

Movement Societies and Digital Protest: Fan Activism and Other Nonpolitical Protest Online*

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Sociologists of culture studying “fan activism” have noted an apparent increase in its volume, which they attribute to the growing use of the Internet to register fan claims. However, scholars have yet to measure the extent of contemporary fan activism, account for why fan discontent has been expressed through protest, or precisely specify the role of the Internet in this expansion. We argue that these questions can be addressed by drawing on a growing body of work by social movement scholars on “movement societies,” and more particularly on a nascent thread of this approach we develop that theorizes the appropriation of protest practices for causes outside the purview of traditional social movements. Theorizing that the Internet, as a new media, is positioned to accelerate the diffusion of protest practices, we develop and test hypotheses about the use of movement practices for fan activism and other nonpolitical claims online using data on claims made in quasi-random samples of online petitions, boycotts, and e-mailing or letter-writing campaigns. Results are supportive of our hypotheses, showing that diverse claims are being pursued online, including culturally-oriented and consumer-based claims that look very different from traditional social movement claims. Findings have implications for students of social movements, sociologists of culture, and Internet studies.

In 2008, a blog posted a black-and-white photo of protesting Star Trek fans from the 1960s. While the source of the photo is unclear, the photo shows a crowd of mostly younger men holding picket signs supporting Star Trek at a rally in front of NBC studios. Jenkins (1992) wrote about these ardent fans, who transformed their enthusiasm for Star Trek into a campaign to convince NBC to save “their” show, and their online brethren from a few decades later, arguing that the activism of fans should lead scholars to even more aggressively question the passivity of audiences (Radway 1984; see Bielby and Bielby 2004 for a summary of this literature) and the passivity of consumers (Earl and Schussman 2007; Jenkins 1992, 2006).

Aside from the messages on the signs, the photo is virtually indistinguishable from photos of other protest rallies from the 1960s. But, while you can find a large number of such photos for the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the anti-war movement, and so on, you won’t find that many photos or historic occasions of fan activism, aside from these early Star Trek fans and a few instances of early soap opera fan activism (Scardaville 2005). In fact, even though the protest sector was

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in full bloom in the 1960s and early 1970s in the United States, fan activism was infrequent and unnoticed by social movement scholars.¹

Fast-forward four decades and visit petitiononline.com. The website is a free hosting service for online petitions where anyone interested in creating a petition can do so for free within minutes. Earl and Schussman (2007) examined the petitions on this site, finding that the entertainment section dwarfed the size of other sections on more conventional political topics. Petitions ranged from calls similar to the Star Trek fans' claims, but with different shows, to calls to "port" favored video games onto other game systems.

We take the juxtaposition of those early Star Trek fans and petitiononline.com's content, fixed in different historical and technological moments, as posing important questions for students of social movements and sociologists of culture: How have fan activism and other nonpolitically oriented versions of activism grown over time, particularly as Internet usage has expanded? What does online fan activism look like today? And, more important, why would fan discontent be expressed through practices associated with political protest?

We argue that sociologists of culture (and media scholars more generally), students of social movements, and Internet studies scholars can gain important insights from answering these questions. Work from media studies and the sociology of culture can describe the history of fan activism and contribute to a general descriptive understanding of how the Internet has affected the rate of fan activism. But, scholars from media studies and culture: (1) cannot account for why fan concern has taken the form of activism, versus other forms of action; and (2) have yet to measure the specific extent of fan activism, particularly compared to other kinds of activism, in any systematic way. To address the first issue, which is theoretical, we import and develop theoretical insights from social movement society theory. And to address the second issue, we use unique population-level data to measure the level of fan activism and compare its size to political activism.

On the other side of this scholastic exchange, social movement scholars have: (1) ignored fan activism and the potential that studying it (particularly in contrast to more traditional activism) can hold for unlocking theoretical advances in social movement studies; and (2) ignored the importance of consumer-producer conflicts in a world where corporations are increasingly powerful influences on daily life. Media and cultural research offer a number of corrections.

Finally, students of information technology and communication—who are fundamentally interested in the dynamics of digital life—have much to offer and to learn about how the Internet is implicated in the above issues.

FAN ACTIVISM: FROM STAR TREK TO TODAY

Influential scholarship in media studies and social movements has examined the politicization of cultural products. For instance, in film and media studies, Montgomery (1989) examined how activists politicized network television, seeking to forward their political positions. In social movement studies, Gamson (1998) and Rupp and Taylor (2003) have argued that apparently nonpolitical cultural performances such as talk shows and drag performances, respectively, are actually deeply political.

¹As we discuss below in more detail, there was, of course, activism about politically-inflected cultural issues. However, fan activism is not about the mix between political concerns and culture but rather action that looks like political activism but is used toward nonpolitical ends.

While important contributions, these researchers speak of a different question than what we have raised—these scholars are arguing that apparently nonpolitical issues actually are political, while this article investigates how people (usually fans) forward their own interests in and positions on particular cultural products outside of any standard sense of political affairs.

Jenkins (1992, 2006) has been the leading scholar investigating these purely cultural protests, which he labels “fan activism.” In line with the shift from thinking of audiences as passive to active, Jenkins has examined a related shift among consumers—from consumers being seen as relatively passive cultural purchasers to active consumers, sometimes even blurring the line between consumer and producer through the production of fan media (e.g., fanzines, fan-written episodes or plays). Jenkins (1992) has described fan activism as part of this shift toward active consumers, and documented the existence of fan activism from *Star Trek* forward. Jenkins suggests that fan activism has been historically more rare than other types of fan engagement, such as fan-written literature, but he argues that fan activism in broad terms has gone from negligible levels to much higher levels in recent years (Jenkins 2006).

As a humanist interested in the relationships between consumers and producers and the cultural meaning of consumption, Jenkins has not quantified this shift from less to more, and while he has argued that the substantial increase in fan activism is concomitant with fan action of all types moving online, he has not specified particular causal links between Internet usage and a rise in fan activism. Other scholars who have studied fan activism (e.g., Scardaville 2005) have similarly failed to quantify the shift from less to more (although they, too, acknowledge that empirical trend) and have not provided a causal explanation for the relationship between Internet usage and the rise in fan activism, despite also noting an apparent relationship.

To summarize, based on this work, we know: (1) consumers (and the scholars who study them) have made an activist turn; (2) in rough empirical terms, the amount of fan activism has risen dramatically over time; and (3) much of the rise in fan activism has been casually, but not causally, tied to rising Internet usage. However, what scholars do not know includes: (1) in more precise empirical terms, how much fan activism there is now, and how it compares to more political protest in frequency; (2) in more precise causal terms, what could explain the apparent relationship between rising Internet usage and rising fan activity, which includes fan activism; and (3) why fans would appropriate classic protest forms and tactics as means for addressing their cultural concerns—a question that media scholars and sociologists of culture have yet to even consider. We attempt to address all of these knowledge gaps in this article, and we begin by turning to social movement scholarship to address the last question.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT SOCIETIES

Observing the seeming pervasiveness of protest in many Western democracies and the apparent institutionalization of protest in these same countries, many social movement scholars have begun discussing the rise of “movement societies” and have developed the “movement society perspective” to theorize this shift (see contributions in Meyer and Tarrow 1998a; Rucht and Neidhardt 2002; Soule and Earl 2005). We contend that nested within this emerging perspective are actually two different, although compatible, visions of what a movement society looks like. One of those

two strands of theorizing offers insight into why fans, out of a wide cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986) for engagement and consumer concern, would choose to adopt protest tactics to give voice to their discontent.

