

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MEDIA

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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MEDIA

EDITED BY

JENNIFER EARL

School of Sociology, University of Arizona, USA

DEANA A. ROHLINGER

Department of Sociology, Florida State University, USA



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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<i>Jackson Bird</i>	Harry Potter Alliance, USA
<i>Thomas V. Maher</i>	School of Sociology, University of Arizona, USA
<i>Bernadette Barker-Plummer</i>	Media Studies, University of San Francisco, USA
<i>David Barker-Plummer</i>	Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, USA
<i>Carrie James</i>	Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA
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<i>Hava Rachel Gordon</i>	Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Denver, USA
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<i>Sarah Gaby</i>	Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

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THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS STUDIES: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Deana A. Rohlinger and Jennifer Earl

Mass media have never appeared more politically consequential. Consider Donald Trump's ascendance to the White House. Trump sold himself on cable news as a political outsider who would "drain the swamp" and fix everything from America's economy to its "ISIS problem." Trump took to Twitter to troll his opponents' presumed weaknesses (e.g., "Lying Ted" and "Crooked Hillary") and to signal to his base that he wanted to "make America great again" for the white, Christian, working class. Trump, however, was not a one-man media machine. Firms such as Cambridge Analytica microtargeted voters on Facebook in an effort to mobilize some citizens and suppress others with fake news about the presidential candidates, and "meme magicians" worked around the clock to create images, slogans, characters, and cartoons

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in order to “shit-post” Trump into the White House and Hilary Clinton into political oblivion.¹

Trump and his supporters, of course, were not the only ones to use mass media to try and reshape the political landscape. In the wake of Trump’s election, citizens used Facebook and Twitter to organize a global Women’s March showing support for women’s rights, LGBTQIA rights, worker’s rights, immigrant rights, racial equality, religious freedom, and environmental justice. Millions of men, women, and children marched and many remain engaged through local “huddles,” other organizations, or use online action lists, such as the one put out by Jennifer Hoffman for Democrats, to act on their own accord.

Activists also use mass media, including websites and social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter, to organize and mobilize citizens around explicitly nonpartisan issues. For instance, the March for Science’s website, argued:

Science gives us the ability to examine these questions, enabling us to craft improved policies and regulations that serve our best interests. Political decision-making that impacts the lives of Americans and the world at large should make use of peer-reviewed evidence and scientific consensus, not personal whims and decrees (www.marchforscience.com/mission-and-vision).

By using its website, and having supporters promote it through Twitter, Facebook, and other Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs), the marchers tried to rearticulate the boundaries between science and politics and make clear that, while politicians may not agree with scientific findings, this did not mean their results were biased or lack value.

Just as the political events of the day have cast a spotlight on media and its political implications, the study of media and social movements has developed into a vibrant subfield stretched across multiple disciplines that evaluates the role of media (digital or otherwise) in protest and social movements. Indeed, as digital and social media have been added to the fold of research on the topic – which had been a subfield primarily focused on newspaper coverage (e.g., [Amenta, Caren, & Olasky, 2005](#); [Earl, Martin, McCarthy, & Soule, 2004](#); [Rucht & Neidhardt, 1998](#); [Tarrow, 1998](#)) and the public distribution of frames ([Bail, 2012](#); [Klandermans, 1996](#); [Snow & Benford, 1988](#)), save a few works on books (although, most notable here is [Meyer & Rohlinger, 2012](#), who dispute the importance of “big books” to social movements), radio ([Roscigno & Danaher, 2004](#)), or television ([Gitlin, 1996](#); [McLeod, 1995](#); [Rohlinger, 2007](#); [Rohlinger, Kail, Taylor, & Conn, 2012](#)) – the field has grown dramatically by almost any measure. Traditionally nested within the study

of social movements, the rise of digital and social media has attracted far more scholars to the study of digital protest from outside of social movement studies than from within it, swamping the study of digital protest with scholars trained variously in communication, political science, or interdisciplinary Internet and society programs. Indeed, Earl (Forthcoming) shows that the majority of publications on digital protest are coming out in communication or interdisciplinary journals, not social movements or even sociological journals.

