itself as a site for customer participation and choice.

**“You have a video recording application on your iPhone?”** I stared incredulously at my friend’s iPhone, which, from the outside, looked a lot like mine. When I bought my iPhone 3G back in the summer of 2008, before the flashy new iPhone 4 and iOS5 additions at the time of this writing in late 2011, I was rather disappointed to discover that the iPhone 3G does not offer video recording or cut and paste capabilities. I had thought Apple would undoubtedly add that feature, as it is ubiquitous on other forms of smart phones like the Blackberry and the Treo, and even regular non-smart (dumb?) phones. Yet my friend’s iPhone 3G clearly had video capturing and playback capabilities. It turns out his iPhone was jailbroken, and able to run applications that were not purchased or downloaded through Apple’s iTunes Application Store. Had I not spoken to my hacker friend, I would never have conceived that my little black electronic box has additional capabilities that Apple withholds from us. More importantly, I, like many other iPhone customers, would probably never have thought to question the functionality limits of our iPhones, nor would we be aware of Apple’s total control over the experience we have.

This article will explore the structures of power that govern digital media through both technological determinism and/or social and institutional determinism. Specifically, I will be looking at hacking (“unlocking” and “jailbreaking”) the iPhone and developing and distributing iPhone applications. There are inherent tensions between the potentially democratizing, and occasionally subversive, processes that tinkering with the iPhone has by allowing consumer and citizen participation in the process, and the structures of power (Apple Inc.) in place in the world of the iPhone. These powers still, to a large extent, have control over our iPhone experiences. I will examine how we live in a world of manufactured consent where we agree to have our experiences structured by “The Powers That Be,” how subversive cultures (read: iPhone hackers and programmers, or “tinkerers”) potentially puncture this structure, and also how these acts of subversion are co-opted by those in power and re-positioned in order to maintain the dominant hegemonic framework.

A quick word; we must take into account the fact that technology sometimes advances faster than research can keep up. Because much of this research was done before the inception of the iPhone 4, and before Verizon started

selling the iPhone, some technological aspects may seem outdated and historical, yet the theories and ideas encompass anxieties that are still present.

## Structures of Power DO Exist in Digital Media

Computers and operating systems have allowed us to obtain information and experience the world in previously unthinkable ways. Computer operating systems and Internet browsers have become as ubiquitous as newspapers, televisions, and telephones as technological forms of communication. As Douglas Thomas says in *Hacker Culture*, “The degree to which machines are user-friendly, then, corresponds directly with the degree to which the user is ignorant of the computer’s actual operations.”<sup>1</sup> The ways in which operating systems are organized feel natural and pre-determined. We simply point, click, and drag, not thinking about the intricate codes that are built into our computer in order to enable such actions. This technological normalization is due to software companies selling operating systems, which make using a computer easy and visual. Moreover, as the Internet has been normalized into society, the decentralized architecture of the Internet has also been “naturalized,” and the powers controlling the Internet often go unquestioned.

As Alex Galloway discusses in his book, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, digital protocols, or rules, determine actions by which a computer functions. These actions, then, are dictated by powers that are technologically determined. However, structures of power that are socially and institutionally determined have the potential to take advantage of protocols and these technological structures of power. Apple uses both technologically determined and socially determined power structures to maintain near total control over the usage of the iPhone. Hackers, then, not only understand the structures that Apple enforces, but they also use the same structures to subvert Apple’s power, perpetuating the cat-and-mouse-like game that subversion and re-appropriation play in iPhone tinkering.

## UNPLUGGED! Subverting Apple’s Power

As we can see, there are unseen powers that dictate the way we experience 1) operating systems 2) Networks

and the Internet, and 3) the iPhone. For many users, these unseen powers create the only experience we know, and therefore, we tend not to question this experience. Yet hackers do. Much like Morpheus, Trinity, Neo, and their team in the Wachowski Brothers film, *The Matrix*, hackers challenge protocol, structure, and design. They work to subvert the power the institutions that produce and construct these structures have over our perception and experience of the digital world.

