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ABSTRACT

Using a combination of qualitative frame and discourse analysis methods, this research analyzes sixteen total years of news coverage related to the online direct action tactics of virtual march and hacktivism. The discourse of mainstream news media analyzed in this study favored the normative ideal of Habermas’s public sphere by framing emerging online direct action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism as ineffectual or illegitimate forms of political participation. The findings of this research suggest that despite being different in their contentious nature, the external attention these two protest tactics have received in the form of media discourse serves to delegitimize, marginalize and stigmatize participants and movements, as well as the online direct action tactics they employ. When viewed through proposed revisions to the public sphere, such as the public screen or the networked public sphere, however, the potential effectiveness and legitimacy of online direct action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism may be framed differently, suggesting that a revision to the public sphere ideal is necessary if online direct action tactics are ever to be viewed as legitimate forms of political participation. The use of the internet to facilitate online direct action tactics raises normative questions for democratic societies on a number of different levels. Having a better understanding of how and if these normative concerns are being used as framing devices by the media helps to reveal those issues, and could influence the shape and tone of political and public discourse regarding their use. This research has the potential to offer a starting point from which to make sense of this period of experimentation, a critical juncture in media communication that will influence the shape that discourse, public opinion and policy regarding how, when and if social movements use online direct action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism in the future.
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INTRODUCTION

History offers many examples of individuals and groups who have sought to effect change within the society and communities of which they are a part by organizing acts of contentious collective action and resistance. These efforts include, but are not limited to the use of various forms of protest and civil disobedience. The ultimate goal of these actions is to bring attention to and expose the injustices perpetuated by the unjust laws and policies of governments and corporations, and are utilized in an effort to change the system. In a broad sense, this type of resistance has been said to be “as old as the Hebrew midwives’ defiance of Pharaoh,” and can be seen in other Biblical examples as well: “Moses was a wanted man, and David an outlaw; Isaiah and Jeremiah were both accused of conspiracy and treason…[and] Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are known only for their divine disobedience,” not to mention Jesus himself (Suber 110, Coffin 1).

From at least the time of Jesus to more recent leaders like Thoreau, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and more recently as demonstrated by the Arab Spring and groups like Anonymous, acts of protest and resistance have been used to challenge what were and are seen as the unjust hegemonic policies and practices in a given historical and cultural context. Boykoff argues that the value of dissident voices that often “challenge privilege” and are found within social movements, are a “crucial cog in the complex machine called democracy” (308). Acts of resistance carried out by dissidents in the 21st century have come to include the incorporation of internet technology in a variety of ways. These forms are quickly becoming part of a social movement’s “tool kit,” or more formally what is known as the repertoire of contention (Tilly). This term represents the
whole set of means from which social movements can draw to make their claims and express grievances, including both skills and cultural forms.

This research looks specifically at two relatively recent additions to the repertoire, *hacktivism* and *virtual marches*, and seeks to better understand the nature of the attention and coverage their use has received by the main stream media in the form of news discourse. More specifically this research seeks to understand the nature of news discourse in the United States related to the use of two different online direct action tactics by analyzing 243 news stories over a 16 year period. In order to answer this question the following questions are also considered:

- How do the mainstream news media in the United States frame the use of hacktivism and virtual marches?
- What ideologies, including political, economic and gender based ideologies, can be identified in the frames used to cover virtual marches and hacktivism?
- What normative concerns about these tactics are raised in the news discourse?

Social movements have historically relied on traditional collective action forms that utilize strategies and tactics, such as protest and boycott, with the hope of providing a catalyst for social change. Traditionally, social movements have also relied on mainstream news media outlets for coverage of movement efforts and event. For the purpose of this study mainstream news media outlets are understood as those sources of news that are generally corporatized and widely distributed by and accessible to the public through various mediums. It is no wonder, however, that with the advent of the internet and the increased use and presence of people and organizations in the online realm that people are seeking new and creative ways to bypass the mainstream media and use the online space to carry out what have been called Online Direct Action (ODA)
tactics, yet another means by which to challenge the laws and policies that are seen as unjust in both the online and offline worlds. In 1998, Steven Wray noted in his presentation at the *Socialist Scholars Conference*, “one thing is certain; we have only begun to realize the full potential of how computers will change political activism” (1). Eighteen years later, we still do not fully understand the implications the internet holds for democracy, nor do we have a clear picture of how often and by whom these tactics of online direct action are being experimented with and utilized. Moreover, we know little about how the mass media are dealing with these untraditional forms of protest tactics in their coverage of modern social movements, and we have yet to gauge a clear sense of public opinion regarding their use. When understood as a “field of ideological struggle,” responsible for not only reflecting reality but also playing an active role in constructing it, the mass media must be considered for the role they play in the production of culture and meaning surrounding these new tactics (Hall et al. 1978).

Due to the speed of communication in the 21st century, the experimentation, innovation and diffusion of ODA tactics happens at a pace that makes studying them a challenge. While attempts are being made to quantify and categorize the use of these forms of resistance, much of the conversation to date has focused on the instrumental aspects of internet technology that make the barriers to organizing collective action lower and cheaper, however, it is also necessary that we consider the normative implications of their use as well. If we are to understand the implications of digital resistance for democracy it is necessary to problematize and question not only their use, but also the discourse surrounding their use so as to better understand the ideologies that are informing our understanding of and responses to them. There is much at stake in how this
debate over how social movements use the internet for tactical purposes is resolved in the public’s mind which, as history suggests, will be closely tied to the nature of the media discourse surrounding specific online direct action tactics.

Some have suggested that we live in what has been deemed the “movement society,” a society in which contentious collective action, grassroots participation and symbolic challenge are no longer considered unconventional (Tarrow, “Power in Movement” 8; Soule and Earl 346). Rather, these activities are considered a permanent component of Western democracy and part of the conventional repertoire of activities that citizens can utilize to express their opinions and grievances. Social movements have and continue to experiment with new or hybrid forms of protest and disobedience that utilize the internet and new media for more than fundraising or dissemination of information. Therefore, as a society we are faced with choosing which forms of online resistance and protest we are willing to participate in and accept as viable options from which current and future social movement organizations can choose.

In an interview on National Public Radio law professor John Palfrey, of Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society argued that “we have to think about what is activism in a digital era and how can we enable it in ways that are akin to a sit-in. On the other hand, we plainly need limits.” Embedded in Palfrey’s comment is the normative assumption that at least to some degree these forms of activism should be enabled, encouraged and protected, which is an assumption that this research shares. While there may be some examples of online activism that go too far in violating both ethical and legal standards, as is the case with some instances of offline direct action, rejecting or delegitimizing all acts of online protest and resistance could have detrimental
consequences for democracy’s ability to flourish in the internet age. However, as Palfrey further points out, at this point the “laws about this kind of thing are murky, and society still needs to figure out what kinds of online protests are acceptable” at both the normative and legal levels (Palfrey). This is particularly true of tactics that utilize hacking techniques, but it is also a matter of consideration for less controversial and contentious forms of electronic contention such as virtual marches. As social movements continue to experiment with new media and the possibilities they present for tactical expansion, not only will a tactic’s effectiveness need to be assessed but so too will its normative implications for democracy and society.

The United States’ Institute for Peace 2010 report entitled “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics,” critically assessed both the “cyberutopian” and “cyberskeptic” perspectives on the impact of new media on political movements. Based on their analysis they proposed a more complex approach for assessing the role of new media in contentious politics by suggesting that focus is needed on five interconnected levels of analysis: individual transformation, intergroup relations, collective action, regime policies and external attention (Aday et al.). The report acknowledges that due to the lack of rigorous research on the subject, at this point we are unable to answer the question of whether or not new media have real consequences for contentious politics, let alone in which direction those consequences might move. Therefore they outline the ways in which analysis of this phenomenon could be improved, arguing that the levels mentioned previously are the levels at which new media have the most potential to matter because they “capture distinct pathways by which change might be manifest and
measured” (Aday et al. 9). Using the U.S.I.P’s recommendation, the level of analysis for this research will focus on external attention in the form of news discourse.

In order to better understand the normative questions the use of these tactics raises for democratic societies in the 21st century this research surveys a broad cross section of mainstream news media texts over a sixteen year period, considering them a type of external attention and treating them as a specific type of discourse. Starting with the first-ever appearance of the search terms in the major news outlets searched, the time period covered by these stories spans from 1994 – June, 2011. A total of 243 news stories were analyzed for this project covering that time period. Using the “tactical reasons” subgrouping outlined by Costanza-Chock, the scope of this research is further limited by analyzing the external attention received by two particular forms of electronic contention used frequently for tactical purposes, hacktivism and virtual marches, both of which are tactics that depend on the internet and are often tactical in nature, but tend to be of opposite extremes in their contentious nature. Other possible purposes for which the internet is employed by social movements include representation, information distribution, research, artistic production, fundraising and lobbying (Costanza-Chock 4).

This research combines framing and discourse analysis in order to interrogate news media texts, specifically newspaper, online, TV, and radio news, so that greater insight into the dominant frames and discourse surrounding the use of these tactics can be gained. The overarching intention of this study is to identify the challenges these tactics face in establishing legitimacy in democratic societies by looking specifically at how the media cover and frame the two specific tactics of hacktivism and virtual marches. These two tactics were chosen because of being different in their levels of contentiousness.
Guided by the assumption that dissident voices are a necessary component of a functioning democracy and that at least some of these forms of online direct action should be considered legitimate tools of resistance, this research hopes to influence the shape that social and legal limitations take regarding the use of ODA tactics in the future. Furthermore, from this analysis the beginning of an event catalogue can be constructed for these two tactics and trends in both the use of and the media’s representations of these tactical forms can be identified (Tilly).

The theoretical grounding for this research combines social movement, critical/cultural and normative democratic theories. Integrating these theories allows for a rich understanding of the complex interconnected relationships that exists between social movements and the media in the public sphere, and between culture and technology more broadly. Unlike much of the work done to date on the subject of social movements and technology, this research is not intended to determine whether or not technology is good or bad for social movements, or to what effect it has been used by social movements, but rather to focus on the normative challenges these tactics face in establishing legitimacy. I bring neither a dystopic or utopic perspective to this research, but rather an outsider’s perspective with the benefit of multiple theoretical lenses who remains hopeful, and yet realistic, about the possibilities the internet may hold for the future of democracy.

This research finds, perhaps unsurprisingly, that despite being of opposite extremes in their contentious nature, the dominate frames in the news discourse surrounding virtual marches and hacktivism delegitimize and marginalize the use of these tactics, but through the use of different normative framing devices. Virtual marches are framed primarily as a nuisance that result in inconvenience and are most closely aligned
with celebrities, who, it is implied, are not to be taken seriously nor are their causes. Hacktivism, on the other hand, is primarily framed as a form of warfare that is carried out by young, unsophisticated criminals, which, while it should be feared, is not framed as a legitimate form of resistance due to its criminal nature.

What follows is an overview of the literature that outlines a cultural and normative perspective on resistance in society, describes the historical relationship between the media and social movements, summarizes social movement literature, and explores the intersection of democracy and technology, all of which are situated in an understanding of and possible revision to the public sphere. I then outline the methods of frame and discourse analysis and how they are applied in this research. This research has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature and be valuable to not only scholars, but also social movement leaders and policy makers as well.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Revising the Public Sphere

It is within the context of what is commonly referred to as the public sphere that social movements and the media exist and interact, and within which resistance takes place. Habermas’ idea of the public sphere denotes a discursive space, not a physical one, a space of critical discussion open to all citizens where private people can come together to form a public that serves as a check on state power and has an influence on politics (Hauser 88). The essential characteristic of this sphere is that it is critical in nature and that its culture is characterized as being a space outside the control of the state. For Habermas, the culture of the public sphere was best demonstrated in 18th century Europe with the growth in reading clubs, Masonic lodges and coffee houses (Habermas). He also believed, however, that the growth in commercial mass media would result in a passive consumer culture that would ultimately lead to the decay of the public sphere. The public sphere can best be thought of as a model. Though some suggest it has never actually existed and is unlikely to be achieved, it is lauded as the ideal to which democratic societies should strive and is considered a “vital concept for social theory,” with some theorists taking the position of “uncritical acceptance,” others advocating for acceptance only after it has withstood “scathing criticism,” and still others arguing that the concept is valuable but needs to be revised (DeLuca and Peeples 128). While criticisms of the public sphere have been made it is rarely rejected outright. It has been criticized on the basis of “privileging dialogue” and “fetishizing procedural rationality,” which results in an “exclusionary and impoverished normative ideal,” as well as on the basis that its
“privileging of consensus silences dissent and condemns resistance” (DeLuca and Peeples 128; Phillips 233).

In an attempt to explore and explain the changing nature of the relationship between young people, the media and ultimately the meaning of citizenship, Buckingham lays out a useful summarization of the major critiques of Habermas’ “utopian and highly normative” notion of the public sphere (Buckingham 25). He cites four key points of debate over this model: the social and historical accuracy of Habermas’ characterization of 18th century and contemporary societies, the exclusionary nature of the conception of the public sphere in terms of social class and gender, the privileging of the rational, and his pessimistic conception of the nature and effects of media (23-24). Buckingham argues that Habermas’ unrealistic view of the “ideal citizen” is “conceived in highly reductive terms, as a rational public individual who dutifully exercises his civic responsibilities, while eschewing such dubious practices as story-telling or entertainment” (25). He concludes that there is need for “viable contemporary alternatives” to the notion of the public sphere (27).

Furthermore, legal scholar A. Michael Froomkin argues that new technology, rather than creating passive consumers and leading to the decay of the public sphere, may make “difficult things easier” and thereby “increase the likelihood of achieving the Habermasian scenario of diverse citizens’ groups engaging in practical discourse” (Froomkin 753). Because the ideal Habermasian public sphere is predicated on face-to-face interaction and regards the media as having a negative impact on the quality of discourse, we require a revision to the traditional public sphere. Without revision we cannot take in to account the realities of public life in the 21st century and must
necessarily reject the idea that action which takes place online can be meaningful and legitimate. While having an ideal for which to strive is valuable, we also require a model that allows us to account for what is actually taking place so that we can make sense of our lived experience.

DeLuca and Peeples also raise the question of whether the concept of the public sphere is useful in today’s political environment since it describes the ideal rather than the actual. They therefore propose the concept of the public screen as a viable and necessary supplement. The public screen is “a constant current of images and words,” a never-ending cycle encouraged by “the technologies of television, film, photography, and the internet” responsible for creating a “contextless flow of jarring juxtapositions” (DeLuca and Peeples 135). Furthermore, DeLuca and Peeples argue that the realities of a mass-mediated world create new conditions under which citizens and activists must operate. Recognizing that the screen, whether television or computer, is the “contemporary shape of the public sphere,” the concept of the public screen makes it possible to account for the technological and cultural changes of the 20th century, which have changed the “rules and roles of participatory democracy” including not only who can participate but when and how (127).

The public sphere conjures up images of citizens on their soap boxes in the town square, a place of “embodied voices” where people converse and debate, an ideal image of democracy and communication which suggests that the opposite picture, one of image-heavy mass communication constitute a “nightmare[ish]” scenario (130). Particularly, DeLuca and Peeples are interested in acknowledging the image event as a form of visual discourse that deserves to be taken seriously, which through the lens of the public sphere
cannot be done (144). The image event, when thought of as a “visual philosophical-rhetorical fragment,” functions as a “mind bomb” that “expands the universe of thinkable thoughts” (144). In other words, the image event is a catalyst for creativity that has the potential to inspire entirely new possibilities. From their perspective it is also possible to view violence as a “type of communication” that has “productive possibilities” as a component of image events in today’s public screen (137-138). DeLuca and Peeples see their introduction of the public screen as an “act infused with hope” because it is contrary to much of the current commentary lamenting the decline of American society and culture. As there is little hope for actually attaining the idealistic and unrealistic public sphere since it does not account for the realities of 21st century society, their revision offers a different and less negative version of the story. Through this lens we are able to identify new forms of participatory democracy that the public sphere denies, therefore expanding what is possible. The mainstream news media are a part of the “constant current of images and words” described by DeLuca and Peeple’s public screen concept.

Traditionally communities were understood as being related by proximity, in that your community consisted of those with whom you lived, worked and played in a physical sense. However, as noted by Marvin in her detailed account of the evolution of electric media, “media give shape to the imaginative boundaries of modern communities” therefore the “introduction of new media is a special historical occasion when patterns anchored in older media that have provided stable currency of social exchange are reexamined, challenged and defended” (Marvin 4). We now understand communities to have both physical and nonphysical boundaries, making it possible to identify as part of a community whether we physically share that space with others or not. As new media
emerge and change the nature of our relationships with each other the perceived boundaries of our communities contract and expand to create and recreate the communities with which we identify. This understanding reinforces James Carey’s claim that media and technology both “border and deborder the world” (Carey, 2005, 443). Habermas’ notion of the public sphere limits our understanding of community to include only those with whom we share face-to-face dialogue, whereas the concept of the public screen expands our understanding of community to include those with whom we may identify based on shared values, beliefs and experiences whether online or off.

One of the primary differences between the notion of a public sphere and a public screen is that the public sphere privileges face-to-face communication over any other communication medium, while the public screen takes into account that “most, and the most important, public discussions take place via ‘screens’ – television, computer and the front page of the newspaper” (DeLuca and Peeples131). Accepting this fundamental understanding of communication in today’s world suggests that “new technologies introduce new forms of social organization and new modes of perception” fundamentally altering the nature of reality and the lived experience of citizens in the 21st century (131). Particularly important to understand are the conditions of the public screen that DeLuca and Peeples claim “constrain and enable” the actions of citizens who want to “act on the stage of participatory democracy,” those constraints being: private ownership/monopoly of the public screen which creates competition, infotainment conventions that filter what counts as news with some outlets favoring the visual, and the need to communicate in the discourse of images that can potentially lead to the amplification of voices (136). This particular understanding of the mass media in modern society is “translated into a
practice of staging image events for dissemination,” a lesson which social movements have come to understand and a strategy which many employ (136). All three of these constraints are important to an accurate understanding of news media discourse in today’s social and historical context.

Arguing that the technologies of the 20th century have created a “techno-epistemic break,” three assumptions guide DeLuca and Peeples understanding of the public screen as seen through the examples of television and newspaper (131). The first is that television is a medium “immersed in the process of remediations” meaning that it represents one medium in terms of another, or to quote McLuhan, “the content of any medium is always another medium” (132; 23). Second is that the public screen should be understood as “a scene of hypermediacy,” a logic that “multiplies the signs of mediation” through “windows that open on to other representations or other media” (132). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, they assume that acknowledging the public screen does not mean the “death of the public sphere,” rather the two should be understood as existing in a “dialectic of remediation,” one being represented in terms of the other (132). In other words, media are not best understood as a means of communication or transmission of information, rather they should be understood as “producing the public sphere and public screen” within which we must exist, and therefore having significant consequences for social movements and activists (132).

The reality of human communication is that it’s complicated. DeLuca and Peeples argue that in the public sphere as well as the public screen there is always a risk that transmission/communication, whether face-to-face or in print, may not actually occur even when attempted due to the reality of various forms of interference and interruption.
From their perspective dissemination is the necessary precursor to dialogue since without dissemination dialogue cannot occur. DeLuca and Peeples propose that from the perspective of the public screen, dissemination instead of dialogue, is the best and most accurate way to characterize and understand communication. The dissemination model of communication, as the “endless proliferation and scattering of emissions without the guarantee of productive exchanges” necessarily shifts the way we think about communication’s role in politics and society, and the ability to inspire social change (130). They contend that because it “takes technology seriously,” the metaphor of the public screen changes the way we think about the “places of politics” and the “possibilities of citizenship” (131). A necessary shift in perspective if online direct action tactics such as virtual marches and hacktivism are ever to be seen as legitimate and if the internet is ever to be viewed as a viable social and democratic space (131).

Understanding Resistance: A Critical/Cultural Perspective

Foucault believed that we are always wrapped up in the dynamics of culture and power, and as Storey points out, “Where there is power there is resistance,” therefore it is important that we not ignore the many ways power can be and is resisted (Storey xiii). In the 21st century that includes the various ways in which technology is incorporated into these acts of resistance. Whether resistance takes the form of street protest, boycotts, petitions, or hacking, the goal is to influence the process of meaning-making and therefore culture, with the ultimate goal of shifting the distribution and balance of power in a society. The perspective of cultural studies provides the basis necessary to understand the ways in which audiences have agency in the process of making-meaning
and potential to influence the meaning-making process. Without this assumption any resistance against the prevailing ideologies in a society would be futile regardless of the methods used. Social movements must necessarily share this view of culture as their underlying assumption or they would see no possibility for social change to occur as a result of their efforts.

Activism is the form resistance takes when it is organized and exerted in physical and collective ways so as to challenge authority, both government and corporate. Resistance, in the form of activism, can take various forms but at the center of contentious collective action is a battle over meaning with the goal of influencing or challenging ideologies. Resistance is best understood as a “cultural practice or articulation (i.e. a practice of power) that, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or ineffectively, offers reactions against the dominant political, economic and/or social order” (Van Bauwel 10; Duncombe). This integrated view of resistance suggests that acts of resistance have the potential to be powerful in challenging dominant ideologies in a variety of contexts. This view also firmly establishes resistance as a matter of culture, which from a cultural studies perspective is considered both the site and result of resistance; therefore culture is an integral part of the meaning-making process, a process at the heart of social movement strategies.

