The Internet and the Anti-HST Movement

Considerations for Social Movements in the Internet Age

By

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The purpose of this thesis project was to investigate the role played by the internet in the movement to abolish the Harmonized Sales Tax in British Columbia. A constructivist grounded theory approach was applied to data collection and analysis: specifically, five participants in the anti-HST movement were interviewed, and interview data was triangulated with observations of the movement's online activities. This study analysed the relationship between social forces and the structures of online spaces, identifying several ways that internet structure affected the shape of the movement. In addition, this study found that while the anti-HST movement bore many traits of a traditional, political-economic social movement, some elements of new social movement theory and practice were present within the movement. Finally, the study explored the homogenizing tendencies of online interaction, and how those tendencies affected individuals' interaction with the movement, and the discourses that informed and organized the movement.

Contents

Introduction

The Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) was introduced in July 2010 by the Liberal party of British Columbia, under the leadership of Premier Gordon Campbell. The HST combined the provincial sales tax (PST) and the federal Goods and Services Tax (GST) into a single sales tax for the province of BC. Under the HST, some goods and services that had been exempt from PST are no longer exempt from part of the sales tax and, as a result, their price has increased.

In addition to a general antipathy towards any perceived increase in taxation, public outcry was raised against the HST from various sectors and for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most common source of dissatisfaction with the HST came from the way it was implemented. During the 2009 provincial elections in BC, the Liberal party stated that it was not considering the implementation of an HST as part of its election platform. However, after being elected the Liberal party announced, then implemented, the HST, despite what many perceived to be a clear campaign promise (Say No to HST in BC 2010).

The dissatisfaction of many British Columbian citizens grew into a movement to have the HST revoked. A formal petition to revoke the HST was initiated and began to circulate. The movement behind this petition, which I will refer to as the anti-HST movement throughout this study, was spearheaded by Bill Vander Zalm, a former premier of BC.

In August 2010, the anti-HST petition announced that it had acquired enough signatures to be legally recognized, with a total of over 700,000 names (Bailey 2010). In response to this, Premier Campbell and the Liberal party announced that a referendum would be held in late 2011 to determine the fate of the HST. Campbell also pledged that rather than requiring that the legally necessary 50% of all registered voters, including 50% of voters within at least two-thirds of the province's 89 ridings, vote to remove the tax, his party would repeal the HST in response

to a simple majority of referendum voters (Hunter 2010). In November 2010, Premier Campbell resigned as the leader of the Liberal party, with personal approval ratings of as low as 9% (Fowlie and Culbert 2010). He was succeeded by Premier Christy Clark, under whose leadership the referendum to extinguish the HST was conducted in the summer of 2011. In August 2011, the results of the referendum were released, with the citizens of BC voting 54% in favour of extinguishing the HST.

Research Questions

The goal of this study is to investigate the role of the internet in the anti-HST movement. This research revolves around investigating how the relationship between the structure of online spaces and individuals' expectations and understandings regarding the internet influenced the anti-HST movement. It is not the HST or the effectiveness of the anti-HST movement that are of direct concern to this study; rather, the movement is used as a specific empirical site to inform and refine theory regarding the broader relationship between the internet and social movements.

Three primary considerations run through this study. The first is the status of the anti-HST movement in relation to conventional distinctions between traditional and new social movements. The second is the role of the structure of online spaces in shaping social movements. The third is the presence, and the consequences, of homogenizing tendencies within the anti-HST movement's online activities. These considerations are expressed in the research questions below. The initial design for this research included inquiries into participants' motivations for joining the movement, the methods by which they learned about and become involved with the movement, and their intentions and expectations relating to their use of online tools to engage with the movement, but as the study progressed it became apparent that it was the structure of

online spaces and the activity that took place within them that was of most interest. Consequently, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- *Was the anti-HST movement primarily a traditional, political social movement, or should it be more accurately classified as a "new social movement"?* How have traditional and new logics, motivations, and strategies of social advocacy interacted within the movement, and how might this interaction affect future social advocacy strategies?
- *Did participants in the anti-HST movement see the internet as a neutral technological tool—a "site of struggle"—or did they seek to exert control over it, treating it as an "object of struggle"?*
- *Did the structures of online spaces that were used by the anti-HST movement shape the movement itself, and if so, how?* Does the structure of online spaces affect how social advocacy within those spaces is conducted?
- *Did engagement online affect participants' perceptions of the movement?* In particular, how might online involvement have affected participants' perceptions of public support for the movement, and of whom that support was coming from?

These questions are important because they are designed to shed light on evolutions that are taking place within the definitions and measurement of social action and civic engagement, and to draw attention to the increasing importance of online spaces in shaping social life, and the need to be intentional and reflective about how online spaces are structured.

In what follows, I will argue that the anti-HST movement was a hybrid of new and traditional movements, in that it combined both political and cultural motivations and made use of both traditional and new tactics in pursuing its goals. The hybrid approach of this movement

may have implications for the "traditional vs. new" typology of social movements; while this is not a focus of my thesis, I briefly identify these implications in my conclusion.

The following chapter is comprised of a literature review that presents an overview of existing theory regarding the internet and social movements, followed next by a chapter outlining the methods used in the research. Then, after a brief introduction of the anti-HST movement, my analysis is divided into three sections. In the first of these sections, I lay the theoretical groundwork for a discussion of the role of the structure of online spaces in social movements. In this section, I argue that a dialectic exists between social forces and online structures, wherein socially informed interests and desires influence the creation and the shape of online spaces, while the structures of these spaces influence how those interests and desires arise and are expressed, and also lead to further consequences for different forms of online interaction, including social advocacy. In the second section of my analysis, I directly assess the anti-HST movement in terms of who was involved, what they did, and how their involvement and action was shaped by internet structures. In the third section, I discuss the homogenizing tendencies of the internet, including how perceptions of homogeneity arose within the anti-HST movement, where those perceptions came from, and how they affected both the short-term and long-term success of the movement.

Literature Review

To situate this study within the body of previously published literature, including both theoretical and empirical work, the following pages review existing literature pertaining to studies of the internet, social and political movements, and the intersections between the two. I begin first by outlining the connections that have been found between the internet and everyday "offline" life. I follow this by introducing the debate surrounding the foundations of social analyses of the internet. I then outline some of the identifiable features of "new social movements," in order to situate my research question regarding the nature of the anti-HST movement as either a "traditional" or a "new" social movement. Finally, I review the state of the literature on the internet's homogenizing tendencies.

The Internet as Everyday

Before anything else is said about the internet and society, it must be acknowledged that the internet is not a realm unto itself, separate from everyday life. Early analyses of the internet tended to focus on online spaces as something set apart from the offline world. Online and offline were discrete realms: while offline life was constrained by an assortment of traditional limiting factors such as appearance, race, gender, and so on, online life broke free of these shackles. Scholars such as Turkle (1995) wrote about the ways that individuals invented new and different selves online, escaping from the limitations of their physical world. Since the advent of the internet coincided, to a certain extent, with the rise of postmodern perspectives in social inquiry, concepts of fragmentation and multiplicity were leaned on heavily as ways to conceive of online spaces. Within a certain narrow postmodern view, individuals on the internet were thought to be able to construct and express new and different aspects of their identities. The multiple identities created within online spaces were seen as being essentially separate from

individuals' offline identities, which were constricted, constrained, imposed, and predetermined by social factors. On the internet, Turkle and others suggested, these factors were heavily minimized, or even done away with entirely, leaving users free to determine their own identities and social roles. In other words, the internet seemed like a place of self-constructed identity, rather than socially constructed identity. It appeared that the internet was poised to replace constrained society with postmodern society.

This perception has been heavily challenged in more recent literature. A view of the internet as an unconstrained, self-constructed social space may be useful in a limited number of extreme cases. In the majority of cases, however, this view will not capture the complexities of the role that the internet plays in most individuals' everyday lives. Poster (2001) argues that the internet does not *replace* existing social functions or institutions with something more free, open, fluid, and postmodern, but instead creates new and different social frameworks that interact and intersect with existing social structures in a variety of ways.

Rather than analytically separating online and offline spaces, then, most studies of the internet now advocate a view that recognizes the internet as embedded in everyday life. In other words, the internet is an element of individuals' lifeworlds, an inherent part of the social world, not a new and different social world of its own. Wellman et al. (2001), for example, suggest that personal relationships are carried out both online and offline, and that online interaction often plays a role in "offline" relationships, just as speaking to friends and family on the telephone plays a role in reinforcing and facilitating relationships that were not initially formed by means of the telephone. Online relationships and participation in online communities do not necessarily replace offline sociability. In fact, Wellman et al. (2001) found that "internet use neither increases nor decreases other forms of communication" (444). In other words, individuals do not

use the internet as a means to *escape* from the constraints of offline society—they do not break free of constrained society in favour of living within an unconstrained online society. Rather, they use the internet to facilitate, build upon, and add to their existing relationships.

Of course, many internet users do form relationships that are conducted solely via the internet. However, these relationships cannot typically be seen as the kind of free-form, postmodern, unconstrained identity-building opportunities put forward by Turkle and other early scholars of the social internet. Rather, the internet is predominantly a site of weak, specialized, diverse social ties (Wellman and Gulia 1999). The relationships formed between individuals online tend to be built around a common interest, such as gaming, cars, or parenting. Individuals on the internet generally interact with others on the basis of their shared interest in the central purpose of the online community, and while they may, in certain situations, form relationships that extend beyond their shared activity or interest-based communication, it is far more likely that they will simply exchange information, answer questions, express opinions, and develop no meaningful, lasting ties. For the majority of internet users, then, the internet may allow for the exploration of a more diverse form of identity, to some extent, but it does not generally appear to facilitate an escape from traditional identities and the building of newly significant, online-specific identities.

Looking beyond identity and relationships, it is also misleading to consider the internet as separate from offline society when discussing social action and political society. Carty (2010) demonstrates empirically that "online and offline activism tend to reinforce each other" (170). Activism that is conducted offline is more and more also being conducted online, in tandem with traditional methods. At the same time, activism conducted primarily online is most often directed towards effecting change in offline structures or institutions. As activists incorporate the internet

into their everyday lives, they also incorporate it into their activism, and into various other aspects of their lives. The ways in which the internet is incorporated into activism will be explored in the *New Social Movements* section of this chapter.

Social Theory and the Internet: Substantivism vs. Constructionism

While it is generally agreed that the internet has become embedded in everyday life for the majority of its users, disagreement still exists on the best approach for understanding the interactions between the internet and society. The theoretical underpinnings of the sociology of the internet have largely revolved around two perspectives; these perspectives are technological substantivism[1] and social constructionism.

Technological Substantivism

Technological substantivism conceives of the internet as a technological entity that influences and has effects on society because of its existence and by its use. Within this view, it is often implied that the internet is a static, extra-social structure. The primary points of interest within this perspective are the social effects of the internet's presence. Within substantivism, causality is seen to flow mostly from technology to society, rather than from society to technology.

In the empirical literature that has been published to date, a predominantly substantivist view has been taken in regards to the internet's effects on social movements. Many examples of empirically supported claims regarding the substantive effects of the internet can be found. Leung et al. (2010) find that online communities allow individuals to develop shared identity and common values—or, at the very least, to meet with others who share similar prior values. Little

[1] In some literature, substantivism is referred to as determinism. However, "determinism" implies too extreme a position to accurately reflect the actual theory of substantivist thinkers. "Determinism" suggests absolute, context-free control of or influence over outcomes. The term "substantivism" allows for greater thoughtfulness and more recognition of context and the roles of other social factors.

and Grieco (2010), similarly, find that internet-based communication and networking fosters shared identity and bonding among members of marginalized groups. Wide-scale organization is seen as a capability granted by the existence of the internet: vulnerable people are able, through online infrastructure, to organize into labour and social movements, whether on the level of local or global action.

Wojcieszak (2009) also suggests that participation in online groups and communities can strengthen collective identity and feelings of unity and belonging. Empirically, Wojcieszak finds that online interactions with like-minded extremists led to increased public support—both online and offline—for related social movements or causes.

Fisher and Boekkooi (2010) find that the existence of the internet reduces the barriers to entry for political and social action. Along with the lowering of barriers, social action is becoming, they say, easier, faster, more fluid, and more accessible to a wider cross-section of citizens or social actors. Despite a lowering of barriers, though, Hick and McNutt (2002) suggest that the internet has played a role in the decline of the public sphere, as public spaces and public forms of discourse have been replaced by mass media and public consumption.

Substantivist literature, then, is heavily focused on the *effects* of the internet. In the aforementioned studies, as well as in others, the language that is used to describe the internet's role in society in general, and in social movements specifically, deals with what the existence of the internet permits, allows, or causes. The goal of understanding these effects, according to many researchers, is to shape social actors' engagements with the internet so that they can make appropriate decisions regarding the internet, in order to maximize desirable effects and minimize undesirable ones.

As a whole, the substantivist approach to the social theory of the internet obscures some important aspects of the relationship between social structure and human agency. Hick and McNutt (2002:6) do address part of what is being obscured by acknowledging that human agency cannot be completely separated from technology when it comes to understanding the internet. The technology and the actor, they state, are not independent entities that simply interact in a variety of ways. Rather, according to Hick and McNutt, people are both formed and informed by the internet: agency itself is influenced and constrained by the internet, just as it is influenced and constrained by other social forces and institutions. However, within this approach, the internet is still seen as something that exists externally to its human users. The interaction between technology and actor is said to constrain the shape of the actor, but it is not seen to constrain the shape of the technology in the same way. It is on this point that social constructionism diverges from substantivist theory.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism takes issue with the substantivist approach by contending that the internet is not an extra-social, static structure. The internet does not constrain social forces while remaining unconstrained by them. The focus of constructionism is on the ways that the internet is grounded in and shaped by the social world: it is neither extra-social nor pre-social; rather, it is an inherently social force, a social entity, given shape by human agency just as it gives shape *to* human agency. As Castells (2001) writes, "the historical production of a given technology shapes its content and uses in ways that last beyond its original inception, and the Internet is no exception to this rule" (9). The effects of the internet are not neutral, apolitical, or impartial: instead, they are a reflection and an embodiment of the changing ideas, attitudes, and structures that make up the social world.

The primary points of interest within this perspective, then, are the social factors that contribute to shaping the internet. Causality is seen to flow more from society to technology, rather than from technology to society. The ways that individuals or communities approach, make sense of, and make use of the internet are not shaped only by the structure of the internet itself; they are also shaped by cultural habits, by interpretations, by traditions, and by expectations (Della Porta and Mosca 2009). Social structure and human agency combine in contingent ways to inform how the internet takes shape.

Though no one individual or group of individuals can entirely foresee the consequences of a particular design decision or enforced computer protocol, it is nonetheless human decisions, combined with other social factors, that shape the internet's effects. In other words, while it is certainly the case that email and other forms of electronic communication make the global sharing of culture possible, it was the decisions, interests, and actions of computer scientists that created the capacity for email in the first place. The invention of the internet did not take place within a motivational vacuum: the desire for global communication existed prior to the created capability for doing so—at least, it existed among the circle of elites who funded, managed, and executed the internet's inception. Therefore, it is too limiting to study only the things that the internet's existence and structure permit or prevent: it is also necessary to ask *why this is so*, how it has come to be, and how it can be made otherwise, through the intentional (and unintentional) shaping of the internet's structure by human actors and social forces.

A critique of the simple causality of the relationship between the internet and society does not necessitate universally denying empirical studies that are based on substantivist theory or assumptions. These studies contain valid findings and highlight real social processes that are at work between society and the internet. However, these findings should be approached

critically, so that the relationships and structures that are identified are not taken to be static when they are actually dynamic and evolving. Of particular concern is the way that studies founded on a substantivist perspective run a greater risk of reifying their findings. If the internet is assumed to be a relatively stable, extra-social structure, then a significant source of variation in its effects will be lost: we will be unable to account for structural shifts in a changing internet. However, if the internet is understood as inherently dynamic and shifting, built on a changing structure that is influenced by a dialectic between technology and agency, then the structure of the internet can be acknowledged as a variable of study in its own right.

A specific example of the process of the social construction of internet structure can be seen in the emergence of and relationship between Facebook, Twitter, and mobile phones. Twitter is a website that allows users to share short messages with other users who "follow" them and receive similar updates from users whom they follow. Twitter was created to accommodate mobile phone usage: the length limit on updates posted on Twitter is 140 characters, which is the same as a standard SMS text message. By connecting their phone number to the Twitter site, users could send and receive updates directly from their phones, even without a phone plan that allowed direct internet connection. The creation of Twitter would not have taken place without the rise of text messaging and the desire of mobile phone owners to be connected on a minute-by-minute basis with their friends in the most convenient and instantaneous way possible. Through this desire for instant, broad connectivity (a desire that was largely facilitated by the rise of mobile phone network technology), a new internet structure was designed and implemented. The ripple effects of the rising popularity of Twitter were felt by Facebook. The structure of Facebook allowed for day-to-day connectivity and communication between its users, but Twitter had developed a new structure for minute-to-minute communication. Twitter's new capabilities

played a role in the creation of new expectations of minute-to-minute connectivity among users of social networking sites. Facebook responded to this desire by eventually launching a redesign of the site that structured itself around Twitter-like status updates and messages, making the sharing of such information one of the primary focuses of the site. This explanation is a simplification of the process; many different factors played a role in the launch and growth of Twitter, and in the various redesigns that Facebook has undergone, but this simplification of the events highlights the way that social desires and internet structures (or other technological structures) are contingent upon one another and exist in a dialectic.

