TALKING THE TALK: DO WORDS SPEAK LOUDER THAN ACTIONS IN SOCIO-POLITICAL COMMUNITIES ON THE INTERNET?

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Declaration

The research reported in this thesis is my own, except where otherwise indicated, and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

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Abstract

This research investigated processes involved in the development of open, un-moderated on-line social-action communities, and the role those communities serve for their members and the broader movements around which they are based. Specifically, this thesis set out to explain how on-line social action movements remain functioning and viable communities despite being faced with the heterogeneity common in collectives of that form. Beginning with the general proposition that relevant on-line communities (OLCs) develop according to the same processes related to identity and consensus as their face-to-face counterparts, the first study tested the idea that social-action OLCs could develop as one of two forms – either as ‘alliances of convenience’ built around consensualised principles, or as ‘common identity groups’ primarily based around shared behaviour. The surprising finding from that study suggesting OLCs did not appear to engage in action led to Study 2 which tested the modified proposal that, over time, OLCs would change orientation from action to interaction, and that their participants would shift from judging their communities as effective in the domain of action to judging them as effective in the domain of interaction. An on-line survey and interviews with OLC participants offered partial support for this hypothesis, however also suggested that participants perceive interaction as an effective form of action in the on-line environment. A third study supported the validity of these conclusions by subjecting the original data and the key theoretical concepts to an independent audit. This new technique, detailed in this chapter, was developed initially as an additional tool to assist researchers engaging in Internet-based research, however, it is also presented as a potentially useful methodology for broader research. Study 4 further investigated the relationship between interaction and action in a prominent on-line community. This study tested the idea that an OLC would adopt an action orientation when participants could more explicitly drive the nature of their community by ranking messages based on content. Although the OLC did nominally display more of an action orientation in that context, the overall message content closely followed earlier patterns where interaction remained a major component of forum content. The final study used a fine-grained analysis of a thread of interaction related to a specific issue within an OLC to investigate the idea that participants use interaction as a mechanism to mobilise movement consensus. Although prima facie evidence of a
conversation was found, more detailed analysis revealed that the participants in the interaction were not engaging in debate or discussion. Rather, the discrete communications that made up the overall body of the message thread stood alone as sound bites about the relevant issue – there was little engagement between participants in the ‘conversation’, suggesting that movement interaction was not about consensus mobilisation. The overall body of results support the idea that OLC participants perceive interaction as a legitimate form of action, and also suggests that they do so because in an on-line context, interaction is understood to be a legitimate form of action. The key conclusion, however, is that participants appreciate that the overriding value of an OLC rests in the collective body of interaction contained in and presented by that community. Participants comprehend their interaction as a resource that presents the goals, philosophies, constituents, and actions of their movement, built from information deposited by them through their interaction. In other words, on-line communities serve, and indeed act, as ideology banks for social movements and social movement participants.
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Chapter 1: Words and actions in on-line socio-political communities: introduction and overview

Aims and focus

As the Internet extends its reach into more areas of our daily lives researchers from a range of disciplines are increasingly becoming interested in exploring both the mechanics and consequences of communication and interaction conducted online. Psychology has proved no exception to this rule, with a growing body of work about on-line interaction from researchers across all areas, including clinical, organisational, and social psychology. Interestingly, the history of psychology itself can tell us something about Internet research. Ebbinghaus (1908:1973, as cited in Boneau, 1991) wrote that “psychology has a long past, but short history”. Given the relative rapidity of the development and distribution of Internet technologies and the concomitant growth in research interest, we might say that Internet research has a short history, but long future.

My view is that an important part of that future will be driven by an interest in how groups use on-line interaction to form, develop, or enhance their objectives, ideals, and ambitions. As social psychologists, we are uniquely placed to investigate and shed light on these issues. In this thesis, my objective is to take one example of on-line social interaction and pursue that goal. I will present a program of research designed to explore the role of one form of on-line community (OLC). My interest is in on-line social movements, Internet-based communities formed around a social or political issue or cause, and the processes involved in their formation and ongoing development. I will seek to explain why people participate in on-line movements, and how their participation affects their perceptions of and contributions to their movements’ goals.

The Internet has proved a fertile playing field for protest and activism. One popular view casts the medium as a breeding ground for collective action where dedicated (some would say fanatical) activists interact and plan potentially world-changing protests and demonstrations. Along these lines, Sullivan (1999) professed the irony in activists using the Internet to organise a protest by ‘forty busloads of malcontents’ against the World Trade Organisation. Less cynically, Clemetson (2003) noted how antiwar protesters were trying to “spread their message through the Internet and enlist a diverse range of allies”. Hall adopted a similar view, asserting
that "the Internet has allowed groups to assume an international dimension as activists with similar aims coalesce and adopt a universal message" (2007, p. 23). Similar points have been made in more academic analyses. Thus, Kahn and Kellner (2004) suggested that the Internet provided "on-line activist subcultures" spaces in which to "produce new social relations and forms of political possibility". Moreover, social psychology has also shown a growing interest in the medium. For example, Postmes and Brunsting (2002) asserted that the Internet was transforming collective action, and noted its role as "a forum for communication, social debate, communities of thought, and thriving movements".

Clearly then on-line communities and Internet-based collective action are significant phenomenon with the potential to inspire (and possibly confound) participants, commentators, and researchers. Notwithstanding this significance, however, compared with the research on face-to-face movements, one consequence of the infancy of the on-line medium is that the body of literature about on-line interaction in general, and on-line protest and social movements in particular, has formed only comparatively recently. On the other hand, as I have suggested, academic interest in the overall medium is developing very rapidly, and this mirrors the explosion of the Internet into public awareness.

Two points are worth making here in relation to my thesis. Firstly, even though the body of academic work related to the Internet is relatively recent, some conventions exist. In its short but intensive history, the scope of literature has typically included on-line versions of pre-existing groups as well as groups that only have an on-line presence in its definition of on-line communities (e.g., Preece, 2000; Smith & Kollock, 1999). I adopt this broad view of OLCs in this thesis and my empirical work will include both forms of community. The second point relates more to an overall ethos related to openness and participation that determined which communities I included in my work.

Any exhaustive chronological overview of the Internet could easily link its lineage to historical advances in telephony, radio, telegraph, and even earlier technologies. For example, Norman’s (2005) comprehensive volume includes essays connecting the Internet back to the development to the Gutenberg Press. Generally, however, most commentators agree that the modern forebear of the Internet as we know it today was ARPANET, an experimental system of networked computers.
developed by the U.S. Department of Defence in the 1960s to ensure the flow of information in the event of nuclear attack (see http://smithsonian.yahoo.com/Internethistory.html for more information).

ARPANET proved to be a success and, fairly quickly, that network and its successors were being used by the Military (and some Universities) for communication and information exchange. Up until the 1990s network use was still relatively restricted; however the development of ‘hypertext’ protocols by Berners-Lee and Cailliau designed to facilitate document access and exchange heralded the start of the modern Internet revolution (Schell, 2007). In very short order, businesses, the entertainment industry, education and government institutions, and private individuals took up the technology as one way to communicate and interact.

Notwithstanding the original inception of ARPANET as a restricted network, each of its successive iterations allowed wider and better access. Although in more recent times the use of proprietary and restricted technologies and commercial sites have increased, most information still remains freely available on-line. The important point here is that both the past and present of the Internet is grounded in the idea of the free and open exchange of information. This idea translates directly to frameworks relevant to the flow of information within the discrete forms of on-line community relevant to my thesis.

Broadly speaking, there are two frameworks for interaction that can be adopted by on-line communities. OLCs can allow open, un-moderated interaction where any and all participants are free to communicate on topics of their own choosing. Alternatively, communities can operate closed, moderated environments where community administrators or leaders control access and interaction. Of course, it is also possible for communities to offer both frameworks by operating multiple forums for interaction, or to switch forums between open and closed frameworks. Furthermore, it is also technically possible for communities to operate a mixed framework where some interaction is subject to restriction (e.g., a mixed framework might be used to exclude irrelevant information such as unsolicited advertising). Essentially, however, individual forums within which community interaction occurs will either have an ethos of openness or control.

In this thesis I focus my attention specifically on open, un-moderated interaction. This focus mirrors the development of the Internet as a medium for the
free and open exchange of information, and I argue that this ethos of freedom and access remains an important part of the appeal of on-line interaction, and continues to be a popular framework to facilitate community interaction. Moreover, the open and un-regulated ideal upon which the Internet was built also evokes the unconstrained nature of many of the social movements that are the target of my interest. To be clear, I am not arguing that forums for closed and/or moderated interaction are not utilised by social-action OLCs, or that their role is unimportant in those communities. My interest is in open forums because they are commonly found in many social-action OLCs, and they very often attract and maintain an active and passionate level of participation. I argue for that reason alone, they present an interesting and important target for research.

The Internet, on-line interaction, and social movements

The Internet has become commonplace to large numbers of people, however, it also remains a relatively new phenomenon – although its roots may be traced back to the early 1960s, it is only in the past 15 years that its use has become pervasive (Bargh, 2002; Schell, 2007). Following a pattern similar to that seen at the introduction of many new technologies, the initial wave of lay and academic opinion was equivocal about any positive affects of on-line interaction, and concentrated instead on seemingly negative outcomes. For example, McKenna and Bargh (2000) noted that research on the prevalence of on-line pornography widely influenced legislative debate in America (that research was subsequently found to contain severe methodological flaws, see Hoffman & Novak, 2003). Likewise, Kraut et al.’s (1998) findings associating Internet use with declines in social involvement and loneliness received widespread attention (although a follow-up study using the same participants found positive effects of Internet use, Kraut et al., 2002). Moreover, this early predominantly negative orientation was often aligned with a focus on an individualist perspective. In other words, Internet users were seen as individuals communicating with other individuals.

Spears and colleagues argued that many of the early theoretical assumptions about on-line interaction were based on what they termed the “engineering concept of communication bandwidth” (2002). According to Spears et al., the limited information exchange inherent in on-line interaction (e.g., lack of visual cues, asynchronous communication, etc.) was seen to have a predominantly negative effect
on communication. However, as Internet interaction became more prevalent and the body of research in that domain grew, that largely negative interpretation gave way to a growing acceptance that on-line interaction need not be harmful. For example, others have pointed out that like its face-to-face counterpart, on-line interaction is neither inherently positive nor negative (e.g., Borgida et al., 2002; Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1999), and the explicitly social nature of many on-line interactions is now also generally recognised and accepted (e.g., see Day & Schuler, 2004; McKenna & Green, 2002).

Increasingly, then, people are participating in Internet-based communication, and many of the collective behaviours associated with face-to-face interaction are being reflected on-line. Moreover, as web technologies improve and Internet use becomes more pervasive, the potential for communities to guide and develop interactions between their members (and potential members) also grows. Such interactions have helped lead to the creation of explicit on-line groups or communities, which at times can appear to behave similarly to their face-to-face analogues (McKenna & Green, 2002; Wellman & M., 1999).

In this first decade of the 21st century, an increasing participation in on-line groups is also changing our understanding of the nature of collective action. Social movements have readily taken up the new mechanism of on-line social interaction. In turn, these new mechanisms have opened novel avenues through which collective action can potentially take place. Put another way, many social movements have recognised and are exploiting the potential for the Internet to not only facilitate interaction but also, potentially, as a medium for action in its own right (Carty & Onyett, 2006; Foot & Schneider, 2002; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992).

Plainly then the Internet is a social medium. Moreover, it a medium to which many groups, including social movements, are readily adapting. However, notwithstanding the differences between on-line and face-to-face interaction, similarities of behaviour also exist between groups interacting face-to-face and on-line. Therefore, it seems reasonable that any analysis of on-line communities should be guided by existing theory and research that, most commonly, will be about face-to-face groups. Consequently, my focus on on-line social action communities must also be based on what we know more generally about social movements and collective action. Fortunately, the study of both has an important place in the
extensive and varied traditions of contemporary social psychology, and I will draw on that literature throughout this thesis. I begin in my next chapter with a review of some relevant work on social movements, social action, and social identity.
Chapter 2: Social Movements, Identity, and Action

In this chapter, I explore reasons why people support and actively engage in social movements. Recently, a number of researchers have proposed dual pathway models to explain social movement participation, most often incorporating both instrumental and identity related factors. Focussing on the identity pathway, I will first review how categorisation and self-definition generally relate to identity. I then argue how adding the idea of opinion-based groups (Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007) to the process of identity formation can provide a more nuanced understanding of social movement groups. Within specific social movements heterogeneity is common, and I will address how such heterogeneity can sometimes create strains and tensions that militate towards group fracture and dissolution. Finally, I will review how recent work on intersecting categorisations (McGarty, 1999, 2006) adds to identity-based theories of group behaviour and explains the development of heterogenous groups such as social movements.

Review of Key Themes

There is wide support for the idea that, at a fundamental level, social movements should be seen merely as one particular manifestation of a social group or collective. For example, Tajfel made this point when, drawing on work by Toch, he described social movements as “… efforts by large numbers of people, who define themselves and are also defined by others as a group, to solve collectively a problem they have in common.” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 46). In a similar vein, Snow and colleagues (2004) have affirmed the group-based nature of social movements, and Klandermans (1997) has also noted the importance of the group in social movement research. Importantly, however, Klandermans cautioned against an exclusive focus on the collective as the unit of analysis, noting that social movements “… are collectives of individuals acting together and that the very fact that these individuals are acting together needs to be explained not taken for granted” (1997, p. 3, emphasis in original). Klandermans argued that recognition of the individual should place social psychology at the forefront of social movement research; in other words, understanding what drives individuals to particular forms of groups can shed light on how social movements form and develop. It follows, therefore, that although it is important to investigate the way social movements behave as a collective entity, it is equally important to understand the reasons why individuals are drawn to particular
issues and causes, and the motives that enable and facilitate their ongoing participation in social movement groups, so that collective behaviour can occur.

Historically, one approach has been to draw on so-called ‘rational actor’ models to explain why individuals become members of, or participate in, protest groups or social movements. For example, Jenkins (1983) noted that one of the key themes for resource mobilisation theorists was that “movement actions are rational, adaptive responses to the costs and rewards of different lines of action” (p. 528). Similarly, Cohen (1985) contrasted strategic or rational based approaches with those grounded in identity (often conceptualised as the study of ‘New Social movements’, e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988). Cohen argued that utilitarian adherents of resource mobilisation theory, basing their arguments in economic orthodoxy, stressed the objective, strategic and instrumental factors of social movement groups.

He also touched on at least two other important points in his analysis. The first is that the emergence of rational actor approaches contrasted with the bias inherent in many classical explanations (both sociological and psychological) that saw collective behaviour as a “... non-rational or irrational response to change” (J. L. Cohen, 1985, p. 672) – thus, rational actor approaches explicitly recognised that protest and collective action are normal behaviours. Of more direct interest to this thesis, however, is Cohen’s general argument that “… there is no reason why the analysis of the various logics of collective action should be seen as incompatible, so long as they are not construed as the sole rationality of collective action to the exclusion of all others” (J. L. Cohen, 1985, p. 708, emphasis added).

Others were exploring similar themes around the same time. For example, Klandermans (1984) studied mobilisation efforts by an industrial workers’ union in the Netherlands in an effort to understand mobilisation and participation in industrial protest actions. Using longitudinal research, he conducted regular interviews with union members over eight months during the course of an ongoing union campaign revolving around appropriate working hours. Klandermans proposed that potential participants in social action weigh collective motives (benefits to the overall collective), selective motives (the potential reactions of significant others), and reward motives (broadly speaking, individual benefits). He also distinguished two components of mobilisation – consensus mobilisation, where a movement “tries to obtain support for its viewpoint”, and action mobilisation, “the process by which an
organisation in a social movement calls up people participate” (1984, p. 586). He suggested that, although consensus mobilisation does not inevitably lead to action mobilisation, of necessity action mobilisation cannot occur without consensus mobilisation. During the course of the union campaign, two major shifts in the movements’ overall policy occurred. Klandermans’ results clearly showed that the percentage of members who could explain the movements’ goals significantly reduced after each policy shift. The union’s policy shifts were the result of failed actions. These failures, combined with growing uncertainty about the overall aims of the campaign represented a reduction in consensus mobilisation – members lost confidence in the plausibility of their actions achieving positive outcomes. Furthermore, Klandermans also concluded that the union failed in its attempts at action mobilisation because members became increasingly pessimistic about the numbers who would take part in actions, combined with uncertainty about the likely success of their actions. Klandermans argued that one of the key points emerging from his research was support for the idea of a separation between “convincing” (consensus) and “activating” (action). Moreover, Klandermans concluded that “influencing the collective motive demands consensus mobilisation for the collective good, but also attempts to influence the expectations about the behaviour of others, the probability of success, and the individual contribution to the probability of success.” (1984, p. 598). The terminology of ‘consensus mobilisation’, ‘collective motives’, ‘the behaviour of others’ all presage a key contribution that Klandermans and others recognised social psychology added to the theoretical discussion – the place of identity or, more specifically, how identity informs and influences membership and participation in social movement groups.

One of the ways in which these issues have been explored is through the application of the social identity approach, and through the proposition that a social identity contributes to participation in collective action (foreshadowed in the early literature through, for example, concepts such as ‘social competition’, Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Researchers have begun to investigate how identity related motivations toward social action might interact or coexist with traditional utilitarian motives. Referring a considerable body of his own and others research, Klandermans (1997) discussed the main ideas present in the literature on social movement mobilisation and participation across a range of disciplines. This comprehensive work covered the central themes in the literature including how the construction and
perception of social reality influence movement participation, how modes of organisation provide a context in which action can occur, and how movement identities can transform over time.

More recently, researchers have attempted to further refine the idea that individuals might follow multiple pathways to collective action (e.g. Simon et al., 1998; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). The pathways suggested by these researchers follow directly from those put forward by writers like Cohen and Klandermans inasmuch as they propose two independent focuses – an instrumental focus (where motives are primarily related to cost/benefit analyses) and an identity focus (where self-definition is the central motive). For example, van Zomeren et al. (2004) contrasted individuals’ judgements about costs/benefits and group efficacy (constituting an instrumental path) with their perceptions of procedural fairness and emotional social support (representing an identity path) and found evidence that supported the use of both pathways.

As I have already noted, the instrumental pathway to collective action has been a traditional focal point for much of the analysis of social movements, notwithstanding the currency that the identity path has (re-)gained among theorists. The focus of this thesis will be on the more recently proposed identity related motives because, as I will argue, they better fit the types of on-line movements and collectives under study. For example, it might be that on-line movements may be more suited to consensus mobilisation than mobilising action. Thus, I will review questions about the relationship between identity and behaviour, and how the content of (social) identities influence support of and participation in groups. The variability of identity as it relates to context is a key part of explaining collective behaviour. I will argue how identity can provide a level of consistency of purpose across variable contexts for movement participants, and I will use possible identity pathways to propose why social movement collectives develop and endure online.

