The (Re) Evolution of Civic Engagement:

A Network Analysis of the Facebook Groups of Occupy Chicago
Abstract

This study is an empirical examination of the role of social media such as Facebook for civic engagement in contemporary civil society. A network analysis of 1814 Facebook groups joined by 300 randomly sampled Occupy Chicago (OC) participants show that large-scale social movements such as OC rely on broad sponsoring coalitions of civic interests embedded in diverse interconnected social networks running on social media. Instead of serving solely as technological or information platforms for mobilizing individual participants, Facebook enables various forms of social integration from community socialization, network sociality, to event-based participation. It also embodies diverse cultures of civic engagement from life politics, consumer-citizenship, to professionalism. These variegated patterns of interconnection reflect the evolution of civil society amid broad social political changes in late modernity. To the extent that communication via social media networks is mainly a result of user-generated efforts, the individuals are not left isolated but venture into constructing political causes and commitments of their own.

Keywords: civic engagement, social media, Facebook revolution, Occupy Movement, network analysis …
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Introduction

In light of recent waves of pro-democratic protests and popular movements in the Arab world and the U.S., there has seen a significant increase in scholarly interests in the role of social media for political participation. Events in “the Arab Spring” and “the Occupy Movement” were often considered revolutionary for their goal to bring immediate change to the established political orders as well as for the central role of social media for mass mobilization and organization. Media researchers and critics have joined the popular discourse of “Facebook/Twitter revolution” in contending the crucial and progressive role of social media in the events (see Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013 for a review of the press coverage and scholarly discourses). A fast-accumulating body of empirical studies has examined social media’s capacities for reducing the cost and mobilizing resources for fast information dissemination, large geographical reach, and flexible organization (e.g. Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

Given how the situations had later developed, however, the “revolutions” turned out to have exposed more deeply ingrained social issues in those societies than they were supposed to have solved. Nevertheless these events provided a clear lens through which we could see both the strengths and weaknesses of civil society's ability to contribute to the democratization process in the countries involved. At the same time these events offered an interesting set of problems presented by social media’s role for the development of civil society as both a goal and a means to not only check unjust political orders but to nurture institutions and structures to sustain itself. Along this line of argument, this study focuses on the mediating role of social
network media for making, or unmaking, social structures as means of self-determination in civil society.

Subsequently, the study argues that discussions on the relation between social media and politics need to be informed by a historical understanding of broader social structural changes in civil society, including the evolution of forms and cultures of civic engagement and social movements (Bennett, 2008, 2012). Such efforts help us move away from media-centric questions to ground our inquiries in the broad societal context in its specific historical moment. Instead of asking questions on how general technological features exert impacts on short-term mobilization, we look at the role of media in the long-term socio-cultural process. Instead of focusing on how media affect individual participation, we aim to examine the aggregate phenomenon of the evolving structures of civic engagement.

For this purpose, we conceptualize civil society as networks of voluntary associations in this study (Taylor, 1990). The structure and constituency of such networks both enable and are reproduced by the evolving forms of civic engagement (Stern & Fullerton, 2009). Through a network analysis of 1814 Facebook groups participated by 232 randomly sampled Occupy Chicago (OC) members, we demonstrate the patterns of such interconnection of this large-scale social movement. Our empirical results indicate that despite the social trends of apparent individualistic characteristics in late modernity, public life still develops along a social dimension, in renewed forms enabled by social media (Campbell, 2013).

In the sections to follow, we start by situating the Occupy Movement (TOM) in the structural changes of contemporary society and the new characteristics of civic engagement. Then, we discuss the reciprocal influences between these changes and social media serving as the structure of civil society. Finally, we provide rationales for our research questions and the
methods to answer them. In the last part of the article, we discuss the theoretical implications of our empirical findings.

**Literature Review**

**The Occupy Movement amid the Evolution of the Political**

Started as a gathering in New York’s Zuccotti Park in September of 2011, Occupy Wall Street soon evolved into a large-scale broad-spectrum social movement assembled under the banner of anti-capitalism and anti-oppression (Chappell, 2011; Gitlin, 2013). As of today, variant themes and various forms of the Movement have spread to over 600 communities in the United States and 900 cities across 82 countries (Citation here).