In his essay “The Spectacle of the Scaffold,” Michel Foucault talks about torturing criminals. He states that “The entire criminal procedure, right up to the sentence, remains secret: that is to say opaque, not only to the public, but to the accused himself...The secret and written form of the procedure reflects the principle that in criminal matters the establishment of truth was the absolute right and the exclusive power of the sovereign and his judges.”<sup>2</sup> Foucault draws a strong connection between knowledge and power, even using the word “opaque” to imply the importance of the gaze for those in power. Those in power have knowledge that is held from those they wish to dominate. As with Foucault’s account of trial proceedings and sentencing, the technologically determined power that Apple, Microsoft, and other such massive digital media corporations serves to control. Apple created the code of the operating system and their proprietary software, which then manifests visually for the general iPhone user as the iPhone interface, which hides said code.

Hackers, then, represent a subversion of this technologically determined power, because they understand the language of the code and hence can change it, thereby subverting the sovereign power that companies like Apple have over digital devices like the iPhone. Hackers, like my friend who jailbroke his iPhone and rendered it with video recording capabilities, unlock the full capability of the hardware system they are using. My friend has knowledge of not only the interface of the iPhone – the obviously visible aspect of the iPhone – but the actual workings, the mechanisms of production, of the iPhone. Because of this, he is able to expand upon how he experiences his little black electronic box, rendering his iPhone, much like Neo in *The Matrix*, unplugged. “Unplugging” constitutes gaining existential knowledge that one’s experience is being tightly controlled by an unseen force, be it through the

naturalization of the iPhone’s interface or having Amazon know what books/CDs/DVDs a consumer prefers, which is a more institutionally determined power, as Dan Hunter discusses in his review of Cass Sunstein’s *REPUBLIC.COM*. Hackers, in this “unplugged” mode, then learn to master and command the structure. Tinkering with the iPhone is potentially subversive if said tinkering brings the iPhone out of the control of Apple, as is the case with a jailbroken or unlocked phone.

There are two main ways of hacking the iPhone – jailbreaking and unlocking. Unlocking the iPhone means allowing the iPhone to work with a service provider other than Cingular/AT&T, which was the only carrier in the United States for the iPhone until early 2011. Ellen Lee’s report on the iPhone carrier on SFGate.com’s *The Tech Chronicles* back in 2007 stated that she had “confirmed that Apple’s new iPhone will require a two-year cell phone plan and will not be sold without it.”<sup>3</sup> The partnership between Cingular/AT&T and Apple parallels some of the arguments for net neutrality that Tim Wu brings up in his article, “Why You Should Care About Net Neutrality.” What Apple is doing here clearly goes against the concept of neutrality. It is also inherently anti-democratic, reducing the choices people have for cell phone carriers by tying a shiny new gadget with a specific carrier. In fact, because many people wanted the iPhone, they switched their cell phone carrier over to Cingular/AT&T. Wu calls the Internet “meritocratic,” yet states, “When who you know matters more than anything, the market is no longer meritocratic and consequently becomes less efficient. At the extreme, a market where centralized actors pick favorites isn’t a market at all, but a planned economy.”<sup>4</sup> This is what Apple did with its exclusive partnership with Cingular/AT&T. A similar theory can be put to use when discussing the fact that certain iPhone applications are “featured” in the Application Store. I will come back to this point later, but unlocking the iPhone can be read as a subversive act against “The Powers That Be” – Apple and Cingular/AT&T, using the technology created by these organizations to give people more choices outside of those offered.

The second conventional way of hacking the iPhone is to “jailbreak” the device. An *Electronic Frontier Foundation* article explains “Apple’s iPhone, has been designed with

1. Douglas Thomas, *Hacker Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). 49

2. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Random House, 1975). 35

3. Ellen Lee, “Apple iPhone Requires Two-Year Cingular Plan and Cisco’s iPhone,” [http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/techchron/detail?blogid=19&entry\\_id=12482](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/techchron/detail?blogid=19&entry_id=12482) (last modified January 9, 2007).