This widening of the field brings many advantages. First, the sheer spike in interest in digital protest – which is fundamentally a media and social movements concern – has enlivened the field and substantially expanded scholarship on the topic. This has meant not only far more publications on (digital) media and protest but also new ranks of scholars being brought in to the area. The interdisciplinarity of the area has advantages, promising ways that the settled knowledge from different disciplines can improve the study of digital protest, or even, as [Earl and Garrett \(2017\)](#) have argued, the study of protest more generally.

It is also clear, though, that this blossoming of research, particularly across so many disciplines, has consequences that, if ignored, can have negative effects on our collective ability to study media and social movements. Our volume can be read both on its own as a collection of excellent research on media and social movements, and also as an attempt to demonstrate correctives to different concerning trends we see in the field. In the rest of the introduction, we outline some of the concerns we hold, arguing that if they are not collectively acknowledged and managed, the field will likely squander some of its possibility, instead spending time on making predictable mistakes; we end by introducing each chapter in this special issue in turn.

MEDIA BEYOND DIGITAL MEDIA AND NEWSPRINT

In social movement studies, the study of “newspapers of record,” or “quality” newspapers, has dominated the study of media in movements. This has included: (1) a methodological focus on how newspapers may be used and attended benefits and limitations to this approach and (2) a substantive focus on the (attempted) use of media to convey movement messages. Speaking from a methodological point of view, the collection of catalogs of protest events reported on by newspapers was pioneered by [Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly \(1975\)](#), offering the possibility that social movement scholars could move away from a field almost entirely dominated by case studies

up to that point. Several key projects, such as Dynamics of Collective Action in the US² (e.g., [Earl & Soule, 2006](#); [Soule & Davenport, 2009](#); [Soule & Earl, 2005](#)) and PRODAT in Europe³ (e.g., [Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995](#)) further popularized the use of newspapers to identify and catalog events. While this has generated praise and controversy, principally due to the risk of selection bias in reporting ([Earl et al., 2004](#); [McCarthy, McPhail, & Smith, 1996](#); [Molotch & Lester, 1974](#)), there is also no doubt that the study of social movements through newspapers has dramatically changed the face of social movement scholarship. Of course, there have been other methodological uses of newspapers. Amenta's Political Organizations in the News project, for instance, has collected data on the social movement organizations (SMOs) discussed in quality US newspapers in the twentieth century. But, in either case, the goal tends to be to track the prominence and/or mobilization of movements across time using newspaper-based data.

More substantively, scholars have focused on how movements try to get media coverage ([Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002](#); [Garner, 1987](#); [Gaventa, 1980](#); [Gitlin, 1980](#); [Rohlinger, 2015](#)), particularly newspaper coverage. This often involves a discussion of the paradoxes that media coverage represents for movements. As [Gitlin \(1980\)](#) argued, media may prefer to cover more extreme spokespeople, creating long-term negative effects for movements. Even when not focused on the extreme, a focus on "authentic" protesters ([Sobieraj, 2010](#)) may lead newspapers or other media to avoid covering movement organizations, actors, or events with more elaborated and/or professionalized media routines. Researchers have also tried to understand the diffusion of frames or other movement messages (e.g., [Bail, 2012](#)), among other topics.

This focus on newspapers has been the proverbial backbone of social movement research on media for decades, with a few exceptions cited above relating to books, radio, or television, or more communication-focused research on messaging ([Gamson, 1992, 1995, 2004](#); [Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992](#); [Gamson & Meyer, 1996](#); [Gamson & Modigliani, 1989](#); [Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993](#)). However, with the rise of digital media, newspaper research has had to learn to share the stage, becoming one of two pillars of media and social movements research.

In the following two subsections, we argue that this focus on two primary media forms – newspapers and digital media – creates two related risks for the field: (1) it can lead us to forget that we are studying larger media systems ([Rohlinger, 2015](#)) that are often empirically intertwined ([Chadwick, 2013](#)) and (2) we run the risk when studying a single kind of medium – like

ICTs – of making causal attributions about specific media that would be unsupportable were these media comparatively analyzed.

