## Information, Communication & Society

## MOBILIZING FRIENDS AND STRANGERS

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## MOBILIZING FRIENDS AND STRANGERS
## Understanding the role of the Internet
## in the Step It Up day of action

*What role does the Internet play in mobilizing participants in days of action? Although most research has focused on the way that computer-mediated communication is changing transnational collective action, it is unclear how social movement reliance on this new form of communication is modifying protest within nation-states. This paper analyses how participants in a national day of action in the United States were mobilized, focusing on the role that the Internet played. We find that a very high percentage of participants in all cities heard about the day of action through e-mail lists or websites. Those who mobilized through the Internet, however, were very different from those who mobilized through personal and organizational ties. In particular, the participants who heard about the event through all channels of mediated communication — including the Internet — were much more likely to come to the event alone than those who heard about it through their social networks. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of our findings to collective action and civic participation in the digital age.*

## Introduction

In recent years, scholars have focused their attention on understanding transnational protest, looking particularly at the ways in which transnational activism is similar to, and different from, its predecessors (see particularly Keck & Sikkink 1998; Edwards & Gaventa 2001; Tarrow 2001, 2005; Smith & Johnston 2002; Bédoyan *et al.* 2004; Bandy & Smith 2005; Fisher *et al.* 2005). One of the main themes of this research is exploring the role that new communication technologies play in transnational movements and protest (e.g. Myers 2002; Rheingold 2002; Almeida & Lichbach 2003; Bennett 2003, 2005; Langman & Morris 2003; Kahn & Kellner 2004; see also the review by Garrett 2006).

Through the multiple communication technologies of the Internet – such as the World Wide Web, e-mail, Web logs (blogs), and listservs – scholars note that the Internet is playing a role in making transnational social movements and large-scale protest possible. Even though there is a general level of consensus that access to information and communication technologies are not equally distributed across society and within societies (e.g. Dimaggio *et al.* 2001; Norris 2001; Chen & Wellman 2004; Mehra *et al.* 2004; Warschauer 2003; Dijk 2005; Hargittai 2008; see also chapter 1 in Hindman 2009), this relatively new technology connects social movements and social movement actors in innovative ways. For example, Lichbach notes in his work on the globalization movement that the World Wide Web 'has facilitated the formation of a transnational civil society' (2003, p. 42; see also Rheingold 2002).

But what role does the Internet play in mobilizing participants for *domestic* protest? How do activists working within one nation-state use this technology? Are those activists who rely on the Internet different from other participants? This paper explores the role that the Internet plays in mobilizing participation in domestic protest by analysing data collected during the Step It Up National Day of Climate Action in November 2007 [for more details, see www.stepitup2007. org (9 January 2008)]. First, we briefly review the literature that has looked directly at the role that the Internet is playing in social movements, paying particular attention to its role in social protest. Secondly, we present the results of our analysis of data collected during this national day of action in the United States. Thirdly and finally, we discuss the implications of our research on understanding how communications technologies are contributing to changes in collective action.

## Information technology and social protest

A main theme in the research on transnational activism is to understand the role that the information technologies of the Internet play (see e.g. Bennett 2005). Because social movements and social movement actors tend to be limited in funding, the communication technologies of the Internet provide relatively inexpensive media through which they can distribute their messages to anyone with an e-mail address or access to the World Wide Web (for a full discussion, see Fisher 1998; see also Almeida & Lichbach 2003).

Beyond the cost, the technologies of the Internet reduce barriers to political participation. Talking about the strengths and vulnerabilities of networked politics, Bennett concludes that the Internet is being used 'in the new global activism far beyond reducing the costs of communication, or transcending the geographical and temporal barriers found in other communication media. Various uses of the Internet and other digital media facilitate the loosely structured networks, the weak identity ties, and the issue and demonstration campaign organizing that define a new global politics' (2003, p. 164). In other words, the Internet is changing

the 'ways in which activists communicate, collaborate, and demonstrate' (Garrett 2006, p. 202). Scholars have concluded that these changes are making political action 'easier, faster and more universal' (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2002, p. 466).