Because resistance and protest tactics often break or challenge laws, causing disruption to commerce or the political process, many normative objections have been raised against the use of traditional offline forms of resistance, and similar concerns are being raised about their use in the online realm as well. Depending on whether one takes a narrow or broad view of the term these acts may be labeled acts of civil disobedience.
Among theorists civil disobedience is sometimes discussed “broadly as principled nonviolent disobedience to law,” but more commonly it is understood narrowly as “public protest aimed at persuading others that a law or governmental policy is morally indefensible and must be changed, performed by someone who respects the prevailing system and willingly suffers the legal consequences of disobedience” (Lyons 34).

Primarily, normative objections leveraged against these forms of resistance rest on one of three arguments: arguments from morality, from authority, and from democracy (Martin 127).

One such argument is based on Rousseau’s social contract theory and suggests that as citizens “we have tacitly consented” to the laws of our society and as such it is our moral obligation to “obey the law under a contract with other members of our society” (Suber 110). This moral argument is reflected by Socrates in the Crito. As summarized by Martin, “a citizen by the very fact of staying in a country agrees to abide by the following rule: If one cannot dissuade the authorities from an unjust law then one obeys” (Martin 127). To this argument proponents reply that “an unjust law is not even a law, but a perversion of law,” and as such “consent to obey the laws does not extend to unjust laws” (Suber 111). Another reply to this argument comes from Thoreau, whose writings suggest that “consent to join a society and obey its laws must always be express, never tacit” (111).

Secondly, some argue that civil disobedience “violates the principles of constituted authority” suggesting that to have an orderly society “the private citizen should not set up his personal and subjective opinion of what is moral, or just…we must let the sovereign set the standards to which we all adhere” (Martin 128). The counter
argument to this, which can also be attributed to Thoreau, is that “sometimes the constitution is the problem, not the solution” and that “individuals are sovereign, especially in a democracy,” because the power held by the government is given to them by the people (Suber 110).

Finally, a third common objection raised against the use of civil disobedience argues that it is contrary to democracy, claiming that civil disobedience “cannot be justified in a democracy” where there are lawful channels that one can take to make changes to the law (110). Taking this argument even further, Leibman contends that “In democratic societies any violation of the law is an uncivil act” (Leibman 12). The rebuttal, “legal channels can never be exhausted” and take too long (Suber 110). Furthermore, “to use legal channels to fight unjust laws is to participate in an evil machine, and to disguise dissent as conformity” (110). By asking what would happen if everybody did it, there are those who argue that civil disobedience does not meet Kant’s “universalizability test” because it would result in “increasing lawlessness and tending toward anarchy” (112). The normative assumption underlying this line of reasoning suggests that “if disobedience is justified for one group whose moral beliefs condemn the law, then it is justified for any group…which is a recipe for anarchy” (112). Critics of this line of thinking point to the slippery slope nature of such arguments as being fallacious, thus making it irrelevant and manipulative. Thoreau and Gandhi even go so far as to suggest that perhaps “anarchy is not such a bad outcome” (112).

Although much has changed about the world the desire for change has not dissipated. Wray argues that, “Since Thoreau’s time the tactics of civil disobedience have become woven into the fabric of dissent in this country, as individuals at the grassroots
have continually attempted to participate in civil society” (Wray 1). Also unchanging is the creative use of technology by activists: from satellite TV to fax machines and handheld video cameras, to computers and cell phones, “communication technologies have long been powerful factors shaping political mobilization” and ultimately the meaning-making processes within a culture (Chadwick 114).

The process of meaning making should not be thought of as “the privileged activity of the few, but something in which we are all involved,” albeit in different ways due to differences in status and positions of power (Storey 5). The perspective of cultural studies provides the basis necessary to understand the ways in which audiences have agency in the process of making-meaning and potential to influence the meaning-making process. The forms resistance can take are unique to the specific historic and social context as, “what in one context is resistance can become very easily in another context incorporation” (Storey 51). For this reason the specific historic and social context of the 21st century, including the relationship that exists between social movements and the mass media, must be taken into account as a matter of understanding the future of digital resistance and the viability of tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism.

**Social Movements and the Media**

The relationship between traditional mainstream media and social movements is a complex one. Though an “important strategic relationship” it can best be described as a relationship of “asymmetrical dependency,” as the movements attempt to use the media to ‘get the message out’ while the media strive to maximize profit and market share, and
“movements rely on the media for access to publics much more than media rely on movements for copy” (Carroll & Hackett 87). Historically, social movements have relied on traditional mainstream media to provide access to the public through news coverage and airtime in order to bring attention to their cause. As noted by William Gamson, an expert on political discourse, mass media and social movements, “virtually every aspect of a challenger’s experience – recruitment efforts, organization, strategy, and tactics – is affected by a potential or actual media presence....the media have become the central battleground, which challengers ignore at their peril” (Gamson 145-147). While the structures and forms traditional mainstream media take are evolving they remain a vital component of a social movement’s strategy for disseminating their message.

In the handbook, “An Activist’s Guide to Exploiting the Media,” Monbiot, a journalist, activist and academic states, “Every battle we fight is a battle for the hearts and minds of other people. The only chance we have of reaching people who haven't yet heard what we've got to say is through the media. The war we're fighting is an information war...and we have to use all the weapons at our disposal” (Monbiot). He further reminds activists that, “News doesn't just happen; it is made to happen. News, in other words, is managed and manipulated. And if we don't manage it, someone else will” (Monbiot). What is clear from Monbiot’s advice to activists is that the mass media is a weapon, one that can either be included as part of their strategy or risk having it used against them. At the center of it all is a battle for human attention. Since “one of the most profitable commodities in the world is human attention,” whoever can capture that attention and “harvest” it has the potential to be a driving force in the marketplace of products and ideas (Knowlton and Parsons 203).
In his book, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, Melucci comments that, “the strategic use of media is to be found in all contemporary movements: music, bodily signals and clothing, radios and images, theatre and art, communication networks and virtual reality are all media through which the mental, sensory, and emotional perception of the world is altered” (360). Even in today’s technology saturated world where a variety of media outlets are used by established and non-established organizations to reach people, social movements still rely on mainstream media to ‘get their message out’ to those beyond their already established group of activists, but because the media decide which voices to include and which stories to cover there is no guarantee a movement’s message will reach the public. For most movements, “framing processes are critical to the attainment of desired outcomes,” so if a protest receives coverage but the dominant frames used by the media undermine the movement and its ability to mobilize the public the leaders of these movements must take into consideration how useful this coverage actually is (Benford & Snow 632).

Activist and scholar Todd Gitlin used Goffman’s understanding about framing in his study of the relationship between the news media and the *Student New Left movement* in the 1960’s. Gitlin’s research found that the production of news discourse uses frames so that journalists can “process large amounts of information quickly and routinely [and to] package the information for efficient relay to their audiences” (Gitlin, 1980, 7). Because there are “overlapping conceptions” of frames coming from multiple disciplines they are believed to function as both “internal structures of the mind” and “devices embedded in political discourse” (Pan and Kosicki 57). Therefore, the concept of framing as it relates to media frames can be studied as either a “strategy of constructing and
processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself” (Pan and Kosicki 57). Understood “as persistent selection, emphasis and exclusion,” frames become a strategy in the news production routine, communicated and perpetuated through “professional routines and conventions” (Gitlin 7; Pan and Kosicki 57).

Scholars use the concept of framing to study the inflection of press coverage, with some arguing that the media are “framing protestors into obscurity” (Barker 6). Identified by McLeod and Hertog in “The Manufacture of Public Opinion by Reporters,” the most regularly used frames [in the mainstream media] are those that serve to marginalize protestors, these include the violent crime or property crime story, the carnival frame, the freak show, the Romper Room (or immaturity) frame, the riot frame, the storm watch (warning of potential actions), and lastly the moral decay story. Not only do these frames influence the readers’ perceptions of the movement and the issue, often times the coverage of social protest shows a “propensity for supporting elites and elite power structures over the views of protesters…through implementing various techniques of delegitimization, marginalization, and demonization of the protest group” (Dardis 412).

Previous research into the nature of media coverage of protest groups in the U.S. finds that most often the coverage these protests receive is negative, and while the protest may get coverage the issue being protested rarely does. Instead the coverage often uses frames that are “slanted against the movement” and that further serve to delegitimize or marginalize those who participate, as well as their cause (Barker 6). Instead of focusing on the “actual intellectual or philosophical arguments under debate…coverage tends to include details about disruptions with police, general lawlessness, weird clothing and body decorations…the mention of counter-demonstrators…and various other techniques
that basically imply that the protesters (and their views) are abnormal relative to the rest of society,” leaving one to wonder whether or not the old adage that any coverage is better than no coverage is true for social movements (Dardis 412). Furthermore, it has been found that “only a few percent of protest events that occur are actually reported by at least one national paper,” reinforcing the idea the media are highly selective in their coverage, meaning that “protest groups…often feel ignored or grossly distorted” (Rucht 36). As Dardis notes, “the marginalization of social protest groups by media is an oft-researched and well established phenomenon in the US,” however, little has been done to date to assess media framing specifically as it relates to the use of online direct action tactics and whether or not this marginalization extends to them as well (Dardis 409).

Sandor Vegh’s research has found that “threat reporting” in the media coverage of movements that utilize hacking or “other anti-hegemonic forms of Internet use” by the media became very “frequent and conspicuous” after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 (Changing Media Discourse 1,8). The result, Vegh argues, is the “vilifying” of hacktivists and the “blaming” of the internet as “terrorist territory,” which works in favor of the dominant order by shifting popular consensus towards the elite’s desire to end the practice of hacking (1). In a 2005 study he compared the articles of 5 major U.S. newspapers over a one-year period with 9/11 in the middle and found that the media discourse was shifting from hackers as criminals to hackers as cyber terrorists and, furthermore, that the language used by the media “blurs the differences between hacktivism and cyberterrorism,” with the ultimate consequence being a distortion of online political activism that has a negative impact on public opinion (Media’s Portrayal of Hacking 16).
The mass media play a pivotal role in shaping the public perception regarding the legitimacy of a social movement and the tactics that they use, thus contributing to the perception the public holds of not only the group, but also the issue the movement seeks to influence. “Because mass media coverage is decisive in informing elites and mass publics about movement actions, as well as in forming the morale and self-image of movement activists,” the mass media are “important actors in political conflicts,” and therefore cannot be overlooked for the role they play in either encouraging or discouraging the use of contentious collective action tactics (Jenkins 546). Based on his research into the suppression of dissent, Boykoff identifies five mechanisms of suppression used by the state and media portrayals of social movements: resource depletion, stigmatization, divisive disruption, intimidation and emulation. These mechanisms highlight the state's choice of action when dealing with dissent and the media's role in demobilization. Boykoff further argues that these are actions “that the state and mass media take - whether explicitly or tacitly, openly or surreptitiously - to diminish or discourage dissent” and resistance (307).

The question remains as to whether or not, in the age of Online Direct Action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism, the nature of the relationship between social movements and the media will change. Since the increased use of and access to social media make it possible for social movements to bypass the mainstream media altogether the imbalance of power could shift in favor of social movements. At the very least, it requires that we reevaluate the frames used in media discourse to compare and contrast whether the traditional frames persist, whether they have been revised or whether new ones have emerged.
Technology and Society

Technological innovation is almost always met with both concern and celebration, heralded by those who see its potential as offering humanity solutions to all its problems, while those who see primarily the negative consequences warn of the harm it will do to society and culture. There are numerous examples of this contradictory interpretation of events over the course of history, but particularly with regard to communication technologies. From the printing press to television to the internet much debate has gone on regarding the impact these technologies have had and are having on human relationships, democracy and education. As noted by Fisher and Wright in their explanation of Ogburn’s theory of cultural lag, the difficulty in debating the effects of any particular technology is that “the effects of a technology will not be apparent to social actors for some time after it is introduced to a society” (Fisher and Wright 1). It is during this lag period that “extreme and unrealistic interpretations of the technology” permeate the discourse (6). Once society becomes familiar and comfortable with the technology, history suggests that often the debate becomes less polarized. The theory of cultural lag also suggests that there is value in studying the discourse surrounding a technology over a period of time, which this research does. Discourse surrounding technological change is often polarized and extreme leading to what is referred to as the “utopian/dystopian dichotomy” (Fisher and Wright).

Regardless of whether a positive or negative view of technology and its potential effects on society is held, the belief that “technology and science [are] powerful agents of social change” is considered a deterministic position (Smith 2). The view that technological innovation is responsible to some degree for determining the course of
human affairs including social structures and social values is a widely shared belief among scholars. The term, *technological determinism*, is commonly used to describe this perspective and can be used to refer to both hard and soft determinists, as well as either dystopic or utopic arguments. Hard determinists see technology developing independent of social forces, while soft determinists acknowledge that technological development responds in some amount to the social pressures of the period and culture. It is important to note, however, that not all cultures respond to technological innovation in the same way.

In America the technology-as-progress narrative is the one most widely held and has come to represent “so many aspects of the national and personal identity in American culture” (Smith 38). Though many examples of this deterministic perspective can be found embedded in the language and metaphors people use to discuss technology in the 21st century, few scholars espouse a purely deterministic perspective as being the most accurate lens through which to understand the relationship between technology and society. That does not, however, change the fact that dystopic and utopic perspectives and arguments continue to exist in the discourse regarding this relationship. Whether one takes a dystopic or utopic view of technology depends in large part on whether one sees technology as a neutral tool that offers democratic potential, or as being inherently laden with values and biases that affect communication in ways that will limit or hurt democracy and society.

In response to criticisms leveraged against deterministic perspectives, Hughes proposes the concept of *technological momentum* to describe the perspectives that fit somewhere between the two aforementioned poles. This reciprocal view “infers that
social development shapes and is shaped by technology” positioning it between the two extremes (Hughes 102). His research is based on the assumption that the existing approaches, which may make for interesting discussion, do not do enough to account for the complexities of technological change in reality. Hughes’ findings suggest that technological systems early in their development are more susceptible to social and cultural influences; whereas more established systems tend towards being more deterministic in their nature and less responsive to outside forces. The idea of technological momentum would suggest that if there is any chance for the internet to be a viable tactical tool in the repertoire of contention of modern social movements that the decisions made about the internet while still in the early stage of development are of the utmost consequence to its future. Technological momentum acknowledges and attempts to account for the temporal nature of the relationship between technology and society by providing a more “complex, flexible… and persuasive explanation of technological change” than is offered by deterministic perspectives (104). For these reasons the proposed research adopts the perspective of technological momentum, which acknowledges the reciprocal nature of the relationship between social change and technology, in order to address the criticism and limitations associated with deterministic arguments.

History suggests that the changes to society brought about by the internet will be dramatic and that there will, without a doubt, be unintended consequences as traditional institutions are challenged and reformed. Furthermore, history demonstrates that while those periods of change may be uncomfortable and some will resist, society, democracy, and culture may also flourish. For certain our relationship with technology in the 21st
century is a complicated one; perhaps articulated best by ethicist Cliff Christians, “today’s two most powerful tools, information technologies and military technology, [are] in fundamental contradiction” in that we have the “technological sophistication dialectically to destroy humanity while binding all nations into a worldwide information system” (Christians, “The One-and Many Problem” 1). This quote demonstrates that neither extreme of the utopian/dystopian dichotomy is particularly helpful in accounting for the complex reality of technology and our relationship to it and suggests the contradictions of technology raise ethical questions with which a society must grapple if it is to resolve the moral dilemmas their uses create. It is therefore necessary that the discussion about how social movements use technology shift away from a purely instrumental perspective to one that is more normative in nature.

Social Movements and the Internet

It has been argued that because of the internet, “political action is made easier, faster, and more universal by…lower[ing] the costs and obstacles of organizing collective action” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 97). Efficiency is considered one of the more obvious benefits of the internet, but some have argued that the efficiency gained is valued at the expense of the democratic and humanistic values of the common good, social justice and privacy, suggesting that we need a more humanistic rather than instrumental view of technology if we are too understand its most profound implications (Christians). Others contend that the use of the internet cannot be considered an equivalent form of political action. As summarized by Van Aelst and Walgrave those who are skeptical argue that
“indispensable interpersonal networks cannot simply be replaced by new virtual contacts created by the internet,” nor that “virtual demonstrators can do without the emotions and thrills of participating in real direct action” (98). Some sing the internet’s praises while others warn of its dark side claiming that it’s “killing our culture” (Keen). The discourse surrounding information communication technology in general remains rife with the voices of both deterministic extremes, as well as of those who argue that the internet is more a tool of repression than of liberation. This suggests that we are still in a period of cultural lag with the full effects of internet technologies no yet fully understood because of the unequal rates of change that occur between material and non-material culture (Ogburn). Regardless of the uncertainty, the fact remains that social movements are employing the internet in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons with a wide range of outcomes.

In order to see the internet as a legitimate site for contestation and the implementation of protest tactics and other forms of contentious action, it must be understood as more than just a technology for disseminating information. To study the internet from a “purely technical” perspective by focusing primarily on its “ability to transmit units of information,” rather than its unique ability to change the nature of identity and community, we are limiting the opportunity to understand the most profound implications of the internet (Poster 534). Poster argues that what is at stake as a result of technological innovation “is not the increased ‘efficiency’ of interchange, enabling new avenues of investment, increased productivity at work and new domains of leisure and consumption, but a broad and extensive change in the culture, in the way identities are structured” (533). This is exemplified in the case of the internet, which allows people to
shape their identities through interactions with people who are not dependent on proximity and geography, but rather connecting people across space and time based on shared interest, thus potentially “multiply[ing] the kinds of ‘realities’ one encounters in society” (539). In fact some studies of “activism on the internet suggest that one of the main functions of online tactical repertoires is to create solidarity and collective identity” (Taylor and Van Dyke 270). Whether or not cyberspace should be considered a social space where identity and solidarity can be constructed depends on whether one assumes that the idea of a social space “presupposes a physical space in the conventional sense,” or whether as this project assumes, one understands that “something nongeographic in a narrowly physical sense can nonetheless be a space because social space is practiced…it is the product of human social interaction” (2). A necessary step towards gaining a better understanding of the internet as a social space is to understand the ways in which it has been and continues to be employed by social movements to facilitate human interaction, thus creating social space.

Costanza-Chock offers a “subgrouping of purposes for which [social movement organizations] and other movement actors employ the internet” as a means of electronic contention including: representation, information distribution, research, artistic production, fundraising, lobbying and tactical reasons (Costanza-Chock 4). While Taylor and Van Dyke note that social movement literature lacks an agreed-upon definition for protest tactic and that there are various methods for categorizing them, Olzak and Uhrig define tactic as “recognized patterns of activities that express claims and demands of protesters” (Taylor and Van Dyke 263; Olzak and Uhrig 700). In other words, the word tactic is used generally to refer to the various forms protest can take, acknowledging that
each unique form has its own logic and strategic value for the movement. By this definition both virtual marches and hacktivism can be considered a tactic and the online realm can be considered a viable social space when understood through the lens of the public screen.

In his short paper entitled, “Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention,” Rolfe argues that, “The importance of digital space as a site for contestation is increasing as the groups with which movements are contesting become more vested in the online realm,” with capitalism being a driving force behind this investment (66). More time, money and energy are being devoted to the internet by corporations, governments and citizens providing an opportunity for social movements to use the internet to create disruptions and draw attention to their cause. It is for this reason that many social movements see the need to move their efforts online, where much of their strategy is often focused on using tactics that disrupt the flow of capital.

Capitalism has become increasingly nomadic, mobile, liquid, dispersed, and electronic…resistance needs to take on these very same attributes…to seriously confront capital in its current mobile electronic form, then resistance must take place in the same location where capital now exists in greatest concentrations, namely in cyberspace (Wray 3).

Therefore, as the online space becomes populated with social movements, and becomes both the tool for organizing and the site of contentious collective action, referred to as Online Direct Action, we need to better understand the tactics that have been and are currently being used. The broader impact of this study is in its potential to foster understanding about the ways in which Online Direct Action interacts with and has implications for offline collective action and social change.
Many have made the case that because the internet can be seen as “both a productive cultural site and an artifact and element of social relationships,” it must be viewed as more than a tool for organizing people and resources, but rather “also as an organizing model for a new form of political protest that is international, decentralized, with diverse interests but common targets” leading to the emergence of what has been deemed online direct action and digital resistance (Sterne 282; Fenton 234). Rolfe’s term *Online Direct Action* (ODA) is used in this research because it is more inclusive of the range of possible activities that can be employed by online activists and it does not possess the inherent biases of words like *virtual* and *cyber* that imply the actions being taken in this context are somehow separate from or outside of reality.

Online Direct Action tactics rest on the assumption that the online world is a viable social space where actions taken have consequences for both the online and offline world. Furthermore, ODA is based on the idea that the philosophy of activism and direct action can be extended into the online world of electronic information exchange and communication and refers to tactics ranging from online protests and virtual sit-ins, to acts of hacktivism and denial of service attacks. Referencing the *Electrohippies*, Rolfe defines Online Direct Action as the result of “extending the philosophy of activism and direct action in the “virtual” world of electronic information exchange and communication” and explains that the Internet is being used not only as a tool, but also as the “platform for staging online direct action” (65). ODA is “known variously as virtual activism, net protest, hacktivism and cyberjamming,” as well as electronic civil disobedience, all of which are examples of acts that should be considered forms of online direct action, but may not adequately represent all of the forms of direct action taking
place online. In fact, Meikle argues that as social activism moves online, “the whole repertoire of tactics developed throughout the twentieth century, from Suffragettes to Civil Rights, from Greenpeace to ACT UP, from Gandhi to Greenham Common, have found their digital analogues” (Meikle 24-25). Online Direct Action tactics have taken on a variety of forms and are often part of a hybrid strategy involving both online and offline tactics. In most cases these tactics are modeled after traditional offline forms, often borrowing the language if not the literal form. A fewer number of tactics represent a purely new form of direct action unique to the online world.