The Internet as Either a Site or an Object of Struggle

An interesting difference that arises out of the contrast between technological substantivism and social constructionism is the view of the internet as either a site of struggle or an object of struggle. Within substantivism, the internet is typically seen as a site of struggle: it is a medium through which, and within which, social actors pursue, and perhaps achieve, desired social outcomes. These outcomes may even have to do with the internet: perhaps they are directed towards the policies of a particular website or online community. The "site of struggle" view can be seen in much empirical work that deals with social movements and the internet, several examples of which have been listed above.

But within social constructionism, the internet is an *object* of struggle (Lessig 1999; Fuchs 2008; Castells 2001; Galloway and Thacker 2007). The goal and intention of much social constructionist discourse and study is to influence the shape and structure of the internet itself. Rather than being concerned with how movements make more or less efficient use of the online tools available to achieve their goals, the interest of social constructionism is in how particular values or types of structure are instilled into the internet's core design, its protocols and practices. For example, the open-source movement seeks to build democratic (and often anti-capitalist)

values into the design of internet protocols such as the HTML coding language, as well as into other types and genres of computer software. The (intended) end result of an open-source internet is a more democratic society as a whole, where the whims of big business and corporate government hold less sway.

Ultimately, the desired outcomes of social movements based on both technological substantivist and social constructionist perspectives may be, and often are, quite similar. The difference lies in the perceived role of the internet in achieving this outcome: either it is a tool or medium that can be helpful in the struggle, so long as it is properly understood and utilized, or it is a social entity that can itself be made (for example) more democratic and, consequently, can have a positive effect on inducing greater democracy into broader society.

New Social Movements

Recent literature on social movements is heavily preoccupied with what is changing and evolving about social action. Traditional social movements literature focusses on group protest and institutional social action, and the structural issues that give rise to them. As described by Smith and Fetner (2007), traditional social movements involve the creation of "collective identities," based on a group's awareness or perception of itself as "both distinct and subject to unjust material or social conditions" (13). A traditional social movement requires, within the understandings of this body of literature, the formation of a collective identity, a grievance or deprivation to motivate the social action, and the capacity of the group to access and wield resources in pursuit of its goal. These understandings of traditional social movements are heavily rooted in Marxism and class conflict, though they occasionally deal with noneconomic forms of inequality, injustice, and deprivation, as well.

Compared to traditional social movements, which are most typically motivated by political or economic injustices towards large groups, *new* social movements (NSMs) are seen to be motivated more often by cultural issues of lifestyle, individualism, diversity, and tolerance (Carty 2010; Earl and Schussman 2008). Bennett (2008) suggests that in recent history, "where political activity occurs [among the public], it is often related to lifestyle concerns that seem outside the realm of government" (2). New social movements are also more fluid, geographically distributed, and virtual, and they rely heavily on networking and cooperation between both individuals and groups (Terranova 2004). Within this body of literature, citizens are seen to be increasingly motivated by cultural concerns, lifestyle issues, individualized values, and human rights, rather than by group loyalty or by duty or obligation to institutional participation (Bennett, Wells, and Rank 2009).

In the following section, I will explain in more detail some of the differences that are emerging in new social movements, as identified by NSM literature. I will also discuss how this literature is relevant to the case of the anti-HST movement. By the standards of the "new social movement" distinctions and definitions that will be outlined in more depth below, the anti-HST movement appears fairly traditional: it is structured around institutional goals and actions, and it deals directly with government and economic policies. Viewed from this angle, new social movements literature would not seem especially relevant to the anti-HST movement. The focus of this study, however, is on the role of the internet in the anti-HST campaign. Online advocacy strategies are largely the domain of NSM discussion: the internet is seen as creating a need for new and unique theory and practice concerning social action. My intention is to see whether and how the internet plays a role not only in cultural, fluid, virtual social movements, but also in relatively traditional, top-down, institutional movements such as the anti-HST movement.

Culture as the New Public Sphere

Perhaps the most significant evolution of social and political structure that NSM literature identifies is a shift in the public sphere. While Hick and McNutt (2002), as discussed above, make the claim that the internet is contributing to a *decline* of the public sphere, other contributors to the literature on social and political movements suggest that the public sphere is not disappearing, but rather that it is undergoing a transformation and becoming increasingly organized around culture rather than politics (Carty 2010; Earl and Schussman 2008). Social movements appear more and more often to be issue-based, lifestyle-based, and culture-based, more concerned with supporting human rights and fighting discrimination or stigmatization.

Bennett, Wells, and Rank (2009) approach the idea of a cultural public sphere from a different angle, placing political engagement in the context of two different forms of political citizenship: dutiful citizenship (DC) and actualizing citizenship (AC). Individuals who subscribe

more to the ideals of dutiful citizenship are more likely to perform basic political actions such as voting out of a sense of duty to the democratic state. DC citizens are more comfortable with top-down, one-to-many communication, in which political elites discuss and debate popular issues and educate the public, seeking to gain their support in elections. Dutiful citizenship is also associated with macro-level, nation-focused conceptions of politics and society. The DC paradigm has been losing prevalence recently, Bennett et al. suggest, giving way to the ideals of actualizing citizenship. AC citizens concern themselves more with individualized values, rights, and freedoms, community-oriented politics, and issues of culture. AC citizens see society from a more fragmented or atomized perspective. Within the AC paradigm, fluidity, individualism, and other postmodern values are more meaningful than traditional values such as duty, patriotism, responsibility, and so on.

The emergence of actualizing citizenship and postmodern political values, Bennett et al. suggest, has led to dissonance between the teaching styles of traditional political educators or teaching curricula in schools and the political learning styles of young students (Bennett 2008). The divide between DC and AC citizens can be mapped, to a certain extent, to a generational divide. Teachers tend, more often, to subscribe to DC values, while students resonate more with an AC style of learning. This leads to dissatisfaction with political education and a growing sense of cynicism regarding traditional politics and politicians, and this cynicism is manifested as an unwillingness to engage with politics institutionally, and a corresponding turn towards approaching social action from the realm of culture and lifestyle.

One result of a focus on diverse issues of culture and lifestyle is a reduction of the scope of many social movements and a move to narrower, more specific fields of social action. The banners around which new social movements gather and make their rallying cries are more

localized. In other words, it is less likely that the general public will become involved in a new social movement, as compared to a traditional social movement, because the issues that are addressed by new social movements tend to be applicable only to the interests of a narrow segment of the population. A consequence of the narrowness of many new social movements is that they do not attract sufficient numbers of participants to warrant a high level of attention on an institutional level. Therefore, social movements often see a pragmatic need to find some way to produce a critical mass of protestors, signatories, or campaigners in order to be effective on any kind of meaningful scale. To achieve this, some social movements join into shared action with other movements oriented towards different issues. Different movements promote and support one another, even when their causes seem far removed. Other new social movements form partnerships with corporate interests (Montgomery 2008).

The question to be answered here, in regards to the anti-HST movement, is to what extent cultural motivations and individualized issues of lifestyle played a role in the movement and in attracting supporters and participants to it. Insofar as the movement was oriented towards government economic policy, it was a traditional movement, but how might cultural factors have influenced and been reshaped by the use of the internet in the movement?

Fluidity, Virtuality, and Media

Media plays an important role in the constitution of new social movements. The dominance of traditional broadcast media has become challenged by electronic media and social media. Information, particularly within the context of new social movements, is less often conveyed from elites and authorities to the masses, and is more often distributed broadly and diversely through a network of communication lines. NSMs highly prioritize the fluid distribution of information and the virtualization of action, where a "virtual" movement is defined as "a dynamic movement that is constitutive of electronic and physical space at the same

time" (Terranova 2001:108). The challenge faced by NSMs is often not only distributing information as widely and effectively as possible, but converting that virtualized information into visible and effective, i.e. actualized, social action.

The virtualization of social movements has come about, according to Terranova, at least partially as a response to the changing media landscape. The large-scale social movements of the 1960s, which made use of impressive spectacles and protests in the media, became less effective as the corporate and political elites developed ways to combat the spectacular with powerful media strategies. Mass media and large institutions learned how to prepare for and overcome mass movements. But electronic media provided social movements with a new avenue for their voices to be heard. Online spaces decentralized social movements and allowed them to make use of virtuality, fluidity, and adaptability to target individuals rather than the masses with their messages of change and protest.

Despite these observations on the lost effectiveness of mass media and spectacle, the anti-HST movement has appeared to thrive in just these areas. The involvement of former provincial premier Bill Vander Zalm provided the movement with a high level of media credibility, as well as an element of drama and spectacle. But the anti-HST movement has not appeared to make use of many other traditional forms of spectacle, such as marches and protests. The question to be explored by this research is to what extent spectacle and traditional media strategies have coexisted or interacted with new, online, social, virtual media strategies, and how these strategies have affected one another.

Homogeneity

Finally, the current shape of the internet and online spaces can lead to social homogenization, or the appearance or perception of it. By homogenization, I mean the sharing of values, norms, history, and other social, political, and cultural attributes. Varying levels of homogenization can play a role in the effectiveness of different social movement strategies, due to coincident shifts in cultural values or matters of identity. For example, Wojcieszak (2009) notes that homogenization typically strengthens collective identity and reinforces unity within a community or society. However, Willson (2006) discusses how homogenization and strong community bonding can act not only as a source of connectedness and belonging, but also as a source of repression and marginalization for those who are deemed to fall too far outside the boundaries of the homogenized identity.

LeVine (2008) asserts that "mass media culture is profoundly homogenizing" (131). But the internet is not typically considered to be a form of "mass media." It may be more appropriate to consider the internet a form of distributed media, or to use some other term, because the internet allows for many-to-many communication rather than only top-down or one-to-many communication. The role of the internet in shaping homogeneity, therefore, is different than the role of traditional mass media.

Many studies have found that online communities are useful places for finding or developing shared identity and common values (Leung et al. 2010; Little and Grieco 2010; Wojcieszak 2009). But rather than creating homogenized communities, the internet may simply make connections between individuals who already share similarities. Since online communities are often built around a shared attribute or interest, they bring together individuals who share more in common than they might if they met by chance offline. Consequently, it can be easier to

become connected to an online community than to offline groups where no explicit shared interest or implicit intentionality exists. As a result of the intentionality of becoming involved with an online community, a higher level of homogeneity, or the perception of homogeneity, is present from the beginning. Willson (2006) cautions, however, that interacting online can remove obvious social cues of appearance, accent, or attitude that imply heterogeneity, thus leading to only the *appearance* of homogeneity. Thus, while it may appear—both to participants and members as well as to the observing academic—that online communities are homogenous and tightly bonded, this may be an illusion.

One of the consequences of the perception of homogeneity within a community, according to Wojcieszak (2009), can be that people are led to believe that there is broader public support for their views or causes than is actually the case. This can lead to unwarranted confidence in the viability of the movement, which may lead either to unmet expectations for success, or to additional encouragement and a drive to succeed. However, homogeneity can also lead to the feeling that there is less need to act to reinforce or defend values, views, or causes, because the threatening forces do not appear to be present within the local community. Thus, while Wojcieszak found that online interaction with like-minded individuals did have a motivating role in leading individuals to support social movements through volunteering or fundraising, too much homogeneity can sometimes be counterproductive. The concept of homogeneity plays an important role in the analysis that follows, specifically in terms of how the structure of online spaces produces perceptions of homogeneity among movement supporters, and how movement strategy privileges and pursues unity and homogeneity among its participants.

Methods

In order to approach the central questions of this research, qualitative data was gathered in the form of in-depth interviews and observation of websites and social media. The interviews were privileged in the analysis and supported by observation of anti-HST websites and social media spaces. The online spaces observed for this study were www.fighthst.com, www.hstinbc.ca, the No BC HST group on Facebook, the BC HST Public Forums group on Facebook (which has since been disbanded), and Twitter conversations identified with the #HST hashtag. The www.fighthst.com website was chosen because it was a central hub for the anti-HST movement. The Facebook groups and Twitter activity were selected because of these spaces' use by a high proportion of the active online population. Prior observation suggested that the No BC HST group in particular played a significant role in the development of the anti-HST movement. My attention was drawn to the BC HST Public Forums group and the www.hstinbc.ca website, both of which were government-instituted reactions to the anti-HST movement, during the course of observation and analysis.

Observation of these online spaces was used mostly to situate and provide context for the interview data, rather than being approached through a more complex content-analysis methodology. According to Beer and Burrows (2007), the landscape of online spaces changes so rapidly that attempting complex analysis of the content of online spaces can be premature. Such analysis is often subject to errors, oversimplifications, and over-reliance on anecdotal evidence. Instead of concerning myself with the content of online interactions, I considered the *structures* of online spaces—especially of social media—as important to my analysis, and used my observations of those structures to inform my interpretation of interview data.

Interview Data Collection

Interviewees were recruited through Facebook, Twitter, and other websites where members had expressed opinions or joined groups related to the anti-HST movement. I spent some time observing member activity within these spaces, and identified several active and involved participants. I then sent messages to those I had identified inviting them to participate in the study, and attached a recruitment poster, which I have included in the appendices. Of my six participants, two were able to meet with me face-to-face in Victoria, BC, while I conducted phone-based interviews with the other four. Face-to-face interviews were held in locations chosen by the participants, so that the participants would feel comfortable with the interview process.

Participants were intentionally selected from a diversity of roles within the movement. Two participants were volunteer organizers, responsible for recruitment and helping to coordinate volunteer activities. One participant maintained a blog that opposed the HST, and later became involved in carrying the Recall petition. One participant was mostly involved from home, and kept up-to-date with the campaign through her membership in a workers' union that was supporting the movement. Another participant was a central organizer for the No BC HST Facebook group and Fight HST. As Charmaz (2004) writes, "Gaining multiple views of the phenomenon strengthens the power of our claims to understand it" (983). The diversity of roles explored within this study provided a variety of perspectives on the ways that the internet affected the spread of the anti-HST campaign at different levels of organization. The purpose of gathering a variety of perspectives was to strengthen the accuracy of the study, where accuracy is understood to mean not a reflection of some objective social truth, but rather a) a close adherence to the ways in which the participants understood their own experiences and b) an intersubjective

agreement between the perceptions of the participants, the researcher, and the readers of the study.

My process for recruiting was to initially find up to six participants in the anti-HST movement, using theoretical sampling, and interview them about their experiences with the movement. If silences or gaps in the data were discovered during the analysis, further participants would be recruited and interviewed. After interviewing six participants and analyzing their interviews, I did not identify any noticeable gaps in the data, so I did not conduct any further recruitment.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and consisted of open-ended questions relating to the study's research questions, supplemented by probing questions in order to elicit as much information as possible. The interviews were viewed as a constructive meaning-making process (Charmaz 2004; Hiller and DiLuzio 2004; Roulston, deMarrais, and Lewis 2003) through which the participants were given the opportunity to experience a validation of their experiences and to experience reflexive progression, which is to say a self-analysis through which the participant could refine his or her responses and uncover additional insights into his or her experience over the course of the interview (Hiller and DiLuzio 2004:16). Probing questions were used to encourage reflexive progression and to provide participants with the opportunity to revisit their experiences in newly meaningful ways. Since interviews are meaning-making activities, I sought to be aware of my role in the creation of the data, and formed both my interview questions and my analysis accordingly.

Participants

I recruited six participants for this study. One participant, however, opted not to have their interview included in the study. For that reason, my analysis was based on five interviews, and the sixth was disregarded. This did not cause significant difficulties for my analysis, as the loss of the one interview did not create gaps in my data that could not be filled by the other interviews or observations. Each of my participants was involved with the anti-HST movement in some capacity, and took their involvement online through social media, blogging, or interaction with various websites.

Gary[2] was a middle-aged male volunteer with the movement in the interior regions of British Columbia, helping to organize the petition process, carrying the petition on the street and door-to-door, and recruiting other volunteers to support and carry the petition as well. Gary's online involvement was mostly centred around the No BC HST Facebook group. He was strongly motivated by a desire to see the people have their say in the political process. Gary originally supported a political party called BC Refed, but threw his support behind the NDP in order to more effectively oppose the Liberal party after their introduction of the HST.

Jamie, too, was a volunteer who managed and recruited other volunteers in their carrying of the petition. Jamie, a man in his mid-twenties who was based in Victoria, interacted a lot within the No BC HST Facebook group. Jamie was against the increased taxation of consumers and told me that he wanted to stand in opposition to the "centralization of power and the removal of authority in BC to Ottawa." Jamie considered himself politically independent, and was opposed to too much interference in the anti-HST movement from party politics.

Jim was a white, middle-aged man who was heavily involved with the overall organization of the anti-HST movement, and operated out of Victoria. His involvement began

[2] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of all participants.

through blogging, and expanded to include significant involvement in the No BC HST Facebook group and a relationship with mainstream media. Jim was opposed to the HST on a political and economic level, and saw it as a policy that would hurt British Columbians and the BC economy. Jim's support for the anti-HST movement was not based on affiliation with a political party, but he favoured the NDP over the Liberal Party.