There have been a limited number of studies that look particularly at the Internet and social protest. John Naughton specifically discusses the role that the Internet plays in coordinating protest:

> Given that the Internet offers campaigners a communication system which is cheap, reliable, ubiquitous, efficient and uncontrolled, it would be astonishing if they did *not* make extensive use of it . . .. The real significance of the events surrounding the Seattle WTO meeting lay not so much in protestors' reliance on communications technology as in what the technology enabled them to do.
>
> (2001, pp. 155–156, emphasis in original)

Similarly, in their research on the transnational mobilization at the EU Summit in 2001, Bédoyan *et al.* (2004) discuss the ways that the Internet was used to overcome barriers for participants at demonstrations who travelled internationally to attend. In particular, the authors discuss how information about the logistics of the demonstrations were made available electronically. In an earlier article on the globalization movement, the authors conclude that 'the new media seemed to play a crucial role in the organization of these global protests' (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2002, p. 465). When studying participation in five globalization protests in multiple countries, Fisher *et al.* come to similar conclusions, finding that more than 80 per cent of the protesters in their sample reported using the Internet to learn about the issue, organize accommodations or transportation, and/or coordinate with other people coming to the protest (2005, p. 117).

However, social movement scholarship has yet to examine specifically the role that the Internet is playing in collective action and how it might be changing social movements in the process (but see Bennett 2003; Bennett *et al.* 2008). Coming from outside of social movement research, there are a handful of broader studies about how computer-mediated communication is changing society and social interaction (e.g. Boase *et al.* 2006; Wang & Wellman forthcoming 2010). In particular, research has found that Internet use is changing the ways people interact, but the results are varying. On the one hand, scholars have found that communication through the Internet limits social connections and produces what Putnam calls 'cyberbalkanization' (2000; see also Shapiro 1999; Wilhelm & Ebrary Inc. 2000; Kamarck & Nye 2002). On the other hand, some research has found that the Internet connects people in new and innovative ways. Ray summarizes: 'Used to blend new and old forms of associations, the Internet offers additional choice and gradients to the quality of interaction, bringing people into new configurations of interaction (Ray 1999, p. 322; see also Franzen 2000; the collection by Fine *et al.* 2008). In other words, rather than replacing personal contact, the Internet has been seen to *supplement* it.

When looking at the 15 February 2005 protests in American cities that were a part of the internationally coordinated day of action against the US Invasion of Iraq, Bennett *et al.* (2008) come to conclusions that are consistent with the latter perspective. The authors find that the most politically embedded protest participants were also the most reliant on digital media. They conclude that 'the hallmark of protest in the digital age appears to be rapid and dense networking behavior that can (though surely does not always) cross issue and organizational boundaries with a minimum of formal coalition brokerage and collective identity framing' (2008, p. 286). These findings are consistent with those by scholars who look more generally at the relationship between Internet use and civic engagement, concluding that certain types of Internet use are found to promote civic engagement (Shah *et al.* 2005; see also Nah *et al.* 2006).

A recent report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project provides some resolution to these differing perspectives (Boase *et al.* 2006). The report builds on earlier work by Wellman *et al.*, who find that the Internet facilitates certain social transformations. In their words, 'Widely dispersed communities of shared interest become dominant; neighborhood communities become quaint residuals' (Wellman *et al.* 2003, p. 8). These changes lead to *networked individualism*, which has 'fostered transformation in community from densely-knit villages and neighborhoods to more sparsely-knit social networks' (Boase *et al.* 2006, p. ii). In other words, communication through the Internet does not isolate individuals; rather, it reinforces the disconnection from local community that was already taking place and provides the means through which individuals can connect with like-minded people who are not geographically proximate.

This line of inquiry provides some insight into the ways in which the Internet is changing society and leads to some expectations regarding how Internet usage may change social protest and collective action more broadly. In particular, building on the existing literature, we can hypothesize that people who are mobilized to participate in social protest through the Internet are likely to be less locally connected. This paper, accordingly, analyses the role that the Internet played in mobilizing participants in a national day of action. In the remaining sections, we introduce our study of the Step It Up day of action against climate change. Then, we present our findings of the role that the Internet played in mobilizing participation in this national protest. Finally, we discuss the implications of our conclusions on social movements and collective action more broadly.

## Data and methods

### *Studying the Step It Up national day of climate action*

Our analysis of the role that the Internet plays in the mobilization of participants in collective action focuses on the participation in a centrally coordinated day of action in the United States. Although some scholars have studied days of action

(e.g. Pianta 2001; Pianta *et al.* 2004) or what Rucht calls a 'day of struggle' (2005), the research to date is very limited. None of this research has looked at the role of the Internet in such joint mobilizations (but see Bennett *et al.* 2008). To understand the role that the Internet is playing in these emergent forms of activism, we study a new organization that is exclusively a 'web-based day of action dedicated to stopping climate change' [http://stepitup 2007.org/article.php?list=type&type=48 (8 January 2008)].