The Occupy Movement was a unique case that spoke to many issues of inquiries. Sociologist Gitlin (2013) maintained that the Movement only marked the beginning of an enduring confrontation with plutocratic power and inequality. It was a movement that had concerns going beyond the unfair financial policies to embody the moral crisis that had been eroding the capitalist democracies (are there direct quotes?). As such, the Movement accommodated multiple issues and diverse viewpoints that gathered on an all-inclusive action frame – “We are the 99%”. This easily personalized frame contrasted with traditional collective action frames that required formal organization and collective identification (Bennett, 2012).

Moreover, TOM was noted by its great dependence on social media. Operated horizontally, the movement relied heavily on social media for maintenance and presentation of many entities and sub-movements. Moreover, social media helped amplify each act to highlight its dramatic performance and spread it to an unprecedented wide audience with extraordinary speed even when legacy media paid inadequate attention at the beginning (Calhoun, 2013; Gitlin, 2012). Regardless of the mix reviews of its outcome, the movement should be considered as a
communication success—a movement that had successfully brought the communicated issues to a large audience and potential institutions in the midst of all the noise and clutter (Piven, 2014).

Indeed, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have forcefully argued that communication has become an indispensable part of organizational structure of contemporary social movements. Instead of relying on the traditional collective action frame that emphasized formal organizational structure and collective identity, TOM operated on a connective action frame that empowered self-motivated participants to create massive co-production and distribution of information and ideas. More importantly, such a connective action frame originates from “the personalization of politics”, a general trend of in contemporary civil society (Bennett, 2008, 2012).

The evolution of both the nature and forms of social movements and civic engagement in late-modern societies needs to be understood against the broad structural changes such as individualization (Beck, 1992). This thesis posits a categorical shift in the relation between the individual and society. Disembedded from traditional all-encompassing social categories and entities such as family, church, and class, the individual in (post)industrial society seeks less binding and more flexible relationships with organizations that provide various kinds of support on an easier opt-in, opt-out mechanism for affiliation and participation (Beck, 1992, 2002; Giddens, 1990).

Consequently, both the substance and boundary of the political have been redefined in “new social movements” (Calhoun, 1993). Beck (1997), for instance, postulates a “sub-politics” form of the political, by which agents outside the formal political domain participate in political process. Such agents include individuals, citizens’ issue-centered initiatives as well as different professional groups and organizations (p. 103). Giddens (1991) redefines the political as “life
politics’’ -- politics of lifestyle and life decisions, which concerns political issues originating from the process of self-actualization.

Moreover, everyday thoughts, conversations, and activities have a bearing on democratic politics. Bakardjieva (2009) proposes a lifeworld perspective that casts light on facets of democracy in the multiplication and enrichment of the everyday practices of citizenship. Consumption, for instance, as self-interest-oriented as it is, is tied more closely than ever to civic engagement and social consciousness as citizens’ political involvement has shifted away from the production side to the consumption side of the economy in late modernity (Scammell, 2000).

However, the individualization thesis in Beck’s “sub-politics” and Giddens’s “life politics” is criticized by Mouffe (2005) for they downplay the significance of collective identities for political life. She argues that it indicates a refraction of the public political arena in the private and personal realm. In the cultural turn of political communication, scholars advocated the notion of civic culture that emphasized collective meaning making and negotiation in the context of social norms and values (e.g. Dahlgren, 2000 & 2005).

Following these logic and objective, social actors in the era of new social movements exert concerted and self-organized efforts to influence patterns of culture, social action, and person-state relationship. They form “affinity groups knit together not by superordinate logic but by a web of overlapping memberships” (Calhoun, 1993, p.408).