Applying a focus on identity, it is possible to distinguish at least one characteristic that should be consistently present in the content of participants’ social identity across a broad range of social movements. When Tajfel (1981) wrote that social movements were groups that ‘solve collectively a problem’, and Klandermans (1997) described them as ‘acting together’ they addressed the centrality of action for these groups - the idea that social movements exist to bring about change. The
concept of change has been a pervasive theme in the social movement literature. For example, Blumer described social movements as collectives that were trying to “establish a new order of life” (Blumer, 1951/1995, p. 60), Heberle defined them as a “.... specific kind of concerted-action [group]” (as cited in Banks, 1972, p. 8), and Snow et. al conceptualised movements as “collectives acting with some degree of organisation and continuity .” (2004, p.11, emphasis in original). Action to bring about change, then, is central to a social movement. However, as articulated by Klandermans, collective identity is the foundation that enables a social movement to exist and develop. Consequently, themes of change and action should be integral to the group identity of a social movement. In other words, one of the central characteristics of the ‘identity’ of a social movement, and thus the social identity adopted by its participants, should be an action orientation.

A second characteristic that is commonplace across many social movements is their heterogeneity – social movements are commonly “organisations of organisations” (Klandermans, 1997, p. 118). Gerlach and Hine chose the term ‘reticulation’ to describe the social movements they studied, organisations that were tied together “not through any central point, but rather through intersecting points of personal and other inter-group linkages” (1970, p. 55, their choice of the term 'reticulation' seems somewhat serendipitous for this thesis given they cite Webster's definition of the term as "something that is weblike, resembling a network"). Likewise, Oberschall commented that the examination of broad social movements often uncovered “hundreds of groups and organisations ... lacking direct communication, a single organisation and a common leadership” (1980, p. 45).

As already noted, in the sociological tradition new social movement theorists acknowledge the importance of identity. For social identity theorists a key idea is that behavioural changes can be explained with reference to changing self-concept or identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). One of the significant influences on these changes is context – peoples’ perceptions of context will bear on their identity (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Klandermans (1997) discussed how the organisation of a social movement might influence members’ interaction and participation. Simon and Klandermans, in their analysis of politicised collective identity, noted that “inter-group relations are embedded in the context of even more inclusive or shared group memberships”
Thus, the ways in which groups interact, communicate, cooperate, and organise plays some part in setting the contextual back drop on which determinations of self are made. In other words, structure, process and organisation are factors (contexts) that shape identity and so behaviour.

For social movements, then, the prominence given to their multi-group nature (and so the context in which identity is shaped) by Klandermans and others points to a high, and potentially problematic, level of internal diversity. Where a collective is made up of distinct sub-groups and, as is the case with a social movement, is organised around the pursuit of some action or goal, it follows that dispute about how that goal should be attained will be more likely than in groups where sub-group identity is less distinct. More importantly, however, in internally heterogeneous groups there may even be disagreement about the very reasons why particular goals need to be achieved and/or the very purpose of the group. Theoretically, such tensions should make it more difficult for a unified group to develop and endure because, by definition, debate and argument about what the group should be and do implies the existence of conflicting group definitions (e.g., see Sani & Reicher, 1998). In turn, volatile group definition should make it more difficult for a clear social identity to become salient for individual participants because of uncertainty about the nature and content of such an identity. Accordingly, the lack of a salient social identity should add ambiguity for members of a social movement trying to engage in ongoing group-based action-oriented behaviour and, therefore, mean that the movement might be less likely to achieve its aims, or indeed to stay together at all.

However, social movements do successfully form, evolve, and endure over time, in spite of intra-group tensions that militate towards group dissolution. How then can the ongoing survival of a social movement be explained in identity related terms? Bliuc et al.'s (2007) recent work on the nature of opinion-based groups coupled with the idea of consensualisation (e.g. Haslam et al., 1998; Reicher, 2000) offers a way to reconcile social movement intra-group heterogeneity with the need for a clearly defined social identity. According to Bliuc and colleagues, social identity in opinion-based groups is explicitly defined by a shared opinion, that is, it is the shared characteristic that individuals’ judge binds them to others and so makes them part of a group. Thus, for members of opinion-based groups the boundaries
within which intra-group agreement can be expected may be more clearly delimited than in other types of group. One interpretation of Bliuc et al.’s ideas is that, in effect, inherent in the social identity of opinion-based group members is an expectation of intra-group disagreement about characteristics that are not central to the group. Thus, if a social movement acts as an opinion-based group, members should be tolerant of internal differences (except where they judge those differences to be antithetical to the core idea around which the group has formed).

Notwithstanding the contention that social movements can be based around opinion-based groups it is also true that, across any given movement’s lifespan, the salient social identity adopted by its participants will not always be opinion-based. The social identity tradition invoked by Klandermans and others in their arguments for multiple pathways to collective action posits a dynamic model of identity. More specifically, intrinsic to self-categorisation theory (SCT, Turner et al., 1987) is that context plays a crucial role in determining what identity becomes salient and, therefore, group (or personal) norms and behaviours. Social movements are oriented around engaging in action to bring about change, but in reality, the actual conduct of such action must inevitably ebb and flow. For example, in addition to engaging in overt action, movements may plan future actions, and review past actions. They may debate ideas and norms. Likewise, some movements may take time to develop formalised or semi-formalised structures and rules (e.g. electing leaders, writing mission statements, etc.). Such times represent lulls where direct action related to a movement’s defining idea is not taking place, but where membership remains active; or, put another way, they represent enduring group membership across changes in context. However, following SCT, the salient social identity of individual members will be determined by context; therefore, for example, at times of direct action, the salient social identity that determines behaviour will likely be more oriented to the specific action moment rather than a central idea or opinion.

The dynamism of identity as portrayed by the social identity approach raises two other important points. Firstly, SCT proposes a hierarchical model of self-categorisation where changes in an individual’s social or personal identity are determined by re-categorisation to an alternative social or personal identity. Generally, SCT has been interpreted as not allowing for overlapping categorisations (i.e., for any individual, multiple self-categories cannot be salient at the same time,
Turner et al., 1987). However, recent work by McGarty (1999) has suggested that a more complete reading of the categorisation process should include the possibility of intersecting self-categorisations. In the case of a social movement, such an interpretation would allow, for example, an opinion-based self-category to remain salient at the same time as a direct action based category.

The second relevant theoretical development is the proposal that identity and behaviour interact, whereby behaviour affects the content of an identity and is itself determined by identity (e.g., see Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, & Weerd, 2002; Reicher, 2000). Such an interaction can be seen to be operationalised through the development of consensus (or ‘consensualisation’) as defined by Haslam et al. (1998). Haslam and colleagues suggested that consensualisation was the on-going mechanism that worked to shape reality for group members – a reality upon which future group behaviours and experiences will be enacted and interpreted. In other words, neither identity nor behaviour stands alone, but continually work together to shape an individual’s understanding of, and participation in, the world.

It seems plausible then, that for members of a social movement, at some times opinion will be the key characteristic shaping identity but at other times other factors might become relevant. The importance of action for social movements has already been noted, as has the inevitable ebb and flow of action events throughout a movement’s life cycle. Thus, it also seems plausible that the more proximal are action events the more salient preferences for action become, and so during these times identity will be shaped by these action-related preferences rather than opinion. Furthermore, we can conclude that regardless of context, an identity itself will not be static but will evolve and change through the process of consensus development. In other words, salient opinion-based identities will evolve as a result of the way group members perceive and interpret experiences, as will salient action preference based identities.

Adopting the social identity approach, we are left then with two possibilities that might map on to the development of a social movement. Firstly, following a traditional SCT account where identity and thus behaviour is predicated by a single salient self-categorisation, over time consensualisation within a social movement should lead participants to reduce intra-group homogeneity and sub-group identities in favour of a new exclusive social identity. Alternatively, however, the concept of
intersecting categories allows that self-categorisation as an opinion-based group might also remain salient for members across contexts. Thus, under this scenario, across the ebb and flow of a social movement’s activities the core opinion around which it formed will be retained as its central unifying factor, and so the unique characteristics associated with any sub-group identities need not be discarded or subsumed. Here, consensualisation should work towards agreement about behavioural norms explicitly associated with a shared opinion, and disagreements about other issues should not threaten the viability of the movement resulting in the movement taking the form of an overarching group including a variety of distinctive sub-groups. I will now review in more detail a number of these key themes.

Pathways to Collective Action

In line with the reasoning of Klandermans’ and others about identity and social movements, researchers have proposed and tested models of collective action that posit multiple routes to engagement and participation. For example, Simon et al. (1998) proposed a dual path model that had identity as central to one pathway, but focused on more explicit cost-benefit calculations as a second route to collective action (where such calculations can again be termed ‘instrumental’). To test their ideas, they conducted two field studies in which they looked at the relationship between collective identification and willingness to participate in collective action. Firstly, they considered two levels of collective identification among the elderly in Germany. At the broadest level they used identification with the category of ‘older people’ (i.e. the overall category from which potential action participants could be drawn), whereas for their second, less abstract category they used a specific activist oriented social movement, the Gray Panthers. In their second study Simon et al. sampled the gay community in the United States and again looked at members’ identification at two levels of abstraction: firstly as a gay person (the broadest level), and secondly with the gay movement (the less abstract level). It should be noted that unlike their sample of the elderly in Germany Simon et al. found no single activist organisation in the United States with which the gay community could identify as a catalyst for collective action. Rather, some of their participants were exposed to an experimental manipulation that made salient characteristics of the gay community as a threatened minority group; in other words, they manipulated the salience of a specific action-oriented social identity.
It is further worth noting here that, as conceptualised by Simon et al. (1998), the instrumental pathway also has a collective component. Following Klandermans (1984) Simon et al. distinguished three motives that constituted their instrumental path to collective action – the collective motive, social motive, and reward motive. Collective motive is defined as the perceived collective good that could result from an action, multiplied by the perceived likelihood of an action’s success. Social motive is the reaction expected from others as a result of one’s participation in an action, multiplied by the subjective importance of those others to oneself. Perceived selective personal losses and gains (e.g., the possibility of arrest because of protest participation, improvement of individual circumstances as a result of successful action) make up the reward motive. Simon et al. acknowledged that the calculations involved within their instrumental pathway include normative considerations; thus, by definition, they have a collective component. The key difference, however, between the instrumental and identity paths is that participation in collective action via the instrumental path occurs because of explicit judgements about costs or benefits, whereas participation through the identity path results solely from a salient shared social identity that speaks to one’s self-definition.

Simon and colleagues (1998) saw their two pathways as complementary rather than in opposition, a contention generally supported by the results of their two studies. Interestingly, however, evidence about the contribution of individual instrumental motives differed across the two social movements they sampled. In their study of the elderly and the Gray Power movement, they found only marginal support for the social motive as a contributor to willingness to participate. Similarly, when they sampled the gay community they also found only marginal support for the social motive; additionally, however, they found that the reward motive made no contribution to willingness to participate in that community. In both studies, identification clearly predicted willingness to participate, with identification with the movement category (the less abstract categorisation) mediating the effect of identification with the broader, more abstract category from which potential participants could be drawn. Thus, Simon et al. concluded that “… identification with a broader social category increases one’s willingness to participate in collective action only to the extent that it is transformed into a more politicised form of activist identification” (1998, p. 656).
Alternatively, in a more recent series of studies van Zomeren et al. (2004) examined the role that emotion plays in promoting collective action. Building on work by Lazarus (1991) that made a distinction between emotion and problem focussed coping, and integrating identity related factors through elements of social identity theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979), van Zomeren et al. argued that collective disadvantage, when associated with a salient social identity, can lead to group-based anger when events are also appraised as unfair, and that validation provided by collective opinions (or ‘social opinion support’) increases this anger. Accordingly, they saw group-based anger as providing an identity related emotion-focused path to collective action. They further argued that an alternative, problem-focused (or instrumental) path results from the perception that other group members are willing to engage in collective action. This perception (termed ‘social action support’) increases a sense of group efficacy, and so can lead to actual collective action. Importantly, this instrumental pathway also relies on shared identity – perceptions of action support and efficacy are group-based and so require a salient social identity. Finally, van Zoemeren et al. proposed that emotional and instrumental pathways are complimentary rather than conflicting, noting “collective action tendencies should be highest when emotion-focused coping is accompanied by problem-focused coping…” (van Zomeren et al., 2004, p. 651).

Clearly then recent research does support the idea that individuals follow multiple paths to collective action and, generally, a dual pathway model that comprises complimentary instrumental and identity paths seems to explain the process of social movement participation. The instrumental path has been well researched in traditional analyses of social movements, and identity related factors are increasingly being recognised as major determinants of willingness to participate in action. Equally, however, the nature of the relationship between identification and action is complex. For example, although Klandermans et al. (2002) concluded that identification with a group makes participation in group-based action more likely, their evidence for a direct link between identity and action was weak. Instead, they proposed, and found some support for, an intermediate stage of ‘action preparedness’ between identification and participation, whereby identification fuels preparedness, which then leads to participation. In fact, Bliuc et al. (2007) have argued that in much of the cited evidence supporting the link between group identification and protest the actual links themselves have generally been weak, and thus current
explanations of the relationship are incomplete. However, as discussed below, the work done by Bliuc and colleagues on opinion-based groups may add a significant piece to the identity/action puzzle.

_Categorisation, Identity, and opinion-based groups_

One of the key insights offered by the social identity approach is the concept of dynamic identity. Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory (1979) sought to explain behaviour through the idea of identity based on one’s perception as an individual, or as a member of a group. SIT described a behavioural continuum with individual and social poles such that proximity to the individual pole led to behaviour as an individual whereas proximity to the social pole resulted in behaviour as a member of a social group, and where social and individual behaviours were conceptualised as qualitatively different. Self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987) built on these ideas by reasoning that the behaviour described in the SIT continuum was based on changing self-concept through the mechanism of categorisation. Turner et al. proposed that behaviour is governed by self-categorisation where, broadly speaking, an interaction of category fit and category accessibility determines the salience of a self-category (McGarty, 1999; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Turner et al., 1987).

Hence, a salient social (personal) self-categorisation leads to behaviour as a group-member (individual). Individuals consider themself group members when, through an interaction of present context and past experience, a social self-category becomes salient above a personal self-category. A salient social self-categorisation will result in members accentuating relevant ‘intra-group similarities and inter-group differences’, and so seeing themselves ‘less as differing individuals and more as similar, prototypical representatives’ of their social movement (Turner & Onorato, 1999). The result of this redefinition of self is a transformation of “… individual into collective behaviour as people perceive and act in terms of a shared, collective conception of self…” (Turner & Onorato, 1999, p. 21). So for example, in an anti-globalisation social movement, the mechanism that enables collective action will be the transformation of individuals’ disparate self-categorisations to a common salient social self-category associated with a perceived injustice – presumably in this case the negative effects of globalisation. The content of the salient self-category heightens participants’ perception of shared relevant norms and behaviours
associated with redressing that injustice, for example – protest against international business forums and multi-national corporations, civil disobedience targeted at government trade policies, etc.

Apart from the central idea of dynamic identity, two other conceptual points from SCT are particularly important for an analysis of social movements, both of which are discrete but interrelated facets relating to the construction of identity through categorisation, but which also raise questions about the content of identity of social movement participants. The first of these is the concept of ‘fit’. Fit describes how well a self-defined category conforms to what is actually being experienced (Oakes, 1987; Turner et al., 1994). In SCT, fit has two constituents - comparative and normative, where comparative fit is the comparison of between group and within group difference (i.e. inter-group versus intra-group comparison) and normative fit is the degree to which group behaviour (observed reality) is consistent with relevant prior expectations (self-category content).

From an SCT perspective, strong differences between distinct sub-groups within a larger group should militate against individuals re-categorising to an exclusive overarching category because such intra-group diversity appears to work against the principle of comparative fit. It follows that the greater the perception of group diversity caused by distinctive internal sub-groups, the more difficult it becomes to contrast in-group sub-groups from out-group sub-groups, thus blurring the ability of participants to differentiate members of an overarching in-group from those that should more properly be regarded as out-group members. The example of an anti-globalisation social movement provides a good illustration of this problem. These types of movement most often encompass a wide diversity of existing sub-groups that may include, for example, anarchists, communists, environmentalists, anti-war activists, ultra-conservative nationalists, indigenous peoples organisations, etc. (e.g., see Gerhards & Rucht, 1992, who recorded the involvement of 140 and 133 heterogeneous support groups respectively in German anti-Reagan and anti-International Monetary Fund - IMF - protests). With a net cast so wide it is reasonable to predict that, for example, an ultra-conservative nationalist might easily (and correctly) perceive many points of difference between themselves and an anarchist, leading to uncertainty about whether or not the anarchist fits sufficiently
well in an in-group versus out-group comparison to be categorised as an in-group member.

In addition to problems associated with contrasting in-group versus out-group members, issues also arise around the hierarchical nature of categorisation as described by SCT. SCT proposes that categories exist within a hierarchy, and that a category's relative level of abstraction describes its interrelationship with other relevant categories (Turner et al., 1987). In other words, self-categories exist in a hierarchical system within which most categorisations can include lower level (less abstract) categories, or themselves be included in higher level (more abstract) categories.

Thus, a social movement provides the context for a more abstract self-categorisation for any individual member. For example, a personal self-categorisation will result in identification, and so behaviour, as an individual – the least abstract self-category possible. However, an individual might sympathise with an anti-war group and so, in the appropriate context (e.g., a group meeting), a peace activist self-category could become salient. Upon activation of the more abstract, peace activist social self-category, identification as a group member will supplant identification as an individual, with a resulting change towards the group-based norms and behaviours of the ant-war group. Moreover, if the peace group then becomes part of an anti-globalisation social movement, a new context (e.g., an anti-globalisation protest rally) could activate a third, even more abstract social identity – this time militating towards the group-based norms and behaviours of the social movement. Thus, in this example there are three possible levels of abstraction of identity – subordinate self-categorisation as an individual; intermediate self-categorisation as a peace activist; and super-ordinate self-categorisation as a social movement participant. The key issue here is that, traditionally, SCT has been interpreted as arguing that the change from behaving as an individual person to behaving as a social movement protester also entails complete re-categorisation from individual to protester.

Put another way, in social movements, where organised group-based action takes place, SCT seems to require that participants adopt an appropriate social self-category so that group-based action can occur. That is to say, in a context where there is perceived injustice, self-categorisation as an individual would lead to
behaviour designed to gain maximum individual benefit (e.g., a strategy of individual
mobility calculated to distance oneself personally from the injustice). Alternatively,
though, the appropriate social self-categorisation would lead to group-based
behaviour designed to alleviate injustice for one’s social category or group as a
whole (Turner et al., 1987). More than this, however, SCT has generally been
interpreted as demanding complete re-categorisation at the super-ordinate social
movement level of abstraction for social-movement behaviour to occur (McGarty,
2006).

Therefore, although the SCT model of re-categorisation presents an elegant
explanation of how cooperative behaviour might work, it is seemingly problematic
when applied to groups such as social movements because, as Klandermans (1997)
and others have noted, social movements are internally heterogenous – that is to say,
they are very often made up of groups of groups. Furthermore, the only common link
between these constituent groups may often be the raison d’etre of the social
movement itself. In other words, a social movement consists of a diverse array of
groups that are linked together by a single common cause, but that may otherwise
share few values, philosophies, or rules of behaviour and, in fact, may not un-
commonly support behaviours and norms that are in direct conflict to other
constituent groups within the same social movement.