Perpetual Movement Mobilization

In addition to increases in protest (Rucht 1998), scholars have documented a number of ways in which protest has qualitatively changed, including a rise in the diversity of participants in protest events and the institutionalization of protest forms, both by protesters and the police (Croizat 1998; McCarthy and McPhail 1998). As protest forms were adopted by a growing range of actors and the frequency of protest increased, scholars argued that protest had moved out of the sole purview of social movements and become “mainstream.” In fact, Putnam went so far as to cast protest as something of a “standard operating procedure” (2000:165). It is important to note that even though scholars speak broadly of an increase in “protest,” movement society theory actually focuses on more institutionalized forms such as petitions (see Meyer and Tarrow 1998b:9), rather than more contentious actions such as sit-ins.

Labeling the resulting social structure a “movement society” (Meyer and Tarrow 1998b; Rucht and Neidhardt 2002), the most developed line of argumentation in this perspective has focused on a central claim: traditional protest schemas and practices have been carried beyond the more narrow confines of traditional protest participants and claims such that new types of people are engaging in protest and new political claims are being pursued.² Indeed, Rucht sums up this view when he argues that “protest has become a part of everyday politics” (1998:52).

In this theoretical strand, then, movement mobilization mushrooms in a society such that movements become continuous features of the political landscape and, within the broad confines of politics and civic engagement, movements come to serve as a primary vehicle for claims-making, and do so across a broad range of political issues (Meyer and Tarrow 1998b). For ease of reference, we refer to this view as the “perpetual movement mobilization” strand of the movement society perspective.

While perpetual movement mobilization is the dominant theoretical vision of movement societies, and most empirical research examines this strand (see Soule and Earl 2005 for a review), the theoretical influence of this strand stops at the borders of social movements. We believe that a nascent, second strand of movement society work, which examines what happens outside of standard social movements, can help to explain fan activism (and other nonpolitical uses of protest tactics for that matter).

Ubiquitous Movement Practices

We develop a second strand of theorizing, which we refer to as ubiquitous movement practices, which focuses on the ways in which movement practices—including tactical forms—and the scripts and schemas that underlie social movement practices diffuse beyond the boundaries of social movements, and even political life.³ When these

²To the extent that some claims are not entirely new, they are nonetheless being pursued with more vigor.

³For clarity, we will use “tactical forms” or “protest tactics” to refer to tactics as a class of actions (e.g., petitions, rallies, etc.), and use “tactical implementation” or “tactical deployment” to refer to a specific use of a tactical form (e.g., a specific petition).

schemas and practices diffuse far enough and are institutionalized, we argue that they can become disconnected from political causes and instead serve as more general heuristics for how to make public claims (e.g., see Bimber et al. 2005 for a discussion of collective action as public claims-making). In a nutshell, we are arguing that at the same time that fans were becoming more active, protest was becoming an increasingly common way to express grievances, leading fans, among others, to adopt protest tactics when they had concerns they wanted to express.

The diffusion of tactical forms *within* social movements is not new to social movement scholars, who were studying this long before a movement society approach developed. Indeed, an extensive body of literature on social movement practices, exemplified by work on organizing structures (e.g., Freeman 1975; McAdam 2001), mobilizing strategy (e.g., McAdam 1983), and tactical repertoires (e.g., Tilly et al. 1975), understands movement practices as independent scripts and schemas that can be utilized by a range of movements.⁴ Social movement practices are not considered unique to particular movements, even though particular practices may have more resonance within specific movements (e.g., nonhierarchical leadership structures in the women's movement; see Freeman 1975).

Instead, social movement scripts and schemas are borrowed and shared across movements. For example, in their study of spillover between the women's movement and the peace movement, Meyer and Whittier (1994) identified parallels between the two movements in their membership, tactical choices, and leadership that were distinct from any shared claims. In tracing the use of social movement tactics, scholars have identified the diffusion of particular forms over time and across movements. Tarrow (1994) refers to tactics as "modular" to highlight this characteristic, and Tilly's repertoire of contention (Tilly et al. 1975) is based on the bounded range of commonly understood tactics that activists use at a particular moment in history. From a new institutionalist point of view, these movement-based schemas and practices are part of the deep fabric of movement logics: "the assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules that comprise institutional logics determine what answers and solutions are available and appropriate" (Thornton and Ocasio 1999:806).

It is conceivable that the diffusion highlighted by the perpetual movement mobilization strand would be only one, early shift in a larger social diffusion pattern. The ubiquitous movement practices strand of the movement society approach questions why diffusion of protest schemas and practices would necessarily stop at the boundaries of political claims. We argue that these scripts and schemas won't be penned in so easily, and that they are increasingly applied to a range of grievances that may lie far outside the boundaries of traditional political discourse.

Specifically, we argue that protest tactics are likely to be among the first practices to diffuse beyond the boundaries of social movements (indeed, they already have) as protest comes to be seen as a more general method of communicating grievances. That is, tactical forms are being institutionalized both within and outside of the more narrow confines of social movements. As this happens, institutionalized social movement protest tactics become standard means to make claims—both those of a traditional political nature and those with less traditional content, such as a claim for greater musical diversity among local radio stations—no matter the fit between the claims and traditional social movement concerns. We argue that this diffusion

⁴We also use the term "practice" to locate our work in relation to new institutionalist research on scripts, schemas, and practices. Protest tactics are only one kind of social movement practice and we intentionally nest our discussion of specific tactical forms within that wider frame of reference to protest practices more generally.

has reached fans eager to “make a difference” and thus the ubiquitous movement practices strand of movement society theory can help to explain why we might see fan activism today, and in larger volumes than previously recorded.

Further, we argue that the ubiquitous movement practices strand of the movement society approach anticipates the *decoupling* of movement practices from movement claims. In essence, what had been a previously distinct world of protest, bounded within the field of social movements, has become so institutionalized that protest as a schema for action and protest tactics as a form of practice have become pervasive—indeed, ubiquitous—and increasingly unconfined by institutional boundaries. In the ubiquitous movement practices strand, the practices themselves exist independently as vehicles for claims outside the range of traditional social movement issues, including, for example, a call for the improved quality of a video game. At the more macro level, then, movement societies from this perspective are societies in which movement practices, including social movement tactics, are used to raise and address claims—fan claims, for example—that are removed from standard political arenas.⁵

Beyond the elaborations to movement society theorizing, there are additional reasons that social movement scholars should be interested in ubiquitous movement practices trends and fan activism. First and foremost, for social movement scholars who bridle at the term “fan activism” because they believe the use of protest tactics for “frivolous” ends devalues protest and activism, comparing fan activism (or other nonpolitical uses of protest tactics) to clearly political activism allows access to a question that social movement scholars have never been able to gain explicit purchase over: To what extent does it matter to organizing or participation processes that action is politically oriented? Indeed, never before have social movements scholars enjoyed the benefit of tactically comparable campaigns, some organized for political change and some organized for cultural change, with which to make this comparison. If social movement scholars continue to ignore fan activism, they will also lose an opportunity to study a premise at the heart of their field.