Social Media as Mediating Structure in Civil Society

In essence, civil society, as a program of building self-determinant forms of social life into a web of autonomous associations from below, has fundamentally evolved (Bennett, 2012; Taylor, 1990). Yet, as a prerequisite for positive political change (Putnam, 1995; Shirky, 2011…), it has been increasingly affected by the development of modern media. Previously, it
was axiomatic that societies found their political identities and defined their political direction through and in the traditionally established political institutions. With the advent of the press in modern society, however, the powers of the assembled people were being arrogated to the new print-mediated public space, without having to rely on any traditional structure or face-to-face meeting of any kind. Thus the media helped generate a public outside the politically structured domain (Habermas, 1972; Taylor, 1990). Similarly, social media in contemporary society may function as architecture of networked publics within which the individuals interacted in the convergence of space, practices, and technologies (Papacharissi, 2010).

As the relationships between the personal and the political become increasingly porous in an era of life politics, newer information and communication technologies are believed to afford much flexibility for individuals’ negotiations of the private-public boundary (Bimber, 2005). Social media enabled digital networks are increasingly personal with individual-operated mobilization that is independent from organizations (Almanzar, et al, 1998). Self-referential and selective, social media users tend to post on issues of importance to them and participate in civic conversations that are directly related to their life (Young, 2013). Yet, by bringing in outside content, participants are capable of taking initiatives of situating their posted issues in the larger social, civic, and political contexts, subsequently triggering political and civic conversation among greater population and reaching higher political agendas. Social media networks play a powerful role in influence the extent, breadth, and depth of the kind of social discourse one is exposed to in his or her everyday online behaviors.

More importantly, critics see hope in new forms of communication enabled by social media networks in going beyond raising issues to exercising power (Piven, 2014). Such “interdependent power” is rooted in the increasingly intertwined “webs of economic, political,
and social cooperation that constitute social life” (Piven, 2014, p. 224). Perceived in this vein, TOM is a complex social process that relies on heavily intertwined webs of subsystems to create, recruit and organize. Moreover, it is a kind of power that increases and spreads as the division of labor increases and spreads; as societies become more complex and more intertwined; and as patterns of cooperation become more extended and fragile (Piven, 2014).

Much empirical research has contended the role of social media in the Occupy Movement and for civic engagement in general. Supporters maintain that social media upset the existing power dynamics in communication in favor of ordinary users. Such communication allows them to make contribution and participates in the public sphere through daily engagement (Bimber, 2005; Papacharissi, 2010)… Social media are both a technology and a space where individuals’ political interests were mediated and collective agencies were constructed (Shirky, 2011). Skeptics contend that social media tend to elicit participation from highly interconnected users with pre-existing interests in politics rather than uniting disparate social groups behind a common cause (Conover et al, 2013), that such participation tends to decline as rapidly as it starts after a short period (Vanlaer, 2010), and that the Internet simply “super-sized” activism without fundamentally changing its nature (Earl et al, 2010) (Lewis, Gray, & Meierhenrich, 2014).

Overall, however, research on “the revolutions” has mostly taken an instrumental view that evaluates social media by their technological capacity of cost reduction and fast dissemination of information for near-term political purposes (Shirky, 2011). Moreover, this perspective tends to focus on the effect on individual participation and not much on the evolving structures of civic engagement, as well as their implications for a civil society (Bimber, 2000).

Research Questions
With a historical understanding of the reciprocal influences between social structure and civic engagement, this study aims to examine current forms of civic engagement via social media by looking at the specific case of Occupy Chicago (OC). Inspired by the events of Occupy Wall Street, OC shares with it many significant similarities. In its climax (when?), OC was able to recruit massive crowds of people to embark on protest marches throughout Chicago. It is ideologically inclusive with primarily "left" liberal minded people and communists, socialists, anarchists but also libertarians and even conservative (Citations?). In practice, protests technically "mobile" with a fluid atmosphere with individual participants fluctuating in and out. More importantly, it has a strong social media presence on Twitter with some 36,600 followers and Facebook with over 59,000 members.

Instead of focusing on the impact of social media as technological or informational platforms of mass mobilization for the protests on the street, we concentrate on the patterns of association via social media. Such patterns necessarily constitute many evolving characteristics of civic engagement, thus are expected to reflect the structural changes of civil society at large.