Cindy was a woman in her mid-twenties. Her involvement with the anti-HST movement was at first mostly limited to interaction with friends and acquaintances offline as well as on Twitter and Facebook. Near the end of the petition process, however, she began to become more involved through her union, and she volunteered to help carry the Recall petition in Victoria that followed the original Citizens' Initiative petition. Cindy supported the NDP politically, and some of her motivation was based on opposition to the Liberal party in favour of the NDP. In addition, Cindy was strongly motivated by a sense of social justice, and the belief that the HST would hurt low-income people and the working poor.

Brian, a middle-aged white man, was based in central Vancouver Island. Like Cindy, Brian did not become formally involved as a volunteer until the Recall petitions began, but he was very active during the original Citizens' Initiative petition on Twitter and on his own anti-HST website. Brian supported the NDP's involvement in the anti-HST movement, and originally became involved through his attendance at an NDP-run anti-HST meeting. As an accountant, Brian viewed the HST as something that could negatively impact the BC economy.

These five participants provided me with a diversity of perspectives. I was able to gain insight both from people whose involvement was mostly personal and indirect, and from people who were heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the movement. I was limited somewhat in my analysis of certain social variables, including race and ethnicity, gender, and

class. All of my participants were white, and appeared to be well-educated members of the middle class. I had one female participant and four male participants. Two of my participants were younger, while the other three were between the ages of 35 and 60. Due to a variety of factors, I had little ability to select participants for their demographic qualities. When extending an invitation, I often had only a person's name and the content of their posted messages to base my screening on. Additionally, rates of response to my call for participation were low, preventing me from being particularly selective. It is interesting that I only received responses from white participants, and that they were predominantly male and middle-aged. It may be that the white, male, middle-aged demographic was more heavily involved in the anti-HST movement online than other segments of the population were, and that this accounts for my sample. It may also be, since my sampling was somewhat skewed towards more active, formal, and in-depth involvement with the movement, that white males were given more responsibility within the movement's leadership than other groups were. Based on the composition of my sample, I cannot draw firm conclusions about the demographic makeup of the movement as a whole, and my analysis may be influenced towards a white, male perspective. Due to these limitations, I cannot claim that my findings are broadly generalizable to other social movements or other demographic groups.

Analysis

Interview data was approached through a constructivist grounded theory methodology, modelled after the work of Charmaz (2000; 2004). Grounded theory is characterized by an inductive, emergent approach to analysis: concepts, categories, and themes were allowed to emerge from the data, rather than being sorted into preexisting categories based on prior theory. In order to facilitate the emergence of the analysis, the concepts introduced during the literature review for this study were treated as sensitizing concepts, which is to say that they were used as

a point of departure for studying the data rather than as existing theory which I was seeking to verify—a starting point rather than an ending point (Charmaz 2004). During analysis, I employed a constant comparative method in evaluating interviews against one another and comparing that information to my observations of online spaces. Through these comparisons, I sought to identify both differences and similarities between the accounts provided by the study participants.

The distinction presented between constructivist grounded theory and classical grounded theory is a movement away from the positivist leanings of classical grounded theory and towards a more interpretive understanding. As Charmaz (2000) puts it, the purpose of *constructivist* grounded theory is "to get at meaning, not at truth" (526). Rather than assuming the existence of an objective social reality, which can be uncovered by sufficiently thorough adherence to the prescriptions of the methodology, constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the meaning-making nature of qualitative research: in social research, we can say only that we have "interpreted *a* reality, as we understood both our own experience and our subjects' portrayals of theirs" (Charmaz 2000:523).

Ethical Concerns

In order to respect concerns regarding informed consent, potential participants were fully informed as to the nature of the study, how it was being conducted, what their potential role would be, and what measures would be taken to protect their identity and their right to confidentiality. In the analysis that follows, participants are only identified by pseudonyms, and no personally identifiable information is included. In situations where the anonymity of participants may be threatened, websites, blogs, and social media groups oriented towards the anti-HST movement have not been identified.

An Introduction to the Anti-HST Movement

Before launching into a full discussion of the anti-HST movement, an introduction to the beginnings of the movement and the path it followed to its conclusion will help to situate the analysis. The anti-HST movement began as a general, widespread, dispersed antipathy to the Liberal Party's announcement that it intended to implement a Harmonized Sales Tax. The individuals interviewed for this study learned about the government's intentions to implement the HST primarily through mainstream media. All but one of the interviewees cited television and radio news broadcasts, newspaper articles, and press conferences as their sources for becoming aware of the HST. The exception was Jamie, who was informed by means of a press release sent out by the opposition NDP through an email list. Responses to the announcement of the HST varied. Some people went online to gather more information about the HST so that they could have an informed response to the news. Others immediately began to look for ways to fight against the HST: for example, Jim and Brian took to blogging, Jamie went searching online for other people to join forces with, and Brian also sought out information and potential action from the NDP, the primary political party in opposition to the Liberals. Interestingly, while nearly all of the people who were interviewed identified mainstream media as their source for becoming aware of the HST, most of them learned of the organized, centralized anti-HST campaign (i.e. Fight HST and its corollaries) via online sources, including Facebook and Twitter. Others, like Cindy, were members of existing organizations, such as workers' unions, that took an organizational stance in opposition to the HST, and became involved with the movement through those organizations' activities. Networking played a highly significant role in gathering people into the anti-HST movement, either in the form of individual networking online through websites

and social media, or in the form of cooperative networking between organizations (like unions, the NDP, and others).

The actions of people like those I interviewed led to the formation of the unified anti-HST movement. This formation, and the carrying out of the movement's purpose, involved several important steps. A brief summary of these steps is as follows:

- During the time following the government's announcement of their intent to implement the HST, a wide range of small initiatives were put into motion by many different groups and individuals. Facebook groups and anti-HST websites were created, bloggers and news columnists expressed their opinions both in mainstream media and online, and various small organizations, such as unions and advocacy groups, took their stances. One Facebook group in particular, called "No BC HST," began to spread virally and saw rapidly increasing membership, gaining nearly 130,000 members between the time of its creation in late 2009 and the gathering of data for this thesis in early 2011.
- A well-known former Premier of British Columbia took up a role as the primary public face of a formal declaration of opposition to the HST. The campaign launched through this declaration was known as Fight HST. Fight HST established an online presence through a website, and also began to co-promote the No BC HST Facebook group.
- The involvement of such a high-profile figurehead granted the movement added legitimacy in mainstream media. It also caught the attention of many of the dispersed groups and individuals who had been seeking their own avenues of protest, and many of them began to throw their support behind Fight HST. As

different organizations flocked to Fight HST's banner, they took advantage of their own existing infrastructures to support the movement by spreading information, recruiting volunteers, and so on. This networking of infrastructures allowed the movement to grow very quickly by reaching large audiences that were already aligned with the existing organizations. The practice of cooperation between groups in support of a common goal is a pattern that has previously been identified in social movements literature by Montgomery (2008) and others.

- In April 2010, Fight HST launched a petition under the Recall and Initiative Act, and used their online presence to facilitate the campaign by sharing information, managing logistics, and putting out press releases. By the end of the three month period specified in the Recall and Initiative legislation, they had achieved their goal of acquiring signatures from at least 10% of the registered voters in every riding in British Columbia, thereby forcing the government to respond by scheduling a referendum on whether to keep or extinguish the Harmonized Sales Tax.

Many interesting factors contributed to the success of the anti-HST movement, such as the networking and cooperation between so many different groups and individuals, the use of social media to gather and solidify public support for the movement, and the use of online tools to greatly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the actions undertaken by Fight HST and its supporters. These factors, and their implications for the role of the internet in social movements, will all be discussed in the analyses that follow. In the first section of my analysis, I will begin by outlining some important considerations, based on observations, experience, and interview data, regarding the structures of online spaces and the relevance of those structures to

social action, including the anti-HST movement. In the second chapter, I will look at the specific roles that the internet played in the anti-HST movement, and what those roles suggest about the movement's nature as either a traditional or a new social movement. In the third chapter, I will discuss the homogenizing tendencies of the internet that I identified through the interviews and my observations, and relate those homogenizing tendencies to the tactics employed by the anti-HST movement, and to homogeneity's effects on the movement.

The Structure of Online Spaces

This section of my analysis deals with the question of how individuals' engagement with the internet shapes and is shaped by the structure of online spaces, and what effects these considerations have on the strategies of social advocacy employed by the anti-HST movement and other similar movements. The purpose of this section is to lay the theoretical groundwork for an understanding of the causes and effects of online structures, so that those considerations can be more directly applied, in the following section, to an analysis of the anti-HST movement. I will argue that as the internet withdraws into the woodwork, becoming, for many people, simply another aspect of everyday life, the structures of online spaces come to reflect the social tendencies and desires of their users, and ways of interacting within those spaces become normalized. As the socially contingent nature of online spaces fades from view, online structures come to have effects on online social action and interaction: specifically, internet users gain a greater ability to shape and express their own identities through the pursuit of various topics of interest, and their engagement with their interests is intensified and expressed through interaction, either cooperatively or confrontationally.

Withdrawal Into the Woodwork

It is unquestionably the case that online spaces and internet technologies played an important part in the anti-HST movement. During the anti-HST campaign, a wide variety of activities were undertaken with the ultimate intent—or, at least, the ultimate effect—of gathering signatures for the anti-HST petition, and while the gathering of signatures could only happen offline, online tools and online actions were used heavily by those involved with the movement to support, coordinate, and organize the petition. The movement used online tools for communication, information gathering, promotion, recruiting, planning, organization, and more.

Almost every offline activity was supported or mirrored by online actions. This demonstrates, in support of Wellman et al. (2001) and others, how thoroughly the internet has come to permeate everyday life: the internet is so prevalent that its use is generally assumed or implied. As Mosco (2005) discusses, the greatest power of a new technology arises when it has passed beyond the stage of myth—where its role in and effects on society are the subject of constant debate and conflict—and has begun to "withdraw into the woodwork," becoming relatively routine and mundane.

This is the phase into which the internet is passing, or has passed. Just as with electricity, telephone, or other such significant technologies, the internet is so integral to so many people's daily lives that its presence is typically only considered an interest-worthy variable of social life when it can no longer be assumed and is threatened, disrupted, or absent. Along these lines, the assumptions regarding the internet's ongoing presence are perhaps best demonstrated by the way respondents outlined the difficulties or disruptions that arose when online connectivity was absent, or when online tools were not used according to the "particular codes of conduct or rules of communication" (Willson 2006:56) that have been developed surrounding them. For example, Jamie discussed the difficulties and inefficiencies volunteers faced when they were required to contact people who didn't use email:

> The few volunteers that I had that didn't use email or Facebook or any internet whatsoever, it was actually kind of difficult to arrange and keep them up to date on all of the current plans and the current strategies, especially when they didn't return phone calls....

Jamie also talked about having to educate people who were unfamiliar with the use of the "Reply-All" feature because they were causing problems by flooding the inboxes of people who had been added to informational or organizational email lists. When the norms of online

communication were violated, the activity of the movement was disrupted, and action was necessary in order to bring things back into line, either through the education of the "offenders" or through reacting to and adapting a new strategy for a non-normative situation.

The internet has become such an integral part of everyday life that anti-HST movement strategies became built around its capabilities and its structures: communication with volunteers took place via email, not via phone, and those with questions for Fight HST were directed on its website to submit their queries through an email contact form, because their ability to respond to phone calls was unreliable. In these ways, and many others, the structures of online spaces, and the capabilities and prevalence of online tools, have effects on how social movements conduct themselves, as well as on how they are perceived both from within and from without.

As discussed in the literature review, the sociology of the internet has struggled with finding the most appropriate way to conceptualize the internet as a technology. Is the internet a *site* of struggle, an ideologically neutral collection of tools that "cares little whether it is used for oppression or liberation—or whether it is used at all" (Hick and McNutt 2002:vii)? Or is the internet an *object* of struggle, its own structure being subject to social forces and having socially contingent effects on the individuals and the society that interact with and shape it? In this study I argue for an interpretation of the internet as an unstable object of struggle, while recognizing first that treating the internet as stable allows for a significant simplification of certain research approaches, and second that individuals in their everyday lives do not typically concern themselves with the internet's mutability. Within a constructivist view of the internet as an object of struggle, however, some clarification is needed as to what level of structure we are assessing. An observation that has become clear through this research is that a sociology that effectively considers the internet is not primarily concerned with the contingencies of the structure of

internet technology; rather, at this stage the more important thing to consider is the structure of *online spaces*. This is not to say that it is not informative, in certain situations, to explore the effects of internet protocols like HTML, PHP, and IPv6, but as these underpinnings of the internet withdraw further and further into the woodwork they become less variable and are less susceptible to change and conflict. Therefore, since this study is interested in ways that the internet is an object of struggle, it has less need to explore internet technology, and concerns itself more with online spaces.

The withdrawal into the woodwork of internet technology leads us to identify new objects of struggle within the internet milieu. Some of these are easy to identify: sites like Facebook have consistently struggled to defend their privacy policies, while YouTube and other video sharing websites, along with peer-to-peer file transfer technologies, have altered the landscape of entertainment and copyright claims by making it easy to locate and download illegally replicated and distributed electronic media such as music and movies. While it is true, at a certain level, that it is internet technology that has allowed people to engage in social networking and video sharing activities, it is just as Mosco (2005) identified: the most powerful effects of these technologies are not in their design, which was in many ways subject to myths of limitless democratic communication, but in their application. Thus, we now concern ourselves with the aspects of the internet which demonstrate the most newness and instability, and therefore the most potential to be recognized by the public as objects of struggle We are less interested, then, in a technology like email, and more interested in online spaces, including such predominant examples as Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

Regarding questions of an analysis of the structure of online spaces, we no longer find ourselves interested in the motivations and culture of those who design internet protocols and

server technology; now our attention is drawn both to the design and operation of online spaces—a question which is mostly outside the scope of this study—and to the question of who interacts in and with online spaces. Since this research is concerned with popular movements and public action, it focusses on the latter issue. In addition to identifying a subject population in this way, it is helpful to identify key spaces to centre the analysis around. It is clear that the majority of internet users are not interested in constructing their own online spaces; they prefer, instead, to take advantage of existing online spaces and tools, especially in social media, where they can find ready audiences of friends, acquaintances, or people who share their interests. Jim described Facebook as "a very large ocean with a lot of fish in it" (166), with the implication that the most effective practice for a social movement is to go where the audience has already gathered. Following this logic, then, a large part of my discussion regarding the structure of online spaces will focus on the online spaces which have gathered together the largest user bases. These are Facebook, which played a significant role in the movement through the No BC HST group, and Twitter, which was also used extensively to engage in conversation and networking regarding the HST.

Having identified the spaces and the population which will form the core of our analysis, I now move on to an analysis of online spaces as objects of conflict, focussing on those aspects of popular online spaces that have meaningful social effects and the uncovering of the social factors that have led to the construction of the structures that create those effects. In doing so, I acknowledge that the structure of online spaces is contested in many ways, a few of which have been identified above. Beyond overarching debates surrounding privacy and piracy, though, online spaces are subject to almost constant changes. Websites change their design, add new features, and incorporate new ideas at a rapid—even a disorienting—pace, afraid of the

possibility of being left behind by the next big thing. When Twitter emerges with a new form of communication, Facebook is quick to adopt its new competitor's idea. With the recent emergence of Google's foray into social networking with Google+, it is likely that both of the aforementioned social networking giants will work quickly to find some way to adapt themselves to offer whatever new features the designers of Google+ have dreamed up. In light of this rapidity of change in online spaces, one might suggest that the pattern Mosco identified of technologies withdrawing into the woodwork is in danger of being broken. The applications of the internet appear far too dynamic to become routine and mundane. However, the desire for stability in online spaces certainly exists, as demonstrated by Gary, who said:

> More than anything, if there was anything I remember about Facebook during the time that we were doing the Fight HST, it was just the number of complaints about Facebook changing things, and you just get used to one thing and they change it again. It gets to the point where people were just asking, 'Can't you just leave it alone? Can't you just leave it alone?' And it fell on deaf ears.

People are comfortable with stable, static technologies; they prefer withdrawal into the woodwork. As Gary suggested, disruptions of what had become normalized interactions within an online space like Facebook led to difficulties adjusting. These disruptions caused the technology to emerge from the woodwork, forcing the community to adapt. Similarities can be observed between the kinds of situations Gary identified and the disruptions Jamie discussed regarding the necessity of educating people about their "misuses" of certain email features. In both cases, the norms of the community's use of an online space or technology were violated, creating a need to either bring the violators in line, or to adapt and establish new norms.

While it may seem, then, that the functionality and feature-set—which is to say, the structure—of online spaces is inherently dynamic, and that this could prevent it from ever fully

withdrawing into the woodwork, the public desire for it to do so already exists. Rather than denying the possibility of a staticization of the internet, it may be more worthwhile to identify and observe the ability of communities of users to rapidly adapt to disruptions and negotiate new norms. In other words, perhaps the nature of the process of withdrawal into the woodwork hasn't changed; instead, the process may just be becoming more frequent and more rapid. If this is the case, it speaks to the importance of treating the internet as an object of agent-driven change. Further research into understanding the effects of the dynamism of the internet would be useful. For now, we can satisfy ourselves with accepting the internet as dynamic, while investigating those elements of the structure of online spaces that have shown themselves to be stable enough to impact social action.