Where differences between group members and intra-group factions are
sufficiently strong, they have been found to create schisms resulting in splinter or, in
extreme cases, dissolution of a movement. For example, Sani and Reicher (1998)
have argued that the natural debate and argument about category definition
associated with consensualisation may have two outcomes for a group – unity or
dissolution, and that dissolution would be likely to occur where intra-group factions
perceived each other as acting against the nature of the group. Further to that work,
Sani (2005) recently conducted a field study of schism in the Church of England to
test and refine a model of schism in groups. In support of his predictions, he found
that the path towards schism was initiated by a ‘belief that group identity has been
subverted’. As Sani and Reicher suggested, this subversion occurs when factions
within a group cannot agree about issues that they see as essential to a group’s
norms, values, or behaviours (in Sani’s Church of England study, the issue was the
ordination of women into the priesthood). Sani (2005) concluded that identity
subversion creates a discontinuity between a group’s past and present and that “… those group members who experience such discontinuity will not identify with the group any longer and might consider leaving it” (p. 1082). Identity subversion here relates explicitly to the social identity associated with the group in question; thus, if a group’s social identity is subverted by disagreement about what the group is, then one outcome is group dissolution. Importantly, Sani acknowledged that the group schism model he tested may have limited utility across a wide range of group types; however, he explicitly argued that the model would be particularly relevant to “political parties, religious institutions, and social movements” (2005, p. 1082, emphasis added).

In summary, a fundamental issue appears to militate against categorisation, identity formation and so coordinated social movement behaviour. Heterogeneous sub-groups may work against the SCT concept of comparative fit by adding ambiguity to the differentiation of in-group versus out-group members. Thus, the diversity of distinct sub-groups adds to the potential for differences in norms and behaviours between those groups, leading to the subversion of a higher order movement identity. The question arises, then, how do categorisation and identity work towards explaining social movement behaviour? Bliuc and colleagues’ ideas about the nature of opinion-based groups (Bliuc et al., 2007), along with recent work by McGarty (2006) proposing an alternative to what has been seen to be the exclusively hierarchical system of categorisation suggested in SCT, offer an answer.

McGarty (2006) reasoned that the categorisation process (and, more specifically the idea of multiple categorisation) is at the heart of how humans construct and make sense of the world. McGarty noted that the prevailing view of category relationships was to see them as hierarchically structured (a view not limited to SCT, but present across much of psychology). He argued that the consequence of such a view is that, when the possibility of multiple categorisations is encountered, the inclination is to seek a single, inclusive-category explanation (e.g., proposing a more abstract category that includes other lower order categories, or the formulation of a new, ‘blended’ category). Although he advocated against an exclusively hierarchical view, it should be noted that McGarty did not propose that hierarchies have no place; rather he suggested that although a hierarchical structure could be useful for some categorisations, it is best seen as one ‘particular type of
outcome of the categorisation process” (McGarty, 2006, p. 25). It follows then that if a hierarchy is only one type of category relationship, other types of relationship must also exist that may be more suited to some contexts or, as McGarty concludes “[in] other words, the use and applicability of hierarchical structures in reasoning is itself a variable that depends on context” (2006, p 24).

McGarty’s (2006) ideas followed an earlier analysis of the categorisation process where he had suggested that, rather than using a tree diagram metaphor, a better way to understand the relationships between psychological categories would be to view them as sets within a Venn diagram because the overlap allowed in that type of structure means that “… we do not have to make any assumptions about the hierarchical ordering of categories other than that [things] belong to categories” (McGarty, 1999, p. 215). Thus, his alternative view of inter-category relationships argued for a model that allows intersecting self-categories. With regard to SCT, the idea of intersecting categorisation is useful insofar as it opens the way for identity, and so behaviour, to be predicated on more than one category at a time (see also the idea of 'organic solidarity', Durkheim, 1933; and 'organic pluralism', Haslam, 2001).

A key issue that McGarty (2006) wanted to address is that hierarchies most often lead to the assumption that cooperation in inter-group settings is achieved through a common in-group based on a super-ordinate identity. As already noted, such an assumption is problematic when dealing with social movements – their internal heterogeneity can militate against just this type of identity. McGarty’s solution of intersecting categorisation allows members of distinct sub-groups to conceive of a shared identity constructed around the intersection of some dimension common across all of their groups and thus, seemingly, circumvents issues related to super-ordinate identity by allowing sub-groups to retain some measure of differentiation. However, even in this model of cooperative social behaviour there is still some shared dimension on which social identity through self-categorisation is based. The nature of what that shared dimension might be was elaborated by McGarty (2006) and Bliuc et al. (2007) through their work on opinion-based groups.

Much as McGarty (1999) identified problems associated with prevailing views of category relationships, Bliuc and colleagues (2007) saw inconsistencies between the theory-based predictions of links between self-definition and group behaviour, and the actual empirical support for those links. While agreeing that both
theoretical and empirical support was generally sound, Bliuc et al. argued that the links between self-definition and behaviour found in much of the research have actually been of relatively small size. Their solution to this problem was to propose that identity could form around shared opinion, and that identification with these opinion-based groups would better predict group-behaviour from self-definition. They saw their work as elaborating the processes that lead up to, or are antecedents of, action decisions “rather than the dynamics of particular forms of action”.

Social identity in opinion-based groups is defined by a shared opinion. McGarty (2006) argued that where group formation occurs around shared opinion there is a resultant focus on behavioural norms and so a reduction in ambiguity about the group because members understand more clearly the boundaries within which inter-group agreement can reasonably be expected. In turn, he suggested that a lack of ambiguity about expected consensus should lead to more acceptance of differentiation around other ‘non-core’ group characteristics, and so less likelihood of group fracture and dissolution – although except as McGarty noted “… where two different positions are contested as representing the core or true nature of the group” (2006, p 27). Thus, the nature of opinion-based groups dovetails with the re-conceptualisation of inter-category relationships (1999) to allow a model of collective behaviour that does not necessarily require participants to completely recategorise to a new, exclusive identity and so offers a potential solution to the problem of internal social movement heterogeneity militating towards group schism.

Bliuc et al. (2007) and McGarty (2006) offer some empirical backing for their ideas, however, their work in this area is still relatively new. Haslam (2001) has covered similar themes with his conceptualisation of organic social identity where he also sought to address comparable issues of inter-category relationships. In the context of inter-group negotiations in an organisational setting, Haslam suggested that a dual identity model as proposed by Gaertner et al. (2000) was compatible with self-categorisation theory. Haslam argued a superordinate identity could accommodate (as opposed to subsume) distinct other lower level identities so long as “the content of the emerging superordinate identity requires lower-level differentiation and is therefore sustained by lower-level identification” (2001, p. 191, emphasis in original). This has obvious similarities to Bliuc and McGarty’s ideas about opinion-based groups in which members accept (and potentially expect)
disagreement or variability on certain dimensions of identity. Haslam further suggested that “the process of successful negotiation requires parties who have different lower-level theories of self ... to develop and internalise an integrated theory of self” (2001, p. 192), but that the salience of both sub-group and superordinate identities were necessary so that “parties could share a common motivation”. Furthermore, Haslam was able to point to a growing body of research that supports the idea of multiple simultaneous categorisations. As has been noted, Haslam’s research is primarily concerned with negotiations in an organisational setting. Given the nature of social movements, they can certainly be conceived along the lines of multi-party organisations. Moreover, as noted by Haslam et al. (1998) and Reicher (2000) consensualisation of identity is an ongoing negotiation. Thus, I contend that the scenarios that Haslam (2001) was concerned with are in many ways exactly the situation faced by potential members of social movement collectives. McGarty thought that his work offered the possibility that “rather than just pointing to or emphasising commonality at some level ... it should be possible to emphasise membership of a relevant opinion-based group that may cut across organisational boundaries” (2006, p. 29), and I would argue the same.

In summary, then, there is evidence to suggest that relaxation of a rigid category hierarchy in conjunction with the attributes prescribed to opinion-based groups can help to explain social movement phenomenon. Accordingly, with these subtle modifications we can offer an alternative SCT based explanation of how an association of pre-existing groups can form a stable social movement that continues to function long-term. In my next chapter I will expand on these themes, and discuss how understanding group development, consensus and action leads to at least two alternative ways in which on-line social-action communities might develop.
Chapter 3: Consensus, Behaviour and Action

Building on my earlier arguments about categorisation and opinion-based groups, I will now look in more depth at group development, behaviour, and action. Thus, in this chapter, I will review relevant literature on groups that form with the specific intention to act, and so which is relevant to social movements, and focus on consensualisation and agency - two concepts that are particularly important for these types of group. I will review evidence that speaks against the inevitability of group dissolution, and provide an explanation of the intra-group processes that enable groups to continue to function in spite of widely varied memberships and agendas. Finally, I will attempt to reconcile my arguments to date about categorisation, heterogeneity, and behavioural expectation by proposing two alternative ways in which on-line instantiations of social movements might develop in the real world.

Review of Key Themes

Development, Behaviour and Action

Bliuc et al. (2007) emphasised the centrality of behaviour for opinion-based groups, arguing that if a group formed around a shared opinion then intra-group consensus would centre on behavioural norms. Similarly, social movements form to bring about change, with their defining characteristics the opinion around which they form (x is bad) and the behaviour that they champion (we should act to stop x). It is important to note, however, that understanding within a group that behaviour is a core group focus does not imply intra-group consensus about the mechanisms through which a desired goal should be achieved – in other words, such groups will not necessarily agree about types of behaviour. In a similar way, a number of theorists have highlighted the particular role of behaviour and action in social movements (e.g. Klandermans, 1997, 2005; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Tajfel, 1981). For example, Klandermans, following Tarrow (1994), concluded that social movements “... are populated by individuals sharing collective goals and a collective identity who engage in disruptive collective action.” (Klandermans, 1997, p. 2).

I would argue that the groups under consideration in this thesis share these key characteristics as legitimate social movements. However, they also have in common another quality – they are all groups that exist on-line as expressions of social movements. An interesting issue then is how these on-line movements develop as groups. Of course, the question of group development is not unique to social
movements with an on-line presence, and general considerations of developmental processes are present in most analyses of social movements, even if theories of group development are not their explicit focus. For example, when Oberschall (1980) investigated ‘Loosely Structured Collective Conflict’ he looked at events and protests over time, and the influence of protest groups’ organisation, and Klandermans acknowledged that as a result of ongoing participation in a movement “certain process of socialisation take place and feeling of commitment ... or loyalty ... develop.” (1997, p. 8). With regard to on-line social movements, however, an interesting issue is whether or not they follow similar developmental patterns to those described in existing models formulated for off-line (or face-to-face) groups. Indeed perhaps even more fundamentally, we could ask if these on-line movements develop as groups at all.

There are a number of existing models of group development. A key consideration when looking at these models for the types of groups that are under investigation here is how they conceptualise behaviour and action. Whereas for opinion-based groups the idea of behaviour is defining, in many traditional explanations of group development it occupies a less explicitly central, though still important, role. Behaviour is most often seen as relating to specific steps in a developmental process.

Tuckman (1965) proposed one of the earliest models of group development. He suggested four stages of group life - forming, storming, norming, and performing - and group structures and activities associated with each stage. In brief, he described a process whereby groups come together (form); debate ideas and positions (storm); agree upon appropriate norms (norm); and plan and conduct action (perform). Although Tuckman did not originally formulate his ideas with social movements in mind, his stages of group development do seem applicable to that particular class of group.

Moreland and Levine’s (1982) model included five phases that range from an initial investigation phase (during which a prospective member reconnoitres and evaluates a group, and the group seeks to recruit new members) through socialisation, maintenance, re-socialisation and finally remembrance (where both the former member and the group reflect on and assess the costs and benefits of their relationship). Some similarities to social movements are immediately apparent. It is
clear that participants in social movements must engage in at least some level of investigation to determine if they and the movement share the same goals. Socialisation, maintenance, and re-socialisation describe periods where, in an effort to maintain mutual commitment and enhance mutual rewards, interaction between group and member is used for knowledge exchange, behaviour shaping, and role assessment, negotiation and definition.

Worchel and colleagues (1992) offered another description of group formation and development over time with their Preliminary model of Group Formation and development. Outlining six stages of formation and development (discontent, precipitating event, identification, productivity, individuation, decay), Worchel et al. (1992) emphasised the process of group development as “ongoing and circular”, and noted that “groups exist in a state of constant change”. Their first two stages (‘discontent’ and ‘precipitating event’) may be particularly relevant for the study of social movements. They describe discontent as a state in which individuals are dissatisfied with their current group membership(s). A precipitating event symbolises and focuses this discontent leading to membership in a new group through which it is hoped change can be achieved (Worchel et al. use as an example the deaths of protesters at Kent State University as a precipitating event for the anti-Vietnam War movement). The remaining stages represent periods where group boundaries are solidified (identification); goals and tasks developed and worked towards (productivity); the focus shifts towards individual members and they begin to militate for personal recognition (individuation); and finally, the group starts to disintegrate (decay). Clearly then, this model also offers a potential framework on which to describe the development of social movements (and indeed, Worchel et al. state explicitly that they believe their model is applicable to a wide range of groups including revolutionary movements and protest groups).

All three of these models could be used to describe characteristics of social movements. That we can cherry-pick aspects of one class of group (a social movement) from three descriptions of group development is not remarkable. What is particularly interesting, however, are two simple yet fundamental points that these models make about groups (points which also reflect fairly universal themes in group theory). Firstly, both models make the point that groups change and evolve— they are dynamic.
The second point, though expressed differently in the various models, addresses the same characteristic, and returns us to our comparison of social movements and opinion-based groups. Tuckman describes groups norming and performing; Moreland and Levine speak of role negotiation, evaluation, and behaviour; Worchel et al of tasks and productivity. Thus, although using different terminology, all identify the same central point relevant to all groups regardless of their form; groups exist to do something, to engage in some form of behaviour. In the case of social movements that behaviour is to act to bring about meaningful change.

I have argued that, at certain times, social movements act as opinion-based groups within which membership is defined by consensus about a shared idea of injustice, and the expectation that group-based action will take place to attempt to alleviate that injustice. However, I would also argue that the more specific models do not offer an ideal fit to the types of social movements that we are investigating. One reason this might be so is that heterogeneity is not just a feature within individual social movements, but is also common when movements are compared to one another in the context of their membership in an overall class of group (e.g., see Snow et al., 2004, for a recent summary of social movement definitions). For example, social movements form for a diverse range of reasons; movements can differ markedly from one another in their organisational structure; and every movement can adopt different strategies to achieve its desired behavioural outcomes (Klandermans, 1997; Snow et al., 2004). Thus, I would argue that a general explanation of group processes that allows a greater range of potential structures and behaviours may offer a better fit for social movements in general, and for the on-line movements under consideration here.

Thus, it may be that the earliest model, Tuckman’s, provides what is almost a meta-theoretical structure of the life of a group, and so which also gives us the best general framework on which to base our understanding of social movement development. Tuckman originally conceived his forming, storming, norming, and performing stages as relating to largely interpersonal issues relevant to small, mainly therapy-based, groups; however, they can also be seen to provide a robust framework for larger task-oriented group development.

Tuckman’s model encompasses many qualities of similar models such as those discussed above but, importantly, is also general enough to better fit the broad
range of possible social movements. Thus, we can reasonably surmise that a social movement must go through some sort of formation period where, once an injustice is perceived, people begin to come together to put it right. Further, we can expect that there will be discussion and debate (storming) within the movement about options for correcting the injustice, followed by the movement reaching a level of consensus (norming) about the best ways to achieve its aims. Finally, the movement should act (perform) based on a consensual position.

**Consensus and Agency**

While all four of Tuckman’s stages correspond well to the developmental process of a social movement, there are two important concepts from the literature that map particularly well to his overarching framework. The first addresses the importance of consensus development for groups. As articulated by Haslam (2001) and Reicher (2000), progress towards consensus reflects Tuckman’s norming phase of group development.

Haslam and colleagues have elaborated the process of consensus development in terms of the idea of consensualisation (Haslam, 2001; Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Haslam et al., 1998). In a series of studies, they investigated the role of the group in developing consensus about in-group and out-group stereotypes. They argued that a salient social identity, in concert with social influence through group interaction based upon that identity, enhanced consensus about both stereotypes.

Further, in regard to salient in-groups, they suggested that self-stereotyping enhanced perceptions of group homogeneity, expectations of intra-group agreement about relevant issues, and militated towards consensus on those issues through mutual influence (Haslam et al., 1999). Therefore, it is consensualisation that works upon group members to homogenise individual beliefs into group beliefs that come to represent reality as defined by the shared social identity of the group. Moreover, this shared group reality provides a framework upon which decisions about future events and actions will be made - “a psychological platform for new experiences ... that define what is appropriate (prototypical) group action.” (Haslam, 2001, p. 280).

McGarty (1999) also articulated this concept through the idea of shared normative frameworks (see also Klandermans's 'collective action frames', Klandermans, 1997). McGarty argued that normative frameworks were standards
used to form judgements about reality, and develop beliefs about the truth. Within the context of a social movement, consensualisation determines the shared normative framework, which, in effect, determines reality for group members.

Following a similar theme, Reicher (2000) contended that group-based ‘collective assertions’ are not simply the product of socially determined perceptions of existing reality, but may also represent an ideal of reality as the group would have it be. Making explicit the link between identity and action, he noted that without acting in accordance with a consensually defined identity, one could not claim that identity. Moreover, and with particular relevance to social movements, Reicher makes plain the reciprocal relationship between identity and social action, stating that not only does identity lead to action, but that it influences social constraints, and “is affected by the nature of existing constraints.” (Reicher, 2000; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Sani & Reicher, 1998; Stott & Reicher, 1998).

This reciprocity of identity and action brings into focus an issue I have touched on a number of times above. Consensus has been seen to be a significant component of group formation but, as has also been noted, social movements are groups that form for a purpose – to engage in social action. Once again, then, the importance to social movements of consensus surrounding group action must be explicitly acknowledged - people join social movements to act, and expect consensus within their movement about action so that action can actually take place.

Notwithstanding their focus on enabling action, social movements do more for participants than provide a mechanism for action. Simon and Klandermans argue that collective identity signals that “... one is not alone [and] ... as a group, one is a much more efficacious social agent” (2001, p. 321). Therefore, a social movement’s collective identity reinforces not only participants’ desire to act, but also confidence in their ability to act. This function of collective identity brings to mind the concept of agency, and how it fits with Tuckman’s model.

Although related to consensus, agency more specifically addresses Tuckman’s fourth phase of group development – performance. Klandermans said “agency refers to the belief that one can alter conditions or policies through collective action” (1997, p. 18). Tuckman saw performing, his final stage of group development, as where the energy of the group was focussed on achieving the task it had set itself. Klandermans relates agency directly to group performance when he
suggests that “agency must be rooted in empirical evidence” (Klandermans, 1997, p. 42) and counts it as one of the most important components of successful collective action, without which movements may struggle to retain viability.

Thus, it is not sufficient that people have an abstract understanding that collective action as a form of behaviour can be effective, nor that social movements reach consensus about norms, nor even that a movement’s energies are directed towards accomplishing its goals. If a social movement is to continue operating as a viable group, participants must also believe that their actions will be successful, that they can accomplish their goal to bring about some form of social change. According to Klandermans, this belief, the sense of agency, comes about largely through the experience of successful action. In other words, it is necessary that social movements perform in order to continue performing.