Step It Up was founded in 2007 to try to 'push things a little further' by mobilizing a day of climate action in April 2007 [for information about the first day of action, see http://april.stepitup2007.org/ (9 January 2008)]. Founded by the well-known environmental writer, Bill McKibben, the organizers of Step It Up included a handful of college students working with him to make it happen. Although the team was based out of an office in Manchester, New Hampshire, they organized the day of action almost exclusively through their website, which was modelled after Meet-up. The Step It Up website included materials to help people organize events in their own communities. It also tracked all of the local actions that were being coordinated around the country. These events were searchable on the website by city and state. Potential participants could find events taking place near them and sign up to participate in an action through the website. It is worth noting that this model was subsequently adopted, to some degree, by both the Obama and McCain Presidential campaigns in 2008 to track local campaign-oriented events leading up to the 2008 Presidential election.

Because of the success of the first day of action, which was held on 14 April 2007, the organizers decided to mobilize another event to 'bring together more people to ensure that those in power would understand the meaning of *real* leadership on climate change' [http://stepitup2007.org/article.php?list=type& type=48 (8 January 2008)]. The second day of action – 'Step It Up 2: Who's a Leader?' – was held on 3 November 2007. This date was selected for the day of action for a variety of reasons. In the words of one of the organizers (through personal correspondence with author, 12 August 2007), 'A bunch of factors went into our choice of November 3rd: Congressional recesses, school schedules, other "green" or "protest" events, and the fact that it's nearly exactly one year from next year's elections, etc'. In addition to participating in the Day of Action, the organization urged event coordinators to invite their members of Congress to attend their events. All 540 members of Congress were invited to participate in at least one of the 481 actions that took place throughout the United States on 3 November 2007. Every state had at least one action and most states had many more.

Although Step It Up targeted relatively conventional forms of institutional politics by aiming to pressure members of Congress and presidential candidates, this day of action was innovative in its reliance on the Internet as the central coordinating mechanism. In some ways, Step It Up is consistent with the description provided by Bennett when he notes that 'newer, resource-poor

organizations that tend to reject conventional politics may be defined in important ways by their Internet presence' (2003, p. 145). Even though the organization targeted conventional politics, it did so in unconventional ways that bypassed the usual path to national policymakers, through the large professionalized national social movement organizations that are predominantly located in Washington, DC.

Events during the day of action ran the gamut – from traditional demonstrations and marches to performance art. In New York City, for example, the Step It Up site listed 13 separate events taking place. These events ranged from a rally at Washington Square Park, to a 'Global warming burlesque' (a 'performance and art' event in 'a gritty bar on the Williamsburg waterfront'), to a 'Polar bear ferry ride' (leafleting on the Staten Island ferry, dressed as polar bears). For this study, we excluded the musical and art events and focused our inquiry on the more 'traditional' forms of protest, such as marches and demonstrations.

*Data collection*

Data were collected through an oral survey of 454 participants at the protest events at 10 different events in five cities: (1) New York City, NY; (2) Washington, DC; (3) Chicago, IL; (4) Bloomington, IN; and (5) Long Beach, CA. In total, 19 people refused to take the survey, representing an overall refusal rate of 4.4 per cent.

In events with less than one hundred participants, researchers surveyed every protester who was over the age of 18 and willing to participate. For those events that had more than 100 participants – the 'Big One' in Washington, DC, the 'Big One' in New York City, and the 'Big One' in Chicago – researchers selected survey participants using a field approximation of random selection at the events consistent with the methodology employed by other studies of protest events (e.g. Bédoyan *et al.* 2004; Fisher *et al.* 2005). Starting from different points, field surveyors 'counted off' protesters standing in a formal or informal line, selecting every third protester to participate. Because field situations varied, random selection was achieved at some events by choosing every third person standing in a line to enter a rally area and, at others, by choosing every third person in a line or row as determined by the researcher working in a particular area.