Taking our understanding of the structure of online spaces as a milieu characterized by frequent, rapid changes, disruptions, and adjustments in hand, we can now embark on a discussion of the dialectic between how the structures of online spaces are shaped by certain social forces, and the effects some identifiable aspects of the structure of online spaces had on the anti-HST movement. At the outset, I should state that the purpose of the discussion in this area of my research is not to catalogue all of the ways that different social forces have impacted online spaces or, conversely, all of the ways that the structure of online spaces affects social life. This study deals fairly narrowly with the anti-HST movement, and slightly more broadly with social and political action. As such, my intention is to explore the relationship between the structure of online spaces and the engagement of the public *with this specific movement*, allowing myself to draw out a few observations about the consequences for future social action. Additional, and broader, research is required to identify more of the axes of interplay between

social forces and the structure of online spaces. I can only hope that my work will suggest a pattern of inquiry for conducting further research.

Active and Passive Expressions of Interest

With this disclaimer out of the way, I can identify a few key factors in the relationship between structure and social action. The first factor I will identify is the desire of individuals in modern society to express their individuality through the pursuit of a broad, unique, and personal collection of interests. Early studies of the internet, such as Turkle's (1995), focussed on the freedom the internet granted for the shaping of identity. This heavy academic focus on questions of identity signifies the importance that identity-building held, and continues to hold, in the minds of many internet users. At its most formative stage, the internet was being designed to allow individuals to construct their own identities not in terms of their history, physicality, or social context, but instead through their desires and interests.

Of course, despite the enthusiasm of early analyses, online identity-building through the pursuit and expression of personal interests is not a process divorced from social context. Poster (2001) puts it this way: "On the Internet individuals construct their identities, doing so in relation to ongoing dialogues, not as acts of pure consciousness" (184). The relevance of this aspect of online activity to the analysis at hand can be found in exploring how the structure of online spaces plays into the "ongoing dialogues," or social context, that Poster identifies. In relation to social movements, Bennett and Segerberg (2011) discuss how social action is coming to be "personalized," meaning that individuals see their social advocacy as an element of their personal lifestyle, or an aspect of their identity, such that climate change becomes related to a personal carbon footprint, or fair trade practices are expressed through an individual's choice of food. When social action becomes personalized, individuals incorporate their advocacy into their

identity, and it becomes part of their publicly broadcast self. The suggestion that Poster and others make about the internet as a relatively free space within which to construct and broadcast an identity means that online spaces can be desirable platforms from which individuals can express their personalized social advocacy, and that the structures of online spaces can affect those expressions.

Websites and online spaces are typically designed to allow individuals to express and develop their diverse, identity-building interests in a myriad of ways. The expression of these interests as a way to assert self-constructed identity can be viewed in terms of how actively (and how publicly) an individual engages with a particular topic—the exemplar being, in this case, the HST, and more specifically the anti-HST movement—as manifested by that individual's level of either active or passive engagement with that topic. To clarify, allow me to explain my juxtaposition of active and passive involvement, since this is a theme that is woven throughout my analysis. An individual who is actively interested in a topic may express that interest by initiating conversations with friends, by going online and doing searches for information related to that topic, or by seeking out opportunities for networking with other people who are interested in the topic. Actively interested people are passionate about the topic(s) they are interested in. Passively interested individuals, meanwhile, may be willing to learn more about the topic, but will be less likely to initiate circumstances in which they can expand their interest or make their interest more public. Taking the example of the anti-HST movement, an actively interested individual, on the one hand, might post messages related to the HST on Facebook or Twitter, go looking for news articles to comment on, or seek out a Facebook group they can join so they can interact with others who are interested in the HST. A passively interested individual, on the other hand, might read the social media messages of their actively interested friends, or click on links

to information related to the HST if those links are shared with them, but they are more likely to be content with hearing about the movement in the newspaper or on TV, rather than actively searching for further information on their own initiative. The individuals I interviewed for this research were all more active than passive in their engagement with the HST; that is one reason why they responded to my call for participants. Because of this, my thoughts on the actions of passively interested people tend to be based more on inference and observation, while my discussion of the actions of actively interested individuals is drawn more from my interview data.

The internet is a powerfully enabling tool for active information seekers. Many online spaces and applications are built to accommodate the desires of actively involved people: internet users are supplied with search engines, access to countless informational websites and blogs, and the ability to read or watch coverage from mainstream news at any time, not only at scheduled time slots for TV news or in daily newspapers. In addition, with the advent of "web 2.0," internet users are provided with a host of ways to actively participate in the creation and sharing of web content: they no longer have to simply be consumers of information, but can play an active role in its production. Spaces like discussions boards, Facebook groups, and hashtagged Twitter conversations facilitate the interests of active individuals by providing them with the ability to freely share information and comment on and express opinions about that information. The usefulness of the internet in allowing individuals to act on their interest in the HST by easily finding relevant information and networking with other people who shared their opposition to the HST were among the most common themes identified during interviews. The internet is filled with topic-based online spaces which are designed to facilitate interaction between individuals

who share interests. It is spaces like these that allow for the construction of the weak, specialized social ties discussed by Wellman and Gulia (1999), Carty (2010), and others.

But while many online spaces are built to facilitate the engagement of actively interested individuals, others are designed for individuals who are motivated not by interest in specific topics, but by a desire to expand their ability to interact with people whom they already know, generally through prior offline acquaintance. Facebook is at the forefront of this type of site design. It is true that certain features of Facebook allow for the expression of active interest, such as the ability to join groups or network with other people who "Like" the same music, movies, or sports teams that you do, but the backbone of Facebook, its core feature, is the interaction it allows between existing "friends" through status updates, wall posts, and private messages.

The aspect of Facebook that distinguishes it as an online space that facilitates *passive* interest rather than *active* interest is the way it allows individuals to construct filters for the information that they receive. Facebook users only directly receive information from people they have "friended" or pages they have "Liked." (Pages are profiles that are created to represent topic-centred groups, organizations, products, celebrities, and so on. Some pages are designed as discussion areas; others are designed as ways to publicly align yourself with an opinion. The No BC HST Facebook group is an example of this latter type of page.) When a Facebook user loads the Facebook website, they only see updates from the people or pages that they have previously developed an interest in or a relationship with. In other words, Facebook users passively receive only that information that finds its way through their filters. Twitter works in a similar way: Twitter users only receive updates from Twitter accounts that they have "followed." In either case, instead of the individual actively specifying a topic to find information about, the online space is broadcasting information to passive recipients. In the former situation, the individual is

their own filter: they actively choose which topics to explore. In the latter situation, the online space partially replaces the role of the individual and inserts itself into the filtering process. The distinction, then, is not so much between filtered and unfiltered access to information; rather, it is the role of some online spaces in shaping and embodying those filters that makes the difference. Online spaces that facilitate active involvement and that enable passive filter-building are both designed to allow people to engage with their interests, but the different structures do so in different ways and have different consequences for what that engagement looks like and how it is expressed. Some of the consequences and complexities of the filtering of information online will be discussed further in the *Homogeneity* chapter.

Understanding how online structures have been shaped by social forces, especially through discourses of the construction of identity, means that we can avoid a reification of online structure, or a misinterpretation of online structures as simple manifestations of the technology behind them. Online spaces are heavily influenced and shaped by social forces, and identity-building, expressed through the pursuit of individual interests, is a central element of those forces. Applying these insights to the anti-HST movement, we become aware that the participants in the movement were not simply members of a homogeneous collectivity, washed in the tide of social opinion. Instead, engagement online with the anti-HST movement was rooted in either the active or passive pursuit of individual interest in the movement, and the forms through which those interests were expressed were shaped by online structures that, themselves, reflected those methods of expression.

Intensification

Because of the way that the internet is built around allowing for the expression and pursuit of interests, the internet plays an important role in intensifying individuals' interest levels. When the individuals I interviewed wished to either learn more about the HST and the anti-HST movement, or to become more actively involved in protesting the HST, their recourse tended to be to take their interest online: online activity was a venue through which interested individuals were able to become more involved, both ideologically and practically, with the movement. Said another way, engagement and interaction online improved the effectiveness of the anti-HST movement by intensifying the passion and loyalty of existing and would-be supporters. This was not an unexpected finding. As mentioned in the literature review, Wojcieszak (2009) determined that online interaction with like-minded extremists leads to increased demonstrations of public support both online and offline. It is worth questioning the direction of causality here: does online interaction increase public support, or is it instead the case that the most passionate supporters of a movement take their passion online, increasing the levels of passion shown in online spaces? I argue that both claims may be true: individuals who are actively interested in a topic or a movement are likely to go online in search of like-minded people to cooperate or debate with, and the tools and capabilities they find online enable them to express themselves more effectively and more publicly. At the same time, passively interested people who take their interests online tend to find their interest and engagement levels increased or intensified, as well.

Even when individuals' first engagement with a topic takes place mostly offline, the internet is a ready tool in allowing those individuals to deepen their engagement with the topic. For example, Brian, whose first active engagement with the topic of the HST came through attending a community meeting held by the NDP, followed up his offline exploration of the topic

by going online, using Twitter to engage in discussion and debate regarding the HST and creating an anti-HST website as a way to further express his public voice. Brian said that he "wanted to be more involved" (57), and that desire led him to follow up his online activities by both becoming a volunteer with the MLA Recall campaign that followed the Citizens' Initiative petition and contributing research and analysis about the HST to the anti-HST campaign.

Based on my research into the anti-HST movement, I identify three primary ways in which the internet can intensify engagement in a social movement. First, the internet feeds people's passions by making a wealth of information—and a wealth of interaction—available that they can actively seek out. Like adding new wood to a recently lit flame, information and contact with like-minded supporters can cause interest in and support for a movement to grow. The backbone of a campaign like the anti-HST movement is information and communication, and both of these things appear to be best served online, through informational websites, news articles that can be located through internet searches, social media, and contact forms and email addresses. Without the internet, there are far fewer, and far less convenient, outlets for engaging with new topics and interests. People are only provided with whatever information is conveyed through mainstream news or made available through public institutions such as libraries or universities or through private organizations that already exist and have infrastructures in place to engage with the topic. Without the internet, there is far less flexibility available for engagement with special interests, and a far higher investment of time and effort is needed to become actively engaged with those interests.

Second, in following with Wojcieszak (2009), online interaction with other movement supporters can create or increase perceptions of homogeneity, community, and unity, and this can lead to optimism, encouragement, and a desire to be part of the perceived popularity of the

movement. Gary, for example, saw the rapid growth of the No BC HST Facebook group as an encouraging sign that showed the citizens of British Columbia were united in their opposition to the HST, even though a group membership of 130,000 represented only a small portion of BC's entire population. Gary told me that he felt the 130,000 people were "just about all—I shouldn't say just about all—but...a large number of the people in BC that have computers and have Facebook." Despite his awareness that the Facebook group was only representing a certain group of citizens—those who had computers and used Facebook—he took the group as a sign of broad public support, and used that as a positive motivational and rhetorical tool. Further elements of the homogenizing tendencies of the internet are discussed in greater depth in the *Homogeneity* chapter.

Third, online spaces can increase contact between passionate supporters and provide them with a venue to encourage one another, share stories of successes, and co-construct narratives that validate the movement and invalidate the opposition. Jamie told me about how the No BC HST Facebook group was used to "find out how everybody else was doing to keep the morale up. The more you talked to people in other ridings, and we saw that numbers...were coming in quite easily, it was really exciting. It was really a morale boost." Jamie also described how supporters encouraged one another with stories:

> People would send stories of talking to people and how they've convinced somebody that was on the HST side to come over to our side and sign the [petition], or stories of how...an elderly person spent half an hour looking for a place to sign the petition. And stories about how people would've gone to certain elderly houses, out of their way, so that people could sign. And that boosted morale, showing that it was people that really cared about getting as many signatures as we could.

Through the communication of stories and progress updates, movement supporters were able to encourage one another directly online, without the need for the central, formal organizational body to mediate the sharing of that information.

What may be gathered from these discussions is that the internet is where people went both to explore their initial interest in the HST and to intensify their interaction with the anti-HST movement. The internet, as an entity that drastically increases both the diversity and the convenience of information related to countless topics and special interests, plays a significant role in allowing people either to actively pursue an interest, or to build an interest into their social media filters so that they can "pursue" it passively. A question for future study that arises out of this observation is whether the intensification of people's engagement with their interests leads individuals to more specialized interests, or whether the increased convenience and reduced time requirements of engagement may allow individuals to further diversify and broaden their interests instead.

Confrontation and Cooperation

Another interesting element of the structure of online spaces is the way that different online spaces can privilege either confrontation or cooperation. One well-documented aspect of online interaction is the abundance of personally hostile conversation that takes place, something known online as "flaming" (Castells 2001). A certain amount of hostility and conflict certainly reared its head in the online interactions between anti-HST and pro-HST supporters. Online spaces can also be the sites of cooperation and the achievement of group goals, with the anti-HST movement itself acting as an example. Different people, at different times, are motivated by a desire for either confrontation or cooperation, and different online spaces are structured in ways that appeal to each of these desires in different ways. The structures that are created to

serve these purposes naturally have different effects on the nature and consequences of the social action that takes place within them.

A key factor in the structure of online spaces that contributes towards the privileging of either confrontation or cooperation is the named gathering purpose of that space. A discussion board, Facebook group, or Twitter hashtag that deals with a social movement or issue can be either stance-oriented, or stance-neutral. For example, the Facebook group "No BC HST" was a stance-oriented group because it was overtly designed to cooperatively bring together people who were opposed to the HST in BC, while the BC HST Public Forums Facebook group, created later by the BC government in conjunction with www.hstpublicforums.ca, was a stance-neutral space, intended to act as a place for discussion and debate—i.e. confrontation—from both sides of the HST issue.

Stance-oriented spaces, by definition, tend to attract people who share a perspective, whether they are motivated by the same logics or not. Consequently, stance-oriented spaces appear more homogenous, as members bond around their common interest. Stance-oriented spaces may also attract a higher absolute number of participants, especially on Facebook, where joining a group acts as a public statement of support for the stance the group is created to represent, and where access to such groups is as simple as clicking a single "Like" or "Join" button. It is easy to join a stance-oriented Facebook group, be counted as a supporter, and never actively participate in group discussions or interaction. This is not to say that no active participation takes place in stance-oriented spaces: the No BC HST group has been the site of a great deal of conversation and debate since its creation, and continues to host a fair amount of interaction, though activity has slowed down compared to the time during the lead-up to and execution of the petition. The most passionate members of the group share and comment on

news articles, spread information or interpretations that support their opinions, and encourage one another. They also occasionally butt heads with pro-HST individuals who have joined the group in order to seek out confrontation. But the balance of membership naturally falls on the side of the anti-HST perspective around which the group was created, making the debate somewhat one-sided, while the relatively passive members of the group who make up the majority of its membership largely ignore both any conflict and any supportive activities entirely.

Stance-neutral spaces are designed for active debate and attract individuals who are interested in sharing their views and hearing the opinions of not only people who agree with them, but also people who disagree with them. Compared to stance-oriented spaces, stance-neutral spaces are not only more confrontational, but they can also appear more heterogeneous, since they draw members' focus to their diversity of opinions. The nature of stance-neutral spaces as centred around debate means that only the most active and passionate individuals are likely to join them: there is less to be gained by joining a stance-neutral group and not participating, compared to a stance-oriented group, because a stance-neutral group means less for the construction of identity. This is demonstrated in a practical way through a comparison of the membership numbers of No BC HST, which has nearly 128,000 members at the time of writing, and BC HST Public Forums, which has just over 1,500 members.

Conclusion

To summarize, an important element of online spaces is what approach they take to enabling users to shape and express their individuality by displaying and pursuing their interests. Some online spaces, particularly blogs and organizational websites, are designed to accommodate the active pursuit of an interest, while others, including social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, are meant to enable people to construct filters that will bring information about topics they have selected and interaction with people they know to them in a more passive

way. In addition, different types of spaces are created to accommodate the pursuit of either debate and confrontation or sharing and cooperation. For example, the government-created HST Forums group on Facebook, a stance-neutral space, was designed for debate, while the No BC HST group, a stance-oriented space, was intended to foster community and cooperative support. The structures of these types of spaces lead to different consequences. Following through on the division of stance-oriented and stance-neutral spaces, it appears that stance-oriented spaces are more capable of attracting the interest of otherwise passive individuals who *are not* interested in debate and conflict but *are* interested in expressing their support for a particular stance or opinion. The exponentially higher membership of the No BC HST group compared to the HST Forums is evidence of this claim. Some of the individuals who join stance-oriented groups may be interested in joining these groups as a way to construct and express their identities, a practice that a stance-neutral space contributes less towards. Whatever the combination of motivations, a stance-oriented space centralizes support for that stance and turns that support into a public statement, bringing many passively interested people out from behind their filters and inactivity and making their interest visible. In the absence of a centralized stance-oriented space like the No BC HST Facebook group through which support can be counted, support for a stance such as opposition to the HST may remain relatively dispersed and ephemeral. The role of online spaces in making support visible and measurable is a concept that will be explored further in the following section.

Having thus outlined some of the more significant ways in which the structures of online spaces shape their use, and the social roots and causes of those structures, we can now continue on towards more specifically surveying those structures' role within the anti-HST movement. I will pay attention to the online pursuit of individualized interests, the difference between active

and passive actors and information seekers, and the desire for either cooperation or confrontation. Remaining aware at all times that the actions and desires of individual social actors are a central driving force behind shaping the structures of online spaces, my analysis will in most cases reflect the withdrawal of online structures into the woodwork, and the resulting lack of awareness shown by most social actors regarding their mutability.