Second, despite moves to define contentious action with reference to the involvement of the state as a target or claimant (McAdam et al. 2001), recent research has shown that the state is often not the target of protest, whether protest is occurring offline (Van Dyke et al. 2004) or online (Earl and Kimport 2008). At the same time, globalization has made many increasingly aware of the role of corporations in daily life. Thus, while fan activism and other nonpolitical uses of protest forms might seem frivolous to some, in many ways its investigation begins to broach the dynamics of private power contests where consumers are no longer comfortable playing the role of passive purchasers and seek to actively affect the decision making of cultural producers.

INTERNET USAGE AND DIFFUSION OF PRACTICES

Although scholars have debated the impact of the Internet on activism (see Earl et al. 2009 for a review), there is ample evidence that Internet usage plays an increasingly important role in activism. Yet, the role of the Internet in movement society

⁵The perpetual movement mobilization and ubiquitous movement practices strands offer distinct sets of claims, but are empirically quite compatible approaches: it is likely that societies with high levels of continuous social movement mobilization are also likely to be societies where social movement practices and schemas are so pervasive that they inform and structure claims-making in less political, and even nonpolitical, areas of social life. Further, it is quite likely that at least some factors that we argue accelerate ubiquitous movement practices trends also accelerate perpetual movement mobilization trends.

theorizing has received little theoretical and no empirical attention to date. And, as we noted above, scholars interested in fan activism have also argued that rising levels of fan activism are inextricably tied up in the rise of Internet usage (e.g., Jenkins 2006) but a precise causal relationship has not been specified. We argue that Internet usage can be a powerful accelerant to ubiquitous movement practices trends where institutionalized forms of protest (i.e., standard movement practices) that occur online (e.g., online petitioning) are concerned.

Old and New Media: Diffusing the "How to" of Protest

We argue for the Internet as an accelerant for several reasons. First, an extension of existing work on movement societies suggests that "new media" should be important, as older media have been, to movement society trends. Meyer and Tarrow argued that the growth of the now-older mass media stimulated movement society trends because the "how to" of protest tactics diffused widely and more easily through visual media. Further, they argued that "ordinary citizens are no longer simply passive consumers of the media" (1998b:13), but are instead learning how to influence media coverage.

Similarly, we argue, the Internet enables the "how to" of protest, and specific protest tactics, to be diffused even more widely than standard mass media does. A wide array of researchers have noted the dramatic increase in political and cultural contestation that is taking place online (Almeida and Lichbach 2003; Carty 2002; Eagleton-Pierce 2001; Earl 2006; Earl and Schussman 2003, 2004; Nip 2004; Schussman and Earl 2004; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2002; Vegh 2003), which suggests that there are ample examples online for "how to" engage in contentious politics. These examples should also have broad reach. In fact, one of the most robust findings across research on online protest is that the Internet allows movement messages (and messages about movements) to spread quickly, widely, and cheaply (Ayres 1999; Diani 2000; Eagleton-Pierce 2001; Fandy 1999; Hasian 2001; Jones and Pearson 2001; Leizerov 2000; Martinez-Torres 2001; Myers 1994; Peckham 1998; Stoecker 2002; Warkentin and Mingst 2000).

Some websites are explicitly designed as repositories of "how to" knowledge on protest. For example, netsquared.org and mobileactive.org are websites where individuals can go to learn how to use the Internet for civic engagement and protest, whether on a wired workstation or a mobile device. Web surfers can even learn "How to Organize a Protest or March," "How to Organize a Petition," and "How to Organize a Boycott" on e-How, among other "how tos" on the site (e-how.com 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

And some websites actually enable people to produce individual tactics online using online tools, rendering the how to of protest an almost completely built-in functionality of the website itself. For instance, petitiononline.com has an automated system that allows individuals to fill out an online form to create an online petition. As the form is completed, the petition is automatically created and it is hosted for free on the petitiononline.com servers. Petitiononline.com has software that manages signature collection and even helps to generate e-mails to publicize the petition, as well as allowing potential petition signers, petition creators, and the public at large to browse and search petitions. Put in Meyer and Tarrow's (1998b) terms, the "know how" that is needed to widely diffuse protest, thereby stimulating movement society trends, is now actually automated on some websites.

Ingenious uses of the Internet also allow individuals and groups to circumvent traditional, mass media outlets, and the gate-keeping functions they serve, and directly

provide information to interested publics (Benkler 2006; Bennett 2004; Jenkins 2006). That is, to the extent that activists had to learn how to engage the mass media in order to get their message out to broader publics (Meyer and Tarrow 1998b:14), the Internet allows people to directly connect with wider audiences while bypassing, or at least minimizing, the gate-keeping role of the mass media. This ability to make direct connections is a hallmark of Internet technologies (Jenkins 2006).

Low Cost in Organizing Online and Its Consequences

Another reason to believe that ubiquitous movement practices trends will be accelerated by Internet usage draws on research on online activism, civic engagement, and collective action, where some research finds important differences in protest dynamics when protest can be organized and participated in online (versus studying street protests that are in some ways facilitated by the Internet; see Earl 2007a for more on this distinction). In particular, a number of researchers have stressed the low costs of production and participation in institutionalized forms of protest conducted online (e.g., petitions; Bennett and Fielding 1999; Bimber et al. 2005; Earl and Schussman 2003, 2004; Flanagin et al. 2005).

When production costs decline, research has found that people organize around new issues (e.g., Earl and Schussman 2003). Given that the Internet grants broad access to the “know how” of protest, it is of note that the content on both “how to” sites and sites that automate participation in individual tactics is not tied to a finite list of claims. And there is no indication given to users that the use of these forms to press their claims—including nonpolitical claims—would be inappropriate. With early evidence of online petitioning over cultural products (Earl and Schussman 2007; Jenkins 2006), it is likely that some of these “new” issues will be less explicitly political, yielding, for example, the use of classic protest tactics to address issues such as whether a movie should be followed by a sequel.

Further, when organizing costs fall low enough, research has also found that new kinds of organizers enter the field and champion new concerns (and new ways of doing things; Earl 2007b; Schussman and Earl 2004). These new “organizers” are not necessarily socialized into social movement cultures, even if they understand the mechanics of social movement practices such as petitioning. We might expect that fans, who have a history of using online technologies to circumvent the traditional production cycle, build fan communities, and register their criticism (Bielby et al. 1999), would take advantage of other uses of the Internet, including its facility to organize protest, especially when there is little financial penalty for their exploration.

Earl and Schussman (2003) also showed that organizations are not as essential to some kinds of inexpensive online organizing, further reducing the entry costs for starting and maintaining a campaign around a new cause or issue. The ability of individuals and small groups to organize online around their causes, without either the aid or the oversight of an organization, further unfetters the range of claims around which activists might mobilize.