The survey was designed to be short and non-invasive, so as to facilitate data collection in the field and encourage the widest possible participation among the demonstrators. It includes six short questions designed to elicit responses that can easily be coded into categories regarding how the respondent came to be participating in the protest. Beyond survey data collected from protesters, data were collected through the Step It Up Website, as well as pamphlets, fliers, and other materials that were distributed by participants at each of the

local events. Using data collected from field notes and protest materials provided
at the events, the protest studied in each city will be briefly summarized in turn.

*New York City.*   Because the research team in New York City included eight people,
we were able to study all of the 'traditional' protest events taking place in the five
boroughs of the city. The biggest event in our sample was 'the Big One' in New York
City, which was a rally that took place in Washington Square Park. Organizers
reported that State Representative Weiner and the state's Lieutenant Governor,
who became the Governor of the state when Eliot Spitzer stepped down in
March 2008, both attended the event. Other New York events included the
'Green Guide for Kids Banner Painting Rally' in Brooklyn. This event was designed
'for kids and their parents', with the aim of creating a banner that was to be
displayed at Grand Army Plaza 'in front of thousands of passersby'. Also in
New York City was 'Greenpeace NYC presents: Where's Meeks' in Queens.
This event was part of Greenpeace USA's 'Project Hotseat' [for more information,
see http://us.greenpeace.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ProjectHotseat (29
July 2008)]. It was advertised as a 'community building event' with a march
around the park. The last event that we studied in New York City was the 'Step
It Uptown in the Cloisters', which was advertised as a 'late day edition of the
Step It Up Initiative'. During this event, community members were expected to
meet at the Cloisters after the rally in Washington Square Park.

*Washington, DC.*   There was also an event in Washington, DC called 'the Big
One'. This event was a traditional rally held at the Lincoln Memorial. 'The Big
One' was joined by an event called: 'I have a dream where I'm biking' – a
bike ride from American University to the Lincoln Memorial. The third event
included in the study from this city was the 'Global Warming Town Hall
Meeting', in College Park, MD. (Although this event did not technically take
place in Washington, DC, because of its proximity to the city, the organizer ident-
ified it as a 'DC event'. Therefore, it was included in the study.) This event was
designed to be a community discussion between 'community members and stu-
dents to talk with local elected officials, climate scientists, and student leaders'.

*Chicago, IL.*   The event in Chicago was also called 'The Big One'. It had the
subtitle of 'Lead Through Education and Action Forum'. This event was also
a discussion meeting, in which local policy experts and state legislators spoke
about the 'challenge and opportunities that global warming presents'.

*Bloomington.*   The 'Step It Up Bloomington!' event in Bloomington, Indiana,
consisted of concurrent workshops and discussions all day, with a break in the
afternoon for a collective rally. Data were collected during the rally.

*Long Beach, CA.*  In California, we studied another Greenpeace event. This event, 'Greenpeace: Congress is on the Hot Seat', took place in Long Beach, CA. It was also part of 'Project Hotseat', the nationally coordinated campaign by Greenpeace. The event included a rally in Bixby Park, followed by a march to Bluff Park.

Although the events were quite different from one another in terms of their attendance and structure, they were all part of the same day of action and had the same general goals. Table 1 presents the reported attendance, the number of survey participants, and the refusal rates for each action. Since the aim of this paper is to understand the role the Internet played in mobilizing participants in this day of action overall, we will keep the data from the events aggregated for the remainder of the paper (Table 1).

## Findings

We begin by looking at how important the Internet was for mobilizing participants to attend the day of action. Respondents were asked how they heard about the protest, and if they heard in several ways, which was the most important channel for them (Table 2). If a respondent provided more than one channel, the table represents the channel that each respondent identified as being the most important.

The Internet played a major role in mobilizing participants for the Step It Up day of action. More than a third of the respondents (37.7 per cent) mentioned that a website, e-mail, or e-mail listserv was the most important way that they had heard about the event. The second most important channel through which people heard about the action was personal networks, which included friends, family members, and people from school or work (28.0 per cent). Organizational networks were slightly less important than personal networks. In all, about one-fifth of the respondents (20.4 per cent) reported hearing about the protest from people they knew in social movement organizations. Consistent with the work on social networks and social movements (see e.g. McAdam & Paulson 1993; Diani & McAdam 2003), social and organizational ties played an important role in mobilizing participants in this day of action. In fact, when aggregated, social networks, which include personal and organizational ties, mobilized almost half of all of the participants in the day of action (48.4 per cent). Taken together, the three main channels – the Internet, personal networks, and organizational networks – account for the mobilization of 83.5 per cent of the participants in this day of action (Table 2).