In summary, then, Tuckman’s model gives us a framework on which to map the development of a social movement from its formation around a perceived injustice, through to its performance as a vehicle to correct that injustice. By dint of its manifestation as an opinion-based group, we see that storming and norming should coalesce around behaviour in a social movement, and that consensualisation will result in strong performance-related objectives such as planning and the carrying out of specific action. By definition a behaviour-related group, the normative framework in which the movement develops, will further reinforce a focus on behaviour and action. However, because social movement identity so strongly militates towards action, unless participants eventually experience positive action outcomes, movements are in real danger of losing support and so dissolving.

*Reconciling Categorisation, Heterogeneity, and Behavioural Expectation*

Thus far, then, it is possible to gain some straightforward insights into how social movements should develop. For example, it follows that social movements should coalesce around planning and action norms. However, as I have argued, even where a social movement reaches internal consensus about the definition of an issue or cause, the multiple groups that make up movements commonly have different definitions of and expectations about the appropriate behaviours and actions that should be embraced to further their cause – disagreements that could lead to tensions great enough to cause a movement to fracture or dissolve. Nevertheless, in spite of this potentially fatal problem, social movements do form, develop, conduct effective
actions, and successfully bring about social change. The key to their ability to do so lies in what form the movement’s identity takes, and how the form of that identity determines the categorisation options available to participants as members of a movement group.

To understand these identity issues, we must first return to the starting point of any social movement – the idea that drives its overarching ambition. A social movement forms because of a shared perception of injustice, and because of a shared perception that group action rather than individual action can better alleviate that injustice. These factors must be central to a social movement’s identity because to truly be classed as members, individual participants in a movement must believe that their fellow participants share their judgment about an issue and share their belief that change needs to occur (and see also Reicher, 2000, about the identity-action link).

Accordingly, there appear to be two ways in which the idea of an orientation towards action and change, as well as the diversity of membership focussed on achieving that change might be addressed in a categorical model of identity as described by SCT. I propose that in seeking to accommodate these concepts a social movement identity can develop either as a common-identity group, or as an alliance of convenience.

It is important to note here that I do not propose these two forms of group, ‘common-identity’ and ‘alliance of convenience’, as new theoretical forms. Rather, I argue that the terms are appropriate descriptors or labels that can be applied to two ways that social movement formation can be explained using the theoretical ideas that I have reviewed. So, an alliance of convenience follows principles of organic pluralism outlined by Haslam (2001), and characteristics of opinion-based groups as described by Bliuc et al. (2007) and McGarty (2006). An alliance of convenience describes where an array of heterogeneous groups ally around a shared idea or opinion to collectively engage in action because it is convenient for them do so to achieve their aims. On the other hand, a common-identity group is based on a more traditional interpretation of SCT, and describes where sub-groups consensualise towards a wider set of common norms, values, and behaviours because of the emergence of a superordinate categorisation for participants.
Thus, following the process of categorisation as outlined in a traditional, hierarchical, description of SCT, a common-identity (CI) group can be defined as one in which members of a social movement (acting initially as either individuals or members of existing groups) will unite and establish a new common identity by renegotiating their individual or sub-group goals and interests. Under such a scenario when acting cooperatively to achieve a movement’s goals, participants re-categorise so that a new social movement self-category becomes salient over any other individual or social self-category. Movement participants see themselves as interchangeable with their fellow members, and adopt the consensualised norms and behaviours of their new social movement category. A social movement acting as a common-identity group will continue to function effectively to the extent that the movement category remains salient for participants above other self-categories. Moreover, participants who do not re-categorise could be expected to lose commitment to the movement and depart.

Alternatively, rather than assuming a common identity social movement participants might act more in accordance with McGarty’s (1999) modified interpretation of categorisation, or Haslam’s (2001) description of organic social identity, in which self-categories can co-exist, and where participants see their movement along the lines of an opinion-based group and so focus on specific behavioural characteristics to reduce ambiguity surrounding conflicts in other goals, philosophies, or norms. In these circumstances participants would use the new superordinate movement category as an ‘umbrella’ or alliance of convenience (AoC) under which they can pragmatically align common goals, but at the same time retain the distinctive goals of their particular sub-groups.

Klandermans’s (1984; see also 1997) accounts of the Dutch labour unions provide good examples of common identity groups that act as social movements. On one hand, unions display all the characteristics under which individual members would be expected to adopt a shared social identity to carry out collective actions. Unions are formal organisations – they maintain membership lists and charge membership fees, have defined rules and regulations, have recognised leadership and decision making structures, and, as organisations, have a range of norms and beliefs to which members would be expected to adhere. At the same time, the raison d'etre of a union is to act on their members’ behalf and to protect them from exploitation.
The key mechanism that unions have at their disposal to meet these aims is the mobilisation of their members. This mobilisation can take a variety of forms ranging from relatively minor meetings or marches outside of working hours, through to long-term strikes or pickets. Ultimately, however, any these types of actions undertaken by a union are protests against perceived injustices – thus, one of the key roles of a union is to act as a social movement for its members. It is also possible that the Grey Panther movement that Simon et al., (1998), studied may be an example of a common identity group. Although Simon et al. only provide bare structural and organisational details of the movement, they do note that the Grey Panther’s are a “formal organisation with a registered membership”, and that they hold regular group meetings.

Some of the various groups and organisations that have gained prominence as a result of activity in the anti-globalisation movement also provide examples of common identity groups. An interesting example formed around the broad globalisation debate is the ‘Association pour la Taxe Tobin pour l’Aide aux Citoyen’ (or ATTAC – literally the ‘Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens’). Rather than clearly being a common identity group, ATTAC might more accurately be described as an organisation that is attempting to become a common identity group. In keeping with the central theme of my thesis, ATTAC maintains a significant web presence including a number of country specific websites and mailing lists (see http://www.attac.org/indexen/index.html). Established in Paris in 1998, ATTAC defines itself as “an action-oriented movement of popular education” (Cassen, 2003) whose broad aim is to reform international financial markets and infrastructure. ATTAC membership comprises both individuals and existing groups and organisations across a range of countries. According to its founder the French organisation alone has “more than 200 local committees … constituted as legal bodies … in their own right, with democratic rules that we impose on them, in exchange for use of the acronym.” (Cassen, 2003). The organisation’s attempts at negotiating towards a form of common identity (and some of the potential problems of such negotiations) are evident from the comments of the founder:

The local committees are independent of us … Likewise we are independent of them … A kind of dynamic tension exists between the two poles. The
dream of some of the committees would be to constitute themselves into a federation, more or less like a party or a trade union ... I did sense that problems could arise here, and so I proposed national statutes that on first sight may seem undemocratic, but in my view are by no means so (Cassen, 2003).

Given the widely acknowledged heterogeneity of social movements, there are numerous instances of alliance of convenience groups in the literature. Two brief examples accurately portray the types of movements that have been commonly observed. Gerlach and Hine (1970) describe the Black Power movement as it existed in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. They outline a wide movement composed of a relatively small number of prominent, large-scale national organisations, combined with numerous small local groups that could often have “widely divergent goals” and norms of acceptable behaviour and action. Gerlach and Hine (1970) saw a common ideology as the key factor that linked these types of wide ranging groups. They offered a detailed analysis of the characteristics of what they argued was a template for the way all groups of this nature constructed ideologies. Interestingly, a number of their ideas have similarities with current social psychological explanations of group-based behaviour, however, for the purposes of this thesis, their idea of common ideology could equally be thought of as common opinion in the sense of opinion based groups. Klandermans (1997) work also offers an example of an alliance of convenience. He describes the women’s movement in the Netherlands as highly decentralised, and notes its most striking feature “was its lack of national coordinating organisations”. The movement as he describes it was extremely wide-ranging, incorporating a diverse range of ideologies, groups, and activities. That the movement was able to function as whole again supports the idea of a basis of common opinion across constituent groups.

We can also identify contemporary examples of alliance of convenience groups. The anti-globalisation movement provides a fertile source for these types of movements. For example, the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) is a good example of an AoC (see http://www.whiteband.org/). GCAP is an organisation devoted to increased aid, debt cancellation, and fair trade for the world’s poorest countries, and includes a wide range of member organisations including “existing coalitions, community groups, trade unions, individuals, religious and faith groups,
campaigners and more" (GCAP, 2005). Following the typical characteristics of an AoC, it is apparent that GCAP acts as an umbrella organisation formed around a defining opinion, with a strong focus of behaviour. The range of members listed on its website clearly demonstrates that the defining opinion around which it has formed cuts across a broad range of other norms and values. Furthermore, and in keeping with the properties that have been proposed for an opinion-based AoC, GCAP has an unambiguous action intention orientation.

**Summary**

Chapters 2 and 3 introduced and explored ideas related to social movements, or collectives that form around social issues or causes, and noted that participation in such movements comes with both the desire and expectation from members that their movements will cause change to occur. I argued that social movements are very often comprised of pre-existing groups as well as people acting as individuals, and consequently must juggle a diversity of opinions, ideas, and positions that are sometimes at odds with each other. Important questions arose about how groups such as these can continue to exist over time, retain the long-term participation of their members, and carry on producing effective action outcomes (given that they are specifically action-oriented groups).

The application of principles from self-categorisation theory showed how categorisation and identity are central to understanding how people experience a social movement as a whole, as well as the potential sub-groups that may exist within it. I raised the idea of opinion-based groups as an appropriate descriptor for social movement groups, and using Tuckman’s (1965) work on the sequence of group development as a basis, highlighted the roles of consensualisation and agency as keys to understanding social movements. I concluded by drawing these themes together to describe how social movements could develop and continue to retain the long-term commitment and participation of its members, in-spite of intra-group tensions militating towards fracture and dissolution.

**Prospective Statement of Thesis**

When I presented my arguments about possible forms that social movement development might take, I offered both face-to-face and on-line examples as evidence in support of my ideas. The use of examples drawn from those two different mediums of interaction captures the key essence of this thesis. Broadly, I
suggest that on-line communities should show the same processes of development as we expect to find in their face-to-face counterparts. More specifically, I propose that on-line communities formed around social issues or causes should develop according to the same patterns and rules that we know face-to-face social movements to follow. Thus, I contend that basic processes related to identity, agency, and consensualisation should operate in social-action OLCs so that they follow one of the two forms that I have argued will develop generally in social movements, and that explain factors that would otherwise lead to the disintegration of movements. My next chapter will detail a study that explores these issues more directly, and where I test my specific propositions about the possible forms that social movement collectives may take.
Chapter 4: Anti-globalisation and the internet

*Think global, act local* (anti-globalisation graffiti)

In my earlier chapters, I presented and developed arguments detailing my ideas about the ways in which social movements might develop as functioning organisations. In this chapter, I present my first empirical test of these ideas. Based on my review of the literature, I proposed that on-line social movements might develop as either alliances of convenience (AoC) or common identity (CI) groups. In this chapter, I argue that there will be some differences in the content of interaction for each of these two community styles, and that intra-community consensualisation will reflect these differences; however, notwithstanding, any differences, I also argue that planning and action will be important in both AoC and CI communities. Using a set of coding categories that I developed to gauge the nature of community interaction, I apply my hypotheses to a specific on-line social movement (the S11 on-line forum), and present and discuss my findings about that forum. Finally, I briefly explore one unexpected finding from this empirical work by reviewing the use of formal polls in communities similar to the S11 on-line forum. In light of the overall results from my study of the S11 community and other like forums, I then discuss alternative directions for future study.

*Introduction*

In Chapters 2 and 3 I presented specific ideas from a number of areas of social psychology, and discussed how I might use that work to understand the processes that contribute to the formation of on-line social-action communities. I further argued that our understanding of identity as it relates to social action would provide some clear insights into the ways that social-action OLCs might manifest on-line.

Thus, I proposed that although the path to collective action through the negotiation of identity and the development of consensus appeared to be clearly laid out, for example in the work of Klandermans (1997), Reicher (2000) and others, practical difficulties often militate against successful social action outcomes. For example, social movements are often made up of coalitions of existing groups with diverse interests and goals, and thus the strategies by which movements consider and...
manage intra-group differences can determine the success or failure of their communities. I argued that two recent ideas that refine our understanding of the way that the social identity approach considers the composition of self-categories help to explain these strategies, and provide clues about alternative ways that social movements can form and develop.

The idea that a shared opinion might be the defining characteristic around which some collectives form has been proposed by Bliuc and colleagues (2007). Their ideas, combined with Haslam’s (2001) arguments about how social identity can sometimes manifest organically (or, in other words, how groups can organise around principles of organic pluralism), describe one path that groups can follow to undertake and achieve collective action. Contrasting with this view of intersecting identities, a more traditional reading of SCT offers a pathway for groups based around an inclusive social identity formed through re-categorisation.

Consequently, I proposed two identity-centric community paths that allow the constituents of social movements to work together cooperatively given their potential conflicting range of interests. A movement formed along the lines of a traditional SCT account would lead to existing groups uniting and establishing a new common identity by renegotiating their goals and interests. On the other hand, constituent groups can work together as a new umbrella movement or alliance of convenience by pragmatically aligning under a common opinion.

These two forms of collective entail different instantiations of self-concept for their members; nonetheless, collectives that develop according to either path share a common raison d’être – namely, both types of group form to act. I have previously contended that one of the earliest models of group development, where Tuckman (1965) suggested forming, storming, norming, and performing as the four stages of group life, offers an appropriate general framework on which to base an understanding of social movement development. In Tuckman’s model, a group’s performing equates to the action that a social movement endeavours to accomplish. Put another way, if we overlay Tuckman’s ideas about group development on to our two alternative social movement paths, movements that form as either alliances of convenience or common identity groups would share the common goal of performance/action. However, despite this shared purpose, characteristics of the two different forms of collective would give rise to differences in community style – in
other words, the way that the two forms of collective organise evidenced through the nature and content of their intra-group interaction.

Thus, I have argued that where a movement that comes together under a common identity (CI), individual and sub-group norms, behaviours, and goals will be re-negotiated and subsumed so that participants can re-categorise to a new salient social identity. Furthermore, in this type of common identity movement, we would expect that individual participants who do not re-categorise would lose commitment and depart the movement. Accordingly, if a social movement develops in terms of a common identity (or individual members seek to promote that possibility) then initial intra-community interaction should largely reflect a process whereby groups negotiate and come to agree on the meaning and principles of their group, and those who disagree can be expected to leave (c.f., Reicher & Sani, 1998; Sani & Reicher, 1998).

Alternatively, in an alliance of convenience (AoC) formed under principles of organic pluralism and defined by a shared opinion, individual’s differing self-categories can co-exist. The focus in such a collective will be on *specific* behavioural characteristics. Moreover, participants in this style of group will expect and accept differences between members about non-core issues, norms, and even goals. Thus, in an alliance of convenience, there should be fewer attempts than in a common identity group to reach agreement about the nature of the collective and its principles, as participants’ constituent groups will remain their predominant categorisation. In such a case, community interaction should be mainly about behaviour and goals.

This proposed distinction between the importance of meaning and principle in a common identity group versus the centrality of behaviour for alliances of convenience brings to mind the literature on different types of norms (e.g., Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Terry & Hogg, 1996). For example, Cialdini et al. (1990) contrasted descriptive norms (what people do) with injunctive norms (what people approve/disapprove of), and found some evidence to suggest that the type of norm dictates behaviour, a point recently reiterated by Thomas and McGarty (in press). Following that idea, a focus on behaviour and goals would appear to conform with the concept of descriptive norms whereas the negotiation of principles and positions seems to better reflect injunctive norms.
Nevertheless, regardless of the style (or norm) a community adopts, an important function of social movements remains the facilitation of action, or plans for action. Therefore, it is reasonable that planning and decision-making about action should be present in both common identity and alliance of convenience communities. In previous chapters, I have noted the role of consensus and consensualisation for group formation, and I would argue that the importance of planning and decision-making should be reflected by similar endeavours to reach consensus about the need for, and nature of, action and action plans in both common identity and alliance of convenience groups.

My focus in this thesis is the examination of on-line social movement communities. Traditionally, researchers in the field have viewed on-line communities as including both face-to-face groups that have adopted an on-line instantiation, and groups that have formed and exist exclusively on-line. For example, Olesen (2004) noted how the pre-existing community of Zapatistas used the internet to assist in establishing ‘solidarity networks’, whereas Earl and Schussman (2003) looked at activist groups that formed on-line to facilitate strategic voting during the 2000 U.S. Presidential Elections. Although I accept both forms of on-line community in our broad catchment, in this particular study I decided to explore my ideas in the context of one specific on-line social movement community, an on-line forum that developed around an existing face-to-face movement, the anti-globalisation S11 alliance.

On September 11 2000, members and associates of the World Economic Forum (WEF) descended on the Crown Casino complex in Melbourne Australia, for the three day long Asia Pacific Economic Summit. There to greet them were several thousand anti-globalisation protesters, rallying under the S11 banner. Following the typical characteristics of movements described by Klandermans (1997) and others, the broad anti-globalisation movement includes a vast international array of groups and individuals working from many different ideological bases and, sometimes, towards a range of different outcomes (e.g., see Brooks, 2004, who concluded that this type of diversity limits the effectiveness of the movement). The S11 Alliance also followed this pattern. It formed specifically to coordinate protest action against the regional WEF meeting; however, its actions did not take place in isolation. More accurately, S11 represented one peak in a continuing range of international unrest – a
focal point in a much wider social movement. Therefore, in many ways S11 is best understood as a microcosm of the wider movement, inasmuch as it was comprised of varied groups and individuals who, although sharing a goal, differed in their views on how best to achieve that goal – and, in fact, sometimes also disagreed about what that goal was.

Although self-styled as a “kaleidoscope of actions, conferences and workshops united in opposition to the current policies of corporate globalisation...” (S11, 2001), the way the movement was understood and interpreted was often contradictory. For example, at times commentators treated S11 as an organised bloc with a central, controlling hierarchy. Thus, the Sunday Age newspaper noted that “Police and representatives from the S11 protest alliance have met regularly and the authorities have this week been given undertakings the demonstrators will not resort to violence...” (September, 2000). Alternatively, according to others, the alliance was “... an ill-assorted rabble of woolly-headed idealists and naive students, together with people who dance with the fairies...” (Herald Sun, September 2000).

One focus of the lay analysis of S11 was on the role of the Internet as a medium of communication and organisation. In fact, an important mechanism through which debate did take place in the alliance was through on-line communities. The alliance, like the broader anti-globalisation movement, made extensive use of Internet technology as a way of facilitating communication. It maintained a website (www.s11.org, since off-line) and a number of ‘e-groups’ or on-line forums (websites that accept and archive e-mail messages for public or private display). The most widely used of the alliance’s on-line groups were their discussion and announcement forums (both the discussion and announcement groups are now offline).