Electronic civil disobedience theory as it applies to Online Direct Action can be divided into three major trends: “those who advocate the replication of street based demonstrations on the internet, those who endorse the practice of politically motivated hacking and computer break-ins, and those who articulate the need for creative hacker driven solutions rather than disruptions” (metac0m 2). The first two trends in particular demonstrate the use of traditional civil disobedience tactics like trespass and blockage. Many wonder what electronic civil disobedience looks like, but “essentially, anything a traditional protester can do – from sit-ins, to graffiti, to general civil disobedience – can be done online” (Luman 3). While we may be able to conjure up images that we associate with civil disobedience in the offline world, it is a little harder to imagine what those acts might look like in cyberspace. However, as Wray suggests, “The same principles of traditional civil disobedience, like trespass and blockage, will still be applied, but more and more these acts will take place in electronic digital form” (2). We will begin to see acts like “virtual sit-ins in which government and corporate websites are blocked, preventing legitimate usage,” activists will engage in protest “by clogging or
actual rupture of fiber optic cables and ISDN lines,” and “massive non-violent email assaults will shut down government or corporate computer servers” (2). As civil disobedience moves online we can see that the essential tension between the individual and the state remains unresolved, while a new set of tensions has emerged as the “toolkit” has been expanded.

The repertoire of contention is both a structural and cultural concept in that it represents what activists actually do, as well as what they “know how to do” and are expected to do based on a limited number of options, thus creating well established routines that change very slowly over time and result in incremental changes to the repertoire (Tarrow “Cycle of Collective Action” 283). Tilly’s notion that there exists a repertoire of contention, or a “toolkit” from which social movement actors and organizations develop their collective action strategies, not only implies that tactics can be used to express varies types of grievances by different types of groups and individuals, but also that tactical creation and innovation are rare because familiar forms are often modified or improved to fit the times. The process of creating new protest techniques as a means by which to offset powerlessness is called tactical innovation. These tactics, however, will only become “potent in the context of a political system vulnerable to insurgency” (McAdam 737). As social movements begin to integrate and experiment with new media technologies in an effort to expand the repertoire, an understanding of the process and factors involved in the innovation process will be necessary and useful. Understanding “social movements [as] repositories of knowledge of particular routines in a society’s history,” suggests that Tilly’s notion of a repertoire of contention should be extended to include these new online direct action tactics (Tarrow 20).
Costanza-Chock used the work of Suzanne Staggenborg to create a framework that is used to map what he refers to as the *repertoire of electronic collective action* by differentiating movement outcomes as either political/policy, mobilization, or cultural as a means by which to answer the question: which electronic tools and tactics have been employed by social movement actors to achieve which kinds of outcomes (Costanza-Chock 2)? As mentioned earlier, Costanza-Chock’s “subgrouping of purposes for which SMO’s and other movement actors employ the internet” has been used as the basis for narrowing the focus of this research to tactical uses of the internet (4). What further resulted from his research is a “Repertoire of Electronic Contention Tactic/Outcome Matrix,” which describes the relationships between tactics and outcomes and is helpful for visualizing the relationship between general tactics and general outcomes (8). Costanza-Chock concludes by calling for future work on this subject to “take account of the differences between conventional, disruptive, and violent electronic contention, and to specify the relationships between tactics, outcomes, political opportunity structure and diffusion” (19). Costanza-Chock’s matrix and categories of contention provide a necessary vocabulary and framework for organizing, comparing and explaining various online direct action tactics.

**ODA Tactics: Virtual March and Hacktivism**

Because of the decentralized and low cost nature of the internet it has become a popular tool among social movements across the world. Living in what has been deemed the *movement society* in which “Modern communications allow the diffusion of movements – both issues and methods – in a matter of minutes,” many social movements
and activists are looking to the internet as tool for recruiting, for sharing strategies, and as a means by which to more effectively express grievances and initiate social change, in some cases on a global scale (Tarrow; Crozat 60). What has resulted is an expansion of the repertoire of contention to include an electronic *repertoire of contention* from which social movements can also select and experiment with common tactical forms (Rolfe). Included in the electronic repertoire are virtual marches and hacktivism. The two tactics chosen for study in this paper reflect varying amounts of contentiousness, making them interesting as points of comparison. It is worth noting that a search for scholarly articles in peer reviewed journals across any discipline using the search term “virtual march” yielded eighteen results. In contrast, a search with the same parameters but using the term “hacktivism” yielded 270 results. This reflects how little scholarly effort has been made towards gaining an understanding of these ODA tactics since their emergence and over the course of their evolution. An explanation of each tactic is outlined using a variety of sources and strategies in order to provide important historical and cultural context.

While the logic behind the tactic remains the same, the form a virtual protest, march or demonstration takes, has been conceptualized differently by the many organizations that have used the tactic. For example, on February 1, 2007, MoveOn.org staged a virtual protest as part of a campaign to challenge the President’s plan to increase troops in Iraq, during which MoveOn members were asked to flood the Senate with phone calls and then record their calls on the website. This effort resulted in a map of the U.S. that pinpointed the origins of the calls and the number of calls made from a particular area of the country. In an unrelated effort, Stopglobalwarming.org has initiated an ongoing virtual “Stop Global Warming March,” which they are calling a “non-
political effort to declare that global warming is here now and it’s time to act.” Visitors to the site are encouraged to “Click here to have your voice counted.” Using a ticker at the top of the webpage, they report that 1,277,629 people from around the world, as of May 9, 2008, had joined the march, including 159 featured marchers, ranging from musicians to elected officials to athletes to academics, whose profiles are listed on the page. That is 113,760 more than were members of the march seven months prior. On January 2, 2014 they reported that 1,449,034 supporters have joined the march. This means that over this six year period on average 47,460 new marchers joined the march every year.

BBC News and CNN.com reported on March 13, 2008 that the “media watchdog” group Reporters Without Borders had launched a 24-hour virtual demonstration over internet censorship to mark what the organization had labeled its first “Online Free Expression Day.” The organization recreated nine public spaces online, one from each of the nine countries which they labeled “internet enemies” and asked people to take part in what they called “cyberdemos.” The countries targeted included Burma, China, North Korea, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Vietnam. Within each country a specific symbolic location was chosen as the “site” of the demonstration and specific visual representations of landmarks were used to represent each site: for Burma it was “Oppression Square,” for China “Tiananmen Square,” for North “Korea Kim Jong Il Square,” for Cuba “Revolution Square,” for Egypt “Hosni Mubarak Square,” for Eritrea “Prison Square,” for Tunisia “Ben Ali Square,” for Turkmenistan “People’s Square,” and for Vietnam “One-Party Square.” BBC news explains that these sites were chosen because “these are areas where protests are not normally possible.” Also targeted were some Western companies such as Yahoo who the organization believed had

When people visited the site they could choose to participate in a protest in one of those nine locations and were then asked to supply their name, city and country of residence and then to select from a list the slogan they wanted to have appear on their sign. If you chose to view a protest, an image of faceless bodies carrying signs in front of the visual representation of each location was displayed. Also displayed was a count of the total number of people who had joined the protest at each location. Over a year after the 24-hour protest period ended, they report a total of 30,063 protestors across all nine countries with the highest numbers of protestors in China and Cuba. Though not the first virtual marches ever to be held these three examples are indicative of the many forms a virtual march can take.

In order to provide a sense of the virtual march initiatives that have taken place, a Google search was performed on July 2, 2014 for the phrase “virtual march,” which produced the following list of virtual marches that have been or are being held (see table 1).
Table 1. Examples of virtual marches found through a Google search in August, 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>SPONSOR</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The March for Innovation</td>
<td>In support of immigration reform</td>
<td>Sponsored by a coalition including organizations, companies and leaders</td>
<td>Asked to send email in support of immigration reform to senators, to re-tweet their message using #iMarch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iMarch)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVAAZ Save the Climate</td>
<td>Targeting world leaders at the 2007 UN</td>
<td>Avaaz is a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to</td>
<td>Join the march by signing the petition and are encouraged to spread the word through Facebook and email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March on Bali</td>
<td>UN Climate Change Conference in Bali to</td>
<td>decision making everywhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>take action against climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March on Wall Street</td>
<td>In support of the 99% march to Wall</td>
<td>Sponsored by MoveOn.org</td>
<td>Posting of photo stories and messages of support for the protesters. A ticker counts the number of messages posted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Street against the “corporate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>takeover of our democracy”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March for Marriage</td>
<td>In favor of “traditional marriage”</td>
<td>National Organization for Marriage (and a coalition of sponsors)</td>
<td>Held in conjunction with a day of events, those who join the virtual march are asked to hold rallies in their communities, write letters to the editor, engage in social media throughout the day and pay a visit to local legislator’s offices and donate money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop Global Warming</td>
<td>Demand the freezing and reduction of</td>
<td>Project of the Tides Center and Laurie David</td>
<td>Asked to “click to have your voice counted” then asked for name, email address, and zip code/state. Encouraged to sign up for newsletter. A ticker counts number of supporters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March</td>
<td>carbon dioxide emissions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Million Hoodies Virtual March</td>
<td>Against abortion</td>
<td>Americans United for Life</td>
<td>Those who could not attend the march in Washington could create an avatar and “march” on the National Mall online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Live stream of march on the National Mall and a virtual town hall meeting. Urged to sign and share a petition and to share a photo wearing a hoodie using #HoodiesUp at a specific time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R.T in D.C. Virtual March</th>
<th>Advocacy event for Radiologic Technologists in support of CARE and MARCA bills</th>
<th>American Society of Radiologic Technologists</th>
<th>Those who could not attend in D.C. asked to sign up for virtual march and send communications to the House and Senate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom 25 Virtual March</td>
<td>To mark 25 years since the Freedom Sunday March</td>
<td>Freedom 25 (a coalition of Jewish organizations)</td>
<td>Asks people to sign up through social media or provide email and name, then asks people to share short memories from the 1987 march. Provides a count of number of people “marching.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Virtual “March of Millions”</td>
<td>To show solidarity with Egyptian protestors</td>
<td>Hosted by two UNC students</td>
<td>Online event, click “I am attending.” Provide a count of the number of people attending FB event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Million Strong Virtual March</td>
<td>Awareness of and fight against Colorectal Cancer</td>
<td>Bayer Corporation</td>
<td>Join by creating a character, upload your face, your name pick clothing and customize a sign. Character added to animated march. For every person who joins, Bayer will donate $2 to a nonprofit. Displays the number who have joined and the amount of money raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Virtual March for Whales</td>
<td>Protest against the South Korean’s government’s intention to re-open commercial whaling</td>
<td>Greenpeace</td>
<td>Provides a review of the event and the results, that SK did not resume commercial whaling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These twelve examples demonstrate that organizations are experimenting with and defining the tactic of virtual march differently and broadly. The goal of a virtual march can be anything from spreading awareness, to signing a petition, to raising money, to gaining attention by overwhelming email servers and switchboards, to commemorating an event or conveying support for or against a proposed bill. Common across all three, however, is the acceptance that protest works by utilizing the logic of numbers, in other words that there is power in numbers and that communicating mass suggests majority support. The nature of the online space makes it difficult to communicate mass, however,
and organizations have devised different strategies for doing that from tickers to maps to avatars.

Virtual marches are one example of activist groups using the internet not just as a tool for information dissemination or fundraising, but as the site of collective action or as part of a hybrid strategy involving activities on and offline. Both virtual marches and hacktivism attempt to transfer the assumptions and logics of offline forms of contentious political action to the online space. Hacktivism is a tactic that combines the logic of mass with that of trespass and disruption.

Hacking is a term that denotes an “obsessive commitment to creative and innovative computer programming, especially the reengineering of systems” (Gunkel 595). It is an idea that conjures images of binary code and computer geeks with too much time on their hands (Chadwick 130). The use of “hacktivism” however, can also be seen as a means of digital resistance, or “the development and use of technology to foster human rights and the open exchange of information,” as a means to “battle repression” through “grassroots resistance enabled by technology” (Delio 1). In the words of Oxblood Ruffin of the Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc), the group of activists who coined the term, “hacktivism is about using more eloquent arguments – whether of code or words – to construct a more perfect system” (metac0m 4). Our traditional view of hacking is a far too simplistic image of what motivates hackers to use their computer knowledge and skills out of principle. It is important to understand the distinctions in terminology made by those within the community between hackers who are politically motivated and those who are disruptive for the sake of being disruptive.
On the MIT Gallery of Hacks website the word hack refers to “a clever, benign and ethical prank or practical joke, which is both challenging for the perpetrators and amusing to the MIT community (and sometimes even the rest of the world!). Note that this has nothing to do with computer (or phone) hacking (which we call “cracking”)” (MIT). What is widely believed to be the first recorded use of the word hacker appeared in the MIT newspaper in 1963 and was used to refer to students who were using the college phone system to tie up phone lines and make long distance calls charged to someone else. Over time, however, the term has been used by outsiders and the media to refer to people who illegally break in to computer systems with a malicious intent. Chad Perrin, who works in IT security and writes for TechRepublic.com, argues that, “The inheritors of the technical tradition of the word ‘hacker’ as it was used at MIT take offense at the sloppy use of the term by journalists and others who are influenced by journalistic inaccuracy.” According to Perrin, and other insiders, a hacker, in the “classic” sense, is “someone with a strong interest in how things work, who likes to tinker and create and modify things for the enjoyment of doing so.” The act of hacking is seen as artistic and playful and does not necessarily have to involve computers. For insiders there is an important distinction made between hackers and crackers, reinforcing that not all hacks involve a “malicious violation of security measures or privacy” (Perrin). Someone who uses his or her understanding of technology to “circumvent or break security measures” is a cracker, and even though some use their “powers for good…many others use their powers for evil” (Perrin).

Much like traditional acts of civil disobedience, not every act of law breaking can be considered civil disobedience, and not every hack can be considered an act of
hacktivism. Simply put, “Hacktivism is the fusion of hacking and activism; politics and technology” (meta.com 1). Hacktivism can be best understood as a “form of electronic direct action in which creative and political thinking is fused with programming skill and code creating a new mechanism to achieve social and political change” (7). Even within the hacktivist community however, there is disagreement about what separates a hack from an act of hacktivism. Oxblood Ruffin of the Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc), points out that, “Hacktivism by our definition has certain rules…If you don’t follow those rules you’re…often committing crime” (Luman 3). For example, members of the cDc are against hacks that “bring down web servers or deface sites on the grounds that they constitute an abrogation of First Amendment free speech rights (Chadwick 133). On the other side are groups like the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, with whom most hacktivists agree, who consider web server attacks and site defacing legitimate acts of civil disobedience in the traditional sense because the act “derives its force from the very fact that the law is being broken” (133). While there is no static or single understanding of the concept and the idea is constantly being refined, the “spirit of hacktivism” can be seen in the hacker tenets outlined by Steven Levy in 1984:

1. Access to computers should be unlimited and total.
2. All information should be free.
4. Hackers should be judged by their hacking not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position.
5. You create art and beauty on a computer.
6. Computers can change your life for the better (Levy 39–49).
What has come to be known as the “hacker ethic” provides the criteria and norms on which hackers hold each other accountable, and influences the expectations of how the space should be controlled. Hackers are celebrated by many within the cyberspace culture, as the “heroes of the computer revolution, the visionaries of the Internet and the principle architects of cybersociety” (Gunkel 595). Hacktivism, it is therefore argued constitutes the “contemporary refashioning of the hacker ethic” (Chadwick 131).

Today the term “hacktivism” has come to include a wide range of “transgressive network enabled forms of activism” that can generally be classified into one of three categories as defined by Samuel: political cracking (site defacements, redirects, and denial of service attacks), performative hacktivism (site parodies and virtual sit-ins), and political coding (software development) (Samuel 123, 126). A list of hacktivist techniques has been compiled by Andrew Chadwick in his book, Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies. Hacktivist techniques include:

- **Defacing**: breaking into and altering the content of a website to change its content

- **Distributed denial of service attacks**: aim to physically disrupt a network by flooding it with simultaneous requests for data from thousands of computers

- **Ping storms**: an attack which uses the Internet “ping” program to overload a server by flooding it with ping requests.

- **Email bombing**: using automation software to inundate and email mailbox with thousands of messages in a matter of minutes, with the aim of crippling an organization’s email capabilities

- **Malicious code attacks**: deliberately attempting to destabilize an organization by introducing, for example, a virus which erases data, a worm that may cause high volumes of network traffic, or a Trojan that allows a hacker to break into a system.

- **Redirects**: interception web traffic destined for a particular site and redirecting it elsewhere (130).
Implicit in these techniques are the logics of trespass and disruption, which also guide many offline direct action tactics. The logic of mass is at work in denial of service attacks, ping storms and email bombing, however, because any of those tactics can be done by one individual it is possible to strategically use the illusion of mass. Examples of actions taken by those who label themselves hacktivists include being responsible for “cripple[ing] the web site of the World Trade Center…stag[ing] virtual sit-ins…to knock an opposition organization offline” and “send[ing] spoof email…offering free fares and apologizing for future service cuts” (Luman 3).

The most widely referenced example of hacktivism is the Zapatistas movement’s use of politically motivated hacks against the “Frankfurt stock exchange, the U.S. Pentagon, and Federal Communications Commission and the website of Mexico’s president Zedillo” in their war against the Mexican state throughout the mid 1990’s (Chadwick 131). Their main strategy was to inundate the websites with requests that would shut down their servers in order to bring attention to the oppression of the Mexican people by their government. They did this through the creation of their own software called, Tactical FloodNet, which they have since freely distributed to others wanting to support the cause, and other causes as well (132). This was just one strategy employed by the Zapatista movement, who was ultimately successful in getting the attention of the Mexican government and other world leaders. Identities of the movement’s leaders were kept secret, but in 1995 amidst negotiations and peace talks with the government, their leader was arrested on what were reported to be charges unrelated to his ties to the movement (Ronfeldt et al.).
In a very different context, Jeremy Hammond, a self-proclaimed hacktivist, used his skills to play “an electronic Robin Hood” by stealing the credit card numbers of members of a conservative group called Protest Warrior, claiming that he was “helping people under the thought of ‘Let’s steal from the rich and give to the poor’” (Luman 5). Hammond never actually charged anything to the cards, but he pled guilty to “breaking into a computer system ‘and obtaining information’, a felony offense”, his punishment, a $5,358 payment to Protest Warrior and two years in prison (5). Not all hacktivists, however, support Hammond’s tactics and justification, and many would argue that even though he calls himself a hacktivist, this example, by definition, does not qualify as an example of hacktivism.

Yet another and very different example is Brad Willman, a hacker who wrote and used a Trojan horse program to catch pedophiles. He embedded the program into child pornography images that when opened infected their computers giving him access to the information stored on their machines. He then used this access to collect evidence of child pornography or molestation (Gaudin). In one instance, he infiltrated a judge’s computer and passed the evidence he found onto a group that tracks pedophiles. The information ultimately made its way into the hands of law enforcement. The judge was sentenced to 20-27 months in federal prison, and Willman has yet to be charged for breaking into the computer, or for “writing and distributing the malware” (Gaudin 1). This case raised ethical concerns for the admissibility of the evidence Willman found and whether or not it could be used in court. Initially it was ruled that the evidence was taken under “illegal seizure” because Judge Marshall argued that Willman was acting as “an agent for law enforcement” (20). The prosecution argued that Willman couldn’t have
been acting as an agent for law enforcement because “it took them upwards of six months just to track him down to verify his identity and what he found” (2). This case also raises the issue of whether some laws are more important than others, and whether it is ever justifiable to break a law in order to catch someone else breaking a law. The initial ruling was overturned by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, but the case never went to trial because the judge pled guilty. While the media have labeled Willman a hacktivist, others call him a vigilante. Commenting on the case, Assistant U.S. Attorney Elena Duarte cautions “folks who think that just because there’s a moral justification it makes it all right to violate any law…computer intrusion statutes don’t provide for a justification if you have a good motive,” though the actions taken by the authorities seem to contradict this statement (2).

These examples illustrate how inconsistently the terms hacktivism and hacktivist are used. In all three examples, it is the motive of the hacker that is in question. While it could easily be argued that the cases of Hammond and Willman do not meet the traditional criteria of civil disobedience when narrowly defined because their motives aren’t meant to challenge an unjust law, from a broader perspective these are examples of people breaking the law on principle. Under the principles articulated in John Perry Barlow’s *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* and Levy’s hacker tenets, it could be argued that because any law imposed online by offline entities is unjust and oppressive, these acts are ones of resistance, which also prove that the laws being imposed in cyberspace have little to no influence over those who believe that the space should remain sovereign and outside the control of the state (Barlow). Assuming this motivation and reasoning, breaking any law that attempts to regulate behavior in
cyberspace is thus an act of civil disobedience. These acts can be interpreted as a larger sign of resistance because they send a message to the government and corporations that their attempts to control and restrict cyberspace are not working, thus reasserting their control and sovereignty over the space.