Tracing the Diffusion of Practices: Empirically Examining Ubiquitous Movement Practices Claims

It is quite possible that the ubiquitous movement practices strand, and the claims we outlined above, have remained underdeveloped until now because it is difficult to study these trends using standard social movement techniques. Scholars empirically

examining movement society arguments have heavily relied on data that are collected from events and activities that most scholars would already recognize as protest, social movements, or activism to test their claims. This effectively puts boundaries on how far social movements scholars can trace the diffusion of traditional social movement practices because the places scholars have been investigating are still rather tightly connected to social movement traditions.

Our empirical approach is different: we trace the usage of four institutionalized protest tactics online—online petitions, boycotts, letter-writing, and e-mailing campaigns (a 21st-century version of traditional letter-writing campaigns)—and examine the causes that they have been used to address. By starting with the practice (i.e., the tactical form), instead of a social movement, a specific campaign, or even a claim, we are able to examine the large array of nontraditional claims—and, to many scholars, seemingly nonpolitical claims—that these tactical forms have been appropriated to address. More important, by tracing the use of practices, we gain unique leverage: we can examine how these practices/tactics and the scripts and schemas that underlie them have diffused and become so deeply embedded in civil society that they have been appropriated to address issues that few social movements scholars would recognize as within the confines of traditional activism, such as fan activism. Indeed, were it not for the commonality of the tactic form, the link between traditional protest and these new tactical uses might be entirely hidden.

In our analyses, we examine three hypotheses. First, drawing on both our own extensions of ubiquitous movement practices theorizing and media scholars' work on fan activism, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals and groups will use institutionalized, online tactical forms (e.g., online petitioning) to address a broad range of claims, including not only standard political concerns but also nonpolitical concerns like fan activism.

Not only do we intend to test this hypothesis, but given that a major open empirical question has to do with the current level of fan activism compared to more political forms of activism, our analysis will also estimate the size of this new protest sector.

Second, if the causal arguments we are making about the rise of fan activism are correct, we should find other nonpolitical uses of protest tactics beyond fan activism. That is, just as there is no reason to believe that protest tactics would diffuse only to the boundaries of social movements, there is no reason to believe that protest tactics would diffuse beyond social movements but only into fan-related concerns. Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals and groups will use institutionalized, online tactical forms (e.g., online petitioning) to address nontraditional and seemingly nonpolitical claims beyond fan activism.

Third, building on the arguments we made above, we argue that the automation of institutionalized online tactical forms should matter to the breadth of tactical diffusion, particularly for the diffusion of tactics for nonpolitical claims-making (including fan activism):

Hypothesis 3: Sites that automate online protest and are independent of users' protest content are more likely to contain nontraditional claims.

The automation of online protest tactics on sites like petitiononline.com makes their reappropriation for nonstandard claims relatively effortless and, in turn, more common. And, because such automated sites are largely independent of the content they host, claims-makers are free to pursue any claim.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to understand the range of claims that the four institutionalized tactical forms we study (petitions, boycotts, letter-writing, and e-mailing campaigns) have been used to address outside of the political arena, population-level data on claims use in these tactics were required. Such a bird's eye view allows us to identify and measure the range of claims-making online that is using these institutionalized tactics, without restricting our study to the realm of politics.

This is an ambitious goal because collecting population data on the content of websites has up to now been a fairly intractable research dilemma. Researchers interested in populations and/or probabilistic samples of populations have faced two central difficulties: (1) the lack of a population list to study or from which to sample, and (2) lacking such a list, the inability to generate random possible locators for elements in the population, as random digital dialing did for phone surveys (see Earl 2006 for a discussion of why these dilemmas are so serious for online researchers). Instead, the technical architecture of the Internet requires that webpages are advertised by their owners (e.g., through e-mails), identified by following links from known sites, or retrieved from searches of website directories.

This project overcomes the problems that have plagued researchers by mimicking the ways in which users tend to find sites—that is, through search engines and links—and by harnessing the capacity of large search engines; this allows us to create best approximations of populations of *reachable* websites hosting or linking to petitions, boycotts, and letter-writing and e-mailing campaigns. We define reachable sites as sites that could be located by a user who was not given the page's web address, but instead had to use standard search tools to find a site. These populations can be randomly sampled when the populations are large, yielding high-quality, quasi-random samples of websites.

Further, because the tactical forms we examine (petitions, boycotts, and letter-writing and e-mail campaigns) tend to be hosted on websites—sometimes alone and sometimes in combination with other campaigns (Earl 2006)—we are also able to produce a quasi-random sample of these four online tactics by capturing the tactical implementations hosted and/or linked to from the websites in our quasi-random samples of websites. This allows us to discuss either websites or, by changing the unit of analysis, specific tactical implementations that were housed on or linked to those sites.

Understanding the Geography of Sites Deploying Tactics

Initial investigations of the use of these four tactical forms online, conducted prior to this study, indicated the existence of two types of sites: (1) large websites that host or directly link to many implementations of protest tactics and are often independent of particular causes or social movements, which we refer to as “warehouse sites” since they served as clearinghouses for such things as petitions (e.g., petitiononline.com); and (2) websites that lack this clearinghouse quality, either because of size or because they specialize in a particular cause or set of causes, which this article refers to as “nonwarehouse sites” for ease and clarity (e.g., amnestyusa.org).

Even though there were far fewer warehouse sites than nonwarehouse sites, warehouse sites tended to be up to orders of magnitude larger than most nonwarehouse sites (e.g., petitiononline.com housed tens of thousands of petitions). The entire data collection strategy took the differences between warehouse and nonwarehouse sites into account. Because there were relatively few warehouse sites (ultimately only 15 in this study), it was important to oversample warehouse sites: in fact, we actually study the population of warehouse sites (i.e., sample at a 100 percent rate) and sample from the much larger population of nonwarehouse sites.

Using a Google API to Identify Populations of Sites

Figure 1 provides an outline of the data collection process, discussed more fully in Earl (2006). We used an application programming interface (API) with Google to conduct multiple searches for each tactical form and save and concatenate results from those searches.⁶ The search terms were pretested for breadth and depth prior to this study.

Table 1 reports on the number of search strings and raw counts of webpages identified using this process. The Google searches for data presented in this article were run in March 2004. As cross-sectional data, we cannot trace the annual rates of diffusion of protest tactics online since the advent of the Internet to today; however, we can effectively harness these cross-sectional data to examine the extent to which these practices had diffused by March 2004, given that the advent of the Internet marks a clear starting point for any online diffusion processes and that prior research has already established the broad trend of negligible fan activism growing to larger, but empirically indeterminate, levels.

As Figure 1 illustrates, nonwarehouse populations were generated by concatenating the results from the number of searches shown in Table 1 for each kind of tactic (e.g., the petitions population was produced by concatenating the results from the 16 searches done in Google using petition search strings).

Because there were so few warehouse sites, analysis of the pretest results allowed us to identify most of the warehouse sites; the remaining warehouse sites were located by inspecting Google search results for sites that showed up more than 40 times across the queries for nonwarehouse sites. Warehouse sites, once identified, were removed and nonwarehouse queries rerun.