4. Tim Wu, “Why You Should Care About Network Neutrality,” <http://www.slate.com/id/2140850/> (last modified May 1, 2006).

restrictions that prevent owners from running applications obtained from sources other than Apple's own iTunes App Store. "Jailbreaking" is the term used for removing these restrictions, thereby liberating your phone from Apple's software jail. Estimates put the number of iPhone owners who have jailbroken their phones in the hundreds of thousands."<sup>5</sup>

Here, again, we see Apple's control over the experience of iPhone users. However, even in the use of terms, we see a blatant subversion of power. The use of the words "jail" and "lock" connotes the presence of a state, an institution, or some other embodiment of power. We can apply Foucault's concept of the Panopticon in this situation. The central tower of the Panopticon (representing Apple) maintains control over the inmates (users) by "[inducing] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."<sup>6</sup> I speak of visibility in this case, not so much as the biological definition of "seeing," but rather the "oversight" and hence, control, that Apple has of the process of iPhone application building and distribution—Apple can "see" and hence, control, through funneling all legitimate applications linearly through the iTunes App Store, the experience of iPhone users.

Foucault ties in Truth with the idea of power, which plays into the concept of co-optation. To draw a parallel, hackers are like bloggers, who "hack" the Truth—or hack our epistemological consciousness. Traditionally, the Truth is only doled out by validating institutions like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, reputable and powerful institutions in the world of information dissemination. The establishment of Truth lies with those in power. As Todd Gitlin would say, "The routines of journalism... select certain versions of reality over others."<sup>7</sup> In other words, *The New York Times* can very easily create a framework that maintains the dominant hegemonic ideology, and before the age of blogging, the average American citizen would know no better and believe the framework to be Truth. Bloggers puncture this framework changing the way information is disseminated, oftentimes framing stories in such a way that may not reflect the dominant ideology.

We can equate the tensions between the mainstream news outlets and bloggers with the tensions between powerful digital media companies like Apple and Microsoft and tinkerers. Similar to the acceptance of Truth from *The New York Times*, people tend to buy pre-designed OS systems from Microsoft/Apple, and rarely question how to use it, or if it can be changed. Like Adorno & Horkheimer's fear of us becoming automatons, through manufactured consent we are feeding an insidious power which holds sway over how we get information, how we experience digital media and the Internet—and that gives those in power economic advantages.

### Applications, Applications, Everywhere

The iPhone premiered in American consciousness in early 2007, and was released in the spring of 2007. Speculation and discussion about the workings of the iPhone and the possibility of third party applications followed closely on the heels of the announcement of the iPhone. An early article about the iPhone on *Roughlydrafted.com* reports, "Apple executives have made comments that have been construed by some analysts to mean that no third party software will ever appear. At the same time however, Apple reps at Macworld were actively soliciting iPhone ideas and directing interested parties to its developer relations group."<sup>8</sup>

This excerpt implies that Apple initially did not anticipate allowing third parties to build applications. Furthermore, in the beginning, Apple seemed to want to control and keep development ideas proprietary by directing people to an Apple-controlled group, probably with the purpose of taking people's ideas and developing applications in-house. This was, however, not to be the case, as I will discuss later in examining the history of the open source community's involvement with iPhone applications.

Today, third party application developers can build applications for the iPhone through Apple's Software Development Kit (SDK) distributed via the Apple Application Store. Hence, the iPhone enables a potentially democratizing process – the building of applications by

people not employed by Apple or other big software companies. There are strong parallels between citizen journalism/blogging and iPhone tinkerers/application builders. In *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, Matthew Hindman gives examples of many people who "have concluded that the Internet's challenge to traditional media is real... Most talk about Internet-fueled democratization has been quite specific about the political changes that the internet ostensibly promotes. In these accounts, the Internet is redistributing political influence; it is broadening the public sphere, increasing political participation, involving citizens in political activities that were previously closed to them, and challenging the monopoly of traditional elites... that the technology will amplify the political voice of ordinary citizens."<sup>9</sup>

In the case of iPhones, the potential democratizing effects of the Internet are relevant when thinking about iPhone applications, which are generally written by individuals and companies outside the control of Apple.