For this purpose, we employ a network analysis approach to map the interconnection of voluntary associations as reflected in Facebook group participation by OC members. Facebook groups are user-generated and maintained therefore open and flexible (citations). We argue that activities in voluntary associations are both conducive to and constitutive of political participation, which embodies the very idea of civil society (Putnam, 1995; Walker, 2008). Moreover, the patterns of interconnection enabled by social media signify its role as a mediating structure for civil society.

Numerous, lively, diverse, and decentralized, voluntary associations for all purposes are valuable to against oppressive power (Taylor, 1990). The notion of civic culture presupposes
heterogeneity in the ways citizens engage with the civic (Dahlgren, 2000). Social theorists advocate for a broader notion of the political to include activities in the personal and cultural realms in contemporary society (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; Mouffe, 2005). Consequently, civil society in late modern society are expected to be made of various associational forms including political, nonpolitical voluntary associations, professional associations (Walker, 2008) as well as other groups that have to do with “pacification, enlightenment, the development of production, arts and sciences, and polished mores” (Taylor, 1990, p. 113). Moreover, new forms of communication enabled by social media empower individuals to overcome the limitations of the private-public boundary (Bimber, Flanagan, & Stohl, 2005; Papacharissi, 2010). Therefore, it is worth examining what kinds of groups OC participants are embedded in via Facebook.

RQ1: What are the types of Facebook groups affiliated with OC?

Researchers contend that mechanisms of civic engagement have developed from formal organization and collective group identity to individual autonomy and self-motivation on flexible connective networks (Bennett, 2008, 2012). However, this does not mean civic landscape is nowadays to become a congeries of private enclaves. Civil society is above all aggregation of evolving public social life. Just as a withdrawal into private life would shrink the public sphere of democracy, a proliferation of disconnected public spheres flooded with personal concerns is as detrimental to the civic (Bennett, 2008; Norris, 2004; Putnam, 2005). A well-function civic culture requires a capacity to see beyond the immediate interests of one’s own group and pay attention to other communities, social groups, and even societies (Dahlgren, 2005).

Media researchers argue that social media networks may serve as architecture of networked publics (Papacharissi, 2010). But what exactly is this architecture like? How does it reconcile the tension between more individualized participation and public life? Is this structure
demarcated by single-issue confined in well-defined organizational boundaries or interconnected civic networks that spill beyond?

RQ2: What are the patterns of connection among OC-affiliated Facebook groups?

In his historical study of social groups and social cohesion, Putnam (2000) distinguished between two types of social groups: “bonding” and “bridging” groups. While bonding groups reinforced close-knit networks among people sharing similar backgrounds and beliefs, bridging groups worked to bring together disparate members of the community, exemplified by mixed-race youth sports clubs. Putnam argued that such a distinction had important implications. The strong ties in bonding groups, for instance, have the potential to constrain the freedoms of group members as well as to exclude outsiders. Bridging groups, in contrast, tend to promote weak ties that integrate difference (Norris, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Media researchers have debated about the bridging and bonding potentials of social media in the transition of society from territorial communities of place toward online communities of identity. For instance, online users tend to aggregate according to their own preferences rather than their demographic characteristics (Wellman, 1999). If civil society is made of networks of such groups, we would like to ask:

RQ3: Do OC-affiliated Facebook groups cluster heterogeneously or homogeneously in terms of their forms and contents?

Numerous studies have found that strong social ties in local community, a proxy for degree of social integration and support, serve as critical foundations to civic participation (Norris, 2004; Stern & Fullerton, 2009). Yet, as disembedded modern individuals (Giddens, 1990), social actors have become increasingly open to participating simultaneously at the local and extra-local levels in the highly mobile, information-rich environment of contemporary society. As a result, it has become easy to participate in regional, national, and/or international
groups and organizations. What is the role of social media in disembedding and reembedding social actors for civic engagement?