The Workings of the Anti-HST Movement Online

In this chapter, I first briefly explore the variety of motivations brought by individuals to their involvement with the anti-HST movement, in order to apply Bennett's (2008) discussion of evolving citizenship styles. The goal, here, is to seek out the influence of elements of new social movements by uncovering whether the rise of a cultural public sphere has impacted the anti-HST movement, which would otherwise be considered a fairly traditional movement organized around political and economic motivations. I then outline some distinctions that will help us to dissect the work of the anti-HST movement by better understanding who was acting, what the goals of the movement and its supporters were, and what role the internet played in those actions. Finally, I apply these distinctions to a thorough analysis of the various activities and strategies of the anti-HST movement, and the shifts that appear to be taking place as a result of the growing importance of social media as it pertains to the shaping of public opinion and public action. Throughout this chapter, I will identify elements of the anti-HST movement that align with definitions of both traditional and new social movements.

A Diversity of Motivations

People who supported or were directly involved with the anti-HST movement expressed a wide variety of motivations for their involvement. I inquired into individuals' motivations in order to see whether Bennett's (2008) typology of Dutiful Citizenship and Actualizing Citizenship could be applied, and what effects I might be able to observe regarding the claim made by scholars of new social movements that cultural issues are becoming more important to the public involvement of citizens than political issues (Carty 2010; Earl and Schussman 2008). Though the HST is, on its surface, a political and economic issue, I was curious whether the rise of a cultural public sphere and the proliferation of new social movement motivations and

strategies might have some effect on the approaches individuals took to their engagement in the anti-HST movement.

The motivations behind people's involvement in the campaign against the HST were numerous and fairly diverse, but tended to be arranged mostly along political and economic lines. Political and economic reasoning were wound tightly throughout the rhetoric people used to explain their opposition. For example, some people, like Brian, felt that the HST would be bad for the provincial economy, or disagreed with the government's tax policies because of the way that the HST increased the burden of taxation that was placed on the individual consumer rather than on businesses. Individual financial concerns were also common, with some people concerned that the HST would hurt them financially as individuals, or hurt their small businesses. A possible explanation for the prevalence of politically and economically oriented motivations is that individuals expressed their motivations in ways that fit the framework of the issue. If this is the case, it could obscure some of the deeper political or cultural rationalities that motivated people.

Despite the predominance of political and economic motivations, which are more suggestive of the anti-HST campaign as a traditional social movement, it is also possible to see some ways that cultural logics, involving issues of lifestyle, rights and freedoms, and individualism, were present. According to Gary, some people expressed their motivations as a desire to exercise more self-determination by having greater control over the ruling political party. Brian told me that others felt that the implementation of the HST violated their democratic rights and values: they felt they were being denied of their right to be consulted and to have a say in the administration of the province's affairs. The denial of these rights was sometimes expressed as a lack of "fairness." Finally, some, like Cindy, stated altruistic, social justice-

oriented motivations for their opposition, explaining that they believed the HST would most strongly affect poor and working class people, and that they felt obligated to be a public voice for the working class. These motivations, even when they seem to deal with political or economic considerations, are tied to narratives of cultural values, individual rights, and issues of freedom and lifestyle. In fact, some individuals even expressed an aversion to being associated or allied with people who were too politically driven: Jamie interpreted some other activists' actions as arising out of a desire to engage in party politics, attacking the governing Liberal Party and gaining "points" for the opposition NDP. Jamie's reaction to this perception was hostility towards people polluting what was otherwise a "grassroots" movement by playing political games, and he was not alone in this perspective.[3]

The common theme that appeared throughout all of these motivations was a sense of anger and betrayal. People felt betrayed by the Liberal Party because the Liberals had said, during their most recent election campaign, that the HST was not an option. The widespread perception that the Liberal party lied during its election campaign created a great deal of hostility, and this anger appeared to underlie all other motivations of politics, economics, lifestyle, and social justice.

In summary, while many of the motivations for protesting the HST were expressed along the lines of political and economic opposition, it seems that cultural modes of thinking did play some role in motivating citizens' engagement with the anti-HST movement. A foundation of anger and betrayal acted as the underpinnings of individuals' desires to exercise self-determination, to maintain their lifestyles, to protect their rights and freedoms, and to advocate on behalf of the marginalized poor. While it would not be accurate to remove the label of a

[3] An aversion to party politics can, perhaps, also be demonstrated by the relative failure of the strongly NDP-backed Recall movement which followed the Citizens' Initiative petition.

traditional political movement from the anti-HST campaign based on this evidence alone, it is interesting that some crossover seems to have taken place between the political and the cultural public spheres, manifesting itself as a broad and diverse array of motives coming together to support a common purpose. When considering the question of whether to brand the anti-HST campaign a "traditional social movement" or a "new social movement," most of the evidence gathered from supporters' motivations points towards applying the "traditional" label; however, the diversity of approaches or angles on these motivations, and the presence of some cultural and individualistic logics, suggest that elements of new social movements were present, and that the anti-HST movement does not fall purely into the "traditional" model.

Conceptual Distinctions for an Analysis of Movement Activity

We can now continue on to a direct analysis of the anti-HST movement, paying particular attention to the roles played by online spaces. In considering the activities undertaken by the anti-HST movement, three distinctions should be made. First, we should distinguish between informal actions taken by individuals opposed to the HST and actions taken by official members of formal anti-HST organizations. Second, we should recognize the existence of both institutional and noninstitutional goals and intentions within the anti-HST movement. Third, we should explore the differences between offline and online action.

Formal and Informal Actors

While interviewing Jamie on his involvement with the anti-HST movement, I was presented with a distinction between what I am calling "formal" and "informal" actors. Jamie told me how at the height of the petition process, he would spend several hours a day working as a volunteer, and would then go home and spend another hour or two online, on Facebook and news media websites, leaving comments and sharing links. Jamie's division of his movement-related activity into his "volunteering" activities and his online "personal" activities suggested a

conceptual divide: in the former situation, Jamie was a formal actor, a member of the movement who had the official sanction of the movement's organizing body and was working to directly pursue the movement's goals. At home, however, Jamie was an informal actor, not acting in an official capacity. To extend the definition, the central formal organizing body of the anti-HST movement was Fight HST; therefore, formal actors for the anti-HST movement were the creators, members, and volunteers who officially "worked" for Fight HST, while informal actors were individuals who performed actions that were related to the HST, but that did not fall directly under the umbrella of Fight HST's campaign. As examples, the publishing of a press release on the Fight HST website, or the carrying of the petition, were actions taken by formal actors, while an individual writing a blog post outlining their opposition to the HST or sharing an HST-related link on a social networking site was acting informally.

Formal membership in the movement was regulated by formal guidelines: there were rules in place to regulate who was and was not a volunteer, and what volunteers were and were not allowed to do. Volunteers who wanted to carry the petition had to be granted a canvassing card, and they were limited by guidelines that prevented them from doing certain things, such as going door-to-door in apartment buildings (Jim:316-320). Volunteers who broke the rules for carrying the petition could have their canvassing card taken away (Jamie:246-249).

It should be acknowledged that formal organizations other than Fight HST were also involved in the anti-HST movement, either through cooperating with or supporting Fight HST, or in undertaking their own campaigns. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, however, I will be focussing on Fight HST as the organization that embodied the formal action of the anti-HST movement.

Further analysis in this area will focus on what types of action formal and informal actors tend to concern themselves with, and how online spaces have affected the boundaries of what is considered acceptable or desirable action for a formal organization such as Fight HST or the government.

Institutional and Noninstitutional Action

The distinction between formal and informal actors is similar to a distinction that can be made between two different types of social or political action. Earl and Schussman (2003) write that "the activities that comprise civic engagement are marked by their institutional relationship to government (e.g., voting), or their noninstitutional relationship to government (e.g., protest)" (76). The anti-HST movement ultimately expressed itself through an institutional relationship to government, in the form of the Citizens' Initiative petition, but it also held a noninstitutional relationship with government through its protest-oriented networked association of online and offline protest groups and its public rallies. The institutional goal of the anti-HST movement was to gather signatures for the petition under the Recall and Initiative legislation, forcing a referendum. The noninstitutional goals of the anti-HST movement were to create awareness surrounding the HST and to win public support for an opposition to the HST. Both the institutional and the noninstitutional aspects of the anti-HST movement involved activities that took place online as well as offline.

The alignment that can be made between formal and informal actors and institutional and noninstitutional action is that institutional actions are generally undertaken by formal actors, while noninstitutional action is relatively informal. This is not a hard and fast separation, by any means. Formal organizations do involve themselves in noninstitutional action. For example, Jamie talked about working with supporters of Fight HST to make sure that some of them were listening to every talk radio show, so that they could call in and represent the anti-HST

perspective. The callers were not calling as official representatives of the movement, but they were being organized, to a certain extent, under the Fight HST umbrella. Similarly, Fight HST would encourage its followers to comment online on pro-HST news articles, providing and disseminating links to these articles along with commentary and suggested responses. Noninstitutional activities like these were used by Fight HST as a way to further the movement's noninstitutional goals, thereby also benefitting their institutional pursuits by increasing the potential pool of volunteers and petition signees available to them. An interesting point to consider is that the movement's noninstitutional activities did not start out as supporting mechanisms for the institutional petition process. Jim informed me that the opportunity to use the Recall and Initiative Act came to light after the formation of Fight HST, the No BC HST Facebook group, and most of the rest of the dispersed anti-HST initiatives. The discovery and development of an opportunity for institutional action was simply an outlet for the public sentiment of noninstitutional protest that had been developing broadly and independently, fueled by many small, semi-organized pockets of opposition, since the announcement of the HST.

My further analysis of institutional and noninstitutional social action, below, will focus on the specific ways that the internet has not only enhanced these forms of action, but is also having effects on the legitimacy of social action and may be reawakening the cynical, politically disengaged masses and harnessing their informality into measurable, effective noninstitutional action.

Online and Offline Action

The next separation of movement-related activities is between actions that took place offline and actions that took place online. As an example, carrying a petition from door to door to gather signatures is an offline activity, while promoting a rally via email is an online activity. According to the supporters I interviewed, the types of actions undertaken online appeared to be

more diverse than those that took place offline. Online, the participants discussed a range of activities that involved everything from gathering information about the HST and sharing and discussing that information with others, to networking with other protesters, to actively promoting the movement through various channels such as social media and blogging, to leaving comments on news articles related to the HST, to coordinating the logistics of the movement. Offline activities encompassed talking about the HST with friends, interacting with mainstream media, attending rallies, doing the work of the movement "on the ground" by carrying copies of the petition on the street or from door to door to be signed, or, of course, actually signing the petition.

According to social movement literature, the most widespread use of the internet in social movements is to support offline protest (Carty 2010:170; della Porta and Mosca 2009:780). In other words, social movements are often planned and organized online, but their direct protest or advocacy takes place offline. This was certainly the case with the institutional elements of the anti-HST movement: the actions that were undertaken online were intended to support the gathering of signatures for the petition. Included in these actions were the range of administrative and logistical activities that were necessary for planning and organizing the petition campaign.

Further to this relationship between online and offline activity, a similar relationship can be observed, and has already been alluded to, between institutional and noninstitutional action. Even noninstitutional new social movements which are taking place primarily online often "demonstrate [a] continuity with traditional social movements in which there is an *instrumental* and *strategic* component—the goal being to affect institutional change in formal politics" (Carty 2010:166). In the case of a fairly traditional movement like the anti-HST campaign, this relationship is brought more obviously to the forefront. When conversations and discussions with

friends or strangers, both online and offline, serve to increase awareness of and engagement with a movement like the anti-HST campaign, that increased engagement may lead more people to act as volunteers in the institutional work of the movement. As another example, comments left on mainstream news articles are an informal way to have a public voice, addressing both the media outlet itself and others who read the article, and the ultimate effect on both of these audiences is intended to be greater education about and support for the movement, either by the public or in the media, again so that more people will volunteer and/or sign the petition. While forms of noninstitutional action like the No BC HST Facebook group were already gaining momentum and contributing to the viral spread of anti-HST sentiment before Fight HST arrived on the scene, that sentiment, and the infrastructures that were supporting it, was capitalized on by the movement. Informal actors played a significant role in supporting the institutional pursuits of the formal anti-HST movement by advancing noninstitutional goals. The support Fight HST provided in facilitating noninstitutional actions is evidence that members of that formal organization were aware of this relationship and sought to take advantage of it.

Institutional and Noninstitutional Action Within the Anti-HST Movement

Armed with an understanding of formal versus informal actors, institutional versus noninstitutional action, and the differences between offline and online action, we can now discuss the roles the internet and online spaces played in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the anti-HST campaign's institutional action, the evolutions that have been revealed in the nature of noninstitutional action by informal actors, and the expansion of formal organizations' interest in social media and other online spaces.

Enhancing Institutional Action

Describing the movement's use of the internet, Gary told me, "It's all organizational, if you look at it.... You're furthering your organization by using the internet."Access to online tools

for communication, the managing of logistics, and so on, greatly improved the anti-HST movement's ability to manage its affairs and keep itself organized during its pursuit of the institutional goal of executing a successful petition drive. Specifically, the internet improved the anti-HST movement's recruitment, logistics, and tactics.

In terms of recruitment, Jim identified that the internet was used for "signing people up" and "promoting through email...that we needed canvassers." Movement organizers were able to "use all of the social media to encourage canvassers to sign up where [they] needed them more, and also to get people to consider moving to other locations." Because of the near-instantaneous nature of online communication, movement organizers "knew fairly quickly where there weren't enough signatures coming in, so we could marshal our forces more accurately" by stepping up recruitment in those areas.

Petition-carrying tactics were similarly enhanced by online communication. Jamie discussed the internet's role in facilitating the development of "strategies and scheduling." During the petition process, he told me, "people would post online and onto the email lists at which corners they collected the most signatures...so we used [that information] to try and maximize the amount of people that we had access to."

The Fight HST website and the No BC HST Facebook group also allowed for faster and more efficient event planning. According to Jim, "All of [the] signing events, they were all, and probably all still are, on the FightHST.com website." Supporters could be informed very quickly where and when the next signing event would be, and social media allowed those places and times to be communicated by locals to their friends and colleagues, which is to say the people who might be interested in coming out to sign the petition. This kind of targeted event planning, based on constantly updated tactical information and signature counts, was important because, as

Jim identified, there were people that the movement could not reach by going door-to-door—for example, volunteers were not allowed by the legislation to go door-knocking in apartment buildings—or by standing on street corners. In cities or towns where most people lived in apartment buildings or suburban homes, then, it was inefficient to try to bring the petition to people; instead, the organizers had to try to publicize opportunities for people to come to the petition, through signing events and so on.

Finally, the internet allowed the anti-HST movement to engage in networking and cooperation. New social movements are often built as networks of action and association between individuals and groups, mobilizing different pockets of action among a diverse and heterogeneous population. At the individual level, Bennett and Segerberg (2011) call this networking the "personalization" of political engagement, suggesting that a movement built around networked tactics and individualized messaging allows its supporters to frame their involvement to fit with their own lifestyle, culture, and motivations.

At the organizational level, existing organizations that already have infrastructure and lines of communication in place are able to effectively reach a wide audience, and that audience typically has built-in sympathies for the cause the organization is supporting. For example, Gary suggested that all of the non-Liberal political parties in BC were on board: he said, "Everybody who had a party affiliation jumped on the bandwagon. And that was partly because they already had organizational structures of their own. So that just made it easier." Brian identified networking between organizations and websites as an effective way to not only reach an audience with information, but also to share audiences. He suggested that it is useful to "get a network of people together who probably have independent sites that are linked together, so that all of you can get out a much more effective information campaign." The Fight HST campaign

was able to develop and take advantage of this type of network by receiving support from such pre-existing organizations as the New Democratic Party and various workers' unions. Those organizations used their existing infrastructures, including their own websites, email lists, and other communication tools, to reach their existing audiences, recruit volunteers, improve the movement's level of organization, and so on.

On top of this, networked organizations are able to customize the delivery of their messages based on the nature of their audience, playing more effectively to their audience's diverse sympathies and motivations than a centralized entity could. Bennett and Segerberg (2011) put it this way:

> ...Organization networks can harmonize their agendas around message frames that are broad enough to invite diverse individual participation and coordinate this participation through fine-grained digital media applications that result in coherent collective action. (795)

When social movements go online, they are able to become decentralized, fluid, and adaptable, and they can more accurately target individuals or small segments of the population with their messages, rather than having to use the decreasingly effective mass media methods popular among traditional social movements to convey a common, blanketed message to the masses as a whole. The ability to diversify and target the movement's message can greatly increase the engagement the movement receives from a diverse population of supporters.

Through these types of tools, functions, and capabilities, online spaces were vital to the success of the anti-HST petition. Jim placed great importance on the role of social media, saying, "Without social media we would not have been successful. I'm quite convinced of that." Most of these uses of online spaces fit better under the definition of a traditional political movement, in that citizens were being encouraged and enabled to "do their political duty" by expressing their

opinions in an institutional, official way, as part of a unified group working together under the top-down leadership of a political organization. The networking that took place between Fight HST and other political organizations, however, is a clear sign of new social movement tactics. Networking fits into a new social movement framework by emphasizing individualization and cultural narratives. Thus, to the extent that the anti-HST movement made use of network tactics, it was incorporating the methods and strategies of new social movements, despite its relatively mainstream, traditional course of institutional action.