The S11 on-line discussion forum was completely open (i.e., it allowed unrestricted public access for reading and posting messages) and designed for active interaction and debate. The forum went on-line in February 2000 and was still active as at April 20 2001, receiving approximately 30 messages per month after January 2001. The announcement forum was fully moderated; in other words, participants had unrestricted access to read information, but all postings were screened. As moderation restricted the ability of participants to freely engage in argument and consensus development, I excluded the announcements forum from my investigation.
I reasoned that the S11 discussion forum was an on-line instantiation of the face-to-face S11 movement. In other words, the discussion forum represented exactly the type of on-line movement that was the target of this thesis. Accordingly, if the forum was a legitimate social movement OLC, then it should have developed along either an alliance of convenience or a common identity styles, as I have outlined those styles above. Thus, following my ideas about the alliance of convenience and common identity styles, I made the following specific hypotheses about the S11 discussion forum:

**H1:** The S11 on-line forum would follow one of two different styles of community development, evolving as either as a common identity group, or as an alliance of convenience. Further, these two styles would be characterised by differences in intra-community consensualisation. Thus:

a/ if the forum developed along the lines of a common identity group, participants would advocate structural and organisational norms consistent with a CI, and the content of intra-group communication would initially be characterised by argument and negotiation of consensus about the meaning of the group and its principles

b/ alternatively, if the forum developed as an alliance of convenience, participants would advocate structural and organisational norms consistent with an AoC, and the content of intra-group communication would be more goal directed and so consensualisation would more reflect interaction about behaviour

**H2:** As an on-line instantiation of a social movement planning and facilitating action would assume a primary role in the community. Therefore, participants would advocate specific actions, and consensualisation about the need for planning and conducting action would be prevalent, regardless of whether the forum developed as a common identity group or as an alliance of convenience.
Method

Data Collection

The study involved coding of archived messages posted to the SI 1 discussion on-line forum between February and December 2000. 2,967 messages were posted to the forum over that eleven-month period, with message volume increasing as the date of the SI 1 movement’s primary protest action (September 11th) neared, and declining after that date passed.

I divided the development of the on-line discussion forum into three phases, and sampled messages accordingly. The initial phase of development was marked as falling between forum inception, and progressing through to one month before the major protest action. The second developmental phase comprised the calendar month leading to and including the protest date (i.e., 11 August to 11 September inclusive). I took the final developmental phase as running from 12 September through to the end of December 2000.

Although the forum did not itself officially differentiate between these three phases, I argue that they represent both ‘natural’ and logical temporal snapshots through which the development of community could be viewed. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the increase in frequency of messages leading up to the protest event represents the community increasing its efforts in this period. One-month prior to the protest represents an artificial, yet convenient time frame to capture this increase. Following on from this, the point when the community initially formed to the start of the month prior to the protest, and the time following the protest logically represent two additional developmental phases.

It is important to note that I accept the temporal phases I have used are open to debate. For example, arguments could be advanced for reducing the division of community development into two phases (pre-protest and post-protest), or increasing it to four phases (by simply dividing the total 11-month period by four). Although I acknowledge that alternative divisions of the community’s lifespan are possible, it is my contention that the actual time-period spanned by each of the phases has no material affect on my conclusions. Thus, the use of developmental phases provides a convenient way to group and display my data, however, these phases have only negligible influence on the content or coding of the categories I have developed and used to test my hypotheses.
In summary then, the first phase of forum development included messages from February to August 10, the second phase included messages from August 11 to September 11, and the final phase included messages from September 12 to December 31. Using systematic sampling, I selected 200 messages from each phase, or 20% of the total messages posted over the February - December period.

Category Definition and Coding Procedure

In line with my predictions, coding categories fell into two broad domains - community style, and community interaction. I developed two categories of community style – Common Identity (CI) and Alliance of Convenience (AoC). Following my specific hypotheses, I defined a CI as a community that develops expecting members to adhere to rules, structures, and norms that govern the relevant behaviour of all community members. So, messages were coded CI if they contained:

- advocacy or support of a centralised organisational structure, or
- advocacy or support of centralised decision making, or
- advocacy or support of the need for consensus about appropriate aims and/or unified behaviour, or
- advocacy or support of formation of and adherence to shared norms, rules, and/or behaviours for the whole community

For example, the following excerpt is from a message coded CI –

So therefore our aim in Melbourne is to build this anti-capitalist movement and the focus is the World Economic Forum. So the goal of the action may be to shut down the WEF, but only to increase the size of the movement and push us further along the path to international revolution.

In contrast, I defined the second style category (AoC) as a community that has one or more objectives (and that may even agree on courses of action) but has diverse reasons for seeking those objectives, and does not seek to reduce diversity in reasons, opinion, or actions among community members - so long as they are consistent with the community's purpose. Messages were coded AoC if they contained:

- advocacy or support of a decentralised structure, or
- advocacy or support of autonomous decision making, or
• advocacy or support of independent action, or
• advocacy against shared norms, rules, and/or behaviours

The following message was coded AoC –

No one is actually bound by any decisions that S11 makes. Anyone can, if they wish, form their own “affinity group” outside the weekly meetings and do “whatever” they like.

Community style categories were mutually exclusive, so if a message was coded AoC it could not also be coded CI, and vice-versa.

I also defined three types of community interaction: Discussion of Principles and Positions (PP), Discussion of Behavioural Norms (BN), and Plans or Calls for Action (PCA). Messages about Principles or Positions were defined as those that contained arguments for or against globalisation and related phenomena, and statements that intended to establish positions for the community in terms of its goals and principles. Messages were coded PP if they contained:

• advocacy of, or engagement in, debate on general principles or positions for the S11 community or the wider anti-globalisation movement

For example, the following is taken from a message coded PP –

Well, minimally speaking, I envisage that hierarchical social relations (such as capitalism, patriarchy and the state) would be abolished and that numerous communities of human beings living in harmony with non-human nature established in their place.

Alternatively, I defined messages about Behavioural Norms as those that advocated or discussed non-specific, general opinions or ideas about appropriate behaviour within the S11 community or wider anti-globalisation movement. Messages were coded BN if they contained:

• advocacy or debate of appropriate and/or non-appropriate community, protest, or movement behaviour

The following message was coded BN –
But the organisation doesn’t necessarily have to be top-down and we should be trained in NVDA [non-violent direct action] and self defence, whether we will need either is unsure in our situation.

Finally, messages were coded PCA if they called for a

- specific action(s) to take place at a particular instance, or
- series of actions to take place over time

(Note – PCA was distinguished from BN in that PCA messages addressed specific actions, and/or discussed particular timeframes or places). The following is from a message coded PCA –

advertising tactic, but it might put thoughts into peoples heads as they sit in the morning traffic. and I don't mean safety signs like “Stop”, more those larger 25km to such and such signs. how about making stencils for stop signs like: STOP the wef (s11).

Interaction categories were non-exclusive, so a message could be coded PP, BN, or PCA.

As the primary researcher I initially coded all sampled messages. To test coding reliability, four independent raters coded a random sample of 50 messages. Verbal and written definitions of all categories and examples of relevant category messages were given to raters before they coded the sample messages. I used Cohen’s Kappa test for inter-rater agreement (J. Cohen, 1960) to calculate inter-rater reliability. Reliability ratings are included in the results presented below.
Results

Initial results consist of numbers and proportions of messages coded to each category, and displayed by community development phase.

Table 1. Numbers and proportions of style and interaction messages by community development phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>2 (0.010)</td>
<td>11 (0.055)</td>
<td>9 (0.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AoC</td>
<td>24 (0.120)</td>
<td>9 (0.045)</td>
<td>7 (0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP*</td>
<td>23 (0.115)</td>
<td>14 (0.070)</td>
<td>29 (0.145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BN*</td>
<td>70 (0.350)</td>
<td>22 (0.110)</td>
<td>21 (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>1 (0.0005)</td>
<td>12 (0.060)</td>
<td>11 (0.055)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * acceptable inter-rater reliability (κ > 0.50)

Table 1 shows higher numbers of messages advocating an alliance of convenience in the first phase of community development, but little difference between CI and AoC messages in Phases two and three. However, unacceptably low inter-rater agreement was found for both CI (κ = .04) and AoC (κ = .26) indicating low reliability for both of our two community style categories, thus comparison between CI and AoC categories should be treated with caution. A similar pattern of messages was found for PP and BN categories, with higher numbers of messages advocating behavioural norms than principles and positions in the first phase of community development, but similarity in PP and BN message numbers in phases two and three. Moreover, inter-rater agreement was good for PP (κ = .70) and acceptable for BN (κ = .55) indicating that these categories were generally reliable. Numbers of messages advocating plans or calls for action were unexpectedly low in all phases, but again inter-rater agreement for this category was also low (κ = .44).
Figure 1. Proportions of BN and PP messages and 95% confidence intervals for the three phases of community development.

![Graph showing proportions of BN and PP messages](image)

Figure 1 shows proportions of messages advocating community interaction across the three community phases with bars signifying 95% confidence intervals around proportions. In Phase 1 for Principles and Positions CI_{0.95} = [0.07, 0.16], while for Behavioural Norms CI_{0.95} = [0.28, 0.42]. In the second phase CI_{0.95} = [0.04, 0.1] for PP and CI_{0.95} = [0.07, 0.15] for BN. In the final phase, for PP CI_{0.95} = [0.10, 0.19] and for BN CI_{0.95} = [0.06, 0.15]. I have excluded figures for PCA due to the low frequency of messages in that category, and the relatively low agreement between raters about the category. I noted above that the occurrence of community style messages across phases was similar overall to the occurrence of interaction messages, however, CI and AoC comparisons have also not been shown due to the low inter-rater agreement for those categories. We can have greater confidence, however, in the BN and PP figures that show the proportion of messages advocating behavioural norms as significantly higher than those advocating principles and positions in the first phase, and then evening out in phases two and three.
My analysis also revealed two serendipitous findings. Firstly, I excluded 328 messages from the total sample as unrelated (or ‘Not Applicable’ – NA) to community style, interaction, or action (P (NA) = .55, κ = .64). Messages excluded under this category included those that were blank, advertisements, multiple postings of the same message, or messages that had no original content from the poster. My second unexpected finding was the difficulty my raters had in clearly identifying messages planning or calling for specific actions. As I have noted, an important, perhaps defining aspect, of social movements is collective decision making and action. S11 explicitly positioned itself as a social movement community. However, the absence of clearly delineated advocacy of decision or action provided very little evidence that the S11 OLC had been used for planning or organising specific protest actions or events.

**Examples of content of category messages**

The S11 on-line forum formed around the broader S11 movement, an organisation with the specific aim of closing down the Melbourne WEF. Although S11 had a quite clearly defined goal, the organisation itself was part of the broader anti-globalisation movement and thus included sub-groups and individuals with wider ranging interests and agendas. Moreover, organising and staging other ancillary events and actions supplemented the ultimate aim of shutting down the WEF meeting. In line with my arguments about the expected utility of open interaction and debate, participants on the S11 discussion forum were also free to post messages without fear of censorship or moderation. The interaction in the on-line forum reflected the broad membership of the movement, the multiple activities that members undertook, and the open, un-moderated nature of the discussion – thus, the content of intra-group communication was complex, and the structure and style of messages was wide-ranging.

**Common Identity (CI)**

Title: meeting minutes s11 alliance meeting

Content: 1. What do we do on the day? The meeting came to consensus on the following motion: ‘The S11 Alliance adopts the central slogan: Shut down the World Economic Forum’. The meeting passed the following motion by voting as consensus could not be reached: ‘The Alliance will appoint a number of marshals/stewards, whose role will be to coordinate those who
choose to demonstrate as part of the S11 Alliance … The meeting came to consensus on the following motions: … The S11 Alliance endorses a protest of non-violent direct action. The S11 Alliance believes the real violence in our society come from the free market…” (Message Number 800)

The example above shows excerpts from minutes taken at a face-to-face meeting of the S11 Alliance that were posted to the forum. This excerpt provides a good example of the diversity of content that was present in many of the form posts. For example, parts of the message addressed principles that the group expected its members to uphold (non-violence), as well as advocating positions for alliance members (the free market causes real violence). Much of this type of content indirectly demonstrates support for a common identity group, however, at least one instance of direct advocacy is also apparent. The idea of marshals or stewards coordinating protests reveals a desire for a centralised organisational structure and controlled and coordinated behaviour (in fact, the use of marshals was an issue that aroused some disagreement on the forum).

Alliance of Convenience (AoC)
Title: respecting different spaces for protest/renewal
Content: I’d like to raise a practical issue regarding the property damage debate (I agree that we should move on from debating the ideology of this … we won’t achieve anything unless we start listening to each other and stop sending personal insults and competing with each other about who can email the loudest). If some protesters do choose targeted property damage, then I believe that this shouldn’t interfere with other affinity groups who are focussing on non-violence. I feel it’s important that we provide welcoming spaces for people who will choose not to damage property. To turn away these groups will reduce the overall numbers for the protest dramatically. I feel it is important to work out ways that these groups can participate and to create space for them to practice in a non-violent atmosphere… (Message Number 327)
In contrast to the advocacy of some form of common set of principles for the alliance, message 327 clearly presents an opposing point of view with specific regard to the issue of non-violence. This poster advocated an organisational structure that can accept a diversity of views and standards of behaviour (e.g., “it is important to work out ways that these groups can participate”), and explicitly argued against efforts to find a unifying set of principles or positions (debating ideology is pointless). Moreover, this poster’s use of the term ‘affinity groups’ represents a specific argument in favour of an alliance of convenience group style. The affinity group idea signifies an overall organisational structure that accepts that members will have differing philosophies and behavioural standards, but that their basis of unity will be a shared support of a specific idea or goal. This has clear parallels to the way that Bliuc and colleagues (2007) described opinion-based groups and thus also fits our conceptualisation of an alliance of convenience.

*Principles & Positions (PP)*

Title: RE : Hypothetical scenario

Content: If the topic of the conference was ‘Lets save the health of the worlds indigenous people’ then I would be upset that I was blockaded from getting in to speak. If the topic of the conference was ‘Lets ignore the health of the worlds indigenous because its too expensive’ then I would join the blockade on the front line. And thats what the WEF is all about … their meeting is called ‘Lets continue globalisation as there is no alternative and rape the planet while we are at it’ … their meeting is not called ‘Lets solve the ills of globalisation’. (Message Number 2225)

This message represents the poster’s participation in a debate about the legitimacy of the S11 protest (and the broader anti-globalisation movement) itself. Responding to earlier posts debating the reasons behind opposition to the Melbourne WEF meeting, this poster argued that protest is legitimate because the WEF’s goals are destructive. By defending S11 in this way, this poster engaged in a debate about the principles that underlie protest – in other words, he or she argued that S11 had a legitimate right to protest and blockade the WEF meeting, and that the alliance’s motivating ideals and principles were correct and honourable.
As demonstrated by the 'Re:' prefix to the message title, this post formed part of a discrete, ongoing intra forum discussion about a specific issue. The previous example (message 327) also addressed issues that forum participants had already discussed. Consequently, both messages underscore how an awareness of the specific context in which a message occurs enhances understanding of message content. Put another way, it is apparent that reading messages in isolation from their surrounding interactions can sometimes obscure their meaning. This highlights a methodological issue with the type of research I have undertaken here – practical difficulties may limit the extent to which test coders are able to access background contextualising information, and so affect coding reliability. I address this issue further below.

**Behavioural Norms (BN)**

Title: I Don't Like Mondays

Content: A few points: 1) If they are not planning on taking some other action on S11, students should be prepared to engage in either activity – ‘walkout’ or ‘strike’ – as they see fit, not as others determine ... 3) Re. existence or non-existence of a political bias for two separate mobilisations: of course there is a political bias, a political bias which will be determined by those high school students who participate either in these actions or some others of their own devising. There is more than enough room for *two* assemblies of students: some may like to sleep in on Monday; play truant on Tuesday and then wag on Wednesday, who knows? 4) If students want to play a more positive role in organising actions for S11, they might first consider forming affinity groups of their own. These would provide individual students a direct form of support from their peers, and a means by which to co-ordinate their actions with other protesters, including but not limited to, other students ...

(Message 1321)

**Plans or Calls for Action (PCA)**

Title: regional affinity groups

Content: So, this is a reminder to emerging affinity groups and already exsisting NGOs, Unions, etc. who are planning actions, or planning to participate in actions, (or just want to endorse the concept of the s11 call to
action) around the country/world to please write directly to: peace@s...(**and NOT to the s11_@hotmail**) with a brief (≤ 50 words or less) description of your contact details so that can go up on the web-site asap. Concept: who are you, why do you oppose the WEF, What are you gonna do on s11, what are you currently working on doing, where can you be contacted, where and when do you meet? (Message Number 324)

The final two message excerpts provide examples of content related to behaviour and action planning. Aimed primarily at students, at face value message 1321 could be taken to fall into the PCA category. I argue, however, that this message is about the rules and expectations associated with an event, and so should more accurately be categorised as BN. For example, although the message addresses a form of action (a student walkout), it does so by providing general suggestions about the best ways in which students can engage in that event. It is not a plan or call for action because it does not nominate or discuss a specific action at a particular time or place. On the other hand, the final example, message 324, is legitimately a PCA. This message explicitly calls for a specific action by participants – namely that sub-groups should provide their details for display on a central web site. Interestingly, message 342 advocates action designed to facilitate further action planning. In other words, even though this message is not about a particular event, it provides both specific direction to participants (i.e., it directs action) and it promotes further interaction about future events (i.e., it plans action).

Discussion

My original motivation for this study arose from the idea that interaction informs the process of social movement development, and that I would be able to assess this process within a specific on-line social movement, namely the S11 on-line forum. I contended that two possible paths of community development were likely, leading to a) unification of sub-group and individual identities to form a new, common identity group; or b) an alliance of convenience, consisting of a looser umbrella organisation based upon more pragmatic ideals. Further, I proposed that consensualisation measured through the content of interaction would differ for each of these two paths. Movement towards a common identity should reflect the principles of self-categorisation theory as it has been traditionally interpreted and,
therefore, see a negotiation of consensus initially based on meaning, principles and positions. On the other hand, an alliance of convenience should reflect more pragmatic, goal-oriented development, and so primarily see the negotiation of consensus about behaviour. Moreover, I hypothesised that facilitation of action should be a significant part of interactions for either of these community types.

My results provided only limited support for my original predictions and, overall, poor inter-rater agreement restricted the level of confidence I could place on a number of my findings. With regard to the my first hypothesis, I did find some evidence for a distinction between messages advocating principles and positions and those promoting behavioural norms, with BN messages outweighing PP in Phase 1. As I had proposed that these categories were indicative of community style, (i.e., that PP should be associated with CI, and BN with AoC), this finding could be interpreted as demonstrating that, in Phase 1, the interaction process followed that predicted for an alliance of convenience. On the other hand, Phases 2 and 3 of community development generally showed no difference between PP and BN categories. One reading of these findings is that they indicate the forum reached consensus about community style in the first phase of development, and so debate about that issue naturally withered away in later phases. The levels of inter-rater agreement for BN and PP categories were adequate (particularly given the complexity of the data and coding categories), and thus we can have some confidence in the reliability of these findings.

The pattern of results for community style categories reflects this interpretation. A higher proportion of AoC than CI messages was found in Phase 1, with proportions evening out in the final two phases. Low levels of inter-rater agreement for these categories moderate the extent to which we can rely on the CI versus AoC comparison to support our argument, however.