In 1992 Ganley wrote, “The computer has thus put an enormous amount of power, including political power, in the hands of multitudes of individuals” (60). The power of the computer lies in its ability to give “one individual the power of many by “multiply[ing] the amount of information gathered, and reduc[ing] the time it takes to reassemble and distribute it” (60). In some cases what required a collective to achieve in the past now requires only a couple of people and their computers. This suggests that much of what we understand about organizing and implementing contentious collective action may need to be reconsidered and retested as more of our lived experiences take place in an online context, and as social movements continue to experiment with strategies such as virtual marches and hacktivism that are “either Internet-enhanced or Internet-based” (Vegh 71).
METHODOLOGY

Combining Frame and Discourse Analysis

During the 1970’s Goffman introduced the concept of frames in his work, Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience, in which he suggested that the power of frames is inherent in word choice as “schemata of interpretation” that allow human beings "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events and actions, giving them meaning and suggesting action (21). Frame analysis can be understood as both a “perspective and a methodology,” meaning that it can be used to both inform the strategic construction of a message, as well as to analyze and deconstruct messages (Frameworks Institute). I use the term, frame, as suggested by Hall, “to refer to the elements of a text that cue or activate schemata in the mind of an audience member as he or she interprets a work” (232). In essence a frame can be understood as a type of “mental shortcut” that allows us to process information quickly and make sense of the world around us (Frameworks Institute). The idea of framing has emerged as a powerful concept in understanding how impressions can be influenced, managed and manipulated through the construction of meaning. In particular “the frame of a media text,” i.e. the way the text presents an issue, “activates specific schemata or associations in the minds of audience members,” thus we can see that when viewed as frames news stories help to define social reality (Hall 232-233; Tuchman 93). Because “reporters do more than make an event public; they define what an event is and which amorphous happenings are part of the event,” it has been argued that frame analysis can be used to study the “principles of organization that underlie the selection and definition of news events” and that performing a frame analysis offers insight into social reality (Tuchman 92).
The concept of the mass media acting as a ‘gatekeeper’ is well established. Schudson argues that ,“The term ‘gatekeeper’ is still in use and provides a handy, if not altogether appropriate, metaphor for the relation of news organizations to news products” (Schudson 265). Because a ‘gatekeeper’ utilizes a set of “criteria for selecting which items of information to let through the gate [and] which to hold back” the implication of these choices can be considered as part of the news making process (Schudson 265). It is the dominant and familiar frames that are often the basis for deciding what to let through and what to keep back, “because [if] the catalogue of past story-frames does not include a particular frame that can be made to apply to them” the story doesn’t “make the news” (Tuchman 96). However, “news items are not simply selected but constructed” through the choices made by reporters and editors about what and who to include in the story when it is selected (Schudson 265).

It is widely accepted that "the quality and nature of media coverage strongly influences how [social movements] are perceived in the public eye" (Barker 1). Scholars like Hallin, Herman, Chomsky and Lipstadt argue that in the press of a liberal society, like the United States, lots of news, including dissenting or adversarial information and opinion, gets into the newspaper. The question is where that information appears and how it is inflected, which frame analysis makes possible to identify (Schudson 272). As further justification for why newspapers in particular set the news agenda and can therefore be considered a primary source of news, Schudson argues that because TV “rarely finds news,” rather newspapers supply the news for TV, television news programs are the “parasites of print” (“The Good Citizen” 287). Due to the symbiotic nature of the relationship between TV news and print news and the fact that most Americans receive
news from some combination of TV, print and radio, all three sources of news have been included in the sample. When understood as more than mere information, but rather as entailing the “task of building social cohesion” so as to “locate what everyone [has] to know to act in their environment and through their actions to build a common identity,” news becomes a rich body of text and discourse worth analyzing at a qualitative level (Tuchman 1991, 81)

Ultimately, frame analysis rests on the assumption that as a construct of communication “frames trigger meaning,” signaling to an audience how to “interpret and classify” new information (The Frameworks Institute). News reports in particular have been found to use two particular types of frames when covering public issues: episodic and thematic frames (Iyengar). Whereas episodic news frames “focus on discrete events” involving specific people at a specific place and time, thematic frames put issues in a “broader context by focusing on general conditions or outcomes” (Frameworks Institute). As Inyengar’s research on the way television news frames political issues found, the type of news frame matters because “episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility, while thematic framing has the opposite effect” (Iyengar 15). It is also the case that moving a story from an episodic to a thematic frame can change public attitudes about the topic being covered (The Frameworks Institute).

A frame analysis of media texts that distinguishes stories as being episodic or thematic in nature, which this research does, helps to uncover the nature of the dominant discourse surrounding the use of these tactics in the “contested social field” of the mass media (Melucci 179). The purpose of qualitative frame analysis is to identify themes in order to address latent meanings present in the text to gain a better understanding of how
the coverage frames participants, their actions and the movement of which they are a part (Atkinson). This study uses qualitative frame analysis to investigate media texts by specifically looking at the framing devices used to describe the movement and its participants, the target, the event, the motives, the tactics used, and the consequences, as well as those framing devices used to describe the normative concerns/objections raised by the use of virtual marches and hacktivism.

This qualitative analysis was guided by Pan and Kosicki’s model for using frame analysis to analyze news texts as discourse, which also provided the framework for how the news texts selected for this study were treated. Their framing analysis model is based on the assumption that public discourse about issues is at least in part “constructed and negotiated” through news discourse, and furthermore, that the choices made about words and their organization in news discourse are “not trivial matters,” but rather greatly influence public debate by “setting the context for debate” and “defining the issues under consideration” (Pan and Kosicki 70). This research adopts the same assumptions about how frames function and the reasons for why news media can and should be viewed as a specific type of influential discourse.

Using discourse analysis as a way of understanding media texts is a useful complement to frame analysis as it helps to identify elements within the frame that inform its inflection. Treating the media as discourse, in other words understanding media messages, particularly news, as a “specific type of text and talk,” is an established technique in mass communication research that draws from the humanities and social sciences (van Dijk 108; 10). As an interdisciplinary field, critical discourse analysis is interested in systematically examining the “structures, functions, and processing of text
and talk” in its particular social, political and cultural context (108). This type of analysis frequently devotes attention to the “ideological and political dimensions of media messages” by analyzing the discourse on a variety of possible levels and dimensions, including but not limited to, syntactic, semantic, stylistic, rhetorical, interactional and “other structures and strategies” (108-110). Frames are inherent in discourse and for that reason the theories of discourse analysis provide a useful foundation for understanding and identifying the frames present in particular types of discourse. Furthermore, because “media power is generally symbolic and persuasive” the news media have the potential to influence readers’ understanding and opinion of an event or issue (van Dijk 10). News discourse plays an integral role in “shaping public debate” regarding an issue, which likely contributes to the United State Institute for Peace’s rationale for highlighting external attention as a necessary level of analysis regarding the issue of how new technologies are being employed by social movements (Pan and Kosicki 69).

Van Dijk argues that “most of our social and political knowledge and beliefs about the world derive” from the various news accounts we encounter on a daily basis, concluding that aside from “everyday conversation” there is no other “discursive practice…engaged in so frequently and by so many people as news” (110). Three of these dimensions are particularly relevant to the study of news and will be utilized in this research. Implication is considered one of the “most powerful semantic notions in a critical news analysis” (113). This term refers to the idea that certain words, phrases or expressions may imply ideas which can be inferred by the reader based on previous knowledge even if ‘unsaid’. As a “feature of discourse and communication” implication has “important ideological dimensions” since often ideological implications occur
because both “too little” and “too many irrelevant things” are being said about the actors and actions being described in the news (114).

Two other relevant dimensions for this research are the superstructures of syntax and style. As a particular type of talk, news reports follow a schema that can be understood as a superstructure that provides a hierarchical structure to the story consisting of “conventional categories that specify what the overall function is of the topics of the text” (van Dijk 114). Conventionally this hierarchical schema for the news consists of categories such as, Lead, Main Events, Context, History, Verbal Reactions and Comments, with stories following a top-down strategy that puts the most important information first, thus creating a “relevance structure to the text” (115). Furthermore, as part of the schema the sources used in a news story can also be considered for the way that the “choice of sources and the uses of source texts” can bias the news gathering and coverage (115). As there are often multiple ways to tell the same story, the rhetorical dimension of style in discourse considers the “textual result of choices” made related to possible alternatives for saying more or less the same thing (115). This dimension is guided by the underlying assumption that because these stylistic choices also have cultural, social and ideological implications they are also an indication of the reporter’s opinions and biases (116).

Foucault understood that culture was historically specific and had to be studied in its specific social context. Therefore, he argued for a discursive understanding of culture from which discourse can be understood as reflecting the dominant, hegemonic power structures of a particular time (Hall, 2001). The word discourse, understood as the “systematic set of [socially constructed] relations,” is used by some in cultural studies in
much the same way Williams uses the word *culture* (Storey 7). While objects exist in the world “independently of their discursive or cultural articulation,” it is “only within discourse or culture that they can exist as meaningful objects in meaningful relations” (8). From Foucault’s perspective, it is therefore the critic’s job to analyze the discourse of social institutions like the media, rather than of individuals, in order to identify these power structures so as to reveal the ways in which power is being used and potentially abused to influence the meaning-making process. Foucault’s perspective on social institutions and power inform the underlying assumptions about discourse on which this research is based.

As mentioned previously, the goal of this research is to assess the nature of the media discourse in the United States related to the use of two different online direct action tactics, virtual marches and hacktivism through qualitative frame analysis. In order to address this, the following questions have been considered:

- How do the mainstream news media in the United States frame the use of hacktivism and virtual marches?
- What ideologies, including political, economic and gender based ideologies, can be identified in the frames used to cover virtual marches and hacktivism?
- What normative concerns about these tactics are raised in the news discourse?

**Selection and Treatment of Media Texts**

Statistics from a *Pew Research* survey in May 2010 found that when asked to choose up to two main sources used for news about national and international issues, television accounted for 66% of the responses, with the internet at 41%, newspapers at 31% and radio accounting for 16%. Furthermore, in 2009 Neilsen reported that 74% of
U.S. adults read a newspaper at least once a week in print or online. As forms of external attention and in order to have a representative sample, documents from all four types of media outlets listed above, have been included in this research and as a corpus they represent a specific type of discourse, from this point forward referred to as news discourse.

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations the top newspapers in the United States based on daily circulation in 2011 (by March-September circulations) were The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The New York Times, The Daily News, and Los Angeles Times. Pew reported that the top 25 news providers for total U.S. traffic in 2010 included newspaper websites, as well as network and cable news sites (Olmstead et al.). This list includes: The New York Times (nyt.com), Washington Post (washingtonpost.com), USA Today (usatoday.com), Wall Street Journal (wsj.com), LA Times (latimes.com), New York Post (nypost.com), San Francisco Chronicle (sfgate.co), MSNBC (msnbc.com), CNN (cnn.com), ABC News (abcnews.go.com), Fox News (foxnews.com), and CBS News (Olmstead, Mitchell and Rosenstiel). These are considered legacy news organization, meaning that they are attached to a news operation that that is available through another platform like print or TV, account for two-thirds of the top 25 news sites. The news that is produced for TV and print is republished in these sites.

Based on circulation and designation as major U.S. news outlets, these news sources were selected and searched for the terms “hacktivism” or “hacktivist” and “virtual march,” “virtual rally” or “cyber march.” The twenty other major U.S. newspapers, as determined by NewsBank, were also included in the search. The transcripts of Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN were searched as they represent three of the
four cable news networks, as were the three network news channels, ABC, NBC and CBS. Also included are transcripts of National Public Radio, a radio station that produces national and international news and is widely available across the United States and online. CNN.com was also specifically searched as it is considered by many to be the more moderate of the three cable news networks.

Thirty-three total news outlets were searched using the search terms previously outlined. Thirty-two news outlets yielded results. From the twenty-four U.S. newspapers, the transcripts of three cable news, three network news and one radio station, as well as one online news site, a total of 243 relevant documents were identified (see table 2). The articles analyzed spanned a 16 ½ year period. This represents the period of time from the first appearance of the search terms to the date when the search was performed in June 2011. The search results for “hacktivism” or “hacktivist” range in years from 1998-2011 and yielded 121 stories. Results for the terms “virtual march,” “virtual rally” or “cyber march” range in years from 1994-2011 and yielded 122 stories. The numerical breakdown of documents by source can be seen in table 2. The five bolded newspapers represent the top five newspapers in the U.S. based on circulation at the time of the search according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
Table 2. Breakdown of the number of articles analyzed by media outlet and search term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers (number represents popularity)</th>
<th>Number of documents using “virtual march” or “virtual rally” or “cyber march” (1994 – June 6, 2011)</th>
<th>Number of documents using “hacktivism” or “hacktivist” (1998 – June 6, 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta Journal – Constitution, The</td>
<td>AJC 3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Science Monitor, The</td>
<td>CSM 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily News, The #4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit News, The</td>
<td>DN 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston Chronicle #13</td>
<td>HC 4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas Review - Journal</td>
<td>LVR 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times #5</td>
<td>LAT 0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami Herald, The</td>
<td>MH 6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Post #7</td>
<td>NYP 2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times, The #3</td>
<td>NYT 6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia Inquirer, The #15</td>
<td>PI 5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</td>
<td>PPG 6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento Bee, The</td>
<td>SB 1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Post Dispatch</td>
<td>SLP 4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg Times #22</td>
<td>SPT 5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio Express- News</td>
<td>SAE 0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Union – Tribune #25</td>
<td>SDUT 3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Fran Chronicle #24</td>
<td>SFC 8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Post - Intelligencer</td>
<td>SPI 0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Tribune (Twin Cities) #16</td>
<td>ST 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Baltimore) Sun, The</td>
<td>BS 0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans)</td>
<td>TP 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today #2</td>
<td>USAT 6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal, The #1</td>
<td>WSJ 4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post, The #8</td>
<td>WP 7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online News</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable News Transcripts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network News Transcripts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Transcripts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Number of Stories Analyzed = 243</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 122                              TOTAL 121
Every article was read multiple times and coded by one coder. Excel was used to compile and organize the data. Both deductive and inductive coding processes were used. Using Iyengar’s criteria articles were first deductively classified as either episodic or thematic. Then, using the script dimensions of news, which describe the categories of information that a reporter is expected to gather and report, any word, phrase or sentence in the article that described these dimensions was copied into the appropriate column in a spreadsheet (Pan and Kosicki). The script dimension was broken down into: who (actor and target), what, when, where, why, how and consequences (for the actor, the target, and society). From the syntactic dimension, i.e. the structural elements of news discourse, the name of any source quoted or cited in the story was compiled into one column. This dimension of news is used to indicate balance and impartiality, but can also be used to link certain points of view to authority while marginalizing other points of view (Pan and Kosicki). The sources quoted in the hacktivism articles were then classified as an: activist, organization, law enforcement, security, political, corporate, scholar, media or legal source. The sources quoted in the virtual march articles were classified as being an: activist, corporate, celebrity, political, citizen, law enforcement, media, organization or scholarly source. In order to assess the rhetorical or stylistic dimension of the articles all metaphors or analogies related to the virtual march or act of hacktivism referenced in the article were copied and pasted into a column and then compared (Pan and Kocicki).

Steger’s three-step metaphor analysis was used to better understand the metaphors found and their impact on the overall framing of virtual marches and hacktivism (Steger). As a “means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another,” metaphors are important element of news discourse because “different metaphors have different
ideological attachments” (Fairclough 100). Furthermore, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, “the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor,” suggesting that they deserve special scrutiny as an element of any discourse (3). Steger’s three-step process involves, first, identifying the outstanding metaphors through indicators such as repetition, elaboration, relatedness, contrast and emotion (6). The second step is to perform a general metaphor analysis in order to understand their general meaning through the application of tools such as comparison, associations and categories (7). And lastly, step three requires a return to the original text in order to understand the implications of the metaphor in its particular context (8).

Using the multidimensional approach suggested by Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr and Legnante articles were also classified as being either soft or hard news. Based on their systematic analysis of 24 highly cited studies on hard and soft news published between 1990 and 2011, the researchers determined that there were three primary dimensions used to distinguish news as being hard or soft. These dimensions include: the topic dimension (the subject matter covered, the focus dimension (the specific aspects of events or topics emphasized and the style dimension (the way events or topics are visually and verbally presented (Reinemann et al. 232). An article’s placement in a particular section or the particular type of program in which the story was found was also considered in making this determination. Generally, stories are considered hard news when they are presented as politically relevant, reported in a thematic way, are focused on societal consequences and are impersonal in style (233). News items are considered soft when they are presented as being not politically relevant, are reported on in an episodic way, focus on individual consequences and are personal or emotional in style.
This distinction is worth making because, as Fiske argues, the nature of news discourse not only functions “in the production and reading of a text, but also in making sense of social experience” and helps to determine the overall framing of the event (15).

Using an inductive approach, each article was read with the goal of identifying any normative or ideological themes related to the use of these tactics that may have been implied or specifically stated in the article. Based on the understanding that headlines are “the most important copy” that appears in newspapers because they help readers “decide what piques their interest [and] make decisions about the world around them” the headlines were also analyzed, taking into account whether or not the search term appeared in the headline, as well as the overall tone of the headline and other words that frequently appeared in the headlines (Babb 29 “The Power of Energy in Headlines”). Headlines are also ripe for analysis because they “may subtly influence the interpretation and hence the persuasive effects” of a news story for its readers (van Dijk “Power and the News Media” 10).

From these articles an event catalogue was also created, chronicling the use of these two tactics over the period of time from when they first appeared in the media coverage to the time that the search was performed. While this list does not represent every virtual march held or act of hacktivism carried out during this time period, it does provide the basis from which a more complete list can be built in the future.

Employing the use of multiple analytic strategies made it possible to identify the normative frames embedded in the news discourse surrounding these two specific protest
tactics and what those frames may suggest about the possibility for legitimization of these tactics.
ANALYSIS OF VIRTUAL MARCH COVERAGE

Summary of Virtual March Coverage

As the purpose of this research is to identify the frames embedded in news discourse related to the use of untraditional protest tactics the following chapter outlines the findings of the systematic and multidimensional qualitative analysis method outlined previously. Using the terms virtual march, cyber march and/or virtual rally, a search of Newsbank’s list of major US newspapers, CNN.com and the transcripts of cable and network news, as well as those of NPR, was performed for any stories using one or any of these terms before June 7, 2011. This search produced 122 stories across 26 different news outlets over a 16 ½ year period, 1994 through June 2011 (see figs. 1 and 2). When applied to this sample, the qualitative frame analysis strategy outlined previously reveals that the likelihood of receiving coverage for a virtual march increases when celebrities are involved but that virtual marches are rarely framed as contentious by the mainstream media as indicated by the placement of stories, the metaphors used, and the sources quoted. The combination of these elements contributes to the framing of virtual marches as novel events that raise few normative concerns, ultimately being framed more as a nuisance than an influential form of political action.

The earliest stories that referenced one of the aforementioned search terms were 1994 and 1995 articles in the Wall Street Journal and Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, respectively (Jaroslovsky; Hopey). The 1994 article made brief mention, under the heading “Minor Memos,” of a “high-tech virtual march on Congress” being held by abortion-rights activists that involved “free cellular phone banks on street corners in at
least a dozen cities (Jaroslovsky). The 1995 article was entitled, “Earth Day ’95 a Week’s Worth of Activities to Help Make Our Environment More Green and Clean” (Hopey). This article listed the events being held to celebrate Earth Day, one of which was listed as a “virtual rally” being held on Environmental Justice Day by the Pennsylvania Environmental Network to target the Pennsylvania governor and legislators. The article states that participants can “attend a rally in Harrisburg and never leave home” by participating in a “phone and fax blitz of the governor and legislators between 11 am and 3 pm” (Hopey). Both articles were coded as episodic because they covered discrete events rather than putting events in a broader context, which was consistent with the vast majority of articles analyzed as 93% were coded as episodic. The word “virtual” was used in the naming of these protest events, including these two, even if the efforts did not involve use of the internet. The use of this word, “virtual,” changed over time, likely due to the increase in internet accessibility and use as well as the public’s familiarity with internet technology.

Sixty-eight of the 122 stories, or 55.7%, occurred in 2003 (see fig. 2). All but two of those 68 stories covered or mentioned the celebrity endorsed Win without War virtual march, which was initiated to protest President George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq and involved a day of faxes, phone calls and emails to Senate offices with the goal of every office receiving one call every minute. The other two stories that occurred in 2003 each mentioned a different virtual march. The MOTHER’s (Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights) Virtual March on Mother’s Day that asked supporters to “fax or email their members of Congress” was covered by the Minneapolis Star Tribune (Cummins). The Support the Troops Cyber March started by radio hosts of The Jeff and Jer Showgram
was described as a “message board accessible by logging onto the stations Web site” where Americans in the Persian Gulf with laptops could monitor the list of supporters was covered by the San Diego Union-Tribune (Turengo). These two marches were covered by only one news outlet. CNN transcripts contained the most stories, using at least one of the search terms in 19 articles. Followed by the San Francisco Chronicle with 8 articles (see fig. 1). TV outlets averaged 5.6 stories per outlet, whereas print news averaged 4 stories per source, suggesting that virtual marches on average are more likely to receive coverage from TV news rather than print.

![Figure 1. Number of virtual march stories listed by source.](image-url)
Eight of the 122 articles analyzed were coded as thematic, accounting for only 7% of the stories, an indication that the vast majority of these stories focused on discrete events rather than broader issues, which is consistent with Iyengar’s finding about news coverage of public issues in general. The headlines from these thematic articles provide a sense for the wide angle approach that these thematic stories took in their coverage of and related to virtual marches (see table 3). The 8 thematic articles were spread across 6 different news outlets. USA Today was the only outlet to run more than one thematic story involving at least a reference to a virtual march, though the paper did not actually cover any specific virtual march as an event in and of itself. Seven of the 8 articles that were coded as being thematic in nature covered or mentioned the Win Without War Virtual March, which was organized to protest possible war with Iraq in 2003. The eighth
thematic article referenced the *Stop Global Warming Virtual March*, an ongoing virtual march dedicated to the issues related to global warming.