Evolving Noninstitutional Action

Before the institutional action of the movement could succeed, a very high level of public support for the movement's goals was necessary. The development of that public support was not a matter of institutional action but of noninstitutional action, and the internet played a significant role not only in enhancing the movement's noninstitutional action, but in evolving it into new forms and enabling it to be effective in new ways. In the noninstitutional work of the anti-HST movement, more evidence of new social movement attributes can be identified. The following section is intended to shed light on the ways that the structures of online spaces shaped the uptake, impact, and visibility of noninstitutional action by informal actors in the anti-HST movement.

The main way that informal actors were vital to the performance of the noninstitutional work of the anti-HST movement was through spreading information virally online. Sharing information, opinions, and links online through social media amplifies awareness through a "pay-it-forward" system where one person sees, for example, a Facebook group, and tells two or more of their friends about the group, and each of those friends tells their friends, and so on. Social media websites like Facebook and Twitter make this process even more efficient by

placing people in closer contact, simplifying the act of sharing, and helping to deliver information to a broader, more public audience.

The sharing of links and information through social media can accomplish the important task of getting information past passively interested people's filters. Jim called anti-HST activity on Facebook a "viral warning to the public, the online British Columbia public, about what the HST was, that it was a big issue, that your friends are concerned, your coworkers are concerned, you should be concerned." Receiving HST-related information through social media put a personal face on that information, and increased the amount of attention passively interested people were likely to pay to that information. People who were interested in the anti-HST movement were likely to express that interest through social media, and their audience was likely to contain friends and acquaintances who might not have heard about the movement—or not have heard about certain specific information pertaining to the movement—but who held similar attitudes towards politics, taxation, and so on, and who might be interested, upon learning of the movement, in engaging with it. Rather than seeing a general overview of the HST in mainstream media, where the information is noninteractive and is coming from an ostensibly disinterested party, when people see that their friends are interested in topics like the anti-HST movement they are able to immediately begin interacting with that topic by discussing it or clicking through to more coverage, opinions, or information.

Mainstream media does play a role in making people generally aware of topics like the HST, but social media is capable of making that information more specific, more direct, and more interactive, and of targeting it to the people who are more interested in seeing it. Through social media, there was a higher chance that people who might be interested in opposing the HST would learn of the anti-HST movement's existence and be presented with a way to immediately

interact with the movement and express support through joining a group or pay it forward by re-sharing information. In these ways, online spaces awaken the passive masses into activity.

The ability for "the masses" to act on the information they received about the anti-HST movement was greatly enhanced by the very low barriers to entry for informal involvement. While institutional work, such as carrying the petition, had institutional barriers in place, with rules and guidelines that must be followed, noninstitutional work had few or no barriers: there are no rules about who is allowed to talk to their friends or pass news articles around. Online action, too, has low barriers to entry (Fisher and Boekkooi 2010), and increases the audience people have available to them. Individuals engaged in offline noninstitutional action did not have much of an audience, unless they made use of some organizational infrastructure, and individuals engaged in online institutional action were still limited by institutional regulations, but people who wanted to conduct online, noninstitutional action were able to combine low barriers with larger audiences, as well as with tools built into online spaces that enabled them to target their opinions to their friends or to find other people who were interested in the anti-HST movement to share their information with.

Online action through social media also has the advantage of allowing information to be presented to people where they are; the information can seek out its audience rather than the audience having to seek out its information. Social networking sites provided the anti-HST movement with large existing audiences, allowing them to reach more people more easily. Jim expressed it this way:

> There are a lot of people who are on Facebook, obviously, and I think BC is one of the higher penetration areas. We have a base, you know, where there are so many people on it, that all they had to do was just recommend [No BC HST and FightHST.com] to their friends, and that's exactly how it grew.

The infrastructure and the audience already existed; it was simply a matter of seeding the information and the opportunities into that space, so that people who were not actively searching for opportunities would have the opportunities brought to them by their friends. These passively interested people—which is to say, people who may have been unlikely to actively seek out opportunities to get involved with the anti-HST movement on their own initiative—could still receive information about the movement if they had actively interested friends built into their social media filters. Cindy told me, "At first, [the internet] brought me important information, but then I still went looking for other information on my own." She added that "Twitter is a good way to be exposed to information that you didn't already know existed." Cindy, like the rest of the people I interviewed, is an actively politically engaged person, but even she had to have information "brought" to her, in the beginning, before she could go out and actively pursue it further. Social media allowed those people who were only passively interested to receive information, even if they were not sufficiently interested to actively pursue it.

The reaching of passive people extends beyond the sharing of information into the realm of action as well. Previous writers have claimed that "those individuals who are politically active will use the Internet to enhance their political activism...and those who are not politically involved are unlikely to become so because of Internet possibilities" (Carty 2010:63). Carty's observation misses a certain subtlety of the matter, though. It may be the case that the internet will not bring people who are not politically involved to *become* politically involved, but it may

also be true that there are people who are politically *interested* who will find, through online spaces, convenient, low-barrier ways to express their interest. In other words, the internet may bring opportunities for action to individuals who are passively interested, and turn their passive interest into action. In the case of the anti-HST movement, people who had Facebook accounts were only a click or two away from expressing their support for the movement by joining the No BC HST group, if a link was presented to them. Observation suggests that the majority of the people who joined the No BC HST group did nothing further in association with that group; however, without Facebook and other social media, these passively interested people might not have been presented with such an easy opportunity to take even so small of an action related to the movement, and they might have continued to be passively interested without expressing that interest. A similar principle was likely in effect with those who signed the anti-HST petition: while some of the signees may have actively sought out times and places where they could provide their signature, it is likely that many more of them happened to be "in the right place at the right time," coming across a petition carrier on the street and expressing their support due to convenience. In my conversations with friends and acquaintances, I have often heard just such a story from people who did not sign the petition, but who would have if a convenient opportunity had presented itself. These are the kinds of people who might read and listen to HST-related information online, or even discuss and comment on it, but will only express their support in any kind of visible or measurable way if the barriers to entry for their action are lowered right to the ground. A Facebook group like No BC HST is one online space that does exactly that.

To express this all in another way, the use of social media in support of the anti-HST movement took the unmeasured, passive people, who had slipped below the level of noticeable involvement, and allowed them to express even their mild, passive interest as a visible,

measurable, noninstitutional action online. It should be said that it is the visibility and measurability of these actions that makes them matters of interest. It is common for a public issue to create public sentiment that could be very supportive for a movement such as the anti-HST campaign—though not, perhaps, to the same extent. Jamie identified a great deal of "supportive complaining" regarding the HST, but bemoaned a perceived lack of direct action of behalf of the complainers. He told me,

> I was a little bit resentful cause so many people were so happy to see you but they weren't willing to, like... They were so against the HST, and they professed how much they didn't like it, but then when you asked them to help you, and like, maybe become a volunteer and collect a few signatures from their friends... They were just 'so busy,' they 'didn't have any time' for that. They just had time to complain a lot, I found.

The advent of social media turns this supportive complaining into a visible entity: it allows the conversation and discussion—the "talk"—surrounding the issue to be publicly viewed and measured. Offline talk between friends is entirely private, and only the participants in the conversation are affected by it. Online talk, however, affects everyone who has access to the conversation. On Facebook statuses, that includes all of the conversationalists' friends; in public Facebook groups, like No BC HST, that is the public; likewise, on public Twitter accounts (most accounts are public), posts are publicly viewable, and if they are marked with topical hashtags (such as #HST), they can be easily found through a simple search. In other forms of social media, and other online spaces, the same principle holds true, though it is most powerfully in effect in the social networking superpowers I have mentioned. The effect of making HST-related talk into a visible, measurable entity was that every "talker" became an "informal employee" working towards the noninstitutional goals of the stance they supported. Even if they discussed

the HST from a neutral perspective, they were still raising general awareness and increasing the visibility of the HST online, and that benefitted the anti-HST movement.

The "harnessing of the masses"—a term which perhaps sounds too intentional, but is still, I think, evocative of what social media does through the measurability of talk—suggests another element of new social movements in the anti-HST campaign. The noninstitutional work of the anti-HST movement was built on a grassroots, bottom-up foundation of individualistic opposition to the HST. As individuals gathered their opposition into conversational groups and worked to promote the anti-HST perspective, they created a fluid, networked association of anti-HST supporters, clearly embodying new social movement tactics, even though that social action came to be supportive of a relatively traditional political goal.

Formal Actors and Noninstitutional Action

On both sides of the HST issue, noninstitutional action was not only the domain of informal actors. Over the course of the petition and referendum process, formal bodies became increasingly involved in battling over public opinion in noninstitutional ways. The two primary battlegrounds for this conflict were mainstream media and social media. While mainstream media has been identified as a realm mostly dominated by the interests of government and big business, entities which have the resources and expertise to effectively sway public opinion, the anti-HST movement was able to gain a foothold in mainstream media, while also making good use of social media to shift the battleground to a location less clearly dominated by government.

The anti-HST movement gained a presence in mainstream media partially through the credibility that was granted to the movement by the involvement of Bill Vander Zalm, former premier of British Columbia. Mr. Vander Zalm's history and experience in BC politics played a significant role in the Fight HST campaign's ability to catch the attention of news media and to use news media to increase awareness of the anti-HST movement among passively interested

citizens whose filters and social networks might not have otherwise brought an awareness of the movement to them. A relationship with mainstream media was helpful to the movement in creating and sustaining interest in and momentum for the petition process, and for spreading popular awareness and public "buzz" around the issue—in other words, in supporting the noninstitutional goals of the movement. Additionally, Gary suggested that to most people, compared to blogs and social media, "traditional news media was still better respected."A media presence granted the movement a certain level of credibility in the eyes of the public that may not have existed without coverage in the news.

The internet played some part in enabling the anti-HST movement to adopt a more effective set of media strategies. The anti-HST movement used online communication to coordinate media strategies relating to radio call-in shows and commenting on online news articles. As has been previously mentioned, Jamie discussed the movement's attempts to coordinate callers for radio talk shows, so that the anti-HST perspective would be heard as frequently as possible over the airwaves. Similar approaches were taken to quickly spreading links via websites and social media when HST-related news articles were posted online, so that movement supporters could leave comments on those articles demonstrating support for the anti-HST campaign.

Finally, in addition to using the internet to find new and more effective ways to engage with mainstream media, the anti-HST movement also applied media strategies to social media spaces. Support for and awareness of the movement was spread virally through social networking, and information, research, or reports that supported the perspectives of the movement were similarly circulated. The movement was also able to partake in new forms of media spectacle using social media. Like the rallies and marches of the 1960s and 1970s, people

flocked to the No BC HST Facebook group as a way to stand up and be counted. The huge numbers of members for No BC HST not only made a statement about public opinion relating to the HST, but also caught the eye of mainstream media, as demonstrated through Jim's anecdote about a friend in the media who was only interested in the group after it had reached 100,000+ members.

It should come as no surprise that as the importance and effectiveness of online spaces and social media in shaping public opinion increase, formal bodies will begin to expand their boundaries of action to include those spaces. The anti-HST movement has demonstrated some ways in which this is taking place. There is evidence to suggest that the government is beginning to "catch on" to the workings of social media, just as government previously developed expertise in its ability to influence public opinion through mainstream media. The creation of stance-neutral spaces, which attract only the most passionate, confrontation-eager individuals, is one example of a government social media strategy. Another sign is engagement in online activity by formal actors from the government or other organizations that were part of the pro-HST "network." In addition, organizational networking and cooperation—new social movement-style tactics that were important to the anti-HST movement—also took place on the pro-HST side: Brian identified some ways that the Liberal party joined forces with the Smart Tax Alliance and other groups to promote the pro-HST perspective.

As formal actors involved with government and institutionally-oriented social movements interest themselves with and engage in activities that were formerly the domain of the informal public, the gap between the traditional distinctions of formal/informal and institutional/noninstitutional are narrowing. The anti-HST movement's heavy reliance on crowd-sourced, informal actors and online, noninstitutional action seemed to awaken the government to

the importance of an engagement with public opinion in online spaces, and the boundaries of what the formal government was interested in were gradually expanded to include these spaces. This is a mirroring of the similar evolution that took place in the battle for public opinion in mainstream media during the rise of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. What remains to be seen is whether, and to what extent, social media will become the domain of expertise in the manipulation of public opinion in the same way that mainstream media has.

The involvement of formal organizations in online, noninstitutional action can also be described as the broader adoption of types of action that have typically been the domain of new social movements. Online advocacy has been a significant part of new social movements' response to the decreased effectiveness of traditional social movement tactics. Social media, networking, and fluidity now appear to be losing their exclusivity to new social movements and the cultural public sphere: traditional movements and formal organizations are adopting elements of new social movement tactics and employing them in the pursuit of relatively traditional political action.

Legitimacy

A possible future effect of greater involvement in online, noninstitutional action by government and other formal organizations may be increased legitimacy for online social action. Currently, the closest most online action gets to institutional legitimacy is through the administrative support of institutional action. Outside of organizational purposes, online action is still almost exclusively noninstitutional, and that affects the ways that it is able to pursue and receive legitimacy.

Legitimacy for institutional action is a function of adhering to regulations and guidelines. From a certain perspective, it is the guidelines that grant legitimacy. Working within the Recall and Initiative Act meant that the movement could get, in Jim's words, "*official sanction and*

authorization for a process which allows people to at least have a voice" (emphasis added). Noninstitutional actions, however, are not regulated in the same way. Legitimacy for noninstitutional action is not a function of working within a set of guidelines; instead, legitimacy for a noninstitutional movement is proportional to its observable success: the more public awareness and engagement the movement is able to create, the more seriously it will be taken not only by the public, but also by the media and by the government or organization towards which the protest is directed. As an example, Jim brought the No BC HST Facebook group to the attention of the media when it had reached 30,000 members, and was told to come back when the group had surpassed 100,000 members. A few weeks later, the group had done just that. Jim went back to his contact and was able to use those membership numbers to gain further recognition from the media. He summarized that process like this:

> "For a while, the media were saying, 'Well, is this real?' or whatever, and they saw this Facebook group growing exponentially, and then they started seeing polling, and they said, 'Wow, there's really something going on here.'"

A similar principle was at work in the spectacle-driven social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which used massive marches and rallies to force recognition in the media and by the government.

In the political world, engagement is typically measured in terms of institutional action, through, for example, voter turnout. As discussed by Bennett (1975), political education is built around encouraging institutional participation in the political system, and recognition of political involvement is, similarly, constructed around only recognizing institutionally measurable action. However, as cynicism and distrust of politicians have grown over the past several decades,

institutional political engagement has significantly declined. Low voter turnout is one measure of that trend.

Dissatisfaction with the political system is often met with exhortations to become politically engaged and take institutional action. This is evidenced by the common sentiment that "if you don't vote, you have no right to complain." Bennett's (1975) recommendation that political engagement must be measured in different ways, however, suggests that perhaps there are elements of noninstitutional action that can be measured as new forms of engagement.

Bennett (1975) suggests that the public's perceived lack of engagement with politics is due to cynicism, changing citizenship styles, distrust, and a lack of confidence in politicians. He says engagement has to be measured differently. Della Porta (2011) suggests that

> while some more conventional forms of participation (such as voting or party-linked activities) are declining, protest forms are instead increasingly used. Citizens vote less, but are not less interested and knowledgeable about politics. (803)

Protest forms are one new way to measure political engagement. Accordingly, the observation Jamie made about "supportive complaining," meaning a willingness to talk and complain but a reluctance to become involved institutionally, can certainly be seen as an expression of protest. As online spaces make "supportive complaining" a measurable entity, and sufficiently lower the barriers to entry for expressing support for a movement or discontent with the government, supportive complaining, to a certain degree, becomes a new form of political engagement, one that harnesses cynicism into something that increases the legitimacy of noninstitutional action.

Despite increases in the relative legitimacy of online, noninstitutional action, online action still generally supports offline action. A significant reason for this is that online action is not built into the structures of institutional social or political protest. Even when noninstitutional

action gains widespread public awareness, support, and legitimacy, practical, i.e. institutional, responses are still the prerogative of the government. In the case of the anti-HST movement, an online petition would have held no official, legitimate status; only a physical, offline petition would force active recognition and response from the government. Online social advocacy tends not to be granted the same degree, and certainly not the same form, of legitimacy as offline social advocacy. One reason for this is that without proper infrastructure and regulation, online petition or public action numbers are too falsifiable: IP addresses and other ways of limiting multiple signatures can be faked or bypassed, and petitions are globally accessible and can usually be signed by non-citizens. There are signs that change may be coming, though: for example, official Canadian census forms may now be completed online, instead of having to be mailed in. As systems for increasing the security and verifiability of online spaces are created and improved; as online, noninstitutional social action potentially becomes more common and more advanced; and as government and other mechanisms of expertise concern themselves more with online spaces and with the new forms of social action and advocacy tactics that they make effective, online action may develop greater formal, institutional legitimacy, and "new social movement" tactics that favour internet-based engagement may lose their "newness" and become relatively standard and commonplace.