Notwithstanding this lack of strong endorsement, I would argue the alliance of convenience developmental path that I have described, organised according to principles of organic pluralism, has at least been partially supported. The very clear differential between PP and BN messages in Phase 1, shifting to near equal levels in later phases demonstrates that the forum underwent a significant change in the content of its interaction between those phases. Thus, in spite of the complexity of my coding categories, PP and BN unmistakably represented different types of
interaction – the distinction between an argument about a ‘principle’ and an argument about a ‘behaviour’ was plain to coders. Likewise, the drop in messages about behaviour from over a third to around a tenth of the total interaction between Phases 1 and 2 was unambiguous.

In earlier chapters I argued that social movements are, by definition, action-based groups and, following Tuckman’s (1965) model of group development, I concluded that on-line social movement forums should commonly storm and norm around planning and conducting action. For this study, I based my two alternative paths of development on differing interpretations of how identity might manifest in a heterogeneous social movement. A more traditional reading of self-categorisation theory leads to a group based around a single, common identity. However, an alternative path is revealed if we begin with the idea that dual or multiple identities can overlap (e.g., McGarty, 1999), or co-exist (e.g., Gaertner et al., 2000). Haslam (2001) built on these themes when he suggested the idea of ‘organic’ groups in which differentiation of lower-level identities is a requirement of a superordinate identity. Likewise, in Bluc and colleague’s (2007) opinion-based groups, members might expect difference and disagreement about issues and themes that are non-central to the defining group opinion.

I used the term ‘alliance of convenience’ as an appropriate label of the ideas encapsulated in Haslam and Bluc et al.’s proposals. Accordingly, one of the qualities of an alliance of convenience is a focus on issues related to the key opinion around which a group forms. McGarty (2006) argued that such a focus would allow groups to concentrate more on behavioural norms by virtue of being able to reduce ambiguity about non-core group issues. Thus, in this type of group interaction should be centred more around specific behaviours that advance a group’s key opinion, and less around themes and issues ancillary to this core aim. This pattern corresponds to the different community style preferences that I proposed. In other words, my conception of the BN category clearly corresponds to the style of interaction I would expect in an alliance of convenience. I argue that my analysis of message content showing participants focused on behavioural norms above principles and positions in the first phase of development is good evidence that they favoured an alliance of convenience community.
That raters were unable to agree about the definition of the specific categories that I developed as exemplars of CI and AoC community types is concerning, but might say more about the quality of my category descriptions and the extent of rater training than it does about the veracity of the category concepts themselves. Of course, my results also show that the community’s focus on behavioural norms fell away in subsequent phases of development. However, I contend that my conceptualisation of an alliance of convenience can accommodate this pattern too. Thus, it seems reasonable that once a social movement community has agreed upon an alliance of convenience as a suitable community style, focus should shift away from debate on that issue and move towards interaction about specific planning and action, in line with the action-oriented nature of these types of groups.

If this assumption were accurate, we would have expected proportions of planning and action messages to significantly increase in at least the second phase of community development. In fact, however, as my analysis shows, I found only low levels of planning or action messages (represented by the PCA category) in all three phases of community development. Moreover, although raters agreed more on the content of the PCA category than they did for either CI of AoC categories, inter-rater agreement still did not reach a level where we could have full confidence in this result. Put bluntly, I was unable to clearly identify action activity in the community.

I contend that the inability to detect action-related interaction does not diminish the extent to which observed differences in PP and BN message proportions support my arguments for viewing forum development as following a path towards an alliance of convenience. However, this failure does direct attention to another of my arguments about social movements in general, and my second hypothesis about the S11 on-line forum in particular. Following the literature about social movements, I predicted that regardless of forum style, planning and action would be prevalent. Plainly, because raters had difficulty recognising what actually constituted action, I was unable to support my second hypothesis. Given the robust quality of the literature emphasising the importance of action for social movements, the inability to accurately detect high levels of action related interaction was unexpected; but even more surprising was the difficulty raters had in consistently identifying action at all, and this is a point that I will address further below.
The generally low coding reliability did cause some concern. In hindsight, however, high inter-rater agreement may have been difficult to achieve. I conducted both the training of raters and their actual coding of messages in a single session. At the start of the session, raters were given verbal instructions about the test, including a description of the broad context under which the on-line forum developed. Raters were also supplied with written explanation sheets that contained example messages that had already been coded (see Appendix A for more information). However, as can be seen from the included examples, the devised coding categories were complex, and messages were often ambiguous. Moreover, community interaction messages were non-exclusive adding to coding complexity and, although raters were given a broad verbal description of the overall on-line forum, during actual coding they were not able to ascertain the context in which specific messages were posted. In other words, raters did not see message threads; rather they rated a random selection of individual messages. Given all of these factors, the variability of Kappa scores suggests that the coding categories were ultimately too complex to allow for easy categorisation after only short and non-specific exposure to the broad forum context, and without reference to any adjacent interaction that may have added background information about the rated messages.

Despite these difficulties, as I have noted, inter-rater agreement was acceptable for PP and BN categories, as well as NA (κ = .64), the category that encompassed excluded messages. In fact, the proportion of messages that were excluded as irrelevant was one of two serendipitous findings. Of the 600 message in my sample, 328 were excluded as not applicable p (NA) = .55. Put another way, less than half (.45) of the content of the on-line forum was about themes and issues that one would reasonably expect a social movement to find important.

The second unforeseen, and arguably most interesting, finding relates to my earlier point about the difficulty in explicitly identifying messages planning or calling for specific action(s). As I have already outlined collective decision-making and action is central to social movements, thus, the SI1 forum should have been used by participants for planning and organising specific actions or events. That they did not visibly do so (or, at least, that such activities could not clearly be delineated) raised another intriguing avenue of research.
The S11 forum was an active social movement community that engaged in considerable community interaction. My analysis of messages showed that participants took part in a frequent and sometimes vigorous exchange of email. The data also showed that some of those exchanges could be characterised as debates or discussions about appropriate community interaction. Most of the exchange, however, was purely for background – in other words, it did not directly address applied decision-making, action or issues. Moreover, whatever planning and/or action communication there was did not clearly stand out from the general mix of interaction. Rather, it appears that participants used the forum primarily to relay opinions or ‘chunks’ of information about a variety of issues – for example, globalisation, political philosophy, the environment, the economy, etc.

Therefore, in contrast to the key functions of a social movement, my study suggests that the S11 on-line forum neither made decisions nor planned or carried out action. In spite of this, however, the forum continued over time to be vibrant, and well utilised by large numbers of participants. I have provided some evidence that my alliance of convenience path accurately described the development of the S11 on-line forum. More interesting, though, might be a matter that would have remained unaddressed but for my serendipitous findings. I expected that the content of intra-community interaction would reflect the high value social movements place on planning and action. However, this did not seem to be the case in the on-line instantiation of the S11 social movement. Could it be then that on-line communities formed around social movements place less importance on decision and action than do their face-to-face counterparts?

Before investigating this question in detail, I needed to consider an important contextual characteristic of the S11 on-line forum. The S11 forum was an open, public community whose interactions were available for view by anyone with Internet access – for example, the police. Given the highly charged environment leading up to the S11 protests, there may well have been legitimate strategic reasons for that forum not to act as a medium for planning and action. Therefore, my first step was to try to gauge the extent to which planning, decision-making and action might occur in other on-line communities. One ready way in which I could gain an impression of this was available through the Yahoo web portal, the general on-line environment that hosted the S11 forum itself.
As I have noted, the Yahoo web portal remains one of the largest of on-line community sites. It is utilised by a wide variety of individuals and groups to facilitate and organise on-line forums dedicated to a vast array of topics, themes, and issues. I therefore decided to sample other forums on Yahoo, that were less in the public eye but still formed around socio-political issues, to see if they engaged in decision-making and action planning, or if they too behaved as did the S11 OLC.

**Formal poll use in on-line communities on the Yahoo web portal**

The Yahoo portal is one of the most widely used sites on the internet, and offers a number of free on-line services, one of which is the ability to create on-line forums or ‘e-groups’. Every Yahoo group is created under one of a number of ‘topic headings’, where headings relate to the subject matter and content of the group. For example, the major heading ‘Business & Finance’ contains groups related to trade, commerce, economics, investment, employment, etc., whereas ‘Entertainment & Arts’ contains groups formed around fashion, film, celebrities, the fine arts, and so on. The S11 on-line forum and other groups that I reviewed formed under the specialised ‘Issues & Causes’ sub-group within the ‘Cultures & Community’ heading.

The Yahoo site is free, easy to use, and affords the communities it hosts access to a range of on-line tools and devices designed to facilitate group communication and interaction (e.g., membership lists, calendars, the ability to display images, etc.). One of the key services that I considered particularly relevant to my interest was the ability for groups to offer on-line polls as a mechanism to measure opinion and consensus.

The Yahoo polling service allows coordinators of Yahoo-based communities to pose questions through formal polls to which members can respond on-line. Yahoo suggests that coordinators can use the polling service to “find out on what people want to discuss in the group, ... [or] get opinions on a current event or issue” (Yahoo, 2006). I reasoned that the poll facility would provide an easy and logical way for movement communities to at least gauge opinion on, and potentially even make decision about, possible rules and behaviours, events and actions, or other matters related to community life. For example, I supposed that communities would use the poll facility to decide on suitable topics or issues around which to focus attention, appropriate community norms or structures, or actions that community
members might wish to undertake in support of the community’s cause. Thus, following work pointing to the likely importance of decision and action in socio-political issue-based groups, I proposed that I would find a high proportion of issue based on-line communities making use of available on-line poll facilities to gauge opinion and make decisions.

To test this proposal, I took a random sample of 100 publicly accessible email communities grouped under the ‘Issues and Causes’ heading on the Yahoo web portal (the same heading under which the S11 OLC formed). In line with the procedure I used in selecting the S11 community, I initially identified publicly accessible groups (those with open archives, un-moderated posting, and open membership). I then recorded their recent use of on-line polls, where I defined ‘recent use’ as any use of polls within two months prior to the date my sample was taken.

Contrary to my expectations, the data showed that very few communities made use of formal polling. Of the 100 groups that I sampled, only nine had made use of the poll facility at any time within the sample timeframe. Moreover, even those communities who had conducted polls had only done so very infrequently (e.g., typically, in those communities that had carried out polling, only one or two polls had ever been conducted).

Nonetheless, the few communities that had used the polling feature used it much as I expected them to. In other words, where communities did conduct polls, they used them to vote on issues related to community focus, behaviours and potential actions. For example, communities conducted polls on appropriate methods of interaction (e.g. the use of attachments in messages), and/or on the broad issues on which they should focus and debate. Moreover, some communities had also conducted polls on what opinions they should appropriately be advocating, and possible actions that they could undertake outside their on-line forum. Overall, however, I found that the on-line communities in the sample were not making decisions or planning events or actions through a formal polling mechanism.

There are at least three reasons the poll use I observed might have been significantly lower than I expected. Firstly, it is possible that my sample was not representative of the wider population. Secondly, coordinators might have determined (e.g., through experience, or feedback) that community participants did
not want to take part in formal polling and so they gauged intra-community consensus in other ways. Thirdly, I may not have observed formal on-line poll use simply because these types of community do not make decisions or judge consensus.

I did not design the review of poll use in these few on-line communities as a comprehensive study of the mechanisms through which on-line social-action communities measure consensus. Rather, I used it as a means of further exploring a conclusion I drew from a serendipitous finding in the S11 study – namely, that social movement OLCs appeared not to plan or make decisions. In other words, I was not seeking conclusive support for this idea, but rather an indication about whether or not it was worthwhile pursuing it further. Accordingly, I contend that regardless of the reason I did not detect significant poll use, my observations have at least established that the question of why I did not observe it is worth more detailed investigation and, by extension, so to is the wider question of whether or not on-line social-action communities actually engage in action.

If social-action OLCs do not engage in decision-making at all, then this would seem to run counter to current and long-standing evidence about social movements. On the other hand, if OLCs use means other than formal polling to measure consensus, participants’ perceptions of intra-community consensualisation gain importance. Finally, if the communities I have sampled were unrepresentative of the general population of such OLCs, I would expect participants to have clear expectations and experiences of planning, decision-making and action in other like communities.

Alternatively, if it is indeed the case that open, on-line social movement communities only very rarely engage in decision making or action planning, or even that they rarely overtly measure consensus, it becomes problematic to characterise such groups as action communities because they do not actually appear to do anything in the expected sense. Thus, I designed my next study to investigate two questions – if action OLCs do not act, what do they do; and why do members of these communities participate in them?
Chapter 5: Action versus Interaction - expectations, preferences, and perceptions of participants in on-line communities

Knowledge is power, just wait and see! (comment by a forum participant)

This chapter further investigates the presence and role of action in open, unmoderated on-line communities formed around social action. I argue that results from my early empirical work challenge some theoretically plausible expectations about how social-action OLCs should behave, and I suggest that we need to distinguish between different types of community to account for this discrepancy. I propose that OLCs can develop with either an action or interaction focus, and that participants in those communities will assess community effectiveness based on the type of OLC that consensually evolves. I present four specific hypotheses based on my proposed typology, and describe results of an on-line study designed to test those specific predictions. Finally, I discuss the implications those results have for the action/interaction community types I propose, and their wider consequences for our understanding of the way that participants in on-line communities understand the nexus between action and interaction.

Introduction

In my introductory chapters I have argued that the literature suggests social movements, and by extension their on-line instantiations, should form and focus around action related to a perceived shared injustice (e.g., Klandermans, 1997). It follows then that participants in social-action OLCs should expect and prefer their communities to engage in action and decision-making related to events and activities in support of relevant issues and causes. I have also discussed the idea that the concept of opinion-based groups (Bliuc et al., 2007) helps us understand the heterogeneity and behaviour-centred characteristics of social movements and their associated on-line instantiations; for example, as Bliuc et al. have shown identification with an OBG provides an excellent predictor of behavioural intentions and commitment to action.

Notwithstanding these ideas, my first empirical explorations of (ostensible) action-based OLCs showed that many of those forums did not engage in decision-making or action planning to the extent that I had predicted they would. Instead, those OLCs predominantly seemed to engage in interaction; in other words, their
participants used their forums to talk about things rather than make plans or decide on action. Nevertheless, the specific forums that I reviewed (and many of their ilk) retained large and active memberships. It seems reasonable that if social-action communities do not engage in action we should expect a reduction in participants’ identification with their communities, and that community membership would drop off. How then can we explain the ongoing existence of OLCs that appear to be failing to meet their stated goals of actively planning, deciding, and acting?

Tuckman (1965) noted performance as a key phase of group development, arguing that when ‘performing’, groups focus on achieving tasks they have set themselves. His conceptualisation focussed more specifically on the importance of performance outcomes, however, another way of thinking about this phase of development is to consider the aspect of achievement. Put another way, according to this model it is important that groups achieve what they set out to do or, in other words, they are effective in accomplishing their goals (see also Reicher, 2000; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Following this line of thought, people might continue to participate in social-action OLCs if they believe that their communities are effective. The question remains though that if social movement OLCs are engaging in interaction how can they be effective at action, and, if they are not effective at action what are they effective at?

The data from my study of the S11 community showed that that community seemed to be very effective at simply relaying information – much of the interaction on that forum was comprised of statements of opinion and exchanges of ‘chunks’ of information. One way to think about this type of interaction is to compare it to a newspaper opinion page. In an opinion page, neither contributors nor readers expect those pages to act as forums for consensualisation where readers and writers will come to common agreement about issues. This comparison seems particularly apt as my research shows that, like opinion pages, a wide range of issues are typically canvassed by messages posted on social-action on-line forums. In other words, OLCs seem very effective at facilitating the exchange of information. This is not surprising given the ease with which postings can be made. On the other hand, this information exchange occurs on forums where communication should be quite specifically action focussed and so we would expect most participants to be unhappy with a community that acts like an opinion page.
One way to explain this dichotomy between the theoretical action focus and the observed interaction focus is to consider a typology that includes two potential development paths for social-action OLCs. Put another way, it is possible that two forms of OLC might develop around social or political issues. Firstly, social-action OLCs might develop to plan and facilitate action. Alternatively, though, social-action OLCs might develop to facilitate discussion or information exchange. More specifically, OLCs might talk about a particular issue (and so develop as an interaction community) or they could plan and act on that issue (and so develop as an action community). Thus, there may be two types of social-action OLC: interaction-oriented OLCs that exist to promote wide discussion about relevant topics or issues and action-oriented OLCs that exist to promote planning of relevant actions.

It also seems plausible that these forms of community are interrelated in that all OLCs probably first need to go through a period of interaction. Then, if participants are content for their forum to remain an interaction community it will continue to promote wide discussion and nothing more. However, participants may develop expectations of agreement about decision-making and action and so the forum will transform into an action community.

This typology echoes themes from Tuckman’s (1965) model of group development if we assume interaction equates to storming and action equates to performing. The crucial difference is that my proposal does not require that groups progress from interaction through to action. Under my proposed typology, whatever form a group settles on provides the standard by which participants will judge its performance. The idea here is that social-action OLCs present themselves as action communities and that is why people join them. Although all communities inevitably engage in interaction for some period, over time they can become more driven by pure talk (abandoning action and even decision-making). In spite of this, however, participants may continue to regard communities as effective because the basis on which effectiveness is judged shifts from being the domain of action to the domain of interaction. This idea bears a clear relationship to Hornsey et al.’s (2006) proposition that those participating in collective action can judge its effectiveness in a number of different ways. For example, their findings suggested that protest participants judged the effectiveness of their action on at least three dimensions. Protesters considered
the ability of action to build support for a movement, to influence the general public, and as a mechanism to express relevant values.

Applying this general theme of the potential for different dimensions of effectiveness, the study described in this chapter sets out to discover whether OLC participants themselves recognise a distinction between interaction and action communities, and if their perceptions of their own OLCs change over time from *expecting them to be* action communities to *accepting them as* interaction communities. One possible (and ironic) consequence of this suggested direction of change is that it would herald a counter-revolutionary role for social-action OLCs. If such a change is common in OLCs the Internet becomes, in effect, the new “opium for the masses”, where committed and passionate activists participate with the best intentions of engaging in active, meaningful action but end up endlessly talking about important issues without actually doing anything about them. Indeed, this fear has been sometimes been expressed by activists themselves:

> Opinions are easy; what an organizer looks for are dependable, steady, focussed people who will do political work. In fact, organizers spend a lot of time trying to avoid people whose main desire is to express their opinions at length rather than work. These folks make up one of the groups that is drawn to the Internet (Yates, 1996)

I have already noted that, from the literature, we can make certain assumptions about the expectations and preferences of participants in social-action communities. For example, participants should anticipate that their communities will engage in action, and also want them to do so. Furthermore, many on-line communities do successfully conduct action; for example, Park (2002) illustrated the Electronic Frontier Foundation’s successful campaign against the Communication Decency Act in the United States. However, as I have also earlier made clear, my focus is on open and un-moderated on-line communities, and it is in these communities that I have found little evidence of actual action. Given the data then, one assumption worth investigating is that these more open communities may tend to consensualise into interaction-oriented OLCs. Therefore, even though my assumptions about action communities carry across to my proposed action/interaction typology, a number of more specific predictions about the
expectations, preferences, and perceptions of participants in open, un-moderated social-action OLCs can also be made.