**Table 3.** Headlines from virtual march articles in sample coded as thematic listed in chronological order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking on the Internet as a Protest Tool</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats and Responses: Dissent Disagreements About Civil Disobedience Divide America’s Antiwar Movement</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic, Diverse, Pre-emptive (These Are Not the Past’s Protesters)</td>
<td>SLP</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesters Eye Civil Disobedience</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Stars Speak, Do We Listen?</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where's the Congressional War of Words?</td>
<td>WP</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let Logic Join the Global Warming Debate - Whether its havoc, hoax or something else, common sense would lead us toward a path that protects this planet</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Motherhood Movement: Can a group like MomsRising finally foment policy change in America by harnessing a citizen army of mothers?</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the 17 year period 26 different virtual marches/virtual rallies/cyber rallies were at least mentioned in the sample of 122 stories. Three of those 26 were marches organized entirely or in part by the non-profit advocacy group MoveOn. The virtual march that received the most coverage, with 69 total references across 22 different outlets, was the *Win without War Virtual March*, organized by a coalition of organizations including MoveOn. The march with the second most coverage was the *Stop Global Warming* virtual march with 26 references and the third was the *Virtual March for Life* with 2 references. Both of the two most mentioned marches involved the heavy use of celebrities to promote and participate in the virtual march. The Washington Post and the Miami Herald were the only two news outlets from this sample to cover all three of
those virtual marches (*Win without War Virtual March*, *Stop Global Warming Virtual March* and the *Virtual March for Life*). Appearing in chronological order the list of virtual marches/virtual rallies/cyber rallies that were mentioned or covered at least once across all news stories analyzed are listed in table 4. For further explanation and description of these events please see the Appendix.

**Table 4.** List of virtual march events found in sample listed in chronological order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March on Congress (sponsored by Abortion-rights activists)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA Environmental Network Virtual Rally on Environmental Justice Day</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>PPG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World AIDS Day Virtual March</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>SPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Rally by Texas Teachers (against proposed insurance changes)</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber/Virtual Rally to Support Sen. Levin’s Campaign</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>DN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win without War Virtual March on Washington (sponsored by a coalition of organizations against war with Iraq)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTHERS (Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights) Virtual March</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>STM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the Troops Cyber March</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>SDUT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March for Victory (in support of President Bush’s Iraq policy)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>LVR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacifica Station Virtual Rally (held in conjunction with the street protests against the Bush Administration)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Pride Coalition Virtual Rally (in response to PBS’s decision not to air a children’s show depicting a “lesbian-headed” household)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>PPG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop Global Warming Virtual March</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March (sponsored by MoveOn to protest US foreign policy in Sudan)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Rally by Numbers USA (in opposition to the immigration reform bill)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>FOX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporters of Automakers Virtual March (in support of help for the industry)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>DN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offroaders take on Marines Virtual Rally (to protest the requisition of land used for off-roading)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>SDUT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March to Support the T. Boone Picken’s Energy Plan</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>FOX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March on the Hill (to increase funding for inflammatory bowel disease)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March for Life (sponsored by the anti-abortion group Americans United for Life)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual March to Support Healthcare Reform</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March for Main Street (protest against the financial reform legislation being considered by Congress)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes Virtual Rally on Facebook (to increase voter turnout)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Rally on Facebook (against the closing of the Cactus Café)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>NYT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Party Virtual March</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>FOX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaraguan Virtual March on Facebook</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>CSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Virtual March of Millions on Facebook (in support of Egypt)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This analysis of news discourse revealed that virtual marches are conceptualized and carried out by organizations in a number of different ways, from asking participants to use avatars, Facebook, message boards and email, to using faxes and tiny radios, sometimes not involving the use of the internet at all (see Appendix). Virtual Marches have also been used with the intention of achieving a variety of goals from fundraising, to raising awareness, as well as to express support for or dissent against a policy or decision. Primarily, the virtual marches referenced in this sample were used to express grievances related to public policy and social issues by targeting government entities. Some of the virtual marches and rallies referenced in this sample take on a hybrid form and involve both an online as well as an offline component, such as a traditional street protest or lobbying event, as is the case with the Virtual Rally by Texas Teachers, the Pacifica Station Virtual Rally and the Win Without War virtual march.

Analyzing the Dimensions of News Discourse for Virtual Marches

Through the process of analyzing news stories at the script and syntactical dimensions of news discourse the frames emerged, as did their potential normative implications. An analysis of the coverage finds that virtual marches are primarily initiated by organizations or coalitions for the purpose of expressing either support for, or opposition to, some government policy or decision and involve participants who are described as either citizens, celebrities or activists. Those who participate in virtual marches are characterized in a variety of ways throughout the coverage. The following examples provide an indication of the variation. The headline of one thematic article reads,
“Pragmatic, Diverse, Pre-Emptive (These are not the past's protesters)” in which participants and tactics in the Win Without War peace movement are contrasted with the peace movement organized by “[their] parents” generation (Kee). In a different news story the hosts of the program referred to those who participate in the Win Without War virtual march as “juvenile and self-absorbed” (Barnes). In yet another article, virtual marches were described as “the slackers virtual equivalent of a march” (Mitchell). Generally speaking, however, those who participate in virtual marches, with the exception of celebrities, were framed as legitimate protesters and activists.

The act of carrying out a virtual march is commonly characterized as a grass-roots style campaign used as a means of demonstration or protest that is described as happening on Washington or the White House. When referencing where the act occurred, frequently a specific website address was provided in the news coverage as the location of the march, which would allow a reader to participate if they were so inclined to visit the page and join or learn more about the cause, but this also reinforced that it could not be attended or observed in a traditional sense. However, across all stories in this sample, only twice was there a reference to cyberspace as the place where the act took place. The word “online” was used more frequently to explain where the act occurred.

The media’s attempts to measure the success of virtual marches primarily came down to counting either the number of emails, phone calls, signatures, or amount of money raised. This also became a reason to discredit virtual marches as a number of stories noted the difficulty of counting or verifying the number of people who participated in a virtual march. In one story covering the Win Without War Virtual March the hosts of the news program went so far as to paint a scenario in which virtual marches could present a
threat by asking, “What if there is a terrorist attack on the day they're doing all their
hijinks,” speculating about the “harm they could do” (Barnes). Though the coverage did
not focus on the consequences that virtual marches may present at a societal level, some
articles did suggest that the use of the internet, as part of the repertoire of contention,
would have consequences at a systemic level for both society and democracy (see table 5). These comments were concentrated in three specific articles over a two year period,
occuring during 2003 and 2004. Some examples of the specific ways it was suggested
that the internet may have an impact at societal and institutional levels range from
changes to the political process and those who participate in it, to impacting the influence
of media and the organization of collective action (see table 5).

Table 5. Sample of quotes from sample suggesting potential implications of the internet
organized by theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications for Institutions</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a revolutionizing effect on politics</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break power of big media</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change political landscape</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the future television will matter less</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications for Democratic Participation</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bring young people back into the system</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the revival of public space</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The net is this sort of great medium for groups that aren't empowered to make their voices heard.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet breeds new forms of protest</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications for Social Movements</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can have these kind of uncoordinated activities spread across different communities but the net becomes a kind of glue that allows for chaotic behavior to suddenly turn into something coherent and forceful.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you get these low cost communication tools it really helps extend social networks.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once you've lowered the cost of communication you make it easier for folks to coordinate large groups, particularly when you can sort of bulk email or bulk short message a group.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If America is the world's sole military superpower, the Internet is the other superpower with its ability to organize and activate world public opinion.</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the syntactical dimension of news discourse the three most quoted sources were
organizations, politicians or their spokesperson, and celebrities. Combined they account
for over half of all sources quoted (see fig. 3). When a specific organization takes credit
for a virtual march a representative from that organization is frequently interviewed and quoted. The person most quoted in this sample was Tom Andrews, director of Win Without War, a coalition of organizations against the Iraq war. The number of political sources quoted is reflective of the most common target of virtual march efforts, elected officials. Politicians or their spokespersons were frequently asked to comment on the impact that the virtual march had on the functioning of their offices or on their opinion of an issue. Laurie David, organizer of and spokesperson for the Stop Global Warming Virtual March was the most frequently interviewed and quoted celebrity. Followed by Martin Sheen, the celebrity spokesperson for the Win Without War virtual march, who appeared in advertisement that was referenced or played in a number of stories. Of note is also the fact that across all 306 quotes recorded only 1 was attributed to law enforcement, serving as an indication of the perceived low level of threat and contentiousness presented by virtual marches. The coding of sources also revealed a gendered aspect to the syntactic dimension of news discourse. Of the 306 sources cited in the virtual march coverage, 100 (33%) were coded as female, 189 (62%) as male and 17 as unidentifiable/nongendered. Of the 2 most quoted sources in the virtual march coverage 1 was male and 1 was female. There were 12 different sources quoted 3 or more times across all coverage, of those twelve, 4 were female and 8 were male.
From the rhetorical dimension of news discourse, the stylistic choices of journalists contribute to the overall framing of an event. Metaphors are a prominent element of the news discourse that was analyzed for this project and strongly influence the frame through which virtual marches are explained and understood. Metaphors were used as a framing device primarily to help explain the act itself, as well as the consequences of the act. In the context of the internet, since participants are not literally marching with their feet, the word “march” is itself a metaphor and is the term most commonly used to name the act. One typical example of metaphor being used heavily to describe a virtual march comes from FOX News, “Armed with cell phones, talking points and Internet-powered faxes and emails, activists have tied up Senate phone lines for weeks, all in hopes of driving an electronic stake through the heart of a bill (Garrett).” There are three metaphors present in this one sentence that describe the act (armed) and

**Figure 3.** Type of sources quoted across all virtual march stories in sample.
the outcome of their action (“tied up” and “stake through the heart”). As a metaphor itself, “march” can trigger either positive or negative associations depending on the reader’s existing perceptions of protest and activists, as well as the visual imagery conjured in the mind of the reader. Where some might picture citizens acting out their right to dissent peacefully, others may see images of hoodlums causing violence and destruction. As one editorialist noted, “[He’s] never been a huge fan of the guerrilla theatre antics of rallies and marches, with their chanted, rhyming slogans and colorful banners – even though the practice has a long and respected history in this country (Mitchell).

Similarly, the metaphor “grassroots” was used in several articles to characterize the nature of the virtual march event. This metaphor is used to indicate that the effort was initiated by citizens; that it grew from the bottom up and spread naturally and somewhat uncontrollably out of that initiative, rather than being orchestrated by powerful elites in society and forced down on people. Similarly, the term “grass-roots” is used to validate the efforts of protesters. In contrast, the metaphor “astroturfing” is used to label events or movements that are artificial in nature and thus pretending to be grassroots. The term “astroturfing” only appeared twice across all articles, once in an editorial in the Las Vegas Review that labeled the Virtual March for Victory efforts in support of President Bush’s policy towards Iraq as “astroturf” because, “It is not real grass-roots opinion but a manufactured facsimile cranked out by a machine instead of being grown with careful intellectual watering and nurturing” (Mitchell). The second appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution who quoted Tom Andrews, national director of Win Without War, as using the term to explain what their virtual march was not. “These are not form letters,”
he said. “We’re not fax blasting, we’re not sending bulk email, we’re not using the kind of fake grass-roots techniques that Washington insiders call Astroturf” (Mollison). The “march” and “grass-roots” metaphors, in particular, have a powerful influence over the frame and the meanings triggered by it in the mind of the reader depending on the associations the reader supplies as they interpret the meaning of the metaphor.

The majority of metaphors found across all articles are visual/physical in nature, with some also implying a speed/time element. For example, words like “barrage,” “bombard,” “flurry,” “wave,” “pepper,” “blitz” and “torrents” are used to describe what occurs when a virtual march is taking place. These words are also commonly used to describe military tactics and imply duration and speed. Metaphors like “flooded,” “swamped,” “jam,” “clog,” “tied up”, and “paralyzed” are used to characterize the overwhelming nature of the impact of the virtual march on the target. Though the word “virtual” implies intangibility, the metaphors used to describe the act and its outcome are physical in nature, suggesting that the outcome of a virtual march results in tangible consequences for its target. The combination of metaphors used in this context rely on observable and relatable physical experiences to convey the severity and level of threat or contentiousness presented by virtual marches. The implication of these metaphors is that virtual marches present inconvenience and discomfort that can be overwhelming for the target, but their consequence are quick and impermanent. They also imply that virtual marches are a form of harassment that leave a mess which has to be cleaned up thus creating disruption and discomfort. The effectiveness and ethics of the protest tactic are subtly called into question through the heavy use of metaphors such as “barrage,” “bombard” and “tie up,” as well as through explicit challenges to the appropriateness of
the tactic. Ultimately, the frame created through the use of these metaphors suggests that
virtual marches equate to a nuisance for most targets but with no serious or lasting
consequences for the target or society. This normative angle was also raised during an
interview with actress Janeane Garofalo on CNN’s news talk show “Crossfire.” The
interviewer, Paul Begala, challenged her about the use of a virtual march to protest war
with Iraq by asking, “Are you trying to harass people or are you trying to persuade
government officials here?” (Garofalo). Garofalo responded by saying, “Well, no, I guess
it’s harassment if you consider that you want to get your message across by email and
things of that nature. But I think that a little – if it’s harassment, I think it’s worth it in the
face of this potential war (Garofalo).

The Influence of Placement and Headlines

Using Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr and Legnante’s multidimensional approach
stories were classified as either hard or soft news based on the section, type of program
and tone of presentation. Sixty-two of the 122 (49%) virtual march stories were coded as
soft news, suggesting that virtual marches are frequently presented in an emotional style
and as politically irrelevant. Eighty-eight of the stories analyzed were found in a print-
based medium. Of these stories 1 story appeared in the Business section, 2 in Politics and
2 in Science/Tech sections (see fig. 4). In contrast 6 were found in the
Arts/Culture/Entertainment section, 6 in the Life/Living/Lifestyle and 2 in the Television
section. The choice of presentation and placement of a news story contributes to the
audience’s perception of the event and its level of political importance or potential
influence. The heavy placement of virtual march coverage in sections generally considered soft news is likely related to the heavy involvement of celebrities, which contributes to the overall framing of these events as being less serious or politically relevant.

**Figure 4.** Placement of virtual march coverage found in print news by section name.

As an experimental methodology, the text of newspaper headlines for all virtual march articles that were analyzed was used to create a word cloud (see fig. 5). Common English words were removed and all words were made lower-case. The size of the word indicates its frequency. The visual cloud of words reinforces that the *Win Without War* march and the *Stop Global Warming* march received the most coverage. The cloud also
indicates that the word “march” was used in the actual headline, either alone or as part of the phrase “virtual march.” As a new and unfamiliar protest tactic the phrase “virtual march” may have been used to pique the interest of readers, but also served to put emphasis on the actual issues being protested, as seen in the word cloud through the size of words like “war,” “global” and “warming.” The metaphors “jams,” “clogged,” “swamp” and “bombarded” also appear in headlines indicating the importance of their use in explaining to readers how to understand the impact of a virtual march. The references made to specific technologies such as “phone” and “email” also indicate how a virtual march works in comparison to a traditional street march, which a reader can glean even from just a glance at the headline. Two articles used the phrase “Modem March” in their headline, again emphasizing the role of technology in both how and where the act took place, thus distinguishing it from traditional street protests and emphasizing the metaphorical nature of the word “march” in this context (Begala and Novak; Associated Press).
Figure 5. Word cloud created using the text of newspaper headlines from sample.

Finding for Virtual March Coverage

A qualitative frame analysis of the news discourse found in these 122 stories reveals that as a protest tactic virtual marches are most commonly framed as discrete events that are set in a narrow context with focus on the concrete aspects of the act and its consequences. The primary reason to cover a virtual march appears to be related to the amount of participation that is involved, the specific people who participate (i.e. celebrities) or because the issue being protested or supported has relevance at an international, national or specific local level. Ultimately, the framing of virtual marches
suggest that they are a legitimate, though perhaps ineffective method, for citizens to voice their support for or opposition to a public issue.

Depending on how the success of a virtual march is measured, using celebrities as part of the campaign’s strategy appears to be risky for the campaign and its success. While the use of celebrities clearly worked as a strategy for gaining media attention, the attention received was less than helpful in legitimizing the movement and its cause. Because celebrities were such a prominent part of the two most frequently covered virtual marches, the *Win Without War* and the *Stop Global Warming* virtual marches, these stories were frequently placed in the Entertainment, Style, or Arts and Culture sections of the newspaper, sections generally regarded as containing soft news. The media even turned this into an issue itself by raising questions about the involvement of celebrities in social movements. In 2003 USA Today published a thematic article entitled “When Stars Speak Do We Listen?” The article reported on Gallup Poll survey results that found 87% of people polled said that there is not a celebrity who could cause them to change their position on the war and 31% said they felt celebrities were “somewhat” effective in influencing views of the president and other elected officials (Oldenburg). But, during a CNN program Fred Thompson, a politician and actor, was interviewed and asked in light of these survey results whether or not he thought that Hollywood stars are effective in influencing public opinion. He responded, “Yes… I think people listen to them. I think people weigh what they say” (Thompson). The issue of celebrity was also raised during the Garofalo interview to which she responded, “I don’t why all actors have to be apologists for other actors…..I’m just a citizen who happens to have chosen entertainment for a career” (Garofalo). But she also acknowledges that, “Unfortunately,
the anti-war movement which is huge seems to get more attention when a handful of actors have access to the camera (Garofalo). The issue of celebrity permeated the discourse through which the two most covered virtual marches were framed.

A systematic analysis of the syntactic, script and rhetorical dimensions of news discourse revealed that the sources, information and metaphors used in news course imply that virtual marches are novel, but when grass-roots are a legitimate form of protest that can be disruptive but not contentious and have no long lasting consequences for the actor, the target or society. Therefore, the use of virtual marches raises very few normative concerns in the media discourse beyond being a potential form of harassment when carried out with the intention of overwhelming phone and email systems and raising questions about what influence celebrities should or should not have in the political process. The use of internet technology as a protest tactic in the context of virtual marches specifically did not raise normative concerns for society, but a few thematic articles did suggest that the use of internet technology by social movements more broadly would have positive implications for democracy by challenging traditional systems, increasing participation from citizens and making it easier for social movements to organize.
ANALYSIS OF HACKTIVISM COVERAGE

Summary of Hacktivism Coverage

For the purpose of being able to compare the framing of two different online direction action tactics the same systematic analysis method used to analyze virtual march coverage was applied to articles that used the terms “hacktivist” or “hacktivism.” A search of Newsbank’s list of major US newspapers, CNN.com and the transcripts of cable and network news, as well as those of NPR using the term(s) “hacktivism” and/or “hacktivist” finds that one or both of these terms appear in 24 different news outlets between the years 1998 and June, 2011. These 24 sources produced 121 stories that matched the search terms (see fig. 1). Of these 121 stories 37 (31%) appeared in network, cable or radio news transcripts. The other 84 (69%) stories were found in newspapers or online (see fig. 6). CNN.com produced the most search results with 22 stories, followed by CNN transcripts with 15. The newspaper with the most hacktivism stories was the San Francisco Chronicle with 8. On average hacktivism was slightly more likely to receive coverage from television and radio than from newspapers.

When applied to this sample of 121 stories, the multidimensional frame analysis method reveals that the “hacktivism” label is inconsistently applied by the media in large part because there is no shared definition of hacktivism that would allow specific acts of hacking to be labeled and, therefore, differentiated as hacktivism. This inconsistency dominates the frame leading to potential uncertainty and confusion for the public. The framing devices used by the media suggest that the act of hacking for political reasons is highly contentious and something to be feared, but hard to identify and not generally
collective in nature. The metaphors used by the media contribute to both the militarization and criminalization of all hacking, regardless of motivation. Furthermore, the frequent use of the phrases “so-called” and “self-described” create doubt as to whether or not the terms hacktivism and hacktivist should even be used, therefore ultimately raising questions about the legitimacy of the tactic. For those reasons hacktivism raises a number of normative questions including concerns over the legality of the act, privacy related issues, freedom of speech concerns, the motives of the actors and the security implications for society.

Figure 6. Number of hacktivism stories in sample listed by source.
In a search of Newsbank’s major U.S. newspapers, cable, network and radio news transcripts, as well as CNN.com, the first appearance of the word “hacktivism” and/or “hacktivist” occurred in an October 31, 1998 in a New York Times article entitled ‘Hacktivists’ of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web (Harmon). This 1998 New York Times article was classified as thematic in that it took a broad approach to its explanation and coverage of the subject by providing historical context, discussing trends over time and because it referenced more than one discrete event (Iyengar). The article was published under the section heading “Foreign Desk,” suggesting that hacktivism was more than a domestic issue. During the period of time between 1998 and June 2011 The New York Times ran 6 stories that used the search terms, four of which were classified as thematic, accounting for 23% of all thematic stories in this sample.

The 1998 article introduced Stefan Wray and Ricardo Dominguez as co-founders of a group called the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, who at the time was “beginning to experiment with computer hacking, so far largely nuisance attacks and the equivalent of electronic graffiti, as a means to a political end” (Harmon). In the article the group is also credited with coining the term “hacktivism.” The article goes on later to introduce Oxblood Ruffin, “a member of Cult of the Dead Cow, a hacker group that [had] recently reserved the web address www.hacktivism.org as an Internet distribution hub for tools to assist others in subversive digital activism” (Harmon). The article also explained the hacker culture, the specific techniques/tactics being used at the time and the debate regarding whether hacktivism can and should be considered civil disobedience or terrorism (Harmon). Wray is quoted in the article as saying, “We see this as a form of electronic civil disobedience…We are transforming the social-movement tactics of
trespass and blockade to the Internet.” Also quoted is Oxblood Ruffin, described as “a Toronto-based computer jockey” (Harmon). Specific acts of hacktivism referenced as examples in the 1998 article include: Zapatista’s “Netwar,” the replacement of China’s human rights agency Web site with “an electronic trespasser’s manifesto, “Save Kashmir” being “scrawled” on the Web site of the Indian government, the placement of an image of a mushroom cloud on the Web site of India’s major nuclear weapons research center, the modification of 40 Indonesian servers to display the slogan “Free East Timor,” the crashing of a Web site promoting the ethnic Albanian cause in Kosovo, an attack on the Croatian state-owned newspaper Vjesnik, as well as on the Web site of the Serbian National Library (Harmon).