The fact that most of the applications are built by non-affiliates of Apple does not prevent Apple from boasting about its "development community, saying that it has received 800,000 SDK download requests and has 50,000 companies and individuals working on developing Apps. Apple defended its track record of approvals, which has received a lot of attention of late, saying that it approved 96 percent of submitted Apps, rejecting a mere 4 percent."<sup>10</sup> This passage is particularly interesting in its appropriation and co-optation of the "development community," which consists mostly of people who do not work for Apple. This appropriation of subcultures is nothing new to Apple. Third parties and hackers have been developing their own applications and running open source software on the device since the iPhone came into consumer hands in June 2007.<sup>11</sup> By fall of the same year, the practice became so widespread and visible that there was talk of documenting Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and "[teaching] developers how to write application for the iPhone."<sup>12</sup> Clearly, hacking of the iPhone and creation of "illicit," third-party applications installed on jailbroken iPhones occurred long before Apple announced in October 2007 the expected release date of its iPhone SDK, which it anticipated



5. Fred Von Lohmann, "Apple Says iPhone Jailbreaking is Illegal," <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2009/02/apple-says-jailbreaking-illegal> (last modified February 12, 2009).  
 6. Michel Foucault, *ibid.* 201  
 7. Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2003). 4  
 8. Roughlydrafted.com, "Inside the iPhone: Third Party Software," <http://www.roughlydrafted.com/RD/RDM.Tech.Q1.07/D79522A8-B27A-486C-84AC-17D286B4D23C.html> (last modified January 14, 2007).

9. Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2009). 6  
 10. Jason Mick, "Apple Announces iPhone OS v3.0," <http://www.dailytech.com/Apple+Announces+iPhone+OS+v3.0/article14599.htm> (last modified March 17, 2009).  
 11. Jonathan Zdziarski, "The iPhone SDK: APIs Apple Didn't Want You to Know About," <http://www.onlamp.com/pub/a/onlamp/2008/03/25/the-apple-sdk-apis-apple-didnt-want-you-to-know-about.html> (last modified March 25, 2008).

releasing in February 2008.<sup>13</sup> According to Zdziarski, the SDK allows people to easily design and build their own application, all using a kit designed by Apple in the first place. It seems as though Apple threw up its hands and said, “Well, if you can’t beat ‘em, make something to re-appropriate the previously illicit tinkering, thereby positioning it within the dominant hegemonic framework!” Zdziarski is less kind when he writes:

Jump ahead to March 2008. Apple finally realized what a huge financial opportunity they were missing out on when they snubbed third party developers, and decided to release their own version of what the community already had been using for nearly a year, a software development kit (the Apple SDK) and application distribution chain (the iTunes AppStore). Ironically, due to this delay, Apple was surprisingly the one lagging behind the open community, and rather than the open source community duplicating commercial efforts, Apple embarrassingly became the one trying to duplicate the open source community today.<sup>14</sup>

Apple officially released the iPhone SDK in March of 2008,<sup>15</sup> almost a year after the iPhone came out, and after the open source community had basically written the procedure for the SDK that Apple adopted and appropriated. By creating the SDK and legitimizing the process of third party application development, Apple was able to take a previously subversive act and reposition it into its hegemonic framework in order to maintain dominance over those who seek to work outside the realm of Apple’s power. Insidiously, Apple also placed certain limitations in its SDK so that “developers have found that they don’t have access to the same low-level functions of the iPhone, such as the ability to run applications in the background, build certain types of objects, or use low-level frameworks such as CoreSurface, Celestial, or LayerKit – all of which provide direct access to graphics and sound components. These, along with many other features, are found in

Apple’s own applications, but nowhere to be found in the SDK.”<sup>16</sup>

By placing limitations on their SDKs, Apple, seeming to relinquish the power to be the sole developer of applications, clearly made sure that it still held the power to make better applications. In a Benjaminian sense, Apple still retains the “aura” of application producing mechanisms. Without actually revealing the modes of production in making applications, like allowing access to the low-level frameworks in its SDK, developers of iPhone applications cannot truly be free of Apple’s “aura,” or the magic of making an application, and the process is not truly disclosed and hence, not democratized. The good news is the open source and hacker community is aware of such limitations and, through articles like Zdziarski’s, speaks out against the perpetration of Apple’s control.