We Should Be Thinking About Media Systems

Conceptualizing mass media as a system is important for at least two related reasons: (1) mass media are comprised of different, but often interconnected, media, which changes how citizens can engage in claims-making and (2) the diversity in media platforms allows citizens to strategically use mass media to organize and mobilize inside *and* outside the view of a larger public. On the first point, it is easy to forget that many systems are “hybridized” (Chadwick, 2013), meaning mass media consist of a sometimes contradictory mix of new, old, and “renewed” media (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2007). This diversifies information flows and affects citizen claims-making as well as collective action. Moreover, “old” media (e.g., television, radio, and newspapers) are evolving and renewing how they deliver content to (increasingly global) audiences. This changes revenue streams, work practices, and, importantly, the ability of politicians, officials, and media professionals to control how citizens use mass media to organize and challenge the status quo (Chadwick, 2013).

Rohlinger and Corrigan-Brown (Forthcoming) argue that these changes lay on top of initial differences in media systems since some media systems were initially more open to challenger claims than others. In relatively open media systems, such as the US, Canada, England, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, and Germany, the state already has limited control over the flow of information. In these media systems, it is relatively easy for citizens to access a range of mediums in their efforts to raise awareness (and mobilize around) their issues of interest. This is not true of relatively closed media systems, such as transitional governments like Egypt during the Arab Spring, Ukraine, China, and some Latin American countries, where the state has a great deal of control over mass media. In these circumstances, citizens with concerns may engage in “polite protest” (Yang, 2013), or directly challenge state positions with the hope of generating support from global audiences.

The Russian punk group Pussy Riot, which protested the “dictatorship” of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his close relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church, is an excellent example in this regard. Pussy Riot staged unauthorized performances in public spaces and posted them online for the world to view. Three members eventually were arrested, denied

bail, and convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred. The trial and sentence sparked international criticism, and the band was credited with bringing international attention to Putin's opposition to gay rights and for reinvigorating feminism in Russia (Gessen, 2014). In short, while a nation state's relative control over mass media and what information gets circulated to the citizenry varies dramatically, citizen's claims can transcend the borders and have global importance.

A second major point is that the complexity of a media system allows citizens to communicate and organize inside *and* outside the view of a larger public with great political influence (Rohlinger, 2015). Citizens are "omnivores" insofar as they consume information from a broad range of media platforms (Howard & Chadwick, 2009). This is no less true of citizens who want to learn more about a cause and get involved with an action on- and/or off-line. Barker-Plummer and Barker-Plummer (this volume) highlight the importance of being sensitive to the complexity of a media system through an analysis of the hashtag #YesAllWomen and its recirculation on other media platforms. They find that the key arguments made relative to the #YesAllWomen hashtag not only attracted global attention but also crossed over into political blogs (such as *Slate* and *The Huffington Post*) as well as mainstream news outlets (such as BBC News and *The New Yorker*). Barker-Plummer and Barker-Plummer also find that #YesAllWomen provided an easy way for citizens to share their experiences and interpretive frameworks, cultivate solidarity, and discuss ways to push back against oppressive practices in very visible ways. In other words, this hashtag both crossed over into other media in the hybridized media system and also served as an internal space of discussion.

While not examined in this volume, it is also important to remember that some of this "internal" discussion may be purposely hidden from public view. For instance, Rohlinger (2006, 2015) finds that sometimes activists communicate with one another behind closed doors and refuse to comment on events and issues to the press. This "strategic" silence is consequential because it can be read differently by different audiences. For instance, the mainstream anti-abortion group National Right to Life Committee purposely did not comment on some of the tactics of its more radical allies (such as the storming of abortion clinics) knowing that supporters sympathetic to these tactics would read their silence as support and those opposed to their tactics would read their silence as a condemnation. Additionally, sociologists find activists have sustained the White Supremacy movement by cultivating collective identity via ICTs (Blee, 2002). Online forums such as Stormfront allow supporters to conceal their real-world identities and express their ideology and opinions

without censorship (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Hier, 2000). These online forums have both public and “member only” spaces. This is important because the former allows White Supremacists to maintain a less stigmatized public identity for their regular face-to-face interactions, which can help the movement attract new members (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Caren, Gaby, & Bond, 2012), while the latter creates a “free space” for authentic identity expression and action (Douglas, McGarty, Bliuc, & Lala, 2005). Indeed, given the reported links between White Nationalists operating on virtual forums such as 4Chan and Reddit to rally support for Donald Trump, it is clear that scholars need to take these communitive spaces and their potential to mobilize individuals to action seriously.