We now turn to how people got to these events: with whom did they travel? The data show that a large proportion of the protesters came to the demonstration alone (43.3 per cent). This number is significantly higher than that in earlier studies of protest participants, in which less than 20 per cent of the attendees reported coming to the events alone (e.g. Fisher *et al.* 2005). Of those protest participants

**TABLE 1** Summary of protests surveyed.

| protest | DC Big One | DC Town-hall | DC Bikes | Chicago | LA | Bloom-ington | NYC Big One | NYC Brooklyn | NYC Queens | NYC Cloisters | total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Estimated attendance | 200 | 50 | 13 | 150 | 75 | 55 | 250 | 12 | 25 | 12 | 842 |
| Sample size | 94 | 12 | 13 | 59 | 45 | 49 | 135 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 435 |
| Refusals | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 19 |

**TABLE 2** Most important channel through which people heard about the demonstration.

| channel | Internet[1] | personal network[2] | org network | flyers | media[3] | newsletter | other events | other[4] | total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 159 | 118 | 86 | 20 | 13 | 5 | 3 | 18 | 422 |
| % | 37.7 | 28.0 | 20.4 | 4.7 | 3.0 | 1.2 | 0.7 | 4.2 | 99.9 |

[1]Composed of 'email or mailinglist' ($N = 110$, 26.1%) and 'website' ($N = 49$, 11.6%).

[2]Composed of 'family or friends' ($N = 99$, 23.5%) and 'people from school or work' ($N = 19$, 4.5%).

[3]Composed of 'radio or TV' ($N = 9$, 2.1%) and 'newspaper' ($N = 4$, 0.9%).

[4]Composed of 'walked in on it' ($N = 14$, 3.3%) and 'other' ($N = 4$, 0.9%).

**TABLE 3** With whom people came to the demonstration.

| with whom they came | alone | with friends or neighbours | with partner or family | with colleagues or co-students | with members of a group | total[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 187 | 102 | 96 | 45 | 31 | 461 |
| % | 43.3 | 23.6 | 22.2 | 10.4 | 7.1 | 106.6 |

[1]Exceeds 100 per cent since some people reported coming to the protest with more than one group of people.

who came to the event with others, most of them came with friends or neighbours or with their partners or family members (23.6 and 22.2 per cent, respectively). In addition, 10 per cent of the respondents travelled to the event with colleagues or co-students, and 7 per cent reported travelling to the event with a member of a social movement organization or civic group (Table 3).

Given the significant differences in the ways participants came to the events, we proceed by looking at the relationship between how participants heard about the event and with whom they travelled to attend the event. In particular, we are interested in knowing whether the Internet mobilized people who were socially embedded, or socially isolated, as some research might lead us to predict. Comparing those who were mobilized through the Internet with those who were mobilized through face-to-face social networks (i.e. personal networks, organizational networks, and those who heard about the day of action from people at previous protest events), we see that there is a big difference in the ways they travelled to the day of action. People who were mobilized through the Internet were much more likely to come to the demonstration alone than those people who were mobilized through face-to-face channels (60.1 versus 26.1 per cent respectively). Conversely, almost three-quarters (73.9 per cent) of the participants who heard about the event through their social networks came to the event with others, in significant contrast to the almost 40 per cent of those who heard about the event through the Internet who came with others (Table 4).

These findings are not unique to the medium of the Internet. Comparing those who heard about the event through the Internet with those who heard about the event through other mediated channels such as the radio, TV, newspaper, flyers, posters, or newsletters, we find that all of these mediated channels tended to mobilize people who travelled to the day of action alone. (About two-thirds (66.7 per cent) of those who heard about the event through the radio, television, newspapers, flyers, posters, or newsletters reported coming to the event alone.) In other words, all of these mediated channels of communication mobilized more isolated individuals than those communication channels that are face-to-face. When we aggregate all of the mediated channels through which people heard and compare them with those people who heard

**TABLE 4** Cross tab of how respondents heard about the demonstration* how they came to the event.

| | came alone | came with others | Pearson's $\chi^2$ | $\gamma$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social networks (friends/family, school/ work, people of SMO's, other events) | 26.1% | 73.9% | | |
| Internet (websites, email/mailing list) | 60.1% | 39.9% | 42.978** | 0.628** |

*$\chi^2$ is significant at the 0.1 level.