To summarize, we ultimately generated five reachable populations of websites: (1) a population of “nonwarehouse sites” that discussed petitions; (2) a population of “nonwarehouse sites” that discussed letter-writing campaigns; (3) a population of “nonwarehouse sites” that discussed e-mail campaigns; (4) a population of “nonwarehouse sites” that discussed boycotts; and (5) a population of “warehouse sites” that discussed any of the four featured kinds of tactics.

Sampling of Nonwarehouse Sites

In all, 15 warehouse sites were located. Because of the small N , warehouse sites were not sampled (i.e., all 15 were included in our study). In contrast, the resulting populations of nonwarehouse sites were so large that we randomly sampled from these

⁶The API was set to exclude non-English pages, pages hosted on non-U.S. domains, and domains located and tracked as warehouse sites (see below for details). See Earl (2006) for a more detailed description of the API and the data collection process more generally.

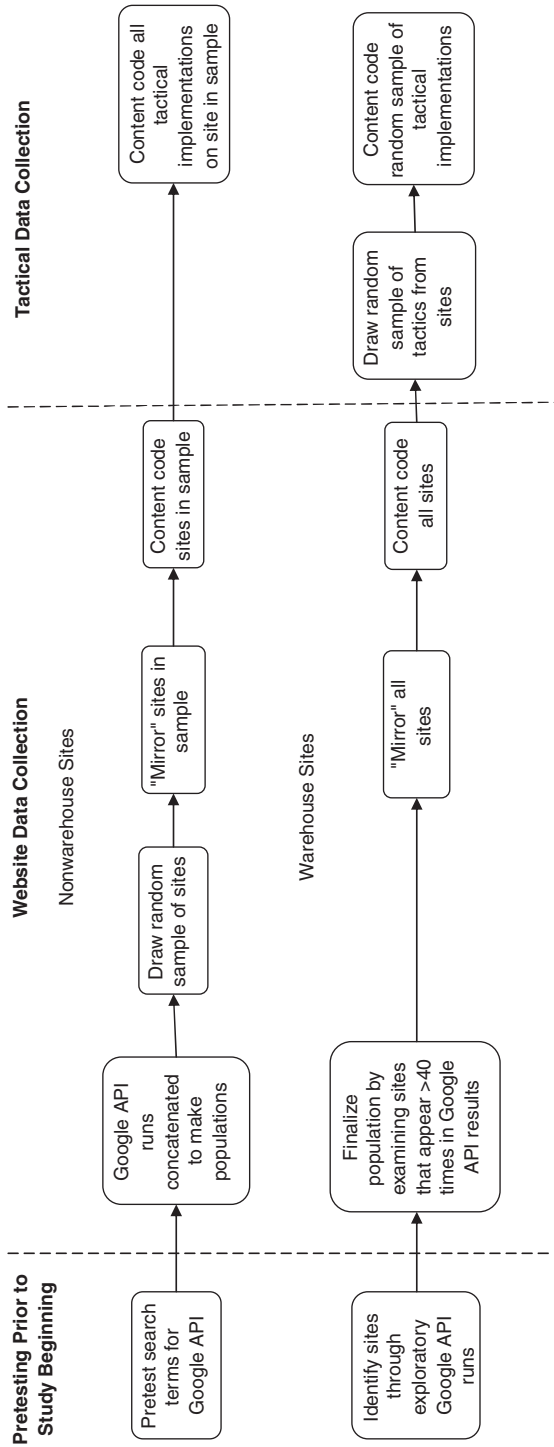


Figure 1. Schematic of data collection process (adapted from Earl and Kimport 2008).

Table 1. Results from Google Searches for Nonwarehouse Sites*

| | Petitions | E-Mail Campaigns | Letter-Writing Campaigns | Online Boycotts |
|---|-----------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Number of search strings | 16 | 16 | 20 | 8 |
| Number of unique webpages that did not include news or media identifiers in webpage | 8,673 | 6,762 | 7,338 | 5,210 |
| Number of webpages included in the 10 percent random sample | 868 | 677 | 734 | 521 |

*In addition to excluding duplicated webpages, this number also excludes webpages whose addressing syntax was improper and therefore were now unreachable, webpages that were clearly hosted on non-U.S. servers (based on their web address), and government webpages. Table is adapted from Earl (2006).

populations at a 10 percent rate. Prior to sampling, webpages that were obviously news pages and duplicate webpages were removed. Table 1 reports the number of webpages included in these samples.

Mirroring Selected Webpages

As shown in Figure 1, the next step in the process was to “mirror” (i.e., download and save into local files for archiving and later examination) the population of warehouse sites and the four quasi-random samples of nonwarehouse sites. Sites were mirrored using a series of computer scripts and freely available mirroring software. Mirroring took place across four weeks in March and April 2004, during which tens of thousands of pages were mirrored.

Content Coding of Websites

The study was interested in how protest tactics were used in claims-making, as opposed to general online discussions about protest. Thus, content coders assessed whether or not each site: (1) hosted at least one implementation of the kinds of protest tactics we were studying, where hosting was defined as providing visitors with enough information about the tactical deployment that visitors could participate (see the last row of Table 2 for nonwarehouse sites); or (2) had a direct link to a site on another domain that hosted such a tactical implementation (see the middle row of Table 2 for nonwarehouse sites).⁷ Table 2 shows results from this preliminary coding for nonwarehouse sites. All 15 warehouse sites either hosted or directly linked to a tactical implementation.

Sites not coded as hosting or directly linking to a deployment of one of the four institutionalized tactics we are studying were eliminated from the study.⁸ This

⁷The link had to directly connect users to the tactical implementation, not to a general information page of another website that may or may not have hosted such an implementation. Coders were instructed to label the site as fitting into one of the categories listed in Table 2. When a site was hosted and linked, it was counted in the hosting row in Table 2.

⁸As Earl (2006) discussed, while this process is effective, it is not optimally efficient in that many irrelevant sites are also located. Other projects using automated search and retrieval of webpages have also faced problems with efficiency (Hindman et al. 2004, unpublished data).

Table 2. Webpages Identified in 10 Percent Random Samples of Nonwarehouse Sites*

| | Petitions | E-Mail Campaigns | Letter-Writing Campaigns | Online Boycotts |
|---|-----------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Number of webpages included in the 10 percent random sample (<i>N</i>) | 868 | 677 | 734 | 521 |
| Percentage of webpages that appealed for action and provided link to a tactical implementation on another website | 3 | 0.3 | 1 | 0 |
| Percentage of webpages that appealed for action and provided access to a tactical implementation on the site | 8 | 5 | 8 | 7 |

*Total percentage may not be 100 because of rounding error. Table is adapted from Earl (2006).

means that sites that encouraged participation in offline (i.e., street) protest events, but did not discuss or deploy online tactics, were not coded further; neither were sites that discussed online protest using *only other types of protest* than the four institutionalized tactical forms we studied.