We Should Continue to Examine Hitherto Unexamined Media

A corollary to this line of argument is that we should not fixate on a small number of media formats or categories of media, disregarding all others, as a research community. The first chapter in this volume serves as an important reminder that many kinds of media, including fiction, may have an impact on social movements and their ability to mobilize. Bird and Maher trace the history of the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), showing how it used fan interest in the Harry Potter series to mobilize tens of thousands of young people into civic and social action on a host of issues ranging from LGBTQ rights to fair trade and corporate production practices. Although certainly HPA was aided by digital technologies, the entire “media story” for HPA cannot be summarized by a discussion of the role of digital media; the Harry Potter books themselves, and the fan communities that were cultivated around them through many means, are central. The same can be said for fan activism more broadly, which can range from politically focused groups like HPA to fans who use activist tools to demand change in cultural products or industries (Earl & Schussman, 2008); while digital media may support fan activism, it is also important to acknowledge the role of the underlying media of which people are fans.

More broadly, we argue that trends like the rise in fan activism, which may be based on book series, movie series, television shows, etc., deserve greater interrogation by social movement scholars. Bird and Maher show us a powerful empirical example and also provide a theoretical roadmap for thinking about the effectiveness and recruitment potential of fan activism. While social movement scholars may be quick to dismiss entertainment-related activism, it is worth noting that political communication scholars have found that

political messages in entertainment media are particularly persuasive because common cognitive reactions to opinion-dissonant information are not as active when consuming entertainment (Earl & Garrett, 2017; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009).

Moreover, even if individual scholars are not interested in fan activism or alternative media on their own, the study of fan activism – and the media tied to that activism – offers important contrasts that are of great value to the overall field. This may be a shocking statement given that many social movement scholars dismiss fan activism as “not serious” enough to study either because its motivation comes from entertainment, instead of political headwaters, or because it targets cultural products but not always the political economy underlying their production. But we reinforce the point initially made by Earl and Kimport (2009): when we fail to study cases like fan activism, we also lose the ability to dissect whether the political origins or aspirations of a movement affect its processes because we lose a method of difference. In other words, we cannot know whether fan activism is different from other forms of activism unless we study them both and compare them.

THERE WAS PROTEST BEFORE THE INTERNET AND THERE IS LITERATURE ON IT

Both of us are trained as social movement scholars, reared in the discipline of sociology. While we both have been amazed and heartened by the significant attention that the relationship between digital media and activism have garnered, it is also evident that there is significant variation in how concerned researchers studying digital activism are with prior work on extant social movements. There are a few well-known scholars that tend to draw on a wide range of literatures and provide leadership to their fields through this interdisciplinary work (e.g., Lance Bennett, Bruce Bimber, and Dave Karpf to name a few), but we argue that much of the work on digital or social media and social movements tends to privilege only one of several areas that are important to understanding these dynamics.

Scholars who approach digital media and movements from a social movements background, for instance, tend to examine the similarities and differences between digitally enabled movements, campaigns, and/or tactics and historically more traditional offline activism (see recent reviews of this literature by Earl, Forthcoming; Earl, Hunt, & Garrett, 2014; Earl, Hunt, Garrett, & Dal, 2015; Garrett, 2006; Garrett, Bimber, & Gil de Zuniga, 2012). This means

that these scholars, as Maher and Earl (this volume) demonstrate in their chapter, take seriously the existing terrain of social movement scholarship, including the categorization of key problems (e.g., how do we explain micromobilization; under what conditions do movements have different kinds of consequences), existing theoretical approaches to these problems (i.e., the existing micromobilization literature that Maher and Earl discuss), and a sensitivity to the wealth and variety of theorizing happening at the mesolevel, well below the grand theory that approaches like resource mobilization or political process represent. After all, these grand theoretical approaches were meant to explain why social movements rise and fall at specific moments, not which specific factors shape individual willingness to participate in protest, what factors shape the application of and consequences of state repression, etc. While apt to make mistakes that political communication or Internet and society scholars are far less likely to make (e.g., making technologically deterministic claims, see [Earl & Garrett, 2017](#) on this topic), these scholars do tend to do a better job of contextualizing digitally enabled protest within the wider protest realm, allowing us to discern what may be particular to digital protest and why.