**$\chi^2$ is significant at the 0.01 level.

**TABLE 5** Cross tab of how respondents heard about the demonstration* how they came to the event.

| | came alone | came with others | Pearson's $\chi^2$ | $\gamma$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social networks (friends/family, school/work, people of SMO's, other events) | 26.1% | 73.9% | | |
| Mediated channels (radio/television, newspaper, flyers/posters, newsletters, websites, email/mailing lists) | 61.3% | 38.7% | 50.738** | 0.644** |

*$\chi^2$ is significant at the 0.1 level.

**$\chi^2$ is significant at the 0.01 level.

about the event from their social networks, the differences are even more significant ($\gamma = 0.644$ versus 0.628 accordingly). These results are consistent with the findings of those scholars who conclude that the Internet is helping to enhance a disconnection from local community that was already taking place (e.g. Wellman *et al.* 2003; Boase *et al.* 2006) (Table 5).

## Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study provide evidence to support the notion of networked individualism (e.g. Wellman *et al.* 2003; Boase *et al.* 2006). As individuals rely more on mediated forms of communication to get their information, they seem to be less connected to their local communities. It is worth noting that these individuals may be *more* connected overall, but these connections are not local. As our analyses show, the Internet did not begin this social transformation, those activists who were mobilized through other mediated forms of

communication also tended to come to the event alone. But, as individuals increasingly rely on this technology to learn about collective action, data collected from the Step It Up day of action suggest that the actions themselves will also change. In particular, as more activists are mobilized through the Internet, it is likely that protest events will become less social events: more participants will come to events alone, and less participants will come to events with members of their social networks.

At the same time, social networks played an important role in mobilizing many of the participants in this day of action. For those who heard about the event from people in their social networks, they tended to travel to the event with others in their social networks. Based on the findings of the research on the role that social ties play in mobilization (see particularly McAdam & Paulsen 1993; Diani & McAdam 2003), it is very likely that one of the main reasons these people participated in the protest was because they were asked by people from organizations in which they were involved, their friends, or family members. Although it may not be particularly surprising that people who hear about collective action from their social networks tend to travel to the events together, what is surprising is how *few* of those people who hear about it through mediated channels of communication are travelling to protest events together.

As the Internet plays an increasingly larger role in social movement coordination and communication, as well as in communication among individuals more broadly, our findings suggest that collective action itself will change. In particular, our results suggest that the Internet mobilizes mostly isolated individuals who are not personally connected to a wider circle of people with whom they engage in social movement activity. These people who came to the events alone are likely to be highly internally motivated to participate in action. If social movement actors increasingly use the Internet as their main form of contact with potential activists, there may be significant implications for all aspects of movement activity. With both of the major candidates in the 2008 Presidential campaigns in the US having used the Internet to mobilize volunteers and connect potential participants to political events and campaign activities (e.g. Rhoads 2008), it is likely that our findings will apply to political mobilization more broadly. In short, mobilization through mediated forms of communication, in contrast to face-to-face channels, will have effects on the nature of participation itself. It remains to be seen, however, whether people who are mobilized through mediated channels and travel to events alone continue to be isolated once they get there. It is possible that the Internet helps them to participate in events at which they can connect with a broader social network of activists. Based on recent reports about people who were mobilized to participate in the Obama campaign through the campaign website, the Internet facilitated new connections among people with common interests in their communities that has endured past the conclusion of the campaign (Scherer 2009).

In other words, as social movements and political campaigns increasingly mobilize participants through computer-mediated forms of communication, effort will be needed to integrate disconnected sympathizers into the movement to maintain a local presence. In the case of the Step It Up day of action in November 2007, no such effort was made, and it is likely that those people who came alone to the various events held around the United States did not build any lasting connections. Since 2007, the organization has held no additional events. Instead, it provides links to other organizations on its website. Future research must build on these findings to understand what happens to people who are mobilized through the Internet to participate in political activities: do they stay involved, do they get more involved, or is their participation only a one time occurrence? It is likely that the answer to these questions will be contingent on the behaviour of the organization that coordinated the mobilization. Data collected from different mobilizations that are coordinated through the Internet have the potential to add significantly to our understanding of the ways that political participation is changing in the digital age, as well as the social capital of networked individuals more broadly. Such an understanding is increasingly necessary as the Internet's capacity for mobilizing civic participation grows.

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