Dick Hebdige speaks of subcultures that “[violate] the authorized codes through which the social world is organized and experienced” and “have considerable power to provoke and disturb.”<sup>17</sup> iPhone hackers and tinkerers indeed violate the authority that Apple has over the iPhone and its applications, creating their own experience outside that which Apple condones. Hebdige goes on to say, “As the subculture begins to strike its own eminently marketable pose, as its vocabulary (both visual and verbal) becomes more and more familiar, so the referential context to which it can be most conveniently assigned is made increasingly apparent. Eventually, the mods, the punks, the glitter rockers can be incorporated, brought back into line, located on the preferred ‘map of problematic social reality’.”<sup>18</sup>

In the case of the iPhone tinkerers, Apple assessed the deviancy of this hacker subculture, and decided to normalize it by incorporating tinkering into their company plan, garnering great economic and social advantages. Before the advent of Apple’s SDK, creating applications was rooted in open source philosophy, and was a particularly democratizing, independent, unregulated process through

12. *ibid.*

13. Paul Miller, “Apple planning iPhone SDK for February!”, <http://www.engadget.com/2007/10/17/apple-planning-iphone-sdk-for-february/> (last modified October 17, 2007).

14. Jonathan Zdziarski, *ibid.*

15. Greasyguide, “Apple Unleashes the iPhone/iPod Touch SDK,” <http://greasyguide.com/2008/03/06/apple-unleashes-the-iphoneipod-touch-sdk/> (last modified March 6, 2008).

16. Jonathan Zdziarski, *ibid.*

17. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Routledge, 1979). 91

18. *ibid.*, 93-94

which tinkerers could experiment creatively while defying Apple’s dominance and celebrate being anti-establishment. Now, with the distribution of the SDK, the entire process from development to distribution is completely controlled by Apple. The application must also be vetted and approved by Apple before it is allowed to appear in the Application Store. The Application Store, in turn, is the only legitimate way to obtain iPhone applications. To obtain applications outside the Application Store, one must jailbreak the iPhone, which Apple now claims “constitutes copyright infringement and a DMCA violation.”<sup>19</sup> This is another example of scaring potential deviants into bending to the will of Apple. However, as the article states, it makes no sense at all, because jailbreaking your iPhone would be akin to popping the hood of your car to tinker with it or annotating a book you own. And I doubt anyone has gotten arrested for the latter situations.

## Developing / Distributing Apps

As mentioned earlier, the creation and distribution of applications by a third party programmer is theoretically democratizing, seemingly taking control of the process out of the hands of Apple. However, Apple upends the potential democratization of a user’s experience of the iPhone by asserting control over all points of the process, from production to distribution, in addition to re-appropriating third party developers who are not affiliated with Apple as part of their “development community.”<sup>20</sup> We cannot deny, even with the measure of control Apple retains, that a third party has a certain modicum of freedom in the creation of applications. There is a caveat though. Theodor Adorno expresses this in his essay, “Culture Industry Reconsidered:” “What parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness; everywhere the changes mask a skeleton which has changed just as little as the profit motive itself since the time it first gained its predominance over culture.”<sup>21</sup>

The creative process of making an application for the iPhone may seem, at first glance, the creation of something

new, with the potential for application builders (who, like bloggers, do not belong to or work for a powerful institution) to get their work distributed. Lev Manovich mentions the concept of the “long-tail.” Applied to the case of applications, he states that, though not all applications will be downloaded one million times, all applications will have at least a few patrons.<sup>22</sup> This idea can be construed as the glimmer of hope for the democratization of building applications. However, the profit motive itself is soldered to the creation and distribution of applications, as are unseen forces that tilt the economic advantage to those institutions in power, maintaining a dominant hegemony. Hindman thus refutes the idea of a democratizing Internet:

Aside from the digital divide, scholars have suggested other reasons that the Internet may have little impact on politics... Some have proposed that the movement of traditional actors and political interests online means that cyberpolitics will mirror traditional patterns... Others have worried that market concentration within Internet-related technology sectors... would compromise the medium’s openness. The search engine marketplace has been a particular locus of concern; as Lucas Introna and Helen Nissenbaum explain, search engines “provide essential access to the Web both to those with something to say and offer as well as those wishing to hear and find.”<sup>23</sup>

While Hindman does not directly speak about software distribution online, the trends he sets forth are applicable to the iPhone application distribution process. One such trend is reflected in Hindman’s mention of market concentration. Apple clearly benefits economically from having third party developers build iPhone applications and tightly controls the entire process of application making, from creation to distribution. If one wanted to develop an iPhone application, one must enroll in the iPhone Developer Program through Apple, which charges users anywhere from \$99 to \$299, depending on the type of program the developer desires. Apple’s website (Apple.com) states, “The iPhone Developer Program

19. Fred Von Lohmann, *ibid.*

20. Jason Mick, *ibid.*

21. Theodor W. Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” *New German Critique* 6 (1975), 12-19. (14)

22. Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (released under CC license, 2008).