However, as Maher and Earl (this volume) point out in their chapter, scholarship contextualizing digital protest within a wider history of protest and/or drawing on theoretical approaches that predate the Internet tends to be substantially in the minority. In terms of sheer research publication volume, communication, political communication, and Internet and society journals (and researchers) publish far more than social movement journals (Earl, Forthcoming), and the vast majority of these articles tend to sidestep existing relevant social movement literatures, which we argue is creating several major problems in this adolescent field of study (although here we only focus on a few).

First, research that is not cognizant of decades of prior work is bound to make predictable mistakes. For instance, social movement scholars recognize that in order to analyze the decision to participate or not, one must have both participants and nonparticipants so that one has a method of similarity and a method of difference. Indeed, the ability to find comparable nonparticipants is what has made classic micromobilization studies such as canonical works (e.g., [Klandermans & Oegema, 1987](#); [McAdam, 1988](#)). However, many interested in studying participation in online protest do not write with any reference to this well-known design issue, or the theoretical insights that have been uncovered by using this essential method of difference (except see [Rohlinger & Bunnage, 2017](#)). Likewise, [Earl \(2014\)](#) and [Earl and Beyer \(2014\)](#) have pointed to problems with research on online surveillance and repression,

which primarily owe to a lack of familiarity with the existing social movement scholarship on repression.

Second, when it manages to avoid (predictable) mistakes, research that is disconnected from prior work on protest is not only at risk of proverbially reinventing the wheel but also believing the finding to be new or, as we discuss in the next section, particular to the online context. This volume contains several pieces that show what is to be gained by connecting with prior work on extant protest. For instance, research on youth online political engagement has substantively found many of the same things that social movement scholars would predict – and Maher and Earl show are true for this case too – but without realizing that these findings are not necessarily particular to youth or the online context. This represents a major lost opportunity as it encourages literatures to develop around cases instead of theoretical and causal regularities. Likewise, Rohlinger and Gaulden take up a classic set of questions about leadership and its influence on group dynamics, showing that whether activism occurs online or offline, organization identity and scripts matter to influencing both leader and participant behavior. They also examine new digital questions such as how organizational identity may be expressed and technically routinized within a site. Finally, James and Lee's chapter examines the impact of activist identities on online behavior, not only making use of past research on identity but also turning the relationship between social movements (here identity) and the digital (activity online in this study) on its head by asking how identity drives that online behavior.

Third, as our next section argues, scholars interested in digital media really cannot claim that anything is new or different when digital media are pervasively used or due to the altered context that pervasive digital media usage creates without a comparison to nondigital or less-digital cases.

NOT EVERYTHING ABOUT NEW MEDIA IS NEW

Earl (2014) has elsewhere pointed out that there is tendency among scholars who have not studied traditional contention to assume or even assert that their findings are related to the unique digital environment. In actuality, this is a difficult claim to sustain from a methodological point of view because of the absence of a method of difference, or at least an implicit method of difference in which one compares their current findings to extant research conducted on non-digital contention. But, scholars tend to make these claims

nonetheless. And, one can easily see why it would be tempting to assume that a finding was genuinely new if it was new to your research community, even if it is not new scholars who have studied social movements for decades. For instance, as [Earl \(2014\)](#) notes, many were eager to argue that the failure of the Arab Spring to translate into sweeping policy changes, even when regime changes occurred, was evidence of the weakness of digital media. However, scholars who study revolutions know that this is a weakness of almost all revolutions – whether one looks at revolutions that occurred centuries ago or the Arab Spring, revolutions often fail to produce substantial actual policy changes. Unfortunately, many of the “new” things about digital media that turn out to not be new at all are viewed as negative and taken as evidence of the weakness of digital media, as is the case with the alleged newness of difficulties creating policy changes post-revolution.