Relatedly, media researchers argue that in contrast to the conventional form of civic engagement, social media enabled participation is often time limited, issue-based, and frequently regional ad hoc group actions that may well dissolve after the issue has receded (Kaase & Marsh, 1979?). Moreover, Wittel (2001) further argues that the emerging form of “network sociality” embodied social relations that are primarily informational instead of on mutual experience or common history. Instead of long-term community experience, network sociality consists of fleeting and transient, yet interactive social relations as well as ephemeral but intense encounters (Wittel, 2001).

R4a: What are the patterns of connection among OC-affiliated Facebook groups along the temporal dimension?
R4b: What are the patterns of connection among OC-affiliated Facebook groups along the spatial dimension?

Method

Using a systematic sampling method we selected 300 members among those who liked OC Facebook page. Then we collected all the groups of these 300 users. We restricted our analysis to Facebook groups that are publicly available and operate in English. Altogether 1814 unique groups from 232 users were gathered and analyzed.

In the first step of data analysis, we performed a content analysis to capture the characteristics of the groups. Each group was classified along three dimensions: its subject matter or goal, geographical focus, and associational form. The exclusive categories along each dimension were generated via an iterative process to cover the variance among all the groups
while distinguishing their differences. Together these three dimensions indicate the forms of participation that each have a differential variation in degree of participation, a differential capacity for the communication of specific political messages, and varying levels of resources such as skill, time, money, and commitment required for participation.

Guided by their self-chosen names and the general descriptions of the group, as well as recent discussion posts in the groups, we identified six salient types of groups based on their subject matters and goals: civic, political, cultural, lifestyle, social, and professional. A civic group aims to improve life or advocate rights for a community or society at large. A political group is one that affiliates with a political party or other divisions of formal political institutions, or one with a major focus on democratic or international politics. A cultural group is a non-profit group that focuses on cultural activities such as arts, usually for self-expression and appreciation. A lifestyle group is identified as one that is for profit, focusing on certain types of products, consumption, and services. A social group has no common goal except sharing random posts to socialize. A professional group is one based on identity that relates to a particular profession and the interests of the individuals engaged in the profession. Groups with ambiguous subjects or goals were categorized as others. These categories overlap with the ones that have been used for similar purpose in previous studies (see Walker, 2008).

Four mutually exclusive categories were identified to identify a group’s geographical focus. Local groups are based in Chicago area or targeted at issues of this area. Regional, close to Chicago area or based in the Midwest. National, based in the United States except Chicago or Midwest areas. A group that has an international scope or is based out of the United State is identified as international. Seven organizational forms emerged in terms of how individuals in the group are connected with each other and the organization structure of the group. A
professional association is a group of individuals who are connected mainly by their professional relations. Campaigns applies to Facebook groups that are aimed to influence the decision making process or promote certain causes among the members, with a large scale for a long period of time. Community refers to a group that shares long-term common values or causes, involves offline interactions and activities, and is locally based for the current study. Commercial enterprises are for-profit groups, organized or affiliated with corporations, companies, or individuals, and indicated by the brand or company name, logo, and description on the group page. Events are those set up within clearly defined time and space. Fan club refers to an entertainment-oriented group that is dedicated to a celebrity or another group. Network applies to a group that lacks a stated specific purpose and allows members to share anything.

The coding was conducted by two doctoral students who are familiar with Facebook. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Holsti’s (1969) coefficient; and is 87%, 57%, and 73% for geographical focus, organizational forms, and subjects and goals respectively.

In the second step of our analysis, a network analysis was conducted to identify the patterns of connections among those groups. The nodes of the network were all the 1814 Facebook groups. If two groups had at least one common participant among the 232 users, we set up a link between them. Next, NodeXL (https://nodexl.codeplex.com/, 2014), an open sources program, was used to do the analysis and visualization. In order to avoid the links created by a same participant’s own groups, we selected 75 groups that had at least two common participants for further analysis. Lastly, we carried out a cluster analysis (Clauset, Newman, & Moore, 2004). Cluster analysis looks for groups of nodes that are more densely clustered than with nodes outside the groups (Smith, Shneiderman, and Hansen, 2010).