Before we move on to these specific predictions, it is worth mentioning one important consequence that consensualisation around interaction will have for an OLC. One of my key arguments is that people will continue their participation if they come to perceive forums as effective interaction-oriented OLCs. I argue that, where this perception successfully takes hold, forums will remain active, vibrant communities where participants successfully engage in on-going dialogue and discussion. Although this proposition assumes that sufficient numbers will keep participating so that forums remain viable, it does not presume that everyone who originally joined will stay on as OLC members; some membership attrition will inevitably occur. Although, following Haslam et al. (1999), consensualisation can work to shape collective beliefs, it does not irresistibly work on every group member. Consequently, people who are disaffected with a transformation from action to interaction will leave their OLC and thus, by definition, current OLC participants will be those who are not disaffected enough to leave (e.g., see Reicher & Sani, 1998; Sani & Reicher, 1999). This has practical consequences for my research. For example, it makes little sense to ask current forum participants if their OLCs focus too much on interaction as, presumably, most of those who believe so would have left. Instead, in this study, relevant items have been designed to ask participants about their intentions based on potential future changes – for example, “I would stop participating in [the web community] if members were not able to reach broad agreement on plans for relevant actions to take place outside the on-line forum”.

With that in mind, I developed an on-line survey including quantitative and qualitative items designed to measure participants’ experience of their own OLCs, and their views about the overall typology. The survey was administered across a range of open, un-moderated social-action on-line communities. I broadly expected that forum participants would agree with my proposed interaction and action typography. Following my earlier reasoning, I also made four more detailed hypotheses based on my prediction that open OLCs would tend to consensualise around interaction as opposed to action:
H1: Participants would expect and prefer their forums to be action communities.

H2: Participants would perceive forums to
a/ be interaction communities
b/ be effective interaction communities.

H3: Participants’ identification with forums would correlate with
a/ expectations of action communities
b/ preferences for action communities
c/ perceptions of interaction communities
d/ perceptions of effective interaction communities.

H4: Even where their forums became more clearly interaction communities, participants would show a low willingness to leave.

Method

Participants

Participants were current members of live forums that had developed on-line around a social issue or cause. Forums were selected from the Yahoo Groups web portal from the list of groups labelled Issues and Causes (see http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/dir/Cultures_Community/Issues_and_Causes). At the time of the study, groups in the Issues and Causes category were clustered under 24 sub-categories. Within each of the 24 sub-categories I identified the proportion of open and un-moderated groups that had 30 or more members. From the groups that had more than 30 members, I then randomly selected 100 groups. This selection was made up of groups from the 24 sub-categories based on the relative proportion of each sub-category to the total number of groups. I checked those 100 groups for forum activity and excluded groups where no interaction had occurred within two weeks prior to the study date, leaving a total of 46 groups in the sample set. Where administrators’ details were available, I obtained permission from forum administrators to include forums in the sample. A standard message (customised to include specific forum names) was posted to all 46 forums advertising the research and directing people to the study web site if they were interested in participating in an on-line survey (see Appendix B for message text). The study site remained available on-line for one month after the notification email was sent, during which
time 40 usable responses were recorded from 17 groups (note that some data were missing from 3 cases, however, responses from those cases were retained where available for inclusion in appropriate analyses).

**Materials**

This study set out to determine how well participants judged that the proposed OLC typology fitted actual on-line forums, and to investigate the relationships between forum types and participants’ perceptions and intentions. More specifically, the study measured the relationship between participants’ identification with their forums and their expectations about forum content and behaviour, participants’ perceptions of content and behaviour, and their participation and commitment to forums. Identification was measured using Haslam et al.’s (1999) single-item social identification measure and items adapted from Doojse et al.’s (1995) four-item measure (e.g., ‘I see myself as part of [the web community]’). Bliuc and colleagues (2007) have used the idea of confidence or ‘social identity certainty’ in their research on opinion-based groups and modified items from their measure to gauge participants’ confidence in their forum participation and commitment (e.g., ‘I am confident that being a member of [the web community] reflects who I am’). Specific items designed to measure expectations, preferences, and perceptions about forums, and conditions under which participants would leave their forum were also included (e.g., ‘If [the web community] changed so that it was more clearly an interaction community, I would stop participating’). Finally, open-ended questions were included on several issues including, for example, asking participants for feedback about the proposed forum types.
Results

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of participant responses for action, interaction, confidence, and typology variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified with forum</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is action/interaction typology appropriate?</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected interaction forum</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected action forum</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred interaction forum</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred action forum</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived interaction forum</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived action forum</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective as interaction forum</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective as action forum</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is forum right for me?</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in commitment to forum</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue Participation in forum</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave if forum moves to interaction</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave if forum moves to action</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. all questions scored 1 - 7, where a higher score indicates better agreement

Overall, scores showed that participants identified strongly with their forums ($M = 5.60$) and, in line with general expectations, participants agreed that the proposed action/interaction difference was legitimate ($M = 4.03$). Following the specific hypotheses, participants had high expectations that their forums would be action communities ($M = 5.13$) and high preferences for them to be action communities ($M = 5.28$). Participants also perceived their forums as interaction communities ($M = 5.18$), and as effective in that role ($M = 4.85$). Moreover, participants were confident about their commitment to their forums ($M = 4.98$), indicated that they would continue their participation ($M = 5.95$), and strongly agreed that they would not leave even if their forums more clearly became interaction communities ($M = 2.10$).

On the other hand, contrary to predictions while participants did expect and prefer action communities, at the same time they had high expectations of interaction communities ($M = 5.35$) and high preferences for interaction communities ($M = 5.50$). Also counter to expectations, participants’ perceptions of their forums as
action communities ($M = 4.89$) and as effective action communities ($M = 4.55$) were relatively high, with both falling above the mid-point of the scale.

Table 3. Correlations between forum identification and interaction, action, and confidence variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ident</td>
<td>Ident</td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>Exp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Per</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eff</td>
<td>Eff</td>
<td>Eff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lea</td>
<td>Lea</td>
<td>Lea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com</td>
<td>Par</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ident = identification with forum, Exp = expected, Pre = preferred, Per = perceived, Eff = effective, Lea = leave if forum moved towards, Com = commitment to, Par = continue to participate

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The pattern of correlations followed a similar trend to the mean results (see Appendix B for full correlation table). Supporting predictions, identification with communities correlated significantly both with perceptions of interaction communities ($r = .43$, $p < .01$) and perceptions of effective interaction communities ($r = .34$, $p < .05$). Interestingly, expectations of an interaction community were also moderately correlated with identification ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), as were preferences for an interaction community ($r = .47$, $p < .01$). Although no specific predictions were made about the correlation between identification and intention to leave if the forum moved more towards interaction, the moderate negative correlation there falls in line with the general idea that participants would come to see pure talk as valuable ($r = -.37$, $p < .05$). Similarly, as would be generally expected, participants’ intention to continue participating in their community was correlated with identification ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), as was their confidence in maintaining commitment to their community ($r = .83$, $p < .01$). Contrary to the hypotheses, however, only variables related to interaction correlated with identification; no significant correlations were found between identification and expectations of or preferences for an action community.

**Qualitative Data**

The role of qualitative data in mixed-methods research can vary. The appropriate use of such information can depend on the underlying epistemological and methodology framework that a researcher adopts, which may in turn be driven by deeper assumptions about the philosophy of science and the nature of the world – for example, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) discuss the importance of a
researcher's 'worldview' when considering research design. A rich body of work exists that discusses these issues in depth, and documents the uses and benefits of different methods of research for various research questions. It is not my intention to present a detailed review of that literature here. However, as with all substantial programs of research, it is important that justification for the selection of particular methods is clear to the reader.

In common with the majority of research in our field, I have adopted what King (2004) terms a 'top-down' approach in this thesis; in other words, my research is explicitly theory driven. I have selected methods of data interrogation that I argue are best suited to answer my specific research questions. As my work has progressed, I have modified my focus based on the empirical evidence, though always with broader theoretical conceptualisations in mind. As I have noted, the research presented in this chapter attempts to question OLC participants directly about some of my key research questions. The on-line survey I developed included six open-ended questions that allowed participants to comment in more detail about a number of ideas canvassed in the research. In the overall context of this study, the survey has been designed so that the quantitative and qualitative data can together provide better validation of overall results. More specifically, I have adopted a variation of a triangulation design – the 'validating quantitative data model' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 65).

The validating quantitative data model as described by Creswell and Plano Clark describes a predominantly quantitative study design that includes 'a few open-ended qualitative questions'. They suggest the model is appropriate for researchers who want to expand on quantitative data acquired through scale-type questions. Creswell and Plano Clark note that responses collected under this model do not necessarily comprise a 'rigorous qualitative data set', but suggest that the qualitative results obtained can be used to 'validate and embellish' quantitative findings. It is in this broad role that I have analysed and presented the qualitative components of the survey.

Although, typically, individual responses to each of my open-ended questions were relatively brief (e.g., one or two sentences), most participants did answer all open-ended questions and, inclusively, their responses provided valuable contextual details about key issues. For example, nearly all responses contained information
related to participants' perceptions of and expectations for their forums. Given the frequency with which participants addressed similar factors across the majority of open-ended items, and based on the idea of validating and informing the quantitative data, qualitative responses from items have been analysed together for content.

Responses across questions in relation to the action versus interaction distinction revealed that reasons for forum use fell into three distinct categories—‘Information Exchange’, ‘Action’, and ‘Support’. Examples from these categories are provided below. Note that in all following analyses participant number identifies quotes; for example, (P1) signifies a quote from participant 1.

**Information Exchange**

Providing support for one plank of the action/interaction typology, participants very commonly mentioned the value of their forums for facilitating the exchange of information. Thus, participants used phrases like “this groups keeps me update on issues” (P15), “it provides a place to share information and opinions” (P7), “we are trying to broaden the number of people who are informed” (P34), and “it gives me good info. and allow[s] me to express my opinions” (P20). These and similar responses clearly mirror the ‘interaction’ category proposed in the original typology such that, following my second hypothesis, they suggest that participants perceived their forums as interaction and effective interaction-oriented OLCs. In other words, these responses further demonstrate the value participants placed on the pure exchange of relevant information (and opinion), regardless of its direct application to specific events, activities, or decisions.

Interestingly, notwithstanding their championing the utility of general information, within the broad category of information exchange some participants also more specifically wrote about the importance of information about action and events. Along these lines, for example, participant 2 commented, “I wanted to be up to date on plans for protests...” (P2), while participant 6 suggested they obtained “a great deal of useful information about not only local happenings but broader national & international political issues” (P6) from their forum. Similarly, another respondent identified obtaining “information about activities” (P4) as a reason for participation, while participant 11 used their forum to keep “aware of the meetings and events” (P11). It is important to note here that these and other comments about event-related information do not amount to action-planning as such. Although they do allude to
action, these responses are more appropriately included in the broader category of information exchange because participants here are suggesting they use their forums not to plan or enact action, but rather to learn about events and activities that have already been planned elsewhere. Nevertheless, a number of participants did suggest they used their forums for planning and decision-making, and their responses are addressed in the second distinctive category explaining forum use.

Action

As well as mentioning information exchange about existing events and activities, some responses related more directly to the category of ‘action’ proposed in the original typology. Here, participants noted the role their forums played in facilitating planning and decision-making, and even argued their forums were places where action could itself take place. Although these responses mirrored the mean results presented in Table 2 that suggested participants perceived their forums as action-oriented OLCs, they seem to run counter to hypothesis 2 where I predicted that forums would be perceived as (effective) interaction-oriented OLCs. For example, participant 35 emphasised both ‘information’ and ‘action’ when they said their forum “helps people in a particular geographical region organise and educate around a broad range of social justic issues, both local and global” (P35), while participant 26 focussed more specifically on the idea of forums as platforms to organise, “it provides an important bulletin board regarding organizing” (P26). Generally addressing the facilitation of shared activity, participant 1 noted that their forum involved “good people cooperating to achieve a better community and world” (P1). Participant 32 also used the idea of sharing to highlight action-specific forum use, “it facilitates decision-making, information sharing, and task sharing quickly and efficiently across large distances” (P32).

One interesting extra detail came through in some responses that discussed action. A few participants linked the idea of action to interaction by asserting that intra forum communication is noticed and has consequences outside the forum. For example, participant 14 suggested that their forum was worthwhile “because we are actually being heard by the media and other organisations...” (P14). This is interesting because it may provide a clue to why participants’ apparently perceived forums as equally interaction and action-oriented OLCs (e.g., see means in Table 2).
Responses such as these suggest that some OLC participants might view interaction as action.

Support

The third category of forum use revealed in open-ended responses was ‘support’, where participants valued their forums not simply as places where they could interact or act in concert with people who shared the same concerns. In responses categorised as support, a few participants suggested their forums were worthwhile because they provided a sense that they were not alone in confronting issues, that there were others like them who shared the same problems and who were seeking similar solutions. I made no specific predictions about forums as venues for support, however, the idea is discussed in the literature on social movements. For example, Simon and Klandermans (2001) wrote about the sense of ‘belongingness’ that movements can provide for their members.

Some participants in this research seemed to be tapping into that role. Thus, participant 18 noted that “I started reading the boards and now I realize I'm not the only one in the world dealing with issues” (P18), while participant 9 said their forum “makes me feel good about myself, knowing that there are women going through the same things that I go through, the same situations and emotions” (P9), and participant 40 mentioned the sense of “continuity, tolerance, and acceptance” (P40) that they experienced in their forum. In one sense this idea of support straddles both of my proposed action and interaction OLC types. Responses suggested that participants’ perceptions of support were driven by interaction on the forum that demonstrated that problems and concerns were shared by like others. The view that interaction can lead to a realisation of shared interest and fate taps into the idea that talk itself can lead to change, if strengthening awareness of a shared grievance is also seen as increasing the potential for others to identify with and join a social movement because of a sense of belongingness. Also relevant here are responses from some participants who expressed a desire to increase the overall participation in their forums. Those results are discussed in the ‘Forum Change’ section below.

Interaction versus Action

Apart from reasons for forum use, a few participants also more directly addressed the distinction between talk and action. For example, when asked what would make them cease participating, participant 3 answered, “time constraints.
Inaction. Too much talk” (P3), while participant 5 responded, “if it was to become a talk only community over a period of time. Time for talk has sort of ended, now is time for action…” (P5). Similarly, participant 26 said they would leave if their forum contained “too much irrelevant clutter and chatter” (P26), while changing their forum’s “parameters to a discussion-based list, as opposed to action and planning…” (P35) would cause participant 35 to cease participation. Once again, responses such as these seem to support the general distinction between action and interaction (i.e., here participants clearly differentiate between ‘talk’ and ‘action’). However, these data are also contrary to hypothesis 4 where I predicted that a move towards more interaction would not adversely affect participants’ intentions to remain part of their OLCs.

On the other hand, some participants did value wide-ranging interaction. Participant 21 suggested that “diversity of opinion and goals is important in groups like [ours]” (P21), a stance echoed by participant 31, “I don’t have to actually agree with any point of view to participate” (P31). Furthermore, the qualitative data once again provided a more subtle insight here. When participants were directly asked how relevant they thought the interaction/action typology was for actual on-line communities, a few accepted the typology holus bolus as an accurate representation of their experience. Many, however, responded that forums were often both interaction and action; for example, “virtually all web communities are a mixture of types… action is almost never global, and the internet promotes globalism. It is a good venue for bringing together shared ideas and philosophies, and gaining support from likeminds ” (P7). Responses like these again foreshadow OLCs as venues for support and information exchange that may itself be seen as akin to action because it promotes a movement’s cause.

**Forum Change**

The final open-ended question asked participants how they would like to see their forums change. Many participants answered they were content with their forums as they currently were; however, a number again addressed action and interaction in their responses. Participant 14 suggested the forum should try to grow its membership and encourage “more planned activities beyond the community in person” (P14). Participant 37 also addressed both of these themes, “I would like us to have more members. I would like our members to be more active – both in sharing
messages on the list and taking part in the actions our group undertakes…” (P37). Finally, a few responses calling for active forum members also extended to include talk itself as a desired activity, “I would like to see more encouragement of ‘Discussion’. More people’s contributions need to be supported and encouraged…” (P24).

One way of interpreting aspirations to increase forum membership and interaction might be to view such calls as contrary to hypothesis 2. In other words, by suggesting they want more and better interaction, one could infer that participants do not currently perceive their forums as effective interaction-oriented OLCs. Contrary to this view, however, we should remember that current participants are those who are not overly dissatisfied with their OLCs. If we take this position, calls by some participants to increase talk on forums offer indirect support for my fourth hypothesis where I predicted moves towards interaction would not impact participation.

Here again we also see that, although some participants distinguished talk from action, others intertwined talk and action. I suggested above that perceptions of support and belongingness could be interpreted as supporting the idea that engaging in talk enables change. When asked how they would like their forums to change, participants implied they wanted a growth in membership and more active membership; in other words not just more action, but also more interaction. Responses like these suggested that participants value interaction as providing information, opinion, and support to existing forum members and potential forum members (i.e., people who they want to encourage to participate). Once more, this reinforces the idea that forum participants perceive interaction (talk) as one potential instigator of change.

Phase 2 – Detailed Participant Interviews

Taken in its entirety, the quantitative and qualitative data from this study allow me to develop and refine some of my key theoretical ideas. Overall, however, participation rates in this study were only moderate. Although I did attempt variations of the on-line survey described here, similar or smaller responses rates were obtained and so those variations have not been included in this thesis. However participants’ answers to open-ended questions added valuable contextual detail to the scale data. Because of the value of that qualitative data, I undertook a second phase
of the study using an expressly qualitative methodology that employed detailed participant interviews designed to elicit further elaborative information about some of the key issues identified in my previous research.

Adapting a freeware web server package, I set up a dedicated chat server that could be used for real-time text-based interviews. To recruit participants, I posted messages on a number of relevant forums advertising for people interested in taking part in in-depth, on-line interviews. The advertisement gave two options for participation. If people selected an interview via real-time chat, I created an account for them on the chat server and arranged an interview time via email. Alternatively, people could select to be interviewed via email, in which case I emailed them questions to complete and return in their own time.

Initial responses were encouraging with 15 people indicating their interest in being interviewed. Most participants opted for email interviews, although 6 selected the real-time chat option. However, after follow up 6 participants either withdrew before interviews started, or did not respond to further contact. Furthermore, although most of the 9 participants that did proceed answered most questions, only 4 completed the full interview; others either withdrew before the end, or answered some questions and then failed to respond to further contact. Participants who did proceed came from a diverse range of international OLCs, including a forum in the United States organising musicians rallying for peace, one based in Malaysia advocating rights for the Malaysian-Indian population, and an OLC fighting against the inclusion of the Ambazonia Republic (Southern Cameroon) in the wider Republic of Cameroon.

Withdrawals likely resulted from a number of factors, including participant fatigue and the ease of non-response (i.e., it is very easy to volunteer for something on-line, but just as easy not to proceed). Technological variables almost certainly also contributed to withdrawal rates. For example, the reliability of the real-time chat option would have been largely dependent on participants' own computer and Internet configurations, variables that are impossible to predict or control. Consequently, response rates dictated that I was unable to attach as much significance to the interview data as I had originally planned.

On the other hand, the responses I did receive contain some interesting observations. Therefore, much as I did with answers to the open-ended questions
from the on-line survey, I am including limited portions of interview responses in my analysis here. Along the lines of the methodology described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) I argue these data do provide some further triangulating information for a number of broad themes, and reinforces and embellishes important key ideas and concepts. Only the most relevant responses are discussed below, however, full transcripts of all interviews are included in Appendix B.