Homogeneity

Perceptions of the movement, particularly among those who were involved in the movement, were an important question for this research from the outset. Over the course of the analysis, and guided by concepts in the literature, I came to see homogenization as the most significant aspect of how online engagement shaped individuals' perspectives on the movement. The literature on online communities and relationships suggests that online interaction and activity can produce homogeneity within groups and communities (Willson 2006; Wojcieszak 2009). Online spaces allow individuals to seek out others based on common values and interests, and to use those commonalities to construct shared homogenous identities. I found that the homogenizing tendencies of online spaces were among the most identifiable ways that the internet played a role in the anti-HST campaign. During my analysis, my interest in homogenization became oriented towards two questions: 1) how did engagement with the anti-HST movement online affect participants' perceptions of public homogeneity and unity; and 2) What role did discourses of unity play in the movement? First, I should explain why I refer to the internet's homogenizing tendencies as creating only the *perception* of homogeneity, rather than "actual" homogenization. The global, interest-based nature of online communication means that there is likely to be an unprecedented amount of diversity and heterogeneity among people who are interacting over the internet; however, following from Willson's (2006) analysis, interaction online can remove obvious social cues of appearance, accent, or attitude that imply heterogeneity, thus leading commonalities to be emphasized or made visible while diversity is deemphasized and rendered invisible.

In this chapter I elaborate on Willson's findings by identifying several different ways that online spaces, in tandem with certain social forces and behavioural considerations, tended to

reinforce a perception of homogeneity among supporters of the anti-HST movement, even within stance-neutral spaces or other venues where diversity seems to be a central design feature. In addition, I discuss some of the consequences of homogenization for the anti-HST movement and other similar movements.

Common Interests and Topic-Based Interaction

Topic-based interaction online, through social media, social networking, forums, websites, and so on, can instill perceptions of social homogeneity, collective identity, unity, and belonging. These perceptions are created through interaction that is almost exclusively focused on commonalities and shared interests. The similarities that bring the group together are emphasized within that group, while the traits of the group's members that are not directly related to the topic at hand are ignored. The discussion of stance-oriented spaces in a previous chapter provides one example of how commonalities can be emphasized online: interaction in a stance-oriented space is built around a shared view or opinion, and differences in approach, motivation, personal history, or almost every other aspect of a person's identity fade into the background, because they don't appear particularly relevant. Thus, a diversity of motives, backgrounds, or worldviews can be obscured by a commonality of interest or purpose.

Another way to express this form of homogenization online is through an understanding of online ties and associations as weak and specialized (Wellman and Gulia 1999). When people form relationships with individuals online whom they did not previously know, those relationships tend to be based on specific purposes or interests, rather than being based, like more traditional relationships, on shared location, history, values, and so on. As Carty (2010) expresses it, "[online] communities, like actors in many contemporary movements, are therefore made up of social relations that are decentralized, diverse, heterogeneous, fluid, open, informal,

and in many ways self-governing" (159). When a community contains so much diversity and heterogeneity, a focus on commonalities and shared purposes may be a coping mechanism that allows the group to function, enabling the group's members to interact based on common ground rather than becoming mired in their heterogeneity.

Along the same lines as specialized or topic-based interaction, people may go looking online not only for people who share their interests, but also for people who share their values and worldviews. People's interests and their worldviews may even be correlated, to some extent. When people find others whose interests and worldviews are similar to their own, they are more likely to sustain contact with those people, and to focus their online social attention in that direction.

As a consequence of the reasons just provided, when online interaction is drawn outside of the boundaries of individuals' usual areas of association, they may develop the idea that "people on the internet" are more similar to them than is actually the case. Cindy put it this way:

> "I always seem to imagine, though, that most people on the internet must think like me. Not at all true, but you get into that... You start thinking with these blinders on sometimes, because you're talking to the same types of people all the time, people that think like you, and sometimes it's easy to forget that in some spaces, like the internet, there are people that will passionately disagree with you."

We can see, then, that interacting within social circles that are built to draw focus to homogeneities doesn't erase heterogeneity, but it may lead to people to forget about the diversity that surrounds them.

The Pursuit of a Unity of Action

A focus on commonalities can be a subtle consequence of the nature of online interaction, through the mechanisms just discussed, but it can also be the outcome of an intentional desire by the organizers of the movement to promote unity. This organizing principle was evident in the anti-HST movement: Jim talked about community as one of the purposes of gathering people into the No BC HST group. An alternative to creating one BC-wide group, he said, would have been "to try to set up regional, riding-sized groups, but you don't have the same sense of community if you've got 85 different groups." It was valuable for the movement to encourage feelings of community and homogeneity, a sense that "we're all in this together." The pursuit of community and a unified front for a social movement is one of the central organizing principles of traditional social movements. From a traditional resource mobilization perspective, Fireman and Gamson (1977) write that "[m]ore often, when events and organizers mobilize people, it is because they build solidarity, raise consciousness of common interests, and create opportunities for collective action" (9). Solidarity and common interests are important tools in the advancement of a social movement, through constructing a "collectivity" whose group interests people will work to support. Feelings of community and solidarity often rely on homogeneity, born from common backgrounds, values, and motivations.

New social movements tend to pursue a more specific form of unity, though. The breadth and diversity that characterizes many present-day social movements, including the anti-HST campaign, means that those movements cannot rely entirely on traditional forms of homogeneity and solidarity: due to the heterogeneity built into having such a large "audience," social movements benefit most from a specific kind of solidarity based around not common motivations, but common purposes. The organizing principle of new social movements, in other

words, is not a common *motivation*, but a common *task*. When this is the case, the role of the movement ceases being the mobilization of people who share common feelings, and becomes the combining of a diversity of motivations into a desire to achieve a common goal. The movement needs to create and sustain a *unity of action*. When a movement is built around a common task, or a common purpose, it takes advantage of the weak ties that exist between diverse, heterogeneous, individually networked supporters and uses them to acquire the benefits of individualized and networked action, these being speed, broad appeal, and the targeting of diversely motivated supporters, among other things.

As Jamie noticed, however, the unity of action that is achieved by a fluid network of individuals associated through weak ties tends to disperse quickly once the action has been completed. Jamie told me that for many people,

> their goal was just to get the petition done and over with. And when that happened I'd say that probably 20% of the comments that I saw on all of the Facebook pages and the newspaper articles started to disappear. [...] They lost a lot of the foot soldiers, 'cause the anger just disappeared. The passion that people had for having their voices heard was satisfied.

Despite the appearance of homogeneity and community among supporters of the anti-HST movement, the movement was built on a much more heterogeneous foundation of support than it appeared to be: in Earl and Schussman's (2003) terms, it had many more transitive "users" than it had committed "members." Flanagin et al. (2007) explain this drop-off in support as follows: "...Lower costs of participation suggest there may be less...commitment to and identification with the group. Members have greater ability to define and control their involvement, hence the intensity of interaction and the number of members may also wax and wane" (41). The combination of low barriers to entry, weak ties, and diversity of motivation means that

commitment to a movement as an organization is likely to be lower, even if buy-in to the movement as a means to accomplish a specific action is very high.

Organizational Networking and Targeted Messaging

Another way that online spaces can create the perception of homogeneity is through the cooperation and networking of organizations. I have already identified the existence of organizational networking within the anti-HST movement, but to briefly review what that looked like, the Fight HST campaign received support from such pre-existing organizations as the New Democratic Party and various workers' unions, and those organizations used their existing infrastructures, including their own websites, email lists, and other communication tools, to reach their existing audiences, promote the movement, and improve the movement's level of organization.

Despite its ability to decentralize through the networking of organizations, the anti-HST movement still had to accomplish a centralized purpose by pushing forward its petition. The consequence of drawing the diversity of a networked movement into a centralized action was the bringing together of a broadly heterogeneous population of supporters, some of the consequences of which have been discussed on an individual level above. In order to hold onto the interest and support of that population, the central body of the movement had to mold its messages to promote unity, togetherness, and commonality. It was best able to do this by keeping its messages simple and focusing them on a shared purpose, rather than attempting to appeal too specifically to any particular subtlety of motivation or background. Fight HST, in other words, had to build its approach around commonalities and generalities, while allowing the groups that had networked in support of the movement to more diversely and specifically target their messages to their own segments of the audience. For example, Cindy tied together her

involvement with a union and a motivation for opposition to the HST based on the difficulties it could create for single moms and the working poor, a demographic segment whose interests a union often represents. Accounting societies, however, such as the one Brian was involved with, tailored their perspectives and their messaging regarding the HST to macro-level economic considerations.

The core messaging of the anti-HST movement, in other words, drew the focus of its supporters to the "lowest common denominators" of homogeneity, while within each organizational subsection of the movement, the members of that section received internally homogeneous messaging, as well. Social justice-motivated union members received social justice-oriented messaging, while economic policy-motivated accountants received economic policy-oriented messaging. The perception of homogeneity was created, therefore, both through Fight HST's central emphasis on commonalities and a unity of action, and also through the relatively homogeneous segmentation of the movement's audience.

Moderation

In addition to the way that online spaces gather people with common interests and purposes, and the effects of network-based social action, the moderation of online spaces can minimize heterogeneity and dissent and lead to more homogenized spaces. Different online spaces come with different built-in functions for the administration of the space, and one common set of administration tools deals with moderation. Discussion boards, Facebook groups, and other similar spaces generally provide the space's creator with the ability to "moderate" the space's content, meaning that they can modify or remove the content that is posted to the space by its users. Typically moderation tools are used as a way to remove offensive or irrelevant content, or to block out users who are repeatedly posting such content.

The internet allows many people who wouldn't otherwise have a public voice to express themselves. That openness especially applies to people whose views might otherwise be ignored: the internet may hold extra appeal for those who cannot otherwise find an audience. I was made aware of the importance of this openness of the internet by Gary, who said,

> "The online stuff tends to [involve] thoughts of what I refer to as whackos. Everybody's got a conspiracy theory... The conspiracy theories are all there. There's too many, shall we say, nutty sites out there and too many people that wouldn't otherwise have an opportunity to present ideas, because they're flaky, who had opportunities to do it. So there was a lot of stuff on the internet that you had to filter though, and most people just couldn't be bothered." (162-166)

Gary's response to the proliferation of "whackos" and "conspiracy theories" was to filter through the most extreme views in order to find the ones he was interested in or agreed with. This is the approach that informs the moderation of groups like No BC HST. In addition to filtering out "whackos" and "nuts," Gary suggested that No BC HST had to be moderated in order to stay away from "threats," while Jim talked about the need to remove posts that contained swearing or too much violence or hostility.

Driven by these approaches, the moderation of a space like the No BC HST group can result in a filtering out of the diversity that exists in the motivations and rationalities of the people who oppose the HST. As supporters of the anti-HST movement come together in a more centralized way through Fight HST and No BC HST, their focus is drawn to their commonalities, and their interaction is structured around certain accepted frames of action. Extreme, hostile, or "conspiracy theory" approaches are moderated away. As Willson (2006) identified, strong community bonding can result in marginalization and repression for people on the fringes. In the case of the anti-HST movement, fringe motivations or rationalities for participation may have

been marginalized not only through subtle social pressures, but also through moderation, as supporters were required to only express their opposition to the HST in ways that fit the guidelines enforced by the moderators of No BC HST.

In addition, the moderating out of irrelevant content can prevent group members from learning more about each other outside of their shared opposition to the HST. If members are not able to learn about the different backgrounds and personal histories that are being brought together in the anti-HST movement, then their focus will, again, be centred only around their common opposition to the HST. Through this process, the emphasizing of commonalities and the minimizing of diversity that have already been identified as a feature of online interaction are normalized and reinforced. As has already been discussed, such a strong focus on commonalities, along with the hiding of diversities, can result in an increased perception of homogeneity.

Filtering

Yet another element of the structure of online spaces that creates the perception of homogeneity is the various forms of filtering that shape the content internet users see and the people they interact with. I outlined the nature of filtering in the chapter on *The Structure of Online Spaces*, discussing how people actively construct their own filters by seeking out information that matches their interests, so that they only find whatever it is they're looking for. I also explained how websites like Facebook and Twitter assist users in building filters that passively bring certain information to them, based on whomever they have chosen to "Like" or "follow." The purpose of this section is to explore the implications of filtering, and how it affects people's perceptions, specifically in terms of homogenization.

Before engaging in a discussion of implications, however, it should be said that filtering is not a process unique to online spaces. Mainstream media has its own form of filtering that

affects what people see and how they interpret it. News media only conveys stories and information that media elites decide is relevant, meaningful, or of interest to their readers, viewers, or listeners. Those readers, viewers, and listeners are often aware that what they see is being filtered for them, and that awareness can lead to cynicism. Jamie suggested, for example, that mainstream media coverage of the anti-HST movement was motivated simply by a desire to sell newspapers, because the movement was a popular and interesting topic. Jim described a Liberal bias in the media, suggesting that the media "[doesn't] always print what's newsworthy." In addition, mainstream media is often seen as a realm dominated by government and big business, institutions which have developed the finely tuned ability to manipulate public opinion. Terranova (2001) writes, "The manipulation of public opinion today is no amateur business but is a field of systematic research, corresponding to the development of specific techniques that make the formation of hegemonic consensus an affair for professionals" (134). Social movements do not usually have the organization, infrastructure, or expertise necessary to engage in a mainstream media battle against government interests.

The internet has, however, created an alternative "battleground" within which the war for public opinion can be waged. Terranova (2001) continues:

> If communication has been 'corrupted' by private interests, the argument goes, then the reconstitution of a free and open space of communication should be a key force in driving the return of a more authentic democratic life. If the worst danger to democratic life today is the political and oligopolistic control of the media system, then a new medium of communication that would be somehow free of this 'old media' baggage is extremely important. It is on these foundations that the hopes for ‘new media’ (and more specifically the Internet) were laid. (134-135)

With the rise of the internet's immediacy, searchability, and networking capabilities, individuals gained a stronger ability to break through the top-down, media elite filtering of information, and were able to appropriate the filtering process by pursuing their own interests and their own information.

Yet while many people want to escape the top-down filtering of mainstream media, they may still be interested in a more passive form of gathering information than what a wide-open, completely independent, disconnected internet experience allows. In reference to avoiding "conspiracy theories" and "nutty sites," Jim said, "There was a lot of stuff on the internet that you had to filter through, and most people just couldn't be bothered." People who "can't be bothered" either continue to receive their information solely through mainstream media, or let their passive filters on social media and other websites bring information to them. The role of filtered online spaces in affecting public perceptions and public opinion can therefore be seen as an important element of the shaping of the new media "battleground," an area where the internet is clearly an object of struggle.

Continuing on to an analysis of the effects of passive filter-building in online spaces, we understand, at the most basic level, that people see only the information that passes through their filters. They build those filters based on their interests and their sympathies: who do they want to network with, whose opinions do they want to see, and, just as importantly, who do they *not* want to hear from? Before a person can make a decision about whether they want to add someone or something to their filter, of course, they must be aware of that person, topic, or group's existence. In other words, the first role of a filter is in shaping individuals' awareness of what content exists to be filtered. An awareness of a new topic such as the anti-HST movement often comes through mainstream media, through a social network, or through the active search

for information, as evidenced by the previously discussed ways that the people interviewed for this study heard about the HST and the anti-HST campaign. The relative prevalence of each method cannot accurately be assessed through this study, since my sample is biased towards proactive, passionate participants. Whatever route the information takes, however, if a relatively passive person is part of a social circle that contains many people who are likely to oppose the HST, for example, they are that much more likely to be exposed to the anti-HST movement's existence than a person whose social group is politically disinterested. This holds true for other topics and perspectives, as well.

The filtering of information through a social network becomes complicated online by the way that in certain online spaces, including Google searches and Facebook, the amount of engagement a person shows towards people or groups that are involved with a topic can affect how much information that person sees that pertains to the topic. This is because the Facebook home page and Google's search results use certain algorithms to determine what information is most likely to be of interest to the user, based on that user's previous interaction with similar content and on the content's general popularity. Sources or types of information that a user has clicked or commented on in the past rise to the top, while content that the user has not directly interacted with is pushed down towards the bottom. Thus, your engagement with a topic or a source affects your likelihood of seeing more information from that source or topic. If a person has both anti-HST and pro-HST friends, but only "Likes" or comments on posts by their anti-HST friends, then they may be less likely to see content shared by their pro-HST friends. This can create the perception that there is more support for the anti-HST perspective—and more homogeneity of HST-related opinion—than there is for the pro-HST perspective, or vice versa, of course, depending on the actions and interests of the user.

In addition, some people may contribute behaviourally to the filtering process through a hesitance to share information to an audience that they perceive as too heterogeneous. Cindy told me that there were certain opinions that she would share on Facebook, where her audience contained mostly offline acquaintances, but would not share on Twitter, where her "followers" were much more diverse. She described her online engagement with the topic of the HST in the following way: "...It's mostly just discussion between friends. Putting it out on Twitter leaves it open to, well, anyone can comment on my snarky comment...." Cindy wanted to avoid both the sharing of information that might be irrelevant to some of her audience, and also the potential for confrontation with people who would disagree with her. In other words, she, and probably others, saved her opinions for a homogeneous audience. If most people did the same, then the crossover of pro-HST and anti-HST opinions could be limited, and people on both sides of the issue might only end up seeing comments from people that agree with them, further creating the illusion of homogenous opinion online.

In these ways, the filtering of content on Facebook, Google, and other similar online spaces can foster a sense of homogeneity. This becomes problematic when users are not aware of, or are not actively considering, the filtering that is taking place. Jim told me that compared to news media, "Facebook tended to better portray the mood of the people." He was aware of how mainstream media filtered information, but he did not treat Facebook as a filtered space, so he gave its representation of public opinion more credibility. Due to the processes just described, that representation may have appeared more homogenous to him than it did to others. The observation that must be made is that the Facebook you see is probably different than the Facebook I see, and if that is not taken into account, it is possible to draw incorrect conclusions about public opinion.