In all, depending on the type of tactic examined, approximately between 8 percent and 12 percent of the original 10 percent sample of nonwarehouse sites met these requirements and were therefore retained in the study; 100 percent of warehouse sites met these requirements and were retained in the study. In raw counts, 169 nonwarehouse sites were retained and all 15 warehouse sites were retained. These 184 remaining sites were then coded further. Coders counted the number of petitions, boycotts, and letter-writing and e-mailing campaigns that were hosted or linked to the site. Also relevant to this article, the various causes, up to four, that were discussed on the sites were coded.

Sampling Tactical Implementations from Warehouse Sites

Because warehouse sites offered so many tactical implementations (e.g., so many petitions), we sampled tactical implementations from these sites at a rate that varied by the size of the site: 10 percent on the largest sites, 50 percent on moderately sized warehouse sites, and 100 percent (i.e., the population) on the smallest warehouse sites (see Earl 2006 for more on the process of sampling tactical implementations from within larger sites). We “oversampled” tactical implementations from smaller warehouse sites so that there would be enough data on tactical implementations from those sites to yield useful comparisons with larger sites. However, in analyses below that use tactical deployments as the unit of analysis, a weighting scheme is employed to eliminate any artifacts of this differential sampling rate. Specifically, “p weights” in Stata 9 SE were used as a correction.

Because so relatively few actions were found on nonwarehouse sites, all active tactical implementations found on nonwarehouse sites were retained in the study and coded. Understood across the entire process represented in Figure 1, the study

Table 3. Unique Claims on Sites and Tactical Implementations

| | Claims on Sites | Claims in Tactical Implementations |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Unique issues | 71 | 86 |
| Unique positions | 88 | 110 |

used a two-pronged sampling scheme: warehouse sites were not sampled, but tactical implementations on those sites were sampled at varying rates depending on the size of the site; nonwarehouse sites were sampled at a 10 percent rate, but all tactical implementations on sampled sites were included in the study. In total, our data set on tactical implementations includes 153 petitions, 212 letter-writing campaigns, 152 e-mail campaigns, and 82 boycotts from nonwarehouse sites (599 total from nonwarehouse sites), and 287 petitions, 12 letter-writing campaigns, 10 e-mail campaigns, and 49 boycotts from warehouse sites (358 total from warehouse sites).

Content Coding of Tactical Implementations

The final coding mechanism treated tactical implementations, not websites, as the unit of analysis. While a variety of characteristics of the implementations were coded, we focus here on the causes that were addressed, which were coded using the same coding scheme as described above.⁹

FINDINGS

Consistent with movement society theory generally, a large range of issues were discussed online: 71 unique issues were addressed on the main pages of the sites coded and 86 different issues were the subject of specific tactical deployments (Table 3). If we further distinguish between the different positions that could be taken on the same issue (i.e., support or opposition for the same issue), we find 88 unique stances on the websites we studied and 110 unique stances forwarded through specific tactical deployments.¹⁰

Supporting Hypothesis 1, we found 104 tactical deployments that had nonstandard claims, including fan-related claims (in order of prevalence): entertainment-related claims, claims where participants were encouraged to engage potentially political issues through individual action (dubbed “personal as political” in Table 4), claims made against businesses based on personal grievances, and claims that were entirely

⁹Intercoder reliability tests revealed high levels of consistency between coders for the items used in these analyses.

¹⁰This places our findings within the range of claims and unique positions found by Soule and Earl (2005) in offline protest. They found a low of 80 unique stances in 1982 and a high of 165 unique stances in 1977. Our snapshot should have lower counts than Soule and Earl due to methodological differences: they aggregate unique stances across an entire year, while we take a snapshot. Even still, our snapshot was already in their range: we observed eight more unique stances on websites than they did in their lowest year, and 30 more unique stances in actual deployments. So, even though our methodology should artificially make our counts lower than theirs, our figures are well within their range. If we had collected data over an entire year, it is quite likely that we would have far exceeded the counts found by Soule and Earl in offline protest. We interpret our findings, as Soule and Earl did theirs, as supporting a movement society approach, perhaps particularly the perpetual movement mobilization variant.

Table 4. Number of Nonstandard Uses of Traditional Protest Tactics by Site Type*

| | Warehouse Sites | Nonwarehouse Sites |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|
| Entertainment, total | 66 | 25 |
| <i>Entertainment subtotals</i> | | |
| -Television and movies | 28 | 17 |
| -Celebrities/entertainers | 7 | 3 |
| -Music | 8 | 1 |
| -Video games | 7 | 0 |
| -Sports | 8 | 1 |
| -Radio | 3 | 0 |
| -Other | 5 | 3 |
| Personal as political | 6 | 0 |
| Personally-oriented business complaints | 4 | 0 |
| Individual based | 3 | 0 |
| Total | 79 | 25 |

*This table reports unweighted frequencies.

idiosyncratic and individually-oriented. As we anticipated in Hypothesis 1, individuals and groups are using institutionalized, online tactics to address new and seemingly nonpolitical claims. Specifically, our analyses show that online letter-writing and e-mail campaigns to some extent, but especially online petitions and boycotts, have become ways of handling a whole range of problems, from fairly individual concerns to collective concerns about areas of social life that have not been previously engaged by social movements, and fan activism is chief among those concerns.

In terms of evaluating the level of fan activism, and other nonpolitically oriented use of protest tactics for that matter, these 104 tactical implementations, when properly weighted, make up about 20 percent of the tactical implementations (11 percent when unweighted). Entertainment-related/fan-activism tactical implementations alone accounted for about 18 percent of weighted tactical implementations (10 percent when unweighted).

Our data allow us to go beyond hypothesis testing to describe the contours of this emerging trend. Below we elaborate on these claims, given their novelty to many social movement scholars as well as many scholars of fan activism, since research on fan activism has tended to study big examples such as Star Trek (Jenkins 2006) and soap opera fan organizing (Bielby et al. 1999; Scardaville 2005).

Entertainment-Related Claims

By far the most common of the nontraditional claims made were entertainment-related claims: 66 tactical implementations with entertainment-related claims were housed on warehouse sites, constituting 21 percent of all warehouse tactical implementations when weighted (18 percent when unweighted) and 17 percent of all tactical implementations coded when weighted (7 percent when unweighted). Twenty-five tactical deployments were housed on or linked to nonwarehouse sites, constituting 4 percent of all nonwarehouse tactical implementations and less than 1 percent of all tactical implementations coded when weighted (3 percent when unweighted). In

these actions, participants could register approval for or opposition to media and/or entertainment products, including specific television shows, movies, video games, celebrities, sports, bands, foods, books, and fictional characters. As such, these tactical implementations focus on claims far from traditional social movement concerns, and often give voice to classes of individuals—usually fans—and their “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983), which have little in common with other classes of individuals who have expressed grievances using these tactics in the past.¹¹

Within this group, claims about television and movies dominated when considered together. Breaking down the figures in Table 4 further, 16 tactical deployments on warehouse sites made claims about television shows, many of which bemoaned the cancellation of a particular show. Efforts to bring back television shows (or other products), commonly referred to by participants in an instructive use of movement language as “revival movements,” were very popular.¹² In addition to attempts to stave off cancellation of a television show, common television claims included pleas to syndicate a show, or a specific episode, and requests for the release of shows on DVD. Claims-makers considered their actions to be collective ones, as shown in a petition that called for a boycott of all Fox products if the network cancelled the television show *The Family Guy*. Authors of the petition explained that they would get the word out about their boycotts so as to “gain more people in our ‘quest’ to get ‘Family Guy’ back on television” (6400997_206).¹³ In another petition, appealing to the economics of entertainment while making a collective claim, authors explained: “We the undersigned wish for you to know that we would spend our hard-earned money if you were to release ‘Let’s Bowl!’ on DVD” (6400997_207).