We are exceptionally pleased to be publishing a chapter that offers a useful counterpoint to this trend by Gordon. Many scholars and public commentators deride online activism, referring to some forms as slacktivism, and valorize offline protest as if it is both the gold standard for successful protest and not encumbered with a huge number of dilemmas, paradoxes, and limitations. Gordon shows how problematic these implicit assumptions and comparisons are by examining offline youth activist organizations. Her chapter provides a much-needed reminder that offline youth activists, and the organizations they participate in, are not utopic civic and political spaces. Our point in publishing this chapter is not to show that offline activism is flawed while online activism is not. Instead, it is to show that both online and offline activist engagement have advantages and disadvantages, struggles, paradoxes, limitations, etc., but that we cannot understand what is unique to the digital world or digital environment until research on digital subjects is brought into conversation with comparable offline subjects.

The Gaby chapter is also focused on youth organizations and emphasizes this same offline to online comparison by asking whether decision-making practices or media practices have more impact on organizational efficacy. Gaby finds that while both initially seem important, when modeled together, decision-making practices matter more. Whether the comparison between online and offline elements comes within a single study (as in the Gaby chapter) or implicitly through the comparison of a current study to a stock of extant research findings (as in the Gordon chapter), we argue it is critical for the field to move to more comparative designs and for scholars who were not trained as social movement scholars to nonetheless engage the literature on predigital protest.

YOUTH, MEDIA, AND THE MOVEMENTS OF TOMORROW

As [Earl, Maher, and Elliott \(2017\)](#) discuss in their review of research on youth and activism, young people have been critical to the history and success of social movements. Whether one thinks about college students sitting-in at lunch counters in the American South, the radical and young New Left, or the Occupy movement today, young people have been key players in social movements. However, social movement scholars often ignore youth (except through concepts like “biographical availability,” see [McAdam, 1988](#)) and/or treat youth as if they are miniature adults, with similar interests and motivations as adults. Recent research shows this is also how SMOs tend to treat youth, failing to see young people as distinct audiences ([Elliott & Earl, Forthcoming](#)) and failing to see youth as part of larger intersectional identities (e.g., young, black women, see [Elliott, Earl, & Maher, 2017](#)).

We see this as problematic for a host of reasons but one is particularly consequential for research on the relationship between media and social movements: to the extent to which the digital environment and digital media usage is affecting protest in substantial ways, and youth represent the first generation of “digital natives,” it is important to look to the study of youth activism for hints about what the future of social movements may hold. As [Earl \(Forthcoming\)](#) argues, the study of social movements gets better at understanding historical protest every day, but through a clear and concerted attention to youth activism today, the field can also get better at preparing itself to study the protest of tomorrow. While youth may well age out of some of their protest-related behaviors, and their media usage tendencies, they will not age out of all of them, bringing potentially important changes to both the studies of media and social movements.

To support the development of this work, this volume has brought together a range of chapters focusing on youth activism. Many of the fan activists that [Bird and Maher](#) study are young people inspired by a book series designed to help young readers become lifelong readers. [Maher and Earl](#) and [James and Lee](#) focus on youth activists. [Maher and Earl](#) examine a broad cross section of young people in terms of their current and past levels of activism and political engagement, whereas [James and Lee](#) focus on very active youth who also tend to be embedded within youth political organizations. Finally, the chapters by [Gaby and Gordon](#) examine the inner-workings of youth-focused organizations. For [Gaby](#), the primary questions are about what makes youth organizations perceive themselves as effective while [Gordon](#) focuses on the

kinds of dilemmas that primarily offline youth activist organizations face. Instead of relegating these chapters to a “youth” section of the volume, we have spread them throughout the volume to show that it is possible to focus explicitly on youth as part of wider theoretical conversations while not by ignoring that young people are the subject of study. We hope the field follows suit by acknowledging that studying youth engagement is essential to the future of social movement scholarship.