23. Matthew Hindman, *ibid.*, 9

offers a complete and integrated process for developing, debugging, and distributing iPhone or iPod touch applications. Select the iPhone Developer Program that best fits your type of development and preferred method of distribution."<sup>24</sup>

Apple does two things that seem to benefit the developer, but actually end up benefitting Apple. First, it offers ease of use by stressing a "complete and integrated process." As a developer, I would be sucked into Apple's shiny world of easily distributing my application, much like the masses that Adorno and Horkheimer discuss in their essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." "It is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest."<sup>25</sup>

In Apple's case, the SDK that Apple offers seems to cater to my needs, and may very well compel me to buy the SDK, which, in the end, benefits Apple, both from the front-end profit of my purchase of the SDK, and through the development of my application, which will be sold in Apple's Application Store, where Apple will get a cut of the profits.

Second, Apple highlights the seemingly customizability of the SDK. In this way, Apple's SDK "[perpetuates] the individual as a supposedly independent unit in a small hygienic dwelling make him all the more subservient to his adversary—the absolute power of capitalism."<sup>26</sup> The culture of consumption has been extensively explored in books such as Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool* and Jean Twenge's *Generation Me*. In short, we now live in a culture where we are drawn to the idea of customizability and individualization, which compels us to consume more products put out by those in economic power in order to

differentiate ourselves from our neighbors. The crazy thing is, we are content to live in this sort of culture. "The Powers That Be" have manufactured our consent to be advertised to, and to give massive amounts of money to those who are already economically powerful. Apple uses this culture to its advantage to attract people to its SDK and its iPhone Developer Program.

Once I, the prospective iPhone application developer, buy the program and create an application within the framework Apple set, I submit my application to Apple to be approved. Apple has final say as to whether or not my application can be seen by the general iPhone-consuming populace. Although Apple claims it has a 96% approval rate for application submissions,<sup>27</sup> one cannot help but wonder about the 4% that did not get approved. Once my application has been approved and is available in the iTunes App Store, I cannot be sure if it will gain the popularity I need in order to recuperate my investment through customer purchases. The iTunes App Store features certain applications, pushing it into a more visible position for customers. With very little clout in the Apple corporation, the chance of my application being featured, and hence producing a healthy return on investment, is slim to none.

Nissenbaum and Introna's discussion about the "dual possibilities of media: to be democratizing or to be colonized by specialized interests at the expense of the public good"<sup>28</sup> is easily applied to the featuring of applications in Apple's Application Store — Nissenbaum and Introna look at how search engines elevate the visibility of certain sites, while other sites get buried under the monstrosity of information on the Internet, and their findings tend to lean toward the latter possibility. Some companies hire people who try to decode a search engine's ranking algorithm, by hiring people to design a website in order to optimize its ranking on search engines. There is something inherently undemocratic about this process, since only those companies with money can afford to spend money on designing such a site with ranking algorithm in mind. The article then goes on to talk about the touchy business of buying top

24. Aayush Arya, "Apple Touts iPhone and App Store Stats," [http://www.macworld.com/article/139435/2009/03/iphone\\_stats.html](http://www.macworld.com/article/139435/2009/03/iphone_stats.html) (last modified March 17, 2009).

25. Theodor W. Adorno and Max M. Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). 121

26. *ibid.*, 120

27. Aayush Arya, *ibid.*

28. Helen Nissenbaum and Lucas Introna, "Shaping the Web: Why the Politics of Search Engines Matter," *The Information Society* 16, no. 3 (2000), 1-17. (170)

29. *ibid.*, 174

slots on search engines: "Beyond the challenge of second-guessing ranking algorithms, there may yet be another, more certain, method of getting results. Some producers of Web sites pursue other ways of elevating their ranking outside of the technical fray: They try to buy them. This subject is an especially sensitive one, and representatives of several major search engines indignantly deny that they sell search positions."<sup>29</sup>