Findings
The content analysis revealed the diversity of the Facebook groups affiliated with OC. In terms of subject matter, 33% (n=597) of the sample groups were cultural, 335 were civic groups, 18% (n=327) social groups, 184 groups political, 178 lifestyle groups, and 164 groups were professional. 28 groups did not fit any of the aforementioned categories.

Geographically, about 40% (n=723) of the groups were based in the Chicago area. In addition, there were 88 regional groups, 432 national groups, and 571 international in scope. Altogether, 60% (n=1091) of the groups were at extra-local levels. The finding indicates that while local social ties still serve as critical springboards to civic participation, we indeed live in a “glocal” world where we can participate easily and simultaneously at the local and extra-local levels (Hampton & Wellman, 2003).

With regards to organizational form, we found that 39% (n=709) of the groups were communities and 33% (n=603) networks. While the former refers to a group that shares long-term common values or causes, involves offline interactions and activities, and is locally based, the latter applies to a group that lacks a stated specific purpose and allows members to share anything they prefer. In addition, there were 141 fan clubs, 104 commercial enterprises, 99 professional associations, 125 events, and 33 campaigns.

The network analysis further revealed the patterns of the connections among those Facebook groups. The overall network was made of all 1814 groups as nodes. If one and more members were shared between two groups, then they were considered connected by a link. We can see from the overall view of the network, these groups were well connected (Figure 1).
(Figure 1: The network with groups that are linked by one or more common members by geographical focus: Local –green; regional –orange; national –red; international -blue)

In order to tease out a clear pattern of connection, we changed the definition of a link to two or more shared members. This reduced the noise of the original network (see Figure 2a). Figure 2a also shows that community (blue) was the most prominent organizational form, followed by network (yellow). Yet, different organizational forms were connected with each other, showing that there was much heterogeneity in terms of the ways the OC-affiliated groups organized themselves.

Figure 2b shows the four main clusters by organizational form. It demonstrates various patterns of interconnection among the groups. Civic groups do tend to cluster together. It’s interesting to note that in the one cluster that was dominated by civic groups a trade union was connected with a student organization, which in turn related itself to, albeit indirectly, a group advocating for undocumented immigrants. It seems to reinforce the notion that those who are
active for a certain cause are likely to be vocal on other civic issues. Moreover, there was evidence that civic groups were likely to organize themselves in the form of campaigns. Yet, the civic groups were more often “bridged” by general-purpose networks and commercial organizations. Lastly, the cluster with mostly networks seems to indicate that there were a somewhat separate realm in which people tend to aggregate for socializing purposes. Nevertheless, the largest cluster contains all types of organizations, communities, networks, events, and commercial organizations. This is evidence that these different types of groups are capable of communicating with each other and therefore possible to be mobilized under a common cause. Social media indeed provide a flexible structure for civil society that is made of diverse interconnected groups.

Figure 2a (The network with groups that are linked by two or more common members by organization form: commercial organization – green; event – orange; campaign – red; community – blue; network – yellow)
We explore further patterns of connections among the OC-affiliated Facebook groups by taking a look at their subject matters (see Figure 3a). Figure 3b shows the four largest clusters. Similarly, there seems to be a separate civic sphere in which civic groups were connected with political groups. However, civic groups were also found to be embedded in midst of groups that were for social or lifestyle purposes. Once again, the heterogeneity in the largest cluster hints at the potential that various groups may be mobilized for common purposes shared among them.
Figure 3a: The network with groups that are linked by two or more common members by subject matter: Culture – green; social – orange; political – red; civic – blue; lifestyle – dark green
(Figure 3b: Main clusters among groups linked with two or more common members by subject matter: Culture –green; lifestyle –dark green; social –orange; political –red; civic –blue;)

Lastly, we investigated the connection patterns among OC-affiliated groups along the temporal and spatial dimension (see Figure 4a and 4b). The majority of the OC-affiliated groups were based in the Chicago area. Moreover, there were national and international groups linked with local groups in the cluster. This pattern reminds us of the small world phenomenon. In contrast, groups with a national reach tended to cluster together. Yet, there was ample evidence that indicated that groups with different geographical reaches may be interconnected with each other. This signifies that issues with different geographical focuses may be able to be attended to or acted upon thanks to the linkages enabled by social media.