In response to the claim that hacktivism is a form of terrorism under United States’ law, members of the EDT countered that “the software they use to attack Web sites disrupts Internet traffic but does not destroy data,” making an important distinction between what they see as terrorism and disobedience (Harmon). Furthermore, it is noted that “In keeping with the tradition of civil disobedience protests, they encourage mass participation and use their real names,” both hallmarks of traditional civil disobedience (Harmon). Similarly, the designer of the FloodNet software program used by hacktivists to carry out denial of service attacks argues that, “This isn’t cyberterrorism…it’s more like conceptual art” (Harmon). An explanation of one specific tactic, the denial of service attack made possible by a software program called FloodNet, is included in the story. The description of the tactic reads:

“When on-line activists heed the call to ‘commence flooding!’, they visit the group’s website and click on an icon that launches a program called FloodNet. The software points their Web browser to the target of the attack, where it
requests the same page over and over again at a rate of about 10 times per minute…An unusually large volume of requests will over whelm the computer that is serving up the target’s Web pages. This can cause legitimate visitors to see error messages instead of pages they are seeking, and it can even crash the server computer” (Harmon).

A spokesman for the United States Defense Department, who was able to thwart a FloodNet attack on their public site stated, “If it wasn’t illegal it was certainly immoral – there are other constructive methods of electronic protest,” making an important normative distinction between legality and ethics (Harmon). Other hacktivists were also quoted in the story, including members of the Mexican hacker group known as X-Ploit, Secretos and Perl Bailey, all of whom refused to give their real names. Except for Oxblood Ruffin and the three members of X-Ploit, the ages of all hackers quoted in the story where printed. In Harmon’s article hacktivists were described as: “cowboys of the electronic frontier,” “radical groups,” “sophomoric hacker underground,” “international teams of teen-agers with cyber pseudonyms,” “electronic trespasser,” “computer intruders,” “burgeoning computer underground,” “online activists” and “digital desperadoes.” Publishing or referencing the age of the activist, as well as these other characterizations such as radical, immature, independent and villainous are reoccurring frames across all stories in the sample.

Of the 121 stories analyzed 101 (83%) were classified as using an episodic frame for stories that cover or make mention of hacktivists and/or acts of hacktivism, leaving 20 (17%) stories that were classified as thematic. The headlines from these thematic articles reinforce the normative concerns surrounding hacktivism and the notion that it is not seen as a mainstream tactic (see table 6). The 12 news outlets that published or produced thematic coverage included: Baltimore Sun, CBS, Miami Herald, the New York Post,
The New York Times, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, San Antonio Express, San Diego Union Tribune San Francisco Chronicle, Saint Petersburg Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal. The year with the most thematic coverage was 2010 (5 stories found in three different sources: The Washington Post, CBS and The Wall Street Journal). The largest number of stories were also published in 2010, which is the year that WikiLeaks leaked classified U.S. government documents setting off a number of hacking related responses. Thematic coverage of “hacktivism” was most concentrated in the first 6 years of the term’s appearance with 12 of 20 total thematic articles occurring from 1998 - 2003. The remaining 8 thematic articles were spread over the period between 2006 and June 2011, with 5 of them occurring in 2010.

**Table 6.** Headlines from hacktivism stories in sample that were coded as thematic listed in Chronological Order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hacktivists of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel Cyberwar Clicks into High Gear</td>
<td>PPG</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web ‘hacktivist’ Warns of Continued Attacks</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web War, When Point and Shoot Becomes Point and Click</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacking with a Conscience is a New Trend</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countercultural World Hacks Its Way into the Mainstream</td>
<td>SPT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists Using Web for Strikes: Hacking Sites Used as Form of Protest</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacktivism: Hacker-Activists Push Their Causes Using Technology</td>
<td>SDUT</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackers Hit Home</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacking Has Gotten Easier - Hacktivists Shutting Down Servers for a Cause - Or for fun?</td>
<td>NYP</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla Warfare, Waged with Code</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Their Own Thing, Making Art Together</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Firewall: Chinese Censors of Internet Face Hacktivists in U.S.</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Social Networking Pool, We Fall Hack, Line and Sinker for Phishers</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet a Source of Help to Terrorist Organizations (48 Hours)</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet a Source of Help to Terrorist Organizations (Evening News)</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Making Someone the Bad Guy Feels so Good</td>
<td>WP</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can we stop the cyber arms race?</td>
<td>WP</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Digital Dictatorship</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Egypt: Access Denied</td>
<td>WP</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fifty-three percent of all stories analyzed occurred in two specific years, 2000 and 2010 (16 and 41 respectively) with the most stories occurring in 2010 (see fig. 7). Between 2000 and 2010 coverage declined and averaged 3.6 stories per year until in 2010 when coverage spiked dramatically with 41 stories in one year. In 2000 the use of hacking by Palestinian and Israeli groups garnered attention from a number of news outlets, which along with the shutting down of the World Trade Organization’s web site the previous year and the break-in to Microsoft’s source code created interest, as one Houston Chronicle headline puts it, around the idea of *'Hacktivists' Breaking in, But Now for Social Reasons* (San Francisco Chronicle). The same article appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle with the headline, *Hacking with a Conscience is a New Trend* (Kirby).

![Figure 7](image.png)

**Figure 7.** Number of hacktivism stories in sample by year.
Table 7 is a compiled list all headlines from 2000 and offers a sense of the trend in coverage “hacktivism” received that year, which implied that because hacking could be carried out with a conscience or for a cause that the motive of the hacker mattered and therefore should, depending on the motive, be considered activism, terrorism or war. Four of the 20 headlines from 2000 use one of the search terms in the headline, which clearly distinguishes for readers that the act being covered is different from other forms of hacking. Two thousand ten marked the year that the WikiLeaks scandal broke and hackers with the group Anonymous, in support of Wikileaks, redirected their effort, referred to as “Operation Payback,” to target companies who had suspended business with or froze the accounts of WikiLeaks (Cohen). Of the 41 stories appearing in 2010, 4 of the stories also used one of the search terms in the headline.

Table 7. All hacktivism headlines from the year 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEADLINES</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Conflict has Gone Online Arab ‘Hacktivists’ Attack Jewish sites</td>
<td>HC</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mideast ‘hacktivists’ Hit Web Sites</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Napster Survive Its Brush with Legitimacy?</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge of the Smurfs</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web in Modern Age is Arena for Activism, Terrorism, Even War</td>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacktivists’ Breaking In, but Now for Social Reasons</td>
<td>HC</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Headline (section heading - Hacktivism Risks)</td>
<td>PPG</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Sites Get Heavy Traffic - Hackers Too</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacking with a Conscience is a New Trend</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countercultural World Hacks its Way into the Mainstream</td>
<td>SPT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacking for a Cause</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East War Rages on the Internet</td>
<td>SPT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo Success Ends After Entertaining Run: Hacktivist siblings crack into Napster</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackers, Security Pros Call Web attacks Vandalism Consultants Ponder Motive</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Third Straight Day, Hacker Attacks Tie Up Popular Web Sites</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web War, When Point and Shoot Becomes Point and Click</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Due to the sheer number of hacking related events and the inconsistency in how terms are used across coverage, as well as the fact that very few acts of hacktivism carried a designated name for the event, a chronological list of specific acts of hacktivism that were referenced or covered during the 13 ½ year period from which this sample was taken is difficult to produce. An article found in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette covered the use of hacktivism to attack NATO and other sites during the war in the Balkans in 1999 noting that “this type of protest has been around since 1995, when hackers became politicized to support convicted hacker Kevin Mitnick,” but that this (1999) was the first time it was being used during an international conflict (Hartigan). In the explanation of hacktivism the author stresses that “most electronic civil disobedience is illegal in the United States” and that there “is no precedent that governs such conduct” (Hartigan). Some other examples of hacking that were frequently classified as “hacktivism” or as involving “hacktivists” include: the Zapatistas movement, Palestinian and Israeli hackers attacking each other and the U.S., Dr. Nuker (a Pakistani hacker), Jam Echelon Day, the celebrity hacker, WikiLeaks supporters, hacking of commercial web sites Amazon, Yahoo and eBay in 2000, Pimpshiz (a Pro-Napster hacker), the hacking of the RNC website on election day, attacks on extremists sites in response to 9/11 attacks and the Jester’s attacks on Wikileaks.

Analyzing the Dimensions of News Discourse for Hacktivism

Analyzing the script, syntactical and rhetorical dimensions of the news discourse surrounding hacktivism revealed the dominant frames applied to this form of political
action serve to emphasize the contentious nature of the act and to raise questions about both the legitimacy of the act and the actor’s motives. The term “hacktivist” is explained in these stories in different, often vague, language with some explanations that emphasize the action and others that emphasize the motive, some that have positive connotations and others that are more negative in tone (see table 8). Most often, however, the term is used but with no explanation or definition provided, instead phrases like “so-called,” “would-be” and “self-described” are often used before the word “hacktivist” or “hacktivism.” Because the phrase is commonly used in a sarcastic or ironic way, the use of the modifier “so-called” in the English language almost always has a negative connotation (English Language & Usage Stack Exchange). William Safire, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, includes “so-called” in a list of sneer words like “self-proclaimed” or “would-be,” which are adjectives that put distance between the writer and the subject matter, implying that the word is being used but under protest (Safire 2). Furthermore, the dictionary definition of the phrase “so-called” notes that it can mean “falsely or improperly so named” (Merriam-Webster). In the context of hacktivism it would suggest that the author doesn’t believe that hacking can or should be carried out as a legitimate protest tactic and the prevalence of these phrases in the coverage of hacktivism contributes to the overall negative and skeptical tone of the news discourse surrounding hacktivism.
**Table 8.** Definitions and explanations of the word “hacktivist” found in sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUOTE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cyber savvy activists...also known as hacktivists</td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“hacktivist” - a computer cracker with a political or social goal</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hacktivist.” An activist who hacks into sites.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Villeneuve considers himself a &quot;hacktivist&quot; - an activist who</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses technology for political ends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insider term for this: &quot;hacktivist,&quot; or hacker plus activist</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hacktivists&quot; are internet activists who shut down websites and</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cause other digital trouble to make a political point.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a &quot;hacktivist,&quot; which is basically a hacker who acts out of activist</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hacktivists.” These are activists who may not like a certain</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company or government agency, and they are very sophisticated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the coverage hacktivists are either lumped together with a group, such as Pro-Israeli hackers, Electrohippies or Zapatista Rebels, or singled out specifically by name, usually with their screen name, as in the case of Dr. Nuker, Pimpshiz and the Jester. Emphasis is often placed on the participants’ technological skill and whether or not the type of hacking or technological strategy used is “sophisticated.” For example, a USA Today article interviewed a computer security official who was quoted as saying that he “agrees with the assessment that [the attacks in question] are fairly sophisticated attacks” (Zuckerman). The terms “cyber,” “digital” or “electronic” are frequently is used in front of other terms when characterizing the participants and their actions. They are used as an adjective or prefix to words such as, “crusaders,” “desperados,” “warriors,” “trespassers,” “protesters,” “army,” “terrorists,” “punks,” “criminals,” “vandals” and “vigilantes.”

In a post written in 2013 by Annalee Newitz, founding editor of the blog io9, she outlines what she deems the “bizarre evolution of the word ‘cyber’.” She explains, the
word comes from “cybernetics,” a word attributed to mathematician Norbert Weiner in the 1940’s, which he used to refer to the futuristic idea that someday there “would be a computer system that ran on feedback,” essentially a “self-governing system” (Newitz). Weiner borrowed from the Greek word “cyber,” meaning skilled in steering or governing. But, the prefix “cyber” did not become popular until the cyberpunk movement of the 1980’s, spurred in part by William Gibson’s dystopic novel _Neuromancer_. Newitz interviewed Richard Holden, a lexicographer with the Oxford English Dictionary whose research of the word “cyber” found that it was in the 1990’s where the word “underwent rapid diversification,” likely due to the invention of the World Wide Web (Newitz). Ben Zimmer, a linguist who writes for The Wall Street Journal points out that the “seemingly incongruous ideas of cybersex and cyberwar grew up side by side” during this time (Newitz). In the days before the internet was widely accepted and used by people, Newitz notes that “adding the prefix cyber to something made it seem like it was taking place in the gleaming, pixelated world inhabited by futuristic youth” (Newitz). An article in the New York Magazine in 1996 contends that, “Cyber is such a perfect prefix because nobody has any idea what it means, it can be grafted onto any old word to make it seem new, cool – and therefore strange, spooky” (Davis). According to Holden, use of the word has narrowed over the last decade. Now it is almost entirely belongs to the military and, outside of the military context, its primary uses are considered negative, which is consistent with the findings of this research (Newitz).

The word “cyber” appears throughout the news discourse and is used in various ways becoming an influential element of the frame. It can be found as a prefix used to describe or characterize the actor and the target, as well as the act and its consequences,
The term “cyber,” in some form or another, appeared over 200 times in this sample.

The age and gender of the hacker is also frequently referenced and emphasis is placed on how young the person is, which it is implied, is either a reason to be impressed by their skills or a reason not to take them seriously. In reference to the hacking carried out by Arabs and Jews during the ground war in Israel and the West Bank in 2000 a St. Petersburg Times reporter notes “While some Internet experts and government officials in Israel and the United States dismiss this electronic terrorism as boys-will-be-boys pranks, others are seriously monitoring it” (Maxwell). The quotes in table 9 come from articles in this sample and serve as further example of the emphasis placed on age (specifically the young age of the actors), and that they are generally male.

References to screen names, the use of prefixes such as “cyber” or “digital” and emphasis on the age and gender of participants in the news discourse contributes to the dominant framing of actors as nerds or people on the fringes of society. Some accounts even explicitly describe participants as nerds, “What I’m seeing in my nerd brethren is an increasing combativeness, a loss of empathy, and creepiness…It’s just another supremacy movement, ultimately. It just happens to be nerd supremacy” (Sarno). In yet another story on the NBC Nightly News, a clip from Comedy Central’s “The Colbert Report” is played describing participants in the group Anonymous as a “global hacker nerd brigade” (Isikoff). Explicit use of the word “nerd” occurs in 4 news stories from this sample and use of the word “geek” in 5, but much of the language used to describe participants contributes to the framing of them as nerds or geeks without necessarily using the words, as can be seen in the quotes in Table 9.
Table 9. Examples from sample of references made to the age and gender of the actor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUOTE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a 26 year-old University of Toronto dropout calling himself Perl Bailey</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>international teams of teen-agers with cyber pseudonyms like Milworm and causes like anti-imperialism</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretos, a Portugese hacker in his early 20's whose group, the Kaotik Team</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one member of Team Spl0it, an 18 year old resident of the east coast who goes by the handle f0bic</td>
<td>PPG</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Priest' was 18 years old when he was caught hacking into a corporate computer system and given the choice of going to jail or taking a job as a &quot;security consultant&quot; with the company he attacked.</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackers, according to experts, tend to be white, middle-class boys who are socially awkward, quite bright, mechanically proficient and curious -- but not malicious.</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a group of individuals with a broad range of skills, sometimes quite juvenile, other times highly organized</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The practice is popular among the young, opinionated and disaffected.</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it's mostly the younger people</td>
<td>HC</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is the 21st century, the world of technology belongs to us, says a 21-year-old computer security worker from Ohio who uses the name Hackah Jak.</td>
<td>USAT</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 year old hacker took responsibility for hacking into Twitter</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 28 year old computer science student at the University of Toronto</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He's a young guy, just 18, and we're trying to channel his talent in a positive way.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That's very typical of juvenile hackers…they usually have that superior belief of themselves.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was assumed by cyber cynics that, as soon as this teen hacker got a job or a girlfriend, his hacking days would cease.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activists include computer industry professionals as well as teenage geeks. (Hacktivismo's youngest member lives in India and says he is 15 years old.) Most are in their 20's and 30's.</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They suspect Lyttle, 18, of being one-half of a so-called patriotic defacement team called &quot;The Deceptive Duo.&quot;</td>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige, a young collective that takes obsolete computer technology as its medium</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 year old</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 year old boy</td>
<td>LAT</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 year old David Kernell</td>
<td>LAT</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Blood( their spokesman), and he is 22 years old</td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He's only 16 years of age.</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-year-old male is also being questioned in connection with the inquiry</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-year-old man has been arrested in Scotland on suspicion of being linked to computer hacking groups Anonymous and LulzSec</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-year-old</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ripped off by a 16-year-old girl and her friends</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the men, ages 24 and 20</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-nine years old, a cocky college dropout, Brown calls himself a senior strategist for Anonymous.</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the stories analyzed, the consequences for participants in hacktivism are primarily measured by the media in legal terminology and punishment received. Words like “arrest,” “charge,” and “investigate” permeate the coverage, as do references to the number of years in prison someone faces if convicted or amount of fines paid. Three examples that emphasize the punishment hackers receive include the following, “Chaney has been indicted on nine counts of computer hacking for gain, eight counts of aggravated identify theft, and nine counts of illegal wiretapping,” or, “His career as Pimpshiz ended abruptly in December 2000, when federal and local investigators raided his home and seized his computers,” and lastly, “Police in Britain, the United States and elsewhere have made a number of arrests of suspected "hacktivists" in recent weeks” (CNN Wire Staff; McManis; CNN Wire Staff).

Quotes related to the concerns surrounding hacktivism’s legality and morality help to explain why there is such emphasis on measuring the consequences for the actors in these terms, but also highlight the tension it creates. In an interview related to the subject of “hacktivism” with Professor Marc Cooper of USC’s Annenberg School that appeared in the LA Times he notes, "Whatever the legality and morality, I think it has an undeniable Robin Hood type of resonance with lots of people" (Sarno). It is stressed in a separate article, however, that the motive of the hacker doesn’t change the punishment, "It may be an act of conscience, it may even be an appropriate act of conscience to that person, but that doesn't transform it into a protected activity," said Barry Steinhardt former president of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and associate director of the ACLU (Christenson). Also noted was that, “Federal prosecutor’s turn a blind eye as to why a hacker is breaking into a computer, even if they call themselves a hacktivist”
(Barack). Measuring the outcome of hacktivism in these terms further highlights its contentiousness and the uncertainty surrounding its use, but also serves as a potential deterrent, keeping others from participating out of fear of the legal risks involved, further contributing to the sense that those who do participate in such acts are deviants at the fringes of society.

Based on this sample the websites of corporations appear to be the most common targets of hacktivism, or as targets are most likely to receive media attention when hacked. The websites of Visa, Mastercard, Amazon, PayPal, Ebay, Facebook, Twitter, McDonalds, Starbucks and Monsanto have all been targets of hacktivists. Hacktivism has also been employed on an international scale to target organizations such as NATO, the WTO and the Church of Scientology, as well as countries like Sweden, China, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. This analysis revealed that the consequences of hacktivism for the targets were most frequently measured in dollars lost and bad publicity or harm to reputation for being vulnerable to attacks.

Hacktivism was framed as both an idea as much as an act or event. An act was labeled “hacktivism” or an actor a “hacktivist” even if the specific act of protest did not actually involve hacking. Emphasis tended to be placed instead on the motive of the actor rather than on the technical definition of the act that was carried out. As noted by a hacker turned member of the Homeland Security Advisory Council, “Hacking is sort of a skill set – it’s neutral. You can be a criminal hacker or you can be a noncriminal hacker” (Sutter). Distributed denial of service attacks, scraping, spear fishing, domain name server attacks, pseudo proxy, typo squatting and leaking data were all labeled or implied to be acts of “hacktivism” in the news discourse analyzed. Regardless of whether or not
the act is considered hacking or hacktivism the word “attack” is used more often than any other to describe the nature of the act, including the phrase “cyber-attack.” The word “attack” appears at least 182 times in the sample of text taken from the articles that was coded as the “what” in the script dimension of news.

Acts of hacktivism are given less serious labels ranging from graffiti, defacement, pranksterism and mischief to more serious ones such as sabotage, cyber-war, terrorism and guerilla-warfare. Being further characterized as something to fear by words such as “illegal,” “subversive,” “malicious,” and “dangerous.” However, throughout the news discourse there is uncertainty about when and how to use the term “hacktivism,” and how to know if an act of hacking can or should be labeled hacktivism. The same event may be covered by two different newspapers, one that labels the act one of hacktivism and another that only refers to it as hacking. This fact is reflected in a 2001 article that raises questions about the “loosely defined mashing of hacking and activism” by asking, “Is it hacktivism when an environmental activist uses a Web site and email to organize a protest? Is it hacktivism when a computer-savvy ‘patriot’ sends an e-mail ‘bomb’ that overloads a Serbian government computer system?” (Berdik). The author notes that there are those “who would answer yes to both questions” (Berdik). The article further points out that even among hacktivists there is debate and disagreement about what is and is not hacktivism, creating even more uncertainty and confusion.

From a technical perspective DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks are most commonly labeled “hacktivism” by the media, even though no actual hacking (in the narrow sense of the word) is required by the user for a DDoS attack to occur. FloodNet, a “hacking tool” created by the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, is a program
that “repeatedly asks a targeted Web page to reload, and when used simultaneously by enough protesters, it overpowers and ‘floods’ the site, preventing it from being accessed by others, thus resulting in a distributed denial of service” (Berdik). However, Oxblood Ruffin, founder of the hacktivist group Cult of the Dead Cow, “believes that DDoS attacks like FloodNet are a violation of free speech rights” and therefore is not a proponent of them (Berdik). On the other hand, Ricardo Dominguez, co-founder of the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, the creators of FloodNet, argues that DDoS attacks are a kind of “virtual sit-in,” which get “democratic legitimacy” from the fact that they are inefficient and because of “the group’s refusal to be anonymous” (Berdik). Other specific software applications used by hacktivists that were referenced at least once throughout the news discourse include: Peekabooty, Low Orbit Canon, XerXes, Six/Four, Freenet, Camera Shy (steganography), Trinoo, Tor, Speak to Tweet, HTTPS Everywhere, Psiphon and CryptoSMS. One article in particular entitled “Starting a Revolution with Technology” was devoted to explaining how some of these programs work, specifically ones used by activists in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain (LaMonica and Fixel).