CONCLUSION

We hope that this introduction (and volume) is read as a call for scholars to take the interdisciplinarity of the study of mass media and social movements seriously. While it is certainly possible for individual scholars to thrive by tipping a proverbial hat to other disciplines in their research, this certainly will not help us collectively reach the best possible understanding of the social or the political world. We began the chapter with a discussion of Donald Trump to illustrate this point. Long before the 2016 election, social scientists began outlining the role of digital media in the circulation of political misinformation and its effects on the US elections (Howard & Hussain, 2011; Rojecki & Meraz, 2016) as well as the ways in which ICTs, including social media, had made political parties vulnerable to movement claims (Chadwick, 2006; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Rohlinger, Bunnage, & Klein, 2014). The problem, of course, is that these scholars were talking primarily to audiences in their own disciplines – communication, political science, or sociology – rather than one another. This volume takes a small step toward correcting the problem.

The first two articles discuss the relative influence of mass media on activist recruitment. Chapter one, by Bird and Maher, illustrates the unique role mass media can play in getting individuals engaged in collective action. In this chapter, Bird and Maher find that stories are powerful and can be used to encourage individuals to get politically engaged. Their analysis focuses on the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), which uses the plot of the wildly famous Harry Potter series to reframe social issues and make political engagement more accessible to young activists. HPA mobilizes thousands of young members to advocate around everything from economic equality to more accessible mental health services. The authors attribute HPA’s relative success at mobilizing young people to two strategies. First, the HPA used its understanding of the series and the enthusiasm of its most committed fans to recruit activists.

Specifically, the HPA used the series as well as the social and political ills the fictional characters faced as a lens through which to educate fans about “real world” problems and mobilize them to action on- and off-line. Second, the HPA engaged in “cultural acupuncture” by using plot points from the series to ignite the broader public’s interest in social change efforts. This strategy worked, in large part, because the HPA strategically linked their campaigns to popular culture events, such as the release of a film, and made participation relatively easy.

However, in chapter two, Maher and Earl remind us that mass media alone are not always what moves youth into the street. In this chapter, the authors take issue with the claim that youth are largely unengaged and, through interviews with high school and college students, show that the pathways to activism have not changed – the support youth receive for activism has. They find that family, friends, and school continue to play an important role in education, consensus mobilization, and collective action. These findings are important because, instead of blaming apathy for any lack of youth engagement, they suggest that changes in youth participation reflect changes in the levels of support from family, friends, and school. In fact, respondents indicate that they often find support once they have identified their own opportunities for engagement. In their conclusion, Maher and Earl caution scholars, particularly those studying ICTs, to remember that not everything about digital technologies are, in fact, “new.” For individual young people, ICTs do not often alone account for substantial increases or decreases in participation”. They work in conjunction with well-known mobilizing pathways.

Chapters three and four focus on discursive activism and the implications of online participation and identity. In chapter three, Barker-Plummer and Barker-Plummer analyze the discursive activism that took place in the wake of the gender-based violence perpetrated by Elliot Rodger in May 2014. Here, the authors show that although hashtags are not always taken seriously as a form of political participation, #YesAllWomen enabled the “consciousness raising” and “meaning-making” among geographically dispersed women responding to the incident. The authors argue that discursive activism is particularly important in the digital age because discourses, such as those produced by #YesAllWomen, constitute political actions and enable women to share their daily experiences with harassment, violence, insults, and threats, call out gender inequities, and articulate a shared feminist sensibility. Of course, this forum also provided a space for familiar, and historically relevant, critiques about the women’s movement and the fact that white, middle-class, heterosexual, feminist claims continue to attract public and broader political attention. The lack of recognition among hashtag users that gender, race,

class, and sexuality intersect and have different effects on women caused some to start/or follow other, more inclusive hashtags.

Similarly, James and Lee (chapter four) find that young activists associate activism with “speaking up” on- and off-line. In fact, the authors find that nearly two in three self-identified activists share their views across social media platforms online. However, the authors argue that scholars should take care not to equate silence on an issue with lack of engagement or antipathy. They discover several reasons that young activists may be careful about how they present their activism online, including the concern of being pigeonholed as “one of those social justice kids” and concerns about how relationships may be affected by their online activities. Additionally, the authors find that self-identification as an activist shapes online behavior. Youth that identified as activists felt responsible for sharing information about the causes they cared about over time. Youth that did not identify as activists cited concerns such as potential negative repercussions to explain their greater likelihood of being silent online even though they were politically active offline. Life transitions such as entering the job market and starting a family also made young people more hesitant to share their political views online. This reminds us that it is important to connect work on youth and digital engagement with research done by social movement scholars on identity and biographical availability.