However, Nissenbaum and Introna go on to talk about two search engines that have publicized allowing advertisers to buy positions in top slots, while also contemplating the implications of the mechanisms behind search engines:

We may wonder how all this affects the nature of Web users' experiences. Based on what we have learned so far about the way search engines work, we would predict that information seekers on the Web, whose experiences are mediated through search engines, are most likely to find popular, large, sites whose designers have enough technical savvy to succeed in the ranking game, and especially those sites whose proprietors are able to pay for various means of improving their site's positioning. Seekers are less likely to find less popular, smaller, sites, including those that are not supported by knowledgeable professionals. When a search does yield these sites, they are likely to have lower prominence in rankings.<sup>30</sup>

We can apply this line of thinking to looking at which applications get featured in the Application Store, which is certainly not a democratic process. Although an article in October 2008 by MG Siegler on *VentureBeat.com* states, "It's all about creating a game (or application) that will showcase the technology the iPhone possesses in a fun way, the company says,"<sup>31</sup> one of the comments by Matt Brian on the site states, "Although third-party advertising isn't allowed, THQ, [an iPhone application developer] still has the money to influence Apple. Independent publishers might not get the same exposure as they don't have the finances, something about this makes me think there are marketing dollars at work here."<sup>32</sup> There is still skepticism

that the featuring of applications is solely merit-based, and based on what we know about how search engines work, we can assume a correlation between application developers with clout and influence, and applications featured in the App Store.

So let's get back to me — the poor, uninfluential iPhone developer, and my puny, yet brilliant application. In the event that my application is purchased by an iPhone user, Apple takes 29.7% of the price of the purchase. As a matter of fact, if the user decides to return my \$0.99 application, I "would not only have to refund the \$1.00 to the user, but still pay Apple its original \$0.297 cut," as Dianne Morrison points out.<sup>33</sup> In the end, it is I, the developer, who takes a bigger risk in selling my application, since I, and not Apple, must take financial responsibility for the application should the customer be dissatisfied. Clearly, Apple's iPhone enables the potential profit I can make from applications as a developer (without the iPhone, iPhone applications would not exist at all), yet through the Apple-controlled App Store, Apple still makes a hefty profit, taking a cut from less powerful and financially-fortunate souls, pushing the financial risk completely upon the developer. Through the application and money process, we can see that Apple still maintains dominance over applications and over iPhone consumers and users.

No wonder hackers want to jailbreak the iPhone and obtain applications outside the factory-like process that is completely within Apple's control. "Jailbreaking" is a very apt term to describe the subversion hackers perform in order to circumvent the power Apple has over the iPhone, which, in order to function, is in a "jail" of Apple's construction. While the rest of the world may be oblivious, or accepting of the power Apple has over them, hackers are not content to be fed candy that rots their teeth.

### iPhone Tinkers Unite

Hackers and tinkers of the iPhone have formed what Chris Kely would call "a recursive public... a public that is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal,

30. *ibid.*

31. MG Siegler, "How to Really Sell an iPhone App: Get Apple to Promote it in its Retail Stores," <http://venturebeat.com/2008/10/02/how-to-really-sell-an-iphone-app-get-apple-to-promote-it-in-its-retail-stores/> (last modified October 2, 2008).

32. *ibid.*

33. Diane See Morrison, "Developers Cry Foul Over Apple's App Store Refund Policy," <http://moconews.net/article/419-developers-cry-foul-over-apples-app-store-refund-policy/>

34. Chris Kely, *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). 3

practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives.”<sup>34</sup>

There are well-organized websites like [iphonehacks.com](http://iphonehacks.com) (a blog) and [hackthatphone.com](http://hackthatphone.com) (a how-to guide) that help other like-minded folks, well, hack their iPhone. It is a culture of subverting “The Powers That Be” – Apple Inc. Much like the tinkerers of Free Software and Open Source, the iPhone hacking community shares information online about the best ways to jailbreak or unlock one’s iPhone, as well as providing actual software and programs to facilitate the process.