Perceptions of homogeneity are not only affected within filtered online spaces that are based on passive information gathering. The active pursuit of information online can be affected by perceptions of homogeneity, as well. To state it simply, when people go online, they find what they are looking for. People who are seeking homogeneity are typically able to find it, while, conversely, people who are seeking confrontation and debate may find a greater degree of heterogeneity. Interviewees' perceptions of support for the anti-HST movement "on the ground" were unanimous in seeing anti-HST sentiment as holding a strong majority. (This could possibly be explained by most of the participants carrying the petition and, therefore, interacting directly with people who came to them wanting to sign it.) Most of the people I interviewed identified the weight of public opinion online as being similar, placing it somewhere in the range of 80% anti-HST to 20% pro-HST. Brian, however, felt that from what he saw, opinions on the HST online were split fairly evenly between support and opposition. One way to explain this difference in perception is that Brian, an accountant, was very interested in debating the relative merits of the HST and the PST/GST system. Brian looked for most of his engagement around the HST through Twitter, a space which does not filter content algorithmically and which may have made it easier for him to find conversation and confrontation than Facebook, which was the space the other respondents seemed to favour. Brian, who hoped to see arguments from both sides of the issue, found the balance of public opinion online that he was looking for, just as the other interviewees did. Their interests and their engagement shaped their perceptions.

To summarize, people who actively go online seeking engagement with an issue like the HST are likely to find the levels of homogeneity or heterogeneity that they want to find, while people who are content to receive their information more passively, through social networking in algorithmically filtered spaces, are likely to see a higher degree of homogeneity than may

actually exist, due in part to behavioural tendencies, and in part to the processes by which the content and the interaction in those spaces is filtered and presented to them.

The Privileging of Agreement

A final element of structure that can produce a perception of homogeneity is the way that social networking sites tend to privilege agreement over disagreement. On Facebook, there are two ways that users can interact with another user's post: one is to "Like" the post, and the other is to leave a comment. There is no option for "Disliking." On the newly released Google+, users can "+1" a post, expressing support or agreement, or, again, leave a comment. On Twitter, a user can reply to a tweet, or they can "retweet" it, sharing it directly with all of their own followers, typically because they enjoyed or agreed with the content of the post they are retweeting.

The privileging of agreement makes support for a sentiment visible, while relegating disagreement or opposition to the "Comments" area. If you disagree with someone's post, your only options are to express that disagreement in a comment, to ignore the post, or to remove the post's author from your filter by unfollowing or defriending them. Leaving a comment is more time-consuming than pressing a "Like" or "+1" button, and comments can sometimes be hidden from view unless they are directly sought out to be read. In the meantime, ignoring or unfollowing the source of the post leaves your disagreement invisible and unmeasured. As a result, the easiest and most visible way to gauge the level of support for a posted statement is through the number of agreements it received. Through this aspect of the structure of social networking sites, agreement, which suggests commonality and homogeneity, is spotlighted, while disagreement, which is an expression of heterogeneity, is obscured and hidden from view.

Summary

To draw all of the considerations surrounding the internet's homogenizing tendencies together, it should be reemphasized that the internet does not necessarily create actual

homogeneity. In fact, online spaces can free people to more openly and actively construct their identities and interact with broader, more diverse groups of people, creating higher levels of heterogeneity and bringing heterogeneous individuals together. Despite the myths and cultural narratives that describe the internet as a wide-open, free, heterogeneous space, though, the structure of many online spaces facilitates the emphasizing of homogeneous attributes, minimizes differences, marginalizes perspectives that fall outside of the majority, obscures diversity, and privileges unity, agreement, and networked cooperation. At the same time, people who go online seeking heterogeneity are able to find it, suggesting that the internet's homogenizing tendencies can certainly be treated as an object of conflict, where online spaces can be designed to emphasize either homogeneity or heterogeneity. Still, it appears that only the most actively interested debaters and conversationalists, in the case of the anti-HST movement, sought out heterogeneity and the confrontation that came with it, while most people were content to find the homogeneity they sought, or to let the structure of their social networks build that homogeneity on their behalf.

All of this discussion is not meant to imply that the heterogeneity inherent within the movement was not noticed by those who were involved in the campaign. Jamie described the people who were signing the petition as "the biggest group of everybodies I'd ever seen." Gary, too, found it "amazing" how the movement "had people young, old, male, female, from every walk of life, and I mean *every* walk of life, that were part of the Fight HST campaign." When I probed further into his perceptions of heterogeneity, though, Gary said that the diversity that he noticed was "not something that [he] had particularly looked for," and he appeared to be less interested in discussing that diversity, and more interested in how opposition to the HST had so dramatically "united the people of BC."

One explanation for the relative lack of interest Gary and the other participants showed in discussing the diversity within the movement, as compared to their celebration of unity, is that heterogeneity can appear to threaten the ability of a group to act cohesively. Flanagin et al. (2007) identify one way that heterogeneity can appear dangerous to a social movement. They write,

> ...The greater the heterogeneity of substantive membership and goals in a collective action group, the greater the likelihood of a mismatch between elite and participant views.... Mismatch may have implications for success and innovation within the group. (44)

To avoid the consequences of mismatched views, goals, or motivations, the anti-HST campaign, and other movements like it, may seek to downplay and deemphasize heterogeneity, while focusing on homogeneity and unity instead, since these are qualities that are traditionally associated with a strong, cohesive movement.

One risk involved in the deemphasizing of heterogeneity is that the most heterogeneous elements of the group's membership can be silenced or marginalized. Willson (2006) writes,

> "The removal of [identifiable] characteristics simply overrides the basis of discrimination, rather than effectively dealing with the discrimination itself. Participants are thus rendered as 'the same' rather than allowing for the accommodation of differences that may be viewed as threatening or uncomfortable" (60).

In other words, heterogeneity and diversity can be recognized, but the response to this recognition can often be to try to work around, or in spite of, that heterogeneity, and to applaud and emphasize unity over diversity. When this happens, the most dominant forces within the group can appear to represent a monoculture, creating disunity rather than unity and not only

ignoring, but also potentially overriding, the essential benefits that a heterogeneous, networked population provides to a social movement that is relying on new social movement tactics.

The silencing of heterogeneity did not appear to create a significant problem for the anti-HST movement during its main petition campaign, but the nearly immediate drop-off in active, vocal support that took place after the petition was completed, and the failure of the Recall petitions, may have been symptoms of the disconnect between the movement's central organizing bodies and the new-social-movement networked heterogeneity that made the anti-HST petition a success. Bennett and Segerberg's (2011) research into heterogeneous communication strategies within social movements suggests that movements which more actively incorporate heterogeneity into their strategies are still able to maintain strong networks and cohesive action. It may have been more effective in the long-term, then, for the anti-HST campaign to work more actively to emphasize diversity within the movement, and not to focus so much of its communication on unity and homogeneity, though of course this assessment can only be speculative.

Conclusion

Throughout all of these analyses, I have sought to address four main questions: 1) Was the anti-HST movement more of a traditional or a new social movement; 2) Did participants in the movement view the internet more as a site of struggle or an object of struggle; 3) How did the structure of online spaces affect the movement; and 4) How did the use of the internet affect participants' perceptions of the movement, especially in terms of homogenization and unity?

In terms of participants' views of the internet as either a site or an object of struggle, my research did not prove to be particularly empirically informative: I discovered that as internet technology and the structures of online spaces withdraw into the woodwork and become part of the everyday, new norms of internet use become established, and that it is only when those norms or expectations are disrupted that internet users begin to treat the internet as an object of struggle. Despite the apparently inherent dynamism in the structure of online spaces, internet users seem to desire stability and predictability. If the structures of online spaces respond to those desires by becoming increasingly stabilized, the shape and effects of those structures may become reified in the public consciousness. For this reason, it is important to discuss the effects of internet structure while they are still somewhat in flux, and are most susceptible to intentional, reflective design decisions.

Regarding the role of the structure of online spaces, I found that so far as they pertain to social action, online spaces are largely structured around interests and interaction. Through this structure, individuals' engagement levels with their topics of interests—such as social action—are often intensified. In order to facilitate the expression and intensification of interests, online spaces tend to be built to satisfy a desire either for cooperation, through the emphasizing of homogeneity, or confrontation, through the enabling of heterogeneous networking and

interaction. Online spaces designed for these purposes shape individuals' access to and interactions with information and with other people in different ways.

Responding to my question about the internet's role in shaping participants' perceptions of the anti-HST movement, I found that as a global communication technology, the internet allows for widespread heterogeneous networking and interaction, but that some online spaces veil that diversity. The heterogeneity that existed within the anti-HST movement, as evidenced by a diversity of motivations and by the success of tactics based on networking, individualized communication, and fluidity, was overridden in many ways by the homogenizing tendencies of the internet. The structures of many online spaces obscured heterogeneity, and movement organizers and supporters alike appeared to favour interpretations that highlighted unity and homogeneity rather than diversity. Traditional social movement sensibilities suggest that heterogeneity can be harmful to a social movement; however, the importance of the new social movement tactics identified above, along with other findings in the literature on new social movements, suggest that heterogeneity is a vital element of networked social action, and that a failure to recognize and celebrate heterogeneity can lead to rapid and significant drop-offs in support after a movement has achieved the purpose and action around which it has organized itself. I cannot say whether the anti-HST movement would have been more successful if it had placed more emphasis on heterogeneity and diversity than it did on homogeneity and commonalities, but it is clear that the internet's homogenizing tendencies can lead to both advantages and drawbacks.

Finally, regarding the application of either a "traditional" or a "new" label to the anti-HST movement, I found that while the core purpose of the movement was political, and its primary expression of action was also traditional, a great deal of diversity existed in the motivations of

the movement's supporters, and many of the tactics employed the movement relied on networking, cooperative action, individualization, fluidity, and other features that are associated with "new" social movements. The movement's use of online spaces not only enhanced the movement's traditional, institutional lines of action, but also led to the development of new forms of engagement, especially through noninstitutional action by informal actors. Along with identifying the use of new social movement tactics and logics of action within the anti-HST campaign, the government of BC also interested itself in online action and organizational networking, suggesting that these tactics may be losing their "newness" and are instead becoming incorporated into mainstream toolboxes.

The anti-HST movement, ultimately, could be considered a sort of hybrid between traditional and new social movements, and I expect that more and more social movements will come to incorporate new social movement tactics into their otherwise traditional, political action. As this process continues, and especially as government and other large formal bodies assert themselves through social media, within other online spaces, and by the exercising of network tactics, greater legitimacy may be gained for what are currently noninstitutional actions performed mostly by informal actors. In addition, the theoretical distinction between traditional and new social movements as ideal types may begin to collapse, as the political-economic and cultural spheres blend into one another and can no longer be neatly separated into discrete realms of action. As more and more movements blur the lines between political and cultural social action, and as tactics and philosophies based on diversity, heterogeneity, and networking come to the fore, the discussion of new vs. traditional social movements may become less insightful. Instead, we may be entering a period of even "newer" social movements. Perhaps it is time for a new social movement typology.

Questions for Further Study

Further research in the area of the internet and social movements would be well served to pursue the following questions:

- How are large formal bodies incorporating social media, networking, crowdsourcing, and other new social movement tactics into their repertoires of social action?
- Are the structures of online spaces becoming more stable, in response to social desires for stability, or is dynamism perhaps becoming more and more incorporated into the worldview and lifestyle of internet users? In other words, what are the consequences of the interplay between the internet's dynamism and individuals' desire for stability and predictability? How do these questions affect internet users' views of the internet as an object of struggle?
- Are discourses within social movements changing to incorporate and pursue greater diversity and heterogeneity, or is the desire for unified action, community, and homogeneity still the central principle of organization among most social movements?
- Finally, is it possible to develop a more specific and robust typology of the uses of the internet by social movements, or are internet structures and strategies changing too quickly to be effectively categorized? A more heavily empirical approach to this question might lead to further refinements of my separations between formal/informal and institutional/noninstitutional.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Call for Participants:
The Role of the Internet in the Anti-HST Movement

Who I Am
My name is Tim Sevenhuysen. I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria, working towards a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. My interests are in the areas of social movements and the role of the internet in social life.

What the Study Is
This study, titled "The Role of the Internet in the Anti-HST Movement", will look at the role that the internet played in the movement to have the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) in BC repealed. This research is meant to provide insight into how the internet, and the uses people make of it, have influenced social and political movements. I am particularly interested in how people's attitudes towards and understandings of politics and political action may be changing in the age of the internet.

Who I'm Looking For
I am looking for individuals who were involved in or engaged with the anti-HST movement on some level, especially online. I am hoping to interview people who did more than simply sign the petition. I would like to hear from people who spread word of the movement online through websites, discussion boards, and social media like Facebook and Twitter, or who were involved with organizing groups of people to support or further the movement in some capacity.

What Involvement Entails
Participation in this study will involve an interview that will last up to one hour and will take place at a time and in a location that is convenient to the participant. In-person interviews are preferable, but, if necessary, over-the-phone interviews may also be an option. With the permission of the interviewee, interviews will be recorded for later transcription. All information gathered during interviews will be kept confidential. Participants' identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, and records and data will be destroyed after the study is complete.

How to Get Involved
If you are interested in participating, send me an email at tseven@uvic.ca or send me a message on Facebook. I will ask you a few questions to make sure you fit what I'm looking for, and we'll go from there.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

The Role of the Internet in the Anti-HST Movement

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "The Role of the Internet in the Anti-HST Movement" that is being conducted by Tim Sevenhuysen.

Tim Sevenhuysen is a graduate student in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by emailing tseven@uvic.ca or calling 250-508-7023.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Sociology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Steve Garlick. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8600.

If you are taking part in a telephone interview, please sign this form and send it by fax to 250-721-6217, by email to tseven@uvic.ca, or by mail to

Tim Sevenhuysen
University of Victoria
Department of Sociology
PO Box 3050 STN CSC
Victoria BC V8W 3P5

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to study the role of the internet in the anti-HST movement. This research has to do with the relationship between the structure of the internet and how individuals approach, understand, and use the internet in both their everyday lives and their political activities.

Importance of this Research
Research of this type is important because it can be used to inform and refine our understanding of the relationship between the internet and social movements. It is also important because the presence and structure of the internet are related to ongoing changes in various aspects of society, and the consequences of these changes must be uncovered and described in detail in order to be understood.

Participant Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you were involved with the anti-HST movement on some level and made use of online spaces or internet-based tools as part of your involvement. You therefore represent the group of people who are of interest to this study.

What is Involved
If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an in-person or phone-based interview lasting up to one hour at a time and location that is convenient to you. If you are comfortable with it, audio tapes, written notes, and observations will be taken and a transcription will be made.

The findings of this study will also take into account statements taken from online spaces.

Inconvenience
The only anticipated inconvenience to you is the use of up to one hour of your time.

Risks
There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include a greater understanding of your own role in the anti-HST movement and increased awareness of the role of the internet in social and political action. This increase in knowledge may benefit society as a whole through an increased awareness of how to conduct effective social and political action. There may also be benefits to the state of knowledge regarding social movements and the internet; this knowledge may inform future studies into this area.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

Anonymity
In terms of protecting your anonymity, your name will not be shared or published in the drafts or final versions of this study. Pseudonyms will be used in place of real names, and no identifiable information will be presented.

Confidentiality
Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by password protection of the digital files where interview transcripts, recordings, and analysis are stored, and by the storage of physical documents containing any private or identifiable information in a secure location.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through distribution to participants, during a thesis presentation, and potentially through publication or dissemination in an academic journal or online. The completed study will also be shared with those who have participated in interviews.

Disposal of Data
When the study is complete, physical data from this study will be destroyed and digital copies of the data will be deleted, in order to protect confidentiality.

Ethical Approval
You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

- How did you first hear about the HST?
- How did you first hear about the anti-HST movement?
- What other social movements, such as petitions, advocacy groups, and so on, have you been involved with in the past, if any?
    - How politically active do you consider yourself to be?
        - Probe for DC vs. AC values.
- What is or was your level of involvement with the anti-HST movement?
    - Mostly involved online or offline?
    - Any kind of official or volunteer capacity, or mostly informal?
- How and why did you become involved with the anti-HST movement?
    - Why do you want to see the HST abolished?
- What has the reaction to the anti-HST movement been like, from your perspective?
    - Who is most involved? Are there differences between engagement offline and online?
    - What does involvement look like for a typical person?
    - Probe re: homogeneity.
- How do you see the movement represented by different people or organizations, both online and offline?
    - Has the representation of the movement changed over time, either online or offline?
    - Has your understanding of the movement changed over time? Why (or why not)?
        - (how it was operating, its goals, its chances at success, and so on)
    - How much public support have you seen for the movement?
        - Compare online and offline.

- What role has the internet played in your involvement with the movement?
    - How did you use the internet in relation to the movement?
        - What tools, services, and websites did you, or have you, made use of?
        - How did that work?
- How might you have used the internet differently in your involvement with the anti-HST movement?
    - What lessons could be learned from your involvement in the anti-HST movement?
    - How could the use of the internet in social movements be more effective, based on your experience?
    - What kinds of capabilities might you have liked to have that you didn't or don't?
    - How might you use the internet differently in the future?