Twelve tactical deployments on warehouse sites had claims related to specific movies. These actions called for the production and/or release of films, often specifying certain plot or casting preferences. For example, one petition targeted the actresses and “anyone else involved in the making of Charlie’s angels [sic]” (6400997_224) asking, “we the undersigned are asking you to please make as many Charlie’s Angels as possible.” In another example, fans of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy used an online petition to make the claim that fans deserved the opportunity to see all three movies in sequence.

Video games were the subject of seven tactical implementations on warehouse sites, all following a model similar to some of the television claims and drawing on an economic argument for the games’ production. In addition, some actions appealed to a general sense of quality. One petition explained that the undersigned were writing in an effort to improve the product: “We are taking this opportunity to help Nintendo avoid releasing an unsatisfactory product” (6400997_210).

Three tactical implementations focused on radio specifically (e.g., a petition for more rock radio stations in Los Angeles), while eight others channeled their musical concerns into tactical deployments about specific musicians, musical groups, or musical styles. Some of those actions seemed more focused on expressing support for specific musicians, as fans of the band The Verve did when they created a petition to bring the band back together. Not all were so supportive, though. One petition protested the existence of a band because of their alleged poor quality: “Please help,

¹¹Since social movements have targeted the entertainment industry in the past—as when the civil rights movement makes claims about the tone and frequency of media depictions of African Americans—such claims do not strike us as “new” and are thus excluded from this category.

¹²Revival movements also occurred where other products were concerned. For instance, we observed a candy revival petition, coded as “other” in Table 4 under the entertainment heading.

¹³Numbers in parentheses are case identifiers and serve as citations to the original data.

there is an evil in this world known as ‘Busted’ they are a crappy pop boy band who claim to be true rock are [sic] an insult to all good music” (6100790_85). By signing, participants agreed that the band is bad.

Similar in focus, seven tactical deployments on warehouse sites made claims about specific celebrities or entertainers and eight took these entertainment-related concerns onto the sports field, focusing claims on specific sports, sporting events, or athletes. In one instance of the former group, a petition called for the U.S. Postal Service to issue a Marx Brothers stamp. In perhaps one of the most off-the-beaten-path petitions on celebrities, another petition called for Donald Trump to shave his head to prove that his hair is real. The petition’s author writes that he represents “an international consortium of concerned citizens who believe you’re deceiving the public about your hair” (6400997_163). In the latter group, fans created a petition in support of the election of Allen Iverson to the U.S. Olympic team. A less supportive petition author used the petition form to register dislike for a professional wrestler.

These kinds of entertainment claims were also made on nonwarehouse sites. The only difference was in scale, with the nonwarehouse sites devoting multiple pages or even their entire sites to the claim. For example, on a fan site devoted to the show *A Country Practice*, the author provided four online tactical implementations to protest the cancellation of the show. In another instance, in support of two characters in the Harry Potter movies, a fan created a site to advocate for their inclusion in the third movie of the series with links to three petitions. She writes:

It has come to my attention that Oliver Wood has been taken from the third movie, and I will not take that! So I whipped up a webpage, aiming to feature multiple ways to get the word out about how disappointed Harry Potter and Oliver Wood/Sean Biggerstaff fans are upon hearing the news. (1101518)

As with other instances of entertainment-related claims, these tactical deployments often referenced a large group of like-minded fans or supporters or framed fans as a community that shared a collective identity. On the aforementioned television show fan site, for example, explaining her use of the petitioning tactic, the webmaster writes: “Please note that this petition is simply a list of people who have enjoyed watching ‘A Country Practice’ on Showcase and who would like to see Showcase (or another channel) begin airing the show again” (1100060).

Some tactical implementations worked against the image that their causes were humorous or inconsequential. For instance, one site contained two actions that supported the comic strip *Mary Worth*, calling for letters and e-mails to a local newspaper to protest the comic’s cancellation. The author directed readers: “All letters should include language of the following nature: ‘I am simply irate at the cancellation of Mary Worth, and I intend to write to my member of Congress!’” (3105173_778–779). To explain the importance of this action, the author writes: “And while the cutting of a serial comic in a Central Jersey newspaper may strike you as an issue of no great moment, something you need not get involved in, it is whimpering ends like this that we must protest with special vigor—for the callous disregard of hipsters diminishes us all.”

Other Nontraditional Claims

As shown in Table 4, there were three other broad kinds of nontraditional claims made with the four social movement tactical forms featured in our analyses, all of

which were found on warehouse sites. These findings support Hypothesis 2, which anticipated online tactical forms would be used for nonpolitical claims beyond fan activism. While some of these causes share more similarities with traditional social movement concerns than the entertainment-related claims did, all nonetheless have unexpected pairings of individual versus collective grievances, and individual versus collective solutions for action. That is, unlike the more traditional situation in which a social movement attempts to address collective grievances with collective action, these tactical implementations feature different constellations of individual and collective grievances and actions.

For instance, in six tactical deployments, claimants draw attention to what they see as community-wide problems (see “Personal as Political” in Table 4). However, they encourage participants to address those issues through their own individual action, instead of through collective action. Participation in a petition, for instance, is thereby transformed into a list of like-minded individuals, instead of a group of people collectively asking for some change. For example, asking everyone to “takes [sic] this issue very seriously,” one petition called for people to stop using their cell phones while driving because of safety concerns. Tying her claim to the anti-drunk-driving claim, the author writes: “Cell phone use while driving is similar to drinking and driving because [sic] one is not using all of their [sic] senses behind the wheel” (6100790_105). Yet, the petition does not target legislators or phone manufacturers, but instead requests that people stop engaging in this behavior and allows people to sign to register their shared discontent with this behavior.

Another set of claimants turned this individual-collective relationship on its head by notifying potential boycott participants of the boycott organizer’s personal complaints against businesses in hopes that others will join the organizer, thereby using collective power to remedy individual grievances (see “Business Complaints” in Table 4). For instance, one boycotter described his frustration with a specific car dealership. The author calls on others to boycott this dealership and claims he will never service his car there. The tactical implementation seemed to serve as a space to register a problem and handle the individual’s emotional upset about the dealership. While corporations have frequently been the targets of social movement actions, these large-scale mobilizations have not been traditionally framed as a response to a single individual’s complaint about customer service.