Hacktivism, and hacking more generally, are framed as being dangerous and as having primarily negative consequences for society, but again, there are differing opinions depending on whether one is more concerned with democracy or with capitalism. A few think hacktivism is of no consequence to society at large. A San Diego Union Tribune article from 2001 claims that skeptics of hacktivism “believe the dominance of such technology-centered issues will keep hacktivism a parochial concern, practiced by and for hackers, with little impact on mainstream society” (Berdik). Those who argue for the potential positive consequences from the use of hacktivism tactics
however, see the internet as “an intrinsically collective medium” that presents “another frontier for people to engage in these type of [protest] activities,” as well as a place where the fusion of performance and politics can occur that will “transform both in ways that we are just beginning to imagine” (Cotter; Mirapaul). Amitai Etzioni, a professor of sociology at George Washington University, was interviewed for a piece on the use of hacking during the Middle East conflict in 2000 (Schwartz). The journalist writes, “Perhaps wishfully, [Etzioni] says [cyberattacks] move people from the battlefield and into the virtual world, from war, with its real bullets and blood, to pretend war with its computer game casualties” (Schwartz). These quotes represent the outlying opinions found in the coverage regarding the consequences hacktivism presents for society, but are important for understanding the contrast and debate that exists. The vast majority of opinions represented in this sample suggest that hacktivism is dangerous and should be seen as a threat to our individual and collective safety. At the heart of the debate is information, access to it, uses of and control over it. Four themes emerge in the media’s coverage of the potential consequences hacktivism poses for society: anonymity, security of data, power and privacy (see table 10).
Table 10. Quotes from hacktivism coverage suggesting potential implications of the internet organized by theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications of Anonymity</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least in traditional guerrilla warfare you may not know who the individuals are or where they are, but at least you know it's an attack by the Viet Cong or an attack by the Shining Path.</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It could just as easily be the government or a group of junior high school kids.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And that's one of the problems with the Internet, is that when you let people be anonymous, they might do things they wouldn't otherwise do.</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Determining exactly who is responsible for the cyber attacks is difficult given hacker's skill at covering their tracks. | PPG | 2010 |
| In cyber attacks, it's almost always impossible to determine the origins of an attack unless it's perpetuated by the slip of the tongue on the part of the attacker. | CNN.com | 2010 |
| the whole problem of identifying members of Anonymous, or LulzSec, and prosecuting them for committing various hacking crimes such as shutting down websites. | CNN.com | 2011 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications for Security</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She worries more about hackers lifting vital information from home computers than someone yanking secrets from classified databases, which are not tied directly to the Internet.</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warned that ordinary citizens who are using the Internet to communicate on their own political opinions legally should be careful</td>
<td>PPG</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do you the favor of attacking you so often that you have a chance to build up protection….hacktivism could help military organizations prepare for the worst.</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If war is hell, cyberwar could turn out to be cyberhell. And we're only beginning to discover what that means.</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer security experts say it is difficult to know how many hacking attempts have been related to the Sept. 11 attacks because hacking is so prevalent on the Internet</td>
<td>HC</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the threat of websites being compromised by hackers has been great enough to cause the FBI to issue two warnings about &quot;threatened vigilante hacking activity&quot;</td>
<td>HC</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notices were sent not just to companies, but to consumers as well since home computers can be easily hijacked by a hacker even in a different country.</td>
<td>NYP</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show you why all the candidates are vulnerable to what some call political hacktivism and how it could wind up costing you</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may wind up looking at something that seems very real, but it's designed to victimize you.</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but if you add up all the webpages and social networking sites they add up to 85,000 new unique threats a day</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has shown us how impervious and at the same time vulnerable the Internet is</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications for Power</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>political forces which could not take on the United States in conventional military terms stand a better change on an electronic battlefield</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as dependency on the Internet increases, cyberwarriors will do real damage. Businesses will collapse if customers can't reach them online, power grids might be brought down with a mouse click.</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threatening the emerging Internet economy</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of the Internet is that you can't always control it.</td>
<td>SDU</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts believe in the future there will be more and more of these incidents, and that they could undermine online fund raising and competence in our political system itself.</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raises the question of how much damage someone or some group could cause for a society ever more reliant on the Internet.</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Internet is a hard thing to contain.</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it also felt unprecedented, like these attacks were a new way to rattle core institutions of the American economy</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology being where it is, it allows people to fight back.</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Implications for Privacy</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A hacker could find the e-mail addresses of CIA workers, Meinell said, then sneak into their personal computers and obtain data brought home from the office.</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradox is that rise in social networking sites we have become more comfortable and proficient about putting personal info online.</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today, these details are laid out for everyone to read, digitized and accessible with a quick keyword search.</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has a camera on them all the time</td>
<td>CNN.com</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The syntactic dimension of news discourse is concerned with the structural elements of a story, such as headlines, as well as with the rules of source attribution that inform the use of sources and data by journalists (van Dijk). Quoting certain sources and points of view can give authority to a certain point of view while potentially marginalizing others (Pan and Kosicki). For this reason all quotes and their sources were identified and categorized (see figure 8). There were a total of 289 quotes identified in the hacktivism sample. The two most commonly quoted types of sources were network security experts (including hackers turned security experts) and law enforcement officials, accounting for 39% of all the quotes. Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer at the F-Secure Computer Security Company, and Kent Anderson, vice president of computer security with the London-based Control Risks Group, were the most quoted security experts across all stories. Representatives from the FBI were the most frequently quoted law enforcement officials. The hackers turned security experts seemed to be of particular interest to journalists. Specifically, Kevin Mitnick, “the world’s most famous hacker,” was quoted in three different articles as an expert on the subject of hacking and “cyber security” (Velshi). Two other individuals of this nature were also quoted at least once. Oxblood Ruffin and Ricardo Dominguez were the most frequently quoted hacktivists. The only scholar to be quoted more than once in this sample was John Perry Barlow, a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for the Internet and Society, but also described as “one of the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and a cyberlibertarian activist” (Kurtz). With regard to gender, sources were coded as either male, female or unidentifiable/nongendered. For hacktivism, 33 (28%) of the 289 total sources were coded as female, whereas 193 (67%) were male with 63 being
unidentifiable/nongendered. The five most frequently quoted sources in the hacktivism coverage where male, all were quoted 4 or more times.

Due to the controversial and complicated nature of Julian Assange and his role in the Wikileaks scandal, he was not classified as a particular type of source. The “other” category represents character witnesses who were interviewed and asked to comment on their perceptions of Bradley Manning, the Marine responsible for disclosing classified documents to Wikileaks, and Julian Assange.

**Figure 8.** Type of sources quoted across all hacktivism stories in sample.

With regard to the rhetorical dimension of news discourse two contrasting spatial metaphors appear in the coverage of hacktivism during this period: the internet as
battlefield and the internet as playground. In a 1998 article outlining the unlikely partnership between hackers and activists, Harmon accounts for the intersection of them by noting that, “The rapid growth of the Internet has transformed what was once a hacker’s playground into, among other things, a far reaching political platform. What’s more, the tricks invented by hackers have become easier for activists to learn and adopt” (Harmon). In his coverage of the Middle East conflict in 2000 Schwartz wrote, “The online world has entered a new phase. At first it was a combination playground, library and meeting house for scientists and soldiers, an inviolate virtual world. Companies later tried to turn it into a mall. Now, it’s becoming a borderless battlefield” (Schwartz). Ten years later in a story about “the fight over Wikileaks” a CBS news National Security Analyst explains, “The internet is a global backbone for commerce, for communication. And I don’t think we’ve come to grips with individuals using it as a playfield and a battlefield in their political causes” (Zarate). Both the playground and battlefield metaphors speak to how the act, the actors and the consequences are contextualized and understood.

While both metaphors are present, the battlefield metaphor dominates the frame. In keeping with the battlefield metaphor other metaphors reinforce the association of hacktivism with war, such as “newest front,” “fallout,” “battle,” “casualty,” “launch,” “attack,” “hit,” “strikes, “target” and “army.” One journalist describes the actions of hacktivists who declared an “e-jihad” or “hacker holy war” over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the late 1990’s as “lobb[ing] virtual grenades at internet sites” (Wolfe). Further perpetuating the war comparison, the computer and the software used by hacktivists are likened to weapons as seen in the following examples. In reference to
hacktivists associated with Wikileaks one CNN correspondent states that, “They have a scary-sounding weapon…the low-orbit ion canon” (Todd). Also in reference to the attack on credit card company’s by Wikileaks hacktivists an LA Times article wrote, “The weapon: a battery of personal computers (Sarno). In that same article the reporter similarly describes the software used, “The attackers made use of a specially designed hacker weapon dubbed the ‘Low Orbit Ion Canon’ after a space laser in the ‘Star Wars’ movies (Sarno).

The phrase “zombie army” combines metaphorical references and is used in stories across three different news outlets to explain how hacktivists carry out their plan, suggesting a kind of nonhuman mindless conformity. A CBS report regarding “Operation Payback,” the name given to the attack on credit card companies by Wikileaks supporters, explains that hacktivists have “form[ed] a so-called zombie army of robo or slave computers that bombard the main frames of target companies” (Phillips). An article found in both the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the LA Times explains how a distributed denial of service attack works by using the zombie army metaphor, “Skilled hackers install tiny programs called botnets in hundreds of thousands of computers that can be activated on command, turning a chain of home desktops and company servers around the world into what hackers call a ‘zombie army’” (Bennett). The “flood” metaphor is, however, the one most frequently used to explain the consequences of a DDoS event. The metaphors “swamp,” “clog,” and “jam” are also used in conjunction with the flood metaphor to reinforce the type of overwhelming disruption and destruction caused by DDoS events.
The metaphor of white hat vs. black hat hackers is also used explicitly in at least three different stories and alluded to in others through cowboy references to denote the motive of the hacker and imply that a tension between good and evil exists in the world of hackers, and that ultimately, the motive of the hacker matters. In a 2011 interview Michael Calce (a.k.a Mafiaboy), billed as the “most famous, or infamous, computer hacker ever,” was asked to comment on the hacking done by Anonymous and Luzsec in response to Wikileaks (Gross). He states, “They’re a different bread. They’re considered ‘hacktivists.’ They hack for a lot of political reasons. They believe information should be free. But some of them do have malicious intent. It’s really hard to classify them in the white-, black-, or gray-hat hacking, but if I had to pick one, I’d probably go with gray. And you’re going to see a lot more of these groups” (Gross). Nine years earlier Robert Lyttle (a.k.a Pimpshiz) was arrested for being “one-half of a so-called patriotic defacement team called the Deceptive Duo” (McManis). When asked to comment on the case a representative from the D.A.’s office stated, that Lyttle’s “patriotic claim is at best disingenuous and at worst a cynical lie…People say that he is a ‘white hat’ hacker trying to expose the flaws in the system, but, you know, the analogy I’d use is, our children have weaknesses and can be exposed, but we don’t go around kidnapping them just to prove there are holes in children’s security” (McManis). In a different but related article about Lyttle he is quoted as saying, “I’ve always used my knowledge for good instead of evil…All hackers aren’t outlaws…Sometimes hackers have to be faceless, because that’s the only way they can expand their knowledge without being hassled by unjust laws…It is extremely hard to live a legal life on the internet” (McManis). These quotes demonstrate that the use of the white hat vs. black hat hacker metaphor is of significance
because it is a mechanism by which a hacker’s motives are called into question and challenged, while also suggesting that either good or evil forces are at work.

Similarly, over the course of 11 years the David vs. Goliath comparison is made in three different articles in reference to three separate hacktivism examples, the Pakistani hacktivist Dr. Nuker (1999), an anti-Chinese censorship hacktivist and member of Hacktivismo, Nart Villeneuve (2002), and Operation Payback (2010) (see table 11). The use of this metaphor suggests that hacktivists are the underdog, taking on a powerful adversary, which can either be interpreted as brave or foolish, but also that hacking as a tool has the potential to challenge large and powerful entities.

Table 11. Examples of David and Goliath comparisons found in hacktivism coverage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUOTE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This clearly is a David vs. Goliath battle and they could amass enough strength to knock over a big Web site for a big company, at least temporarily.</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of their David versus Goliath struggles can be difficult to gauge.</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He may not have the size or the strength of the Goliath, but if you have that slingshot, if you have that ability to hack, then your statement could be very powerful.</td>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The potency of the slingshot approach is not lost on would-be hacktivists.</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When not framed as an act of war or violence through metaphor, hacking is framed as, at the very least, criminal through the metaphors used to characterize the action of hacktivists. Using the same language that describes the literal and physical act of breaking into buildings by criminals hacktivists are accused of “breaking-in” to systems. Hacktivists also “take down,” “crack,” “cripple,” “hi-jack,” “disable,” “deface” and “shut down.” In contrast to the war metaphors suggesting hacking results in life and
death consequences, these metaphors imply that hacking is destructive, and perhaps criminal, but not necessarily violent.

The Influence of Placement and Headlines

Using Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr and Legnante’s multidimensional approach stories were classified as either hard or soft news based on the section, type of program and tone of presentation. Eight-seven percent of the stories in the hacktivism sample were coded as hard news stories, contributing to the sense of seriousness with which hacktivism is taken by the media. The stories in print (newspaper and online) that used the terms “hacktivist” and/or “hacktivism” were most frequently found in the Business or Technology sections, 18 and 16 articles respectively, accounting for a little over a quarter of the stories in this sample (see fig. 9). Nine stories from this sample were found in the A-section of the newspaper, which is the front section of the paper often believed to contain those stories which editors consider to be the most important or relevant. Hacktivism related stories were also found in a significant number of editorial/commentary sections suggesting that disagreement and debate surround its use therefore generating some amount of controversy worthy of editorializing. It was also the subject of or a topic mentioned in 13 talk shows (TV and radio) during which people are often interviewed and ask to share their perspective and opinion on a specific topic. While some aspects of the coverage suggest that the media are uncertain about hacktivism and its acceptability as a form of protest, the placement of stories would suggest that it is generally treated as hard news, something worthy of debate that should
be taken seriously, particularly in a business or technical context. The prevalence of stories found under the heading of World or International News also suggests that hacktivism, and hacking more broadly, have implications on a global scale.

![Figure 9](image.png)

**Figure 9.** Number of hacktivism stories in sample by section or type of story.

As a mechanism for piquing readers’ interest and informing them about the world, the frequent use of certain words in the headlines of hacktivism related stories provide an indication of the media’s characterization of where and how the act occurred, the nature of the act and who was responsible for it (Babb 29). One of the search terms appear in 17 of the 121 headlines, with “hacktivist” occurring 14 times and “hacktivism” 3. Five of the 20 thematic stories used one of the search terms in the headline. Not including the 17 headlines that used one of the search terms, twenty headlines used the word “hacker” in
the headline, even if the search term was used in the story. Eighteen of the 121 headlines referenced WikiLeaks specifically. Thirteen headlines used the word “attack” and 10 headlines used the prefix “cyber,” such as cyberwar, cyber-attack, cyberspying, cyber-criminals, cyber arms race and cyber-dissidents. “Cyberwar” appeared 4 times and “cyber-attack” twice. The frequent appearance of certain words is demonstrated in a word cloud using the newspaper headlines from stories in this sample (see fig. 10). Common English words were removed and all words were made lower-case. The size of the word indicates its frequency.

Figure 10. Word cloud created using text from newspaper headlines from hacktivism coverage.
Findings for Hacktivism Coverage

A qualitative frame analysis of the news discourse surrounding hacktivism finds that the majority of coverage (83%) received by hacktivism related events is episodic in nature and is, therefore, focused on specific and discrete details of the event such as the age of the actor and the consequences of the act for both the actor and the target. However, some normative concerns are raised about the use of hacktivism, ranging from the ethicality to the legality of its use. The subtle, but frequent, use of modifiers such as “so-called,” “self-described,” and “would be” suggest that a skeptical and cynical attitude exists in news discourse regarding the legitimacy of hacktivism as a protest tactic. The inconsistent use of the term “hacktivism” and the lack of a shared definition for the term emerge as key elements of the frame through which it is covered by the main stream media, thus contributing to the uncertain and skeptical tone of the coverage.

At the syntactic, script and rhetorical dimensions of news discourse emphasis is placed on concerns regarding security and legality through the heavy use of quotes from law enforcement and security experts as official sources, as well as through the use of the battlefield metaphor. Both contribute to the criminalization and militarization of all hacking related activities. These aspects of the discourse further perpetuate the contentiousness around hacking, as well as the idea that all hacking should be feared or seen as an act of war or terrorism, rather than as a form of dissent or resistance. However, the placement and tone of the coverage related to hacktivism suggests that it is viewed as hard news, with serious economic and political implications.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Comparing the frames found in news discourse over the course of more than fifteen years in the coverage of two different online direct action tactics, virtual marches and hacktivism, revealed the unique challenges each tactic has faced in establishing legitimacy as a form of political participation and dissent. The combining of qualitative discourse analysis and frame analysis methods was an effective means by which to assess the nature of mainstream media coverage. This research finds that despite being different in their contentious nature, the external attention these two protest tactics have received in the form of mainstream media discourse serves to delegitimize, marginalize and stigmatize participants, as well as the online direct action tactics they employ. The framing devices used by the media delegitimize and marginalize the actors who participate in the act, as well as the act itself by explicitly raising or implying normative concerns and ideological biases. What follows is a comparison of the coverage each tactic received, as well as a discussion of the implications of these findings and what they might mean for the future of online direct action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism.

Comparing News Discourse

While the online direct action tactics of virtual marches and hacktivism may be relatively new to the repertoire of contention, the media frames found in the coverage during the first decade of their use are not. As previously argued, the most regularly used frames by the media in their coverage of social movements and protests serve to delegitimize protestors and their cause (McLeod and Hertog). This research finds the
same to be true for the online direct action tactics of virtual marches and hacktivism. In fact, three of the most regularly used frames identified by McLeod and Hertog dominate the coverage of hacktivism as well: the violent crime frame, the Romper Room frame and the storm watch frame. The overall framing of virtual marches, however, falls into the futility frame. In the coverage of virtual marches specifically, a new frame emerged as well: the celebrity frame. This frame was also used to delegitimize the event and the actors by challenging whether or not celebrity opinions matter, and served as the basis on which coverage of virtual marches was frequently designated as soft news.

Sixteen percent of the virtual march stories were found in sections or programs that are generally believed to contain soft news, while almost half of the total virtual march articles were coded as soft news. Only three virtual march articles were found in the Business or Technology sections. In contrast, over a quarter of stories in the hacktivism sample were found in Business or Technology sections of the news, sections generally thought to contain hard or serious news. Similarly, 7% of hacktivism stories were found in the A-section of newspapers compared to 4% of virtual march stories. Twice as many hacktivism stories were coded as thematic as were virtual march stories, which further reinforces that hacktivism is taken more seriously by main stream media than virtual marches. This difference may be, in part, related to the fact the virtual marches during this period were primarily used to target the government, whereas hacktivism typically targeted corporations, aligning with Boggs’ notion of corporate colonization, or the idea that corporation have become the “dominant powers of the new millennium” (Boggs; DeLuca and Peeples 126). While hacktivism may be taken more
seriously by the mass media, that does not mean, however, that it is framed as a legitimate form of political participation.

On the rhetorical or stylistic dimension of news discourse the metaphors used as framing devices for each tactic are a particularly powerful factor in how the discourse delegitimizes and stigmatizes the tactics, as are the use of seemingly inconsequential modifiers such as “so-called” and the placement of news stories in sections that are considered soft or hard news. Because metaphors are pervasive and exist in language, as well as in thought and action, our conceptual system is largely metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson). Therefore, “the way we think, what we experience and what we do every day is a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson 3). In the case of hacktivism the predominant metaphors used by the media serve to criminalize and militarize the tactic calling into question its legitimacy as a nonviolent protest tactic. The news discourse for virtual marches, however, calls into question the tactic’s legitimacy by using metaphors that imply that virtual marches are a nuisance and cause temporary disruption, but no long term consequences. These subtle elements of news discourse are influential in contributing to the acceptance of these tactics. Understood as “generally symbolic and persuasive,” media have the power to influence the understanding and opinions of readers, meaning that the influential nature of the media and its use of metaphor deserves close scrutiny (van Dijk 10).

Furthermore, a comparison of news discourse reveals a gendered aspect to the framing of online direction tactics. With regard to the syntactic dimension of news discourse there was a gender gap found in the sources used and cited, both within and between virtual march and hacktivism coverage. Of the 306 sources cited in the virtual
march coverage, 100 (33%) were coded as female, 189 (62%) as male and 17 as unidentifiable/nongendered (see figure 11). Of the 2 most quoted sources in the virtual march coverage one was male and one was female. There were 12 different sources quoted 3 or more times in the coverage, of those 12, 4 quotes were from women and 8 were from men. For hacktivism, however, only 33 (28%) of the 289 total sources were coded as female, whereas 193 (67%) were male with 63 being unidentifiable/nongendered. The five most frequently quoted sources in the hacktivism coverage where male, all of whom were quoted 4 or more times. The overwhelming representation of men in the hacktivism coverage compared to the slightly more gender-balanced nature of virtual march coverage raises further questions about whether or not the soft news nature of virtual march coverage may be connected to the perception of it as being a more feminine tactic than hacktivism.