The idea of the Panopticon – the internalization of a higher power watching our every move, and hence keeping social deviancy in check – does not fully manifest in the digital realm. Hence, there is a blatancy in hacking the iPhone online. The separation of the body and identity on the Internet cultivates a sense of anonymity in one’s actions online that seems to be free of surveillance. Hackers go by their handles, as can be seen in Douglas Thomas’s *Hacker Culture*. Even on [hackthatphone.com](http://hackthatphone.com), we only know the webmaster’s name is Mark, but we know almost nothing more about him (if, indeed, Mark is a “him”). In the discussion forums for the same website, participants use handles rather than their real name, and on [iphonehacks.com](http://iphonehacks.com), one would be hard-pressed to find the real and full name of the article contributors. As a matter of fact, the articles on [iphonehacks.com](http://iphonehacks.com) refer to individual hackers by their handles only.

[Hackthatphone.com](http://hackthatphone.com) includes a reassurance that jailbreaking one’s phone is “a risk-free process that will not void your warranty,” as Apple would like us to believe.<sup>35</sup> The site also mentions that one can easily reset the iPhone settings to erase all signs that the device had ever been hacked. There is a beautiful irony here. The work of tinkerers and hackers is re-appropriated into Apple’s *Matrix* of power and control; yet hackers and tinkerers are seducing those who internalize Apple’s position of power and authority, who may be reluctant to jailbreak or unlock their

iPhones. Ultimately, the Apple Panopticon still flourishes.

Many iPhone users, myself included, have been duped into thinking the way our iPhone functions now, under Apple’s strict gaze, is the natural, normal, and only way our little black electronic box can function. Similarly, many computer users think this way about operating systems, simply because we are not conditioned to question the “natural” state of our digital media. As people who possess knowledge of code – hackers and tinkerers – pass from the realm of the unseen into the seen, the institutions in power struggle to re-appropriate and re-incorporate these counter-hegemonic forces. This paper’s intent was to examine the tension between these subversive forces and The Powers That Be, predominantly in the digital realm, but these tensions are easily translatable to society as a whole.

This paper certainly did not cover all aspects of power and the iPhone. One area of research I did not pursue is the issue of copyright and ownership of the iPhone applications. Nor did I explore the implications of applications that provide VOIP (voice-over IP) service. I also only touched very briefly on the question of whether or not Apple will take legal action should one jailbreak or unlock one’s iPhone, including the potentially frightening, but poorly defined “kill-switch” mechanism which could do something to unauthorized applications. According to Zdziarski, as quoted by Antone Gonsalves, “We do not know just how active this mechanism is. It might vaporize applications. It might simply prevent them from using the GPS [global positioning system]. For all we know, it could trigger world war three, or it could cause some computer somewhere to spit out recipes for buttermilk pancakes.”<sup>36</sup> The hacker community has since developed ways to disable the kill-switch function.

So why does this matter? Why should we not let Apple have all the control and be lulled into contentment with the metaphorical candy it feeds us? In short, it is not democratic. We live in an ideological framework that places democracy in the “good” category. Let us disregard, for purposes of my arguments, Jacques Derrida’s question about whether we can speak democratically about democracy. Let us work with the mentality that democracy in

35. [Hackthatphone.com](http://hackthatphone.com). “read\_me.” [http://www.hackthatphone.com/20/read\\_me\\_first.html](http://www.hackthatphone.com/20/read_me_first.html) (accessed May 11, 2009).

36. Antone Gonsalves, “No Answers From Apple On iPhone ‘Kill Switch,’” [http://www.informationweek.com/news/personal\\_tech/iphone/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=210000467](http://www.informationweek.com/news/personal_tech/iphone/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=210000467) (last modified August 8, 2008).

37. Paul Starr, *Freedom’s Power: The True Force of Liberalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2007). 17

38. *ibid*, 20

our society equals good. According to Paul Starr, “modern democratic liberalism seeks to promote the creation as well as the control of power,”<sup>37</sup> and “liberty is a species of power – the power to make choices about what is rightfully yours, free of removable hindrances.”<sup>38</sup> Apple undermines both of these statements by restricting creativity through their SDK and iPhone application process, clamping down on jail-breaking and unlocking iPhones, thereby preventing people from choosing their carrier or having a full spectrum of application choices, and essentially claiming a monopoly over all things affiliated with the iPhone. Apple, as one of The Powers That Be, as a corporation, as an institution, as a social icon, the last of which misleadingly promotes customer participation and choice, goes against democratization, and that, gentle reader, is why this matters.

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