The final set of nonstandard claims involved both individual grievances and individual action, and yet used social movement tactics whose lineage is based on collective grievances and collective action. In one instance, the author calls for the boycott of the phrase “too much information” (7800022_1079). Ultimately, however, the central concern of the person who called the boycott was whether individuals used this phrase when in conversation with him: “do not, under any circumstance, ever say to me or anyone speaking to me, too much information.”

The Effects of Automation

As Table 4 also makes clear, a majority of the novel uses of tactics that we just reviewed were housed on warehouse sites. This finding is best understood by considering the ease of protest on warehouse sites. Warehouse sites provide protest opportunities with few barriers to entry: participation is often automated so that users do not need advanced (or even basic) technological skills to participate, and there is virtually no cost associated with creating a tactical deployment on these sites. Further, these sites generally have no content restrictions (aside from any legal

guidelines they might be responsible for following). Thus, the high volume of nonpolitical protest on warehouse sites lends support for Hypothesis 3, which anticipated that nontraditional claims would be more frequently found on automated sites.

However, our finding of nontraditional claims on nonwarehouse sites is a caution against assuming that online protest will *always* take the easiest route: 25 of the nontraditional claims were related to nonwarehouse sites, suggesting that organizers did not always take the easiest route available. The not-uncommon existence of nontraditional claims on nonwarehouse sites supports the ubiquitous movement practices strand by illustrating how protest has diffused through both easy and difficult channels.

CONCLUSION

We began by juxtaposing the relative rareness of “fan activism” in the 1960s with its more common appearance today to pose a set of important theoretical and empirical questions, including why fans might increasingly turn to activism and how the introduction of the Internet may have influenced the rising tide of fan activism. In addressing these issues, we have offered an elaboration of work on “social movement societies” to explain the greater availability of social movement schemas and practices for application to nonsocial movement problems. We have also discussed why rising Internet usage—which brings with it wider accessibility to information, movement practices, and movement “know-how” even while lowering the costs of some forms of online participation—has accelerated these trends.

Using an innovative new methodology for studying populations and quasi-random samples of online claims-making using petitions, boycotts, or letter-writing or e-mailing campaigns, we, in turn, empirically tested hypotheses stemming from our theoretical elaboration of movement societies research, ultimately finding support for our hypotheses. Specifically, we showed that these tactical forms were used on a nonnegligible number of occasions to address issues that radically diverged from claims traditionally forwarded using protest tactics, and that these trends are more evident when organizing is automated.

These theoretical arguments and empirical findings raise a number of potentially important implications for social movement scholars, scholars of culture, and Internet researchers. First, in a world where the importance of corporations is increasingly prominent in daily life, studying fan activism offers one window into the private power dynamics of corporate-civil contests, potentially offering insight into the shifting dynamics between consumers and producers. While it might be tempting to dismiss fan activists as unimportant or irrelevant to the study of contentious action, dismissing favorable corporate reactions to fan activists as simple cooptation risks missing some corporations’ acknowledgement of the changing role and force of consumers. Indeed, future research on the reaction of producers to consumer-driven protest could offer an interesting opportunity to study cultural production dynamics that likely lie between what social movement scholars might label accommodation and cooptation. Our study makes clear that understanding how cultural production processes are being altered is also important, whether or not the changes are connected to social movements. There are already signs that some producers are trying to reengineer their production processes to be far more open so that they ally with potential critics and improve their products in the process (e.g., as Lego has in the redesign of some of its products; see also Palmer 2000 for a discussion of the role of social movement representatives in developing Disney products).

Research on this from cultural and social movement perspectives could enliven all fields' understanding of private power dynamics. In addition, for Internet studies scholars, understanding how Internet usage contributes to these trends is critical to unpacking how Internet usage alters existing relationships on the ground and theoretically.

Second, in identifying and elaborating on the ubiquitous movement practices strand of social movement societies, our research provides purchase over how social movements are becoming embedded in society more generally and institutionalized as a general type of claims-making. For the social movements literature, findings that support the ubiquitous movement practices approach are notable because much of the research on diffusion has examined diffusion within the boundaries of political life as if social movement practices and schemas were only at risk of affecting other clearly political causes. Our work shows that the understanding of diffusion might be substantially broadened by examining moments where diffusion processes break through the boundaries of traditional social movement or political life. This also offers an opportunity to think of diffusion beyond political confines as a type of social movement outcome. Moreover, the ubiquitous movement practices trend and analysis of its relationship to Internet usage offer scholars of culture insight into the rise of online fan activism, including its size and the forms it has taken.

Third, by raising fan activism as a set of practices social movement scholars are well equipped to analyze, we offer a hidden opportunity to social movement scholars: far from a frivolous wander into nonpolitical terrain, comparing tactically similar campaigns—one with social and political change goals and one with explicitly cultural goals—would allow social movement scholars leverage over a question they have never been able to directly address: In what ways are movement processes affected by the social and political change goals of actors involved? That is, to the extent that some social movement scholars may have a knee-jerk reaction to fan activism, believing such a label to be a misnomer since activism must be politically-oriented, the cases we study offer such scholars a methodological contrast case with which to empirically examine their assumptions. For instance, did fan activism arise from circumstances that are notably different from traditional political activism, or were the emergence and mobilization dynamics relatively similar? Further, to the extent that the processes were different, and those differences seemed to turn on the political (and nonpolitical) nature of movements, then scholars claiming fan activism is not “real activism” may have more arrows in their quiver. However, if those dynamics were not substantially different, it would be much harder to assume, without evidence, that culturally oriented activism differed automatically from politically oriented activism.

We also believe our research offers new opportunities for future research. We have focused on elaborating and testing the ubiquitous movement practices strand, but future research should pursue the hypotheses we presented further, including their applicability online and offline, and examine the impact of increasingly pervasive Internet usage on the perpetual movement mobilization strand of the movement society approach. Indeed, it may be that perpetual movement mobilization and ubiquitous movement practices strands are linked; it is possible that the general rise in movement claims-making, particularly online, renders movement schemas and practices more available as heuristics for other kinds of actions. This would be an expanded understanding of the role of diffusion, in line with the implications mentioned above, which would allow social movement scholars an avenue for understanding how social movement processes affect aspects of social life far removed from traditional social

movements. To be quite specific, it may be that ubiquitous movement practices are the unintended cultural outcomes of perpetual movement mobilization. Understanding these unintended cultural consequences would substantially contribute to the social movement outcomes literature and bind the diffusion and outcomes literature more tightly together.

Future research should also investigate whether there is a point at which the mimetic isomorphism hypothesized by the ubiquitous movement practices strand can take on an almost self-perpetuating character. The Internet offers a fertile environment for mimetic isomorphism across different spheres of life in that it is unique in how broadly and widely it allows people to literally copy texts, songs, and images, and less materialistically, to copy routines, scripts, and schemas. Imagine that you are a fan of the next blockbuster novel and you desperately want a movie to be made of the novel. In 2006, you might have decided on an Internet petition, appropriating petitioning as a tactic when you came across petitiononline.com. But, in 2015, you may simply copy what other *fans* have been doing in large numbers for a decade, further distancing these traditional social movement practices from their historical, political heritage and challenging scholars to further enrich their understanding of the dynamic relationship between culture and social movements.

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