![Source Gender](image)

**Figure 11.** Comparison by gender of the sources used in virtual march coverage versus hacktivism coverage.
The identification of a gender imbalance at the syntactical dimension of news discourse would suggest that the actions taken by men are perceived by the mainstream media as more threatening to the hegemonic institutions in society and, therefore, carry greater potential political implication. Gender maybe another factor used by the media to delegitimize certain tactics by implying that they are less threatening or contentious because of women’s participation, which would be consistent with past findings regarding the types of frames used by the media in their coverage of social movements, as well as with findings in social movement literature related to social movement participation.

Traditionally, women have struggled to organize and participate in both women’s movements and mixed-gendered movements. This is in large part due to the fact that, “fueled by the ideology of ‘separate-spheres’ - the identification of public life as the proper realm of the “male” and domestic life as the proper realm of the “female,” both the public and political sphere have been, and to some extent still are, constructed as male spaces (Roth and Horan). Similarly, the internet, and technology more generally, are considered to belong in the male domain, further reinforcing the masculinization of online direct action tactics. As Douglas Thomas points out, “hacking is very much a ‘boy culture’ in its emphasis on notions of mastery, competition, and subordination” (Thomas xvi).

Sociologist Verta Taylor argues, “A growing body of feminist research demonstrates that gender is an explanatory factor in the emergence, nature, and outcomes of all social movements” (Taylor 8). The heavy representation and involvement of women in virtual marches raises potentially important questions for social movements
regarding women’s participation in movement actions. This research provides support for Verta’s argument that, “Linking theories of gender to mainstream theories on social movements allows us to recognize gender as a key explanatory factor in social movements and, in turn, to identify the role that social movements play in the social construction of gender” (8). The ability to express grievances and participate in a movement through the internet could mean that the internet reduces the “barriers to participation” faced by women in particular by increasing their “structural availability” (Klanderman and Oegema; Rochford). Structural availability, or the extent to which social roles or “a lack of alternative commitments and obligations might limit an individual’s ability to participate,” has been identified as a “critical factor in social movement recruitment” and mobilization (Rochford; Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford). The relationship between gender and certain online direct action tactics presents an area ripe for further study.

While it may be true that, thanks to new digital technology, “social movement actors have access to innovative media outlets that help nurture a new political terrain,” the fate of social movements is still, at least somewhat, tied to their relationship with the mainstream media (Carty 5). The framing of movements and their tactics in news discourse is a matter of not only how the public will perceive the protesters who use these tactics but also whether or not the public will support the cause of the movement and use of the tactic (McLeod and Detenber). Furthermore, the frames used have the potential to impact the protesters’ morale and self-image, in the case of hacktivism for example, as criminals and terrorists. This research would suggest that participants in virtual marches are generally framed by the mainstream media more positively than hacktivists. The
frequent use of the word “activist” when referring to participants in virtual marches implies that they are legitimate protesters (unless they are celebrities) engaging in what is a socially acceptable, though futile, tactic.

Discussion of Online Direct Action Tactics

Despite the fact that the increase in social media platforms and outlets allows social movements to bypass the mainstream media, the framing of movements and their tactics by mainstream media remains relevant. As Milan notes, “the question of infrastructure might sound trivial in times of abundant ‘free’ social media,” that allow people to “voice their opinions” for almost no cost (Milan 1). However, it must be understood that “these platforms are owned and controlled by media and telecom corporations” whose values and agenda are more focused on profit and capitalistic interests than those of “participation, empowerment, and social justice,” meaning that there is little incentive for the mass media to represent any tactic that could undermine their interests or power as politically viable or socially acceptable (Milan 1).

Since movements still rely on mainstream media to communicate their message to the public it is important to acknowledge that the well-established “protest paradigm” found in media coverage acts as a type of news template that reflects and perpetuates a pattern of marginalizing and delegitimizing protest and dissent (Chan and Lee; Lee). This is not to say that there is a conspiratorial effort to delegitimize protest tactics or that editors and journalists intentionally put capitalistic interests before democratic ones, rather established journalistic norms and paradigms are perpetuated and reinforced with
the continued use of established frames and ideological biases. Therefore, whether or not virtual marches and hacktivism are seen as a form of legitimate political participation depends, in large part, on which formulation of deliberative democracy is at play, how the “deliberative concepts of free speech and accountability” are reconciled and whether or not one accepts that deliberative democracy is even possible online (Samuel 124).

McChesney argues that we find ourselves at a “critical juncture” for media communication, an idea that can be used to help explain “how social change works” and when it is most likely to occur (66). A critical juncture in media and communication occurs when at least two of three specific conditions exist, one of which is the emergence of “a revolutionary new communication technology that undermines the existing system,” such as the internet (McChesney 67). Two other possible conditions include having the content of a media system, especially the journalism, discredited or seen as illegitimate, and/or the presence of a major political crisis (67). Any combination of at least two of these three conditions increases the likelihood of the occurrence of a critical juncture. Critical junctures last no more than one or two decades, during which time society faces a range of options far greater than it would have otherwise because all ideas are on the table. Identifying a critical juncture is of consequence because “the decisions made during such a period establish institutions and rules that put society on a course that will be difficult to change for decades or generations” (67). The findings of this research reinforce, as McChesney argues, the need to have a media system independent of both the state and dominant corporate economic institutions and also that the news discourse of the mainstream media surrounding online direct actions tactics during this critical juncture likely has had and will continue to have an influence on shaping public policy
related to the use of the internet as a viable site for contentious collective action and civil disobedience in all its possible forms (McChesney 66).

Virtual marches, for example, can take a number of different forms and can be used successfully by social movements for a variety purposes ranging from issue awareness to fundraising. The inconsistent use of virtual marches by social movements is potentially problematic, however, and may contribute to how they are framed by the media as being less relevant politically, and therefore futile. Furthermore, by simply comparing the list of virtual marches produced by a Google search with the list of virtual marches covered by the media it is evident that there is a significant discrepancy between the number of virtual marches held and the number that receive coverage from the mainstream mass media. It does, however, seem to work in favor of virtual marches that all virtual marches have a name by which the media can easily refer to the march, creating consistency across coverage in how the event is referred to, therefore, also potentially increasing the event’s name recognition, as well as issue awareness.

This was not the case for hacktivism. Not only are the acts of hacktivism themselves diverse, but the term is applied inconsistently by the mainstream media, even if the actors themselves label the act “hacktivism.” Rarely is a name given to a specific act of hacktivism. The only frequent and consistent label used by the media in reference to an act of hacktivism was Operation Payback. One other event, Jam Echelon Day, also had a name, but it was covered by only two news outlets. Based on this research it is not possible to tell whether hacktivists gave their events a name and the media chose not to use it or whether the act was not clearly named by the hacktivists to begin with. Having a
name for the event would make it easy for journalists to drop the story into a familiar news template and create consistency across coverage.

At this critical juncture, the media must make a distinction between hacking and hacktivism, which requires a clear and shared definition of hacktivism that allows journalists to label those acts appropriately. Alexandra Samuel’s hacktivism clusters and taxonomy of hacktivism are useful towards this aim as they provide a basis on which acts of hacktivism can be evaluated and explained. Using the taxonomy could prevent hacktivism from being lumped in with nonpolitically motivated forms of hacking or written off as terrorism. Samuel’s hacktivism clusters, which take into account the objective of the hacktivist, the legality of the specific tactic and their pattern of collaboration as important dimensions, include: political cracking, performative hacktivism and political coding (126). Samuel argues that being able to identify and distinguish between these “three types of hacktivists helps us understand the internal hacktivist division of key questions of free speech and accountability,” issues that are “hotly debated by in the hacktivist community as well as among deliberative democrats (133).

The issue of anonymity in hacktivism was specifically found in the news discourse analyzed for this study. Arguments in support of anonymity’s role in the deliberative process see it as both “necessary and valuable” because it encourages the free flow of ideas, and puts the focus on the speech rather than the speaker thus making it possible to “speak their conscience freely” (Samuel 136). Those in opposition to the idea that anonymity is good for democracy point to accountability, which anonymity makes impossible, as being central to “responsible behavior and responsible politics,” meaning,
therefore, that anonymity “precludes meaningful speech” (Samuel 136). Anonymity is thus either an essential component of free speech or an enemy to it. News media discourse in this study appears to favor the supposition that anonymity is detrimental to democracy, though rarely, as in the case of hacking, is identity actually binary (i.e. identifiable or not identifiable).

Society’s relationship with technology is and always will be a complicated one. During this critical juncture, as social movements experiment with and push the limits of resistance and dissent through forms of online direct action that are made possible by the internet, mainstream news discourse will, to some degree or another, influence public understanding and perception of the actors, their tactic and, ultimately, their cause. As “frames identify problems, establish their causes, offer moral judgments and recommend solutions” it is important that citizens, movement actors and lawmakers understand which ideological and normative biases are privileged in the frames used by the media (Harlow and Johnson 1361). Ultimately, the nature of news discourse will be a factor in whether or not the possibilities for deliberative, participatory democracy in the 21st century will be expanded.

Discussion of the Public Sphere

While any discursive arena that allows people to contribute to the shaping of public opinion and the building of consensus could be considered a part of the public sphere, Habermas’s ideal public sphere privileged face-to-face interaction and was characterized as a space for critical discussion, open to all, that existed outside of the control of the state, which served as a check on state power. Despite Habermas’s warning
that the commercial mass media would eventually lead to the decay of the public sphere by creating a passive public, according to McChesney, “the media have come to assume the role of the public sphere in the United States” (McChesney 66.) The logic of the public sphere argument is to emphasize the importance of having a “media system independent of both the state and the dominant corporate economic institutions” and would, therefore, necessarily reject the idea that the conditions necessary for democratic discourse and participation are present in the media and the systems they control (66). The inherent structural disincentives built into the media system make it unlikely that the media would frame any protest tactic that undermines their existing hegemonic structure as legitimate. This research reinforces that accepting the media as playing the role of the public sphere in a democratic society is problematic, as is their perpetuation of an ideal public sphere that does not exist, nor ever has, as it thereby limits what can and should be viewed as legitimate forms of political participation.

The news discourse of mainstream media analyzed in this study favored the normative ideal of Habermas’s public sphere by framing emerging online direct action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism as ineffectual or illegitimate forms of political participation. It is the nature of any industry to favor ideologies that uphold the status quo and support existing power structures, therefore the media industry benefits when citizens remain passive. Furthermore, because the “public sphere’s privileging of consensus silences dissent and condemns resistance,” it is problematic as a standard by which to evaluate any form of protest (Phillips 233). If viewed through revisions to the public sphere, such as the public screen or the networked public sphere, however, the potential
effectiveness and legitimacy of online direct action tactics like virtual marches and
hacktivism may be framed differently.

As a result of transformations to “economic/political and technological realities,
new conditions for the possibility of participatory democracy in a corporate-controlled
mass-mediated world” exist (DeLuca and Peeples 126). Furthermore, Benkler argues that
the internet’s networked architecture and the low cost of communication, mean that the
characteristics of a networked public sphere “have fundamentally altered capacity of
individuals, acting alone or with others, to be active participants in the public sphere as
opposed to passive readers, listeners, or viewers” (Benkler 212). This would suggest that
the concept of the networked public sphere “offers significant improvements over one
dominated by commercial mass media” because it “allows individuals to monitor and
disrupt the use of mass-media power, as well as organize for political action. (Benkler
215, 220).

In the early years of the internet the utopic images of “everyone a pamphleteer”
permeated the public discourse and represented the hopes people had for how democracy
and freedom would benefit from the opportunities made possible by the new technology.
While those hopes have not entirely come to fruition, Benkler argues, “Departures from
the naïve utopia are not signs that the Internet does not democratize” (Benkler 215).
Instead, these departures should be viewed as a sign that “the medium and its analysis are
maturing” (Benkler 215). Therefore, it is on the basis of the actual 20th century public
sphere, which was dominated by mass media, that we should understand internet based
participatory democracy, not the utopic ideals of Habermas or those of cyber-optimists
who heralded the democratizing nature of the internet as an inevitability. A “critical
acceptance” of the public sphere recognizes its flaws as an “exclusionary and impoverished ideal,” but maintains that it is a valuable model on which social and political theory can and should be built (DeLuca and Peeples 128).

**Concluding Remarks**

In 1992 Ganley wrote, “The computer has thus put an enormous amount of power, including political power, in the hands of multitudes of individuals” (60). Ganley’s enthusiasm is indicative of what many believed would account for the power of the computer coupled with the internet at the dawn of the 21st century, highlighting its ability to give “one individual the power of many by “multiply[ing] the amount of information gathered, and reduc[ing] the time it takes to reassemble and distribute it” (60). However, more than twenty years later the “recovering cyber-utopian,” Evgeny Morozov, argued in his book “The Dark Side of Internet Freedom: The Net Delusion,” that there is a lesson to be drawn from attempts made thus far to use the internet as a strategy for challenging authoritarian regimes and spreading democracy.

Though most efforts have produced “results that were the exact opposite of what [his] cyber-utopian self wanted” the primary lesson to be drawn, Morozov argues, is that “the internet is here to stay,” its importance will continue to grow, “and those concerned with promoting democracy need not only grapple with it but also come up with mechanisms and procedures” to prevent its use as a tool of oppression, surveillance and censorship (xv). Furthermore, changes in “economic/political and technological realities” have resulted in conditions that make possible new forms of participatory
As social movements continue to experiment with strategies that are “either Internet-enhanced or Internet-based” much of what we understand about organizing and implementing collective action in the public sphere needs to be reconsidered, retested and revised, including the concept of the public sphere ideal itself, which DeLuca and Peeples argue is an “exclusionary and impoverished normative ideal,” but one that “remains essential” (Vegh 71; DeLuca and Peeples 128). Revisions to the public sphere such as the pubic screen and the networked public sphere are necessary in order to allow the potential for online direct action tactics to establish legitimacy in the eyes of the media, public and law makers.

Perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight, we will label the early part of a the 21st century, during which time social movements have experimented with various forms of online direct action, as a “moment of madness,” when everything and anything seemed possible and out of the tumult emerged a new repertoire of contention for social movements (Tarrow). However, as Hugh’s concept of technological momentum posits, timing is everything when it comes to technology. It is in the formative years of any technology that social and cultural pressures, including news discourse, are most likely to exert influence on the shape those technological systems take. This is a point on which most determinists and constructionists would agree, which suggests that waiting for the benefit of hindsight could have striking consequences for social movement organizations, policy makers, and ultimately, for the possibility of new forms of participatory and deliberative democracy.
It is not likely that Online Direct Action tactics will ever replace traditional offline tactics, but as these worlds overlap and intersect we are likely to continue to see the invention of new tactical forms, translation of old forms into new, and the creation of hybrid forms expand both repertoires, meaning the normative consequences for society must be considered and anticipated. The mainstream media’s role in framing our perceptions and understanding of these tactics should not be underestimated. As the United States Institute for Peace’s report indicated, there is much research to be done regarding the use of these internet based protest tactics by social movements.

This study contributes to existing literature by focusing on one of the interconnected levels of analysis suggested by the U.S.I.P. in the hopes that it will contribute to a more in-depth and accurate understanding of the realities of protest and resistance and the role of media in the internet age. Our ability to reconcile the extremes of the cyber utopian/dystopian dichotomy which are pervasive in the discourse regarding technology requires as Morozov advocates, “a more realist posture” (xv). Achieving this posture requires a change in discourse, both in academia and the media. Identifying the frames embedded in the news discourse during the internet’s formative years helps to explain the role external attention has played in influencing opinions and perceptions of social movements and their online tactics, thus far. This study establishes a basis on which future studies can compare changes and trends in the news discourse and the evolution of these tactics over time.

The use of the internet to facilitate online direct action tactics raises normative questions for democratic societies on a number of different levels. Having a better understanding of how and if these normative concerns are being used as framing devices
by the media helps to reveal those issues, and influence the shape and tone of political and public discourse regarding their use. When viewing the use of the internet as a social movement tactic through the lens of the news media, the possibility of whether or not these tactics have and will achieve legitimacy in the public’s mind can also be anticipated, which if existing frames persist, is unlikely. As an under-studied area with major implications for the future of democratic societies in the internet age, this research has the potential to offer a starting point from which to make sense of this period of experimentation, a critical juncture in media communication that will influence the shape that discourse, public opinion and policy regarding how, when and if social movements use online direct action tactics like virtual marches and hacktivism in the future.
APPENDIX

The following is a list of Virtual Marches that were mentioned in the coverage analyzed (listed in chronological order). Twenty-two of the marches were mentioned only once.

The three most referenced virtual marches in the sample are indicated by asterisks.

**Virtual March on Congress sponsored by Abortion-right activists (1994)** for which “free cellular phone banks on street corners in at least a dozen cities were set up” (WSJ).

**PA Environmental Network Virtual Rally on Environmental Justice Day (1995)** explained as “a phone and fax blitz of the governor and legislators between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.” (PPG-1995)

**World AIDS Day Virtual March (1997)** described as the “first ‘virtual ’ march on Washington, enabling citizens worldwide to participate without leaving their computer screens” was a yearlong e-march that featured “speeches” by President Clinton and others (SPT-1997).

**Virtual Rally by Texas Teachers (2001)** against proposed insurance changes was organized to encourage those who couldn’t make it to Austin to lobby lawmakers to instead participate in a "virtual rally" by sending e-mails and making telephone calls (HC).

**Cyber/Virtual Rally to Support Sen. Levin’s Campaign (2002)** that involved actor Martin Sheen endorsing the candidate “during inauguration of an online ‘cyber-rally’ on Levin’s campaign Web site.” Supporters were urged to visit the site and sign up as volunteers (DN).

**WIN WITHOUT WAR VIRUAL MARCH ON WASHINGTON (2003)** sponsored by a coalition of organizations against war with Iraq.

**MOTHERS (Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights) Virtual March (2003)** asking supporters to “fax or email their members of Congress to change the current Social Security System” (STM).

**Support the Troops Cyber March (2003)** was “a message board accessible by logging onto the station's Web site at www.histar.com. Americans with laptop
computers in the Persian Gulf area have been monitoring the list of Cyber-March names” (SDUT).

**Virtual March for Victory (2003)** a website that encouraged visitors to cut and paste a message in support of President Bush’s Iraq policy and email it to congressional leaders and newspapers (LVR).

**Pacifica Station Virtual Rally (2004)** held in conjunction with the street protests against the Bush Administration during the RNC in New York. Since there was a march but no rally permit the Pacifica Station created a virtual rally by giving out “little, red, teeny button radios that just tune to their frequency so that people who want to rally can have a rally even though there isn’t a rally” (NPR).

**STOP GLOBAL WARMING VIRTUAL MARCH (2005)**

**Family Pride Coalition Virtual Rally (2005)** in response to PBS’s decision not to air a children’s show depicting a “lesbian-headed” household due to pressure from the Department of Education involved a "nationwide virtual rally," urging members to "express your outrage” at the harmful rhetoric being espoused by the Department of Education. To participate in the event, members of the group are asked to call or e-mail the education department (PPG).

**Virtual March (2006)** sponsored by MoveOn to protest US foreign policy in Sudan. (SFC)

**Virtual Rally by Numbers USA (2007)** in opposition to the immigration reform bill using cell phones, talking points and Internet-powered faxes and emails to tie up Senate phone lines (FOX).

**Supporters of Automakers Virtual March (2008)** for which the group built a site called TheEngineofDemocracy.com. “There, people [could] share their stories about how the auto industry impacts their lives. There will also be a congressional locator with contact information. The group [encouraged] people to write and call their representatives to support help for the industry.” The VM was organized instead of a caravan because interest was so high and they “didn't want to become targets for environmental groups or others” (DN).
Offroaders take on Marines Virtual Rally (2008) to protest the requisition of land used for off-roading through a four-hour "virtual rally" over the Internet billed as a way to show solidarity. Messages posted and page views during that four hour window were recorded and reported (SDUT).

Virtual March to Support the T. Boone Picken’s Energy Plan (2009) by sending emails and faxes to Washington (FOX).

Virtual March on the Hill (2009) by Shire Pharmaceuticals described as a “recent social media venture” to increase funding for inflammatory bowel disease. For every "step" a participant takes on the site's virtual Mall, Shire is donating $1 to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America (WP).

** VIRTUAL MARCH FOR LIFE (2010)

Virtual March to Support Healthcare Reform (2010) sponsored by MoveOn claimed that their “virtual march" bombarded lawmakers with more than 1 million pro-reform e-mails (WP).

March for Main Street (2010) sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as a virtual protest against the financial reform legislation being considered by Congress. Referred to as a “cyber-march,” participants could create avatars and add them to a Google map of the National Mall in Washington D.C. (WSJ).

Causes Virtual Rally on Facebook (2010) that asked users to “donate their status” to a candidate or to remind friends to vote on Election Day (CNN.com).

Virtual Rally on Facebook (2010) held by students against the closing of the Cactus Café - no explanation (NYT).


Nicaraguan Virtual March on Facebook (2011) – no explanation provided (CSM).

A Virtual March of Millions on Facebook (2011) in support of Egypt was a “Facebook public event page” that had “at least 122,000 fans ‘attending.”’ This was noted as happening in conjunction with the launch of a ‘speak-to-tweet’ service that gave protesters inside Egypt a way “to get around the shutdown of Internet access in that country” (SFC).
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Worley, S. The Internet as Protest Tactic: A Frame Analysis of Media Discourse Regarding “Hacktivism” and “Virtual Marches” presented during the Research in Progress Roundtable session at the National Communication Association annual conference in New Orleans, LA (Nov. 17-19, 2011).


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