The last section of the volume considers organizational dynamics in the digital age. Gordon (chapter five) analyzes the inner-workings of on-the-ground youth nonprofits and specifically assesses whether activists of color involved with educational nonprofits feel empowered or burnt out by the work. While Gordon finds that youth activists shared the perception that their experiences with educational activism were empowering and that the funded youth nonprofit provided them with an important institutional base, there were clear differences between younger and older youth activists’ experiences. Younger activists were more positive about their accomplishments than the older youth activists were. Older youth activists were charged with mentoring their younger (often more radical) colleagues while still moving forward the organization’s agenda and maintaining its stability over time. These organizational pressures had deleterious effects on the older youth activists, leading many to leave the nonprofit. In addition to offering an important critique to the utopian model of offline activism, Gordon reminds us that the digital divide influences how activists use ICTs in their organizing. Here, youth activists used texting as a way to mobilize teens and social media to communicate with elite, more resourced allies, and supporters.

Rohlinger and Gaulden (chapter six) enter the debate over the relevance of leadership to collective action in the digital age. Here, they argue that leadership remains relevant and analyze two online groups mobilizing against Monsanto – March against Monsanto (MAM) and Occupy Monsanto (OM) – in order to assess the effects of organizational identity on who performs leading tasks. Rohlinger and Gaulden contend that the relationship between the relative inclusivity and exclusivity of an organization's identity as well as the clarity of its scripts regarding how individuals can participate online affect the leading tasks that formal leaders and committed supporters perform. They show that the site that had an exclusive identity and provided a relatively clear participation script signaled to supporters that some kinds of leading tasks (such as justifying and articulating the organization's ideology) were more appropriate than others (such as sharing information with the group). While the most committed supporter engaged in other leading tasks, tasks signaled as appropriate by the organization script were performed at significantly higher rates. In contrast, OM's leader, which provided an inclusive identity but no script regarding how supporters should participate online, signaled that supporters could engage in whatever leading tasks they wished. However, absent norms for participation and reciprocity, the most committed supporter engaged in very few leading tasks and primarily performed easy tasks such as sharing information with the group.

In the final chapter, Gaby uses survey data on youth-oriented organizations with paid staff to examine factors influencing organizational beliefs about effectiveness. Gaby finds that, while organizations use ICTs to communicate with adherents and a broader public, their use does not make organizational leaders feel efficacious. Gaby argues that this is largely a function of how organizations use social media tools such as Twitter. Instead of using ICTs to engage supporters in discussions or to hold virtual events, organizations primarily use social media to share news of their issues and campaigns. Additionally, Gaby finds that the single most important contributor to feelings of efficacy was the inclusion of youth in daily decision-making. This finding serves as an important reminder that ICTs are simply tools that are available to activists. It is how these tools are used that is consequential.

Together, we regard this as a fascinating, provocative, and well-crafted set of research chapters. We hope the contributions remind us all of the importance of truly interdisciplinary research that both draws on and speaks to multiple disciplines at the same time, the complexity of the relationships between media and social movement, the variety of media to be studied, and the continuing importance of young people as media users and as potential movement participants.

NOTES

1. Shit-posting refers to the practice when individuals post negative content in an online forum (such as Reddit) or a social media network (such as Twitter). One purpose of shit-posting is to derail or take over a discussion. Trump supporters shit-posted his opponents by creating memes and, in some cases, billboards emphasizing their potential weaknesses. For an engaging story about the role of trolls, and their use of shit-posting in Trump's campaign, see This American Life episode 608, "Meme Come True." The show's transcript is available at www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/608/transcript.

2. Data are accessible via <https://web.stanford.edu/group/collectiveaction/cgi-bin/drupal/>.

3. Data are accessible via <https://www.wzb.eu/en/research/completed-research-programs/civil-society-and-political-mobilization/projects/prodat-dokumentation-un>.

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