Along the temporal dimension, we noticed the change of organizational forms over time. One example was how “Chicago, Theatre Capital of America: Past. Present. Future” evolved from an academic event in May 2011 to an active and thriving community that reached a larger audience on Facebook and lasted until today.
(Figure 4a: The network with groups that are linked by two or more common members by geographical focus: Local – green; regional – orange; national – red; blue – international)

(Figure 3b: Main clusters among groups linked with two or more common members by geographical focus: Local – green; regional – orange; national – red; blue – international)
Discussion

The focus of this preliminary study is patterns of interconnection among voluntary social groups enabled by social media. Such patterns both constitute new forms of civic engagement and as a result of the long-term structural changes of such engagement in civil society. The power of social media do not confine to serving as an technical tool for reducing the cost of mass mobilization to bring immediate changes to social order. More importantly, it mediates new forms of civic engagements thus serves as the backbone for evolving civil society.

Our findings demonstrate that, first, OC indeed relies on broad sponsoring coalitions. However, these coalitions are embedded and nurtured in diverse interconnected social networks through digital communication channels. Moreover, personalized connective action is indeed a hallmark of OC. However, many questions can be raised about these emerging styles of activism and mobilization. We argue that the diminishing importance of organizational role in protest mobilization does not necessarily mean civic engagement happens only with the atomized individuals in contemporary society.

It is important to place our inquires about the role of social media for civic engagement in theoretical contexts that recognize fundamental changes in society and its politics (Bennett, 1998). In light of the broad social changes, we experience increased flexibility in socio-political affiliations and identifications. Social media potentially facilitate individuals to negotiate their civic roles and realize their civic identities. Large scale social movements such as OC are grounded at the individual level in heterogeneous, multi-faceted networks that reflect social complexity. Indeed, participants of such movements form multiple, all encompassing identities, instead of single-movement identity, via diverse individual-level networks and diffusion mechanisms (della Porta, 2005).
Second, the personal is indeed political. In a sense that groups for various purposes in various forms are all part of the large networks of OC. Some of these groups are devoted to personal issues, some to self-expression, form instance, religion and gender issues such as reproductive choices. Participants present characteristics of being self-referential and selective; they post issues of importance to them and tend to participate in civic and political conversations that are directly related to their life (Young, 2013). Moveover, evidence suggests that individualized orientation of the citizen-consumer further undermines the appeal of collective identifications with party, ideology, or conventional movements. When individuals become fully immersed in consumer cultures they are capable of developing a discerning eye for their personal as well as political products. (commercial event organizers…, social network,..)

Researchers have long lamented over the decline of membership in traditional civic organization (Putnam, 2000). Conventional social movement relied on common goals to develop power relationships with targets of protest, and to ultimately achieve political and social change (Tilly, 2004). In contrast, contemporary social movement depend more on personalized collective action process, which is capable of maintaining high levels of engagement, agenda focus, and network strength (e.g. Bennett & Segerberg, 2011). Yet, the finding of this study demonstrates that personlized engagement with civic issues does not necessarily mean a notable loss of public engagement, or solidarity network coherence. The flexibility of social media serve as a backbone that sustain the evolution of social structure from community integration, network sociality, to life politics

Third, and most importantly, social media provide the most important means for the ongoing process of social construction by disembedd individuals in late modern society (Buechler, 1995). The individuals have come to abandon the roles and allegiances handed down
to them by custom and venture into constructing political causes and commitments of their own (Bakardjieva, 2009; Beck, 1997). They come to know and get involved with the different personal and collective entities populating their social universe via social media. It is indeed a complex social project that relies on heavily intertwined networks to create, organize, and recruit (Davenport, 2011). This project generates, for modern individuals, interdependent power that roots in the increasingly intertwined “webs of economic, political, and social cooperation that constitute social life.” (Piven, 2014)
References