Key Themes and Issues

Three overarching and intersecting themes were apparent across all participant interviews. Firstly, supporting the idea that sampled OLCs were specifically action oriented, all participants agreed that they first joined their forums because they recognised the importance of achieving positive change in relation to a relevant issue, and that they believed the aim of their forums was to accomplish that change. In contrast to broad expectations, however, participants seemed not to perceive a change in the content of their forums over time from action towards discussion. On the other hand, more in line with my ideas, interviewees did generally perceive that discussion could be as effective as action in achieving change. These general themes were interrelated in-as-much as they all related to the effectiveness of forums as vehicles to achieve change, and seemed to set the broad tone for the way participants responded to other questions. I further identified three more specific issues that were directly relevant to my thesis. The interviews provided interesting information about perceptions of how forums were achieving change when participants first joined, how forums were currently achieving change, and participants’ ideas about the role and value of “lurkers”. The idea of non-participating members is a common theme in on-line interaction, and the term “lurker” has been adopted to describe this phenomenon. A lurker is someone who reads or observes an on-line discussion without actively contributing (see ‘http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lurker’ for more information).

How were forums achieving change in the beginning?

The desire to achieve positive change was a major reason that participants originally joined their forums. Further analysis revealed 4 ways participants said their forums were reaching that goal when they first started taking part. Information exchange or education was commonly mentioned. So, participant 1 suggested her forum achieved change “by sending out postings related to positive change –
information about issues and causes that would effect change” (P1), while participant 2 said her forum “educates people to take action” (P2). Similarly, participant 3 also identified the educative value of his forum, “it has contributed enormously towards letting the world and even the UN understand the demise of our masses under the Cameroun’s dictatorships!” (P3).

Participants also confirmed that a number of forums were organising or planning action. For example, Participant 1 said her forum was “more for organising and taking part than discussing and debating relevant issues and ideas” (P1), and participant 4 noted that people used his forum to organise “community services ... like visits to disabled folks home, bringing orphans for outing, school visits, donation drives etc” (P4). Participant 2 offered a more personal example of the organising power of her forum, “I am a single mother living very remotely. Not only have I been able to attend one demo in [Washington] DC due to the monetary assistance I received from other members, but several people have sent me money for my art as well as helping me when my van broke down” (P2).

The third way participants suggested forums were originally achieving change was by increasing participation in their movements. Participant 3 noted he expected his forum to “focus and [increase] membership so as to create a following for our cause and eventually be able to cause pressure to bear on the Cameroonian government and the international community” (P3). In a similar way participant 6’s forum was encouraging widespread participation in his forum, “the most important achievement was that it has helped many Sri Lankan Buddhists scattered all over the globe to share information as well as build up friendships and also attract even non-Sri Lankan Buddhists/Hindus to contribute to the forum” (P6).

The fourth way participants believed their forums were accomplishing change was by fostering unity by connecting similar people, increasing awareness of shared goals, and promoting similarity. Participant 6 touched on this idea in his quote above, and participant 8 addressed it more directly when he said “when I first joined the forum and in my mind, people should be brought to a certain level of unity or common desire before we can push for change” (P8). Participant 3 offered an interesting (though less direct) perspective on forum unity by emphasising how forum members responded to negative out-group attacks, “sometimes we had infiltrators who attempted detracting from the main idea and focus on liberation by
brining issues such as soccer or women and some porno which we vehemently rejected” (P3).

**How are forums achieving change now?**

Although a few participants thought their forums’ goals had altered over time, most suggested those goals remained the same – they affirmed how important it still was for their forums to achieve change. Participants had mixed views about how levels of ‘talk’ versus ‘action’ in their forums might have changed over time. Some suggested that their forums now contained less organising and less discussion while others felt participants were now both organising and discussing more than when forums first started. Some of this disparity most likely reflected the natural ebb and flow of many on-line (and, indeed, face-to-face) groups; groups will flourish or wither depending on a range of factors including accessibility, the impact of external events, members’ personal circumstances, etc. Notwithstanding these differences, I identified two common methods cited by participants as important ways that their forums were currently advancing their causes.

Participants identified *consciousness raising* as an important mechanism for achieving change. For example, speaking about the role of discussion in his forum, participant 3 wrote, “direct action without enough grassroots support might not have the necessary impact and would backfire, as well as fail to move the cause forward” (P3). Participant 6 noted that his forum was “achieving its goals by raising consciousness worldwide on important issues” (P6), an idea also raised by participant 8, “its just like sending a message that here in this part of the world, someone is taking action and it counts on that kind of light” (P8).

Related to the raising of consciousness, but also linked to recruitment and fostering unity, a number of participants mentioned the role their forums played in *networking*. Participant 2 offered a personal example, “I met a chicano man who liked my anti racist, feminist writings and asked if i would be on the Pacifica radio station” (P2), while participant 4 noted the role of his forum in arranging networking activities, “UMIC has just taken the first few steps of that journey by having games, get-togethers, treasure hunt, charity programs, donation drives etc” (P4). Participant 9 also wrote about the facilitation of networking as a key function of his forum, as well as acknowledging the broader role of the Internet, “the web is fantastic at
creating a web, connecting people who would not usually connect and I think that is what the discussion group is about” (P9).

The role of forum lurkers

Although the issue was not addressed directly in my original hypotheses, the role of forum lurkers arose as a result of responses to open-ended questions in the original survey phase. I argued above that responses to open-ended questions in Phase 1 suggest that participants’ aim forum interaction at potential movement members as well as existing members. Interview responses highlighting the role of forums as venues for networking, recruitment, and consciousness raising further support this idea. However, detailed interviews in Phase 2 showed that participants’ overt awareness of lurkers was generally low. Furthermore, when questioned directly, participants suggested that lurkers had only a moderate role in their forums (note also that some participants mentioned the potential for lurkers to be spies or enemies of their cause).

Notwithstanding the lack of explicit acknowledgement of the role and/or value of lurkers, their championing of the educative and recruitment roles of forum interaction suggests that participants may tacitly appreciate the effect forums have on non-participating observers. For example, participant 5 noted the personal affect of forums where she had simply followed interaction, “my groups have influenced me and opened me up to all the possibilities in the world” (P5). Participant 8 canvassed a range of roles that forum lurkers might play, “silence meant three things, they dint know and would want to learn more on issue given, they dint want to be know or identified with allies or supporters of corrupt and inept government officials and or they are learning from us who usually interact with other members” (P8).

A few participants expressed other views about lurkers. Participant 3 suggested that, “their perception improves over time and they become educationists on person to person contact, anasmuchas they also forward the message to show that what we are doing and say is the truth and important” (P3). Participant 4 also picked up on the same themes, “they may not reply, but they may forward to others, or take action offline, worst case, at least information is disseminated” (P4). Finally, participant 6 seemed more convinced about the power of debate to influence observers, “it influences people since the debates and discussion makes them think about the issues we are dealing with” (P6).
**Phase 2 summary**

Although there were some general differences between how participants said they perceived their forums when they first joined and their current perceptions, one clear theme that ran through all of the interviews was the idea of the usefulness of forums as mechanisms to develop consciousness about a movement, or as capacity builders for a cause. Regardless of whether they believed talk or action predominated in their forums, or what they felt the role of lurkers was, participants either explicitly or implicitly acknowledged that the interaction on their forums influenced those engaging in the interaction and had the potential to affect observers, be they forum lurkers, out-group members, or significant third-parties (e.g., the media). The interviews generally then supported the results of the survey phase that suggest participants’ understand an interrelationship between interaction and action. Not only did forum members appreciate direct action-related forum interaction (e.g., talk about organising and planning), but they also acknowledged a wider role whereby talk could influence opinions and ideas and so less directly lead to action.

**Discussion**

This study was primarily driven by earlier empirical work that suggested participants in on-line social-action forums engaged in talk rather than action, even where their OLCs originally aimed to facilitate action. In line with general expectations, participants did agree that the action/interaction distinction was legitimate. I had derived four specific hypotheses based on my reasoning about the relationship between action and interaction on-line. Following the specific hypotheses, participants generally expected and preferred their forums to be action communities, and judged their forums to be interaction communities, and to be effective in that role. Identification was correlated with perceptions of forums as interaction communities, and effective interaction communities, and forum members showed no strong inclination to cease participation if their forums more clearly became interaction communities. Counter to expectations though, participants also preferred and expected forums to be interaction-oriented OLCs, but nevertheless perceived them to be action-oriented OLCs. Moreover, identification correlated with expectations of and preferences for interaction, while there was no significant correlation between forum identification and action expectations or preferences (nor, indeed with the other action variables).
Participants' qualitative responses in Phase 1 also supported the patterns revealed through analysis of the scale data, and provided extra detail about the nuanced perceptions participants have about their forums. Participants identified three main reasons for their forum use. Mirroring the categories in the proposed typology, they suggested that their forums provided valuable opportunities for interaction and action. Additionally, however, they also suggested that forums gave them the sense that others shared and supported their concerns about issues (c.f. Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Some participants also stressed the link between interaction and action by suggesting that talk can itself achieve change and so is a legitimate form of action, and a number further noted that they would like their forums to engage both in more action and more interaction.

Data from the second, interview phase of the study broadly reinforced these results. Participants explicitly saw their forums as vehicles to achieve change, although they offered mixed opinions about how their forums were currently going about that task. However, the idea that interaction between forum participants had a positive influence was broadly accepted. Overall, then the results from both phases provided some support for my original hypotheses, but they also suggest important qualifications.

At face value, these results do make some sense in light of my original action/interaction typology. I have generally argued that the definitions of action and interaction become interchangeable, and that the actual performance of communities comes to be judged through successful interaction (talk). One interpretation of these results is that they support this trend. In Phase 1, action and interaction remain equally valued, and the perception of the forum as a place for the successful conduct of action (and interaction) also remains. However, it is the actual performance of interaction that is related to forum identification – action variables were unrelated to identification.

I have also argued that on-line instantiations of social movements can sometimes be understood as opinion-based groups. Bliuc et al. (2007) found identification with an opinion-based group to be an excellent predictor of action intentions; in the first phase of this study I found a strong correlation between identification and intentions to continue participation. I also argued on-line communities change over time. I suggested that members of an OLC start out
expecting and desiring an action community but if an interaction community emerges then participants will measure that community as effective – as performing – on that basis. Moreover, one consequence of such a change would be that participants no longer differentiate between performance based on the original goals of the community (i.e., action) and performance based on new, consensualised community goals (i.e., interaction). Despite providing some support for the OLC typology I have proposed, my results also suggest that my action/interaction categories might be slightly miscast.

These results suggest an interesting view of the way participants understand the relationship between action and interaction. On the one hand, participants equally valued action and interaction, and asserted their intention to remain members even if forums moved more towards interaction. On the other hand, even though participants’ valued action, their identification with forums did not correlate with action-related variables, while it did with similarly valued interaction variables. While the results lend some support to my overall thesis that the basis on which forum effectiveness is judged changes over time from effectiveness at action to effectiveness at interaction (e.g., participants originally expected action but currently perceived effective interaction communities), they also point to another, more subtle explanation of the way that forum participants actually see the action/interaction relationship, and so understand the value of on-line communities.

The surprising relationship between interaction and identity, but not action and identity, coupled with the relatively similar levels of expectations, preferences, and perceptions of and about interaction and action and the qualitative information about the potential effects of interaction raise the possibility that participants might actually see interaction as an effective form of action. Under this scenario, although the focus of a community might change from explicitly planning events and making-decisions to talking about ideas and issues, for participants this change does not amount to less action but a different form of action that may be just as effective. Thus, over time, even where forums become more driven by talk, participants may continue to see forums as effective not just as interaction communities but also as action communities because the differences ceases to matter – for them, on the Internet talk actually is action.
Participants directly addressed this theme of “talk as action” by suggesting that intra forum interaction could influence external organisations (e.g., the media), however, some of their other views also indirectly raised an interesting point in relation to this theme. When asked in Phase 1 how they would like their forums to change, some participants suggested they would like others to participate more actively in forum interaction. The idea that forums act as information resources, and that information (through interaction) can change those who observe it might also be relevant if the observers are forum members themselves. In other words, another reason that participants might view talk as action is because they understand that interaction has the potential to influence lurkers. The interviews I conducted in Phase 2 provided some support for this idea. Although only moderately overtly acknowledging the presence of lurkers, participants’ responses about the role of discussion and debate suggested they recognised the power of talk to initiate action. This fits well with the opinion-page metaphor I proposed in the introduction to this chapter, and adds another element to the ‘talk as action’ scenario – the idea of OLCs as consciousness raisers.

In this study I employed a mixed-method design that incorporated scale and open-ended questions in an on-line survey of OLC participants. Although I sampled a number of different OLCs, I only achieved moderate response rates in both my survey and interview phases. I have argued that the mix of quantitative and qualitative data provides some triangulation of results in this study, and so I contend that my results do add valuable information to my overall thesis. Nevertheless, larger sample sizes would have provided stronger results.

There are a number of possible issues that might have contributed to relatively low response rates. Rates may have been affected by the high levels of “SPAM” (i.e., unsolicited junk mail or messages) present at the time the study was conducted; although (where possible) I obtained permission from administrators to include their forums, they did not officially endorse my research on their forums; even the nature of forums themselves may have militated against members’ participation (i.e., members may have been focussed on a specific issue and so reluctant to engage in non-relevant interaction). Furthermore, even though I have only presented the results of a single study in this chapter, I did attempt other studies using similar methodologies; response rates for those studies were also low.
Some of the literature about on-line methodology addresses issues of response rates for on-line research, with researchers reporting mixed experiences. I will discuss this work in general, and my own experiences and recommendations more specifically in the concluding chapter of this thesis. However, one valuable outcome of the work I have detailed in this chapter is that it did assist in refining the plan for my later research. Due to the difficulty in obtaining responses to survey instruments, I have adopted different methods in later chapters, including a return to categorical analysis of archival data, and an adaptation and extension of a relatively new method of analysing group interaction – the structural analysis of group arguments (SAGA, Reicher & Sani, 1998). In forthcoming chapters I will use those methods to examine and develop my thesis.

When I originally began my research my broad thesis was that on-line communities would show much the same processes of development as their face-to-face counterparts. I suggested that OLCs formed around social issues or causes should develop according to the same patterns and rules that we know from the literature face-to-face social movements follow. Results from my empirical work have, however, suggested that this may not be completely the case. Although I continue to argue the importance of basic processes related to identity and consensualisation, my results have shown that some on-line forums do not ‘act’ in the ways we would expect their face-to-face counterparts to act. Therefore, my results suggest a modified thesis is needed to better explain my observations. Accordingly, I have developed the idea of social-action OLCs as forums for interaction rather than direct action. The key difference that I now propose is that identity and consensualisation processes in these ostensible ‘action’ communities coalesce more around interaction (i.e., talk) than actual action as they do in their face-to-face instantiations. This is a subtle but significant difference, the practical effect of which is that OLC participants come to understand talk as action in their on-line social movements. Before I pursue this idea further, however, I will first consolidate my current findings. In my next chapter, I will develop and apply a new methodological technique designed to further test my results and ideas to date. I present this new technique, an independent audit, as a useful additional tool to test the validity of my key theoretical concepts.
Chapter 6: A review and audit of theoretical concepts

All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched a different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all the features you mentioned. (Ancient Jain fable - "Blind Men and an Elephant")

In this chapter I consolidate my empirical work and theoretical ideas through the novel methodological approach of an ‘independent audit’ of those concepts. I develop this approach here as a way to test the validity of the overarching theoretical concepts that bind my work together. I argue that this new approach is particularly relevant for Internet-based research because of the challenges presented by work in that area. For example, the Internet is an extremely complex and rapidly growing environment where an established methodological tradition has yet to develop; I present the audit process I describe in this chapter as a useful addition to that developing tradition. I briefly summarise the main points of my arguments about on-line forums, and draw four specific hypotheses from that summary. Those hypotheses are then tested using the audit process I develop below.

Introduction

The ‘Internet’ as we commonly understand it is still relatively new. Although its origins are usually traced back to the development of the ARPANET in the late 1960s, it was only in the early 1990s that the familiar ‘World Wide Web’ began to take hold. It is even more recent still that a rapid growth in Internet access has lead to a seemingly ubiquitous use of on-line technologies for interpersonal and social interaction within industrialised societies (Joinson, 2003; Naughton, 1999; see also http://www.isoc.org for more on the history of the Internet). Despite this comparatively recent history, however, the Internet is already massively large as measured by the sheer numbers of web sites on-line (e.g., at the time of writing there were more than one hundred million active web domains, DomainTools, 2008), as well as massively varied, offering opportunities for information and interaction on an apparently endless range of topics and issues; for example, entering any term in most common Internet search engines will usually return tens of thousands (if not millions) of web pages.
The Internet also continues to constantly grow and evolve as a medium for communication and interaction. Thousands of new web sites and pages are added every day, and developing technologies and improving infrastructure mean that the capacity for interaction is expanding both quantitatively (i.e., there are more ways for people to interact) and qualitatively (i.e., people can interact in richer, more meaningful ways). For example, the growth over the past few years of so-called 'social networking' sites such as ‘facebook’ and ‘myspace’ has been made possible by advances in internet platforms and technologies, combined with the growing deployment of faster and more reliable internet access. Similar advancements are helping to drive an increasing interest in rich interaction environments such as text-based and video chat, and virtual ‘worlds’ (e.g., see http://secondlife.com/).

The impact of these constantly advancing technologies for on-line interaction also means that researchers need to develop new skills and methods to effectively conduct their work. In short, because the Internet itself is complex so too is the process of researching it. Moreover, even though the field is growing, research has still only scratched the surface of the Internet phenomenon. As a result the Internet is currently under-researched, and established research orthodoxies are still developing. In other words, rules and conventions about appropriate ways to carry out, interpret and draw conclusions from on-line research are themselves evolving simultaneously as research in the field continues to grow. At the same time, however, the Internet also provides a potential boon for researchers. For example, it offers the capacity to access populations and data that are not easily available by other means (e.g., international participant samples, verbatim records of actual interactions).

In this thesis I have sought to take advantage of some of the benefits offered by the medium by adopting converging methodologies to focus on one specific, yet relatively common, Internet phenomenon – social-action on-line communities. Applying both quantitative and qualitative methods, I have analysed real interactions in the field, and surveyed participants from a range of relevant on-line groups and movements. Where appropriate, I have also successfully tested the reliability of specific ideas in each of my individual studies with conventional statistical techniques and test of inter-rater reliability. Such techniques allow us to establish confidence in each piece of the thesis I have presented thus far. However, I have also used the developing body of my results in support of a key argument about the nature
of on-line social-action communities. I have posited a distinction between interaction and action in these types of communities and, more specifically, I have argued that the role of many ‘action’ communities is actually interaction.

I have already argued that as Internet researchers our methodological orthodoxies are still evolving and, as a consequence, we are still developing an understanding of how we can or should derive overall meaning from our empirical work – I suggest that, in effect, there remains a level of what Haslam and McGarty (2003) term methodological uncertainty in this particular domain. In connection to the specific ideas I have presented in this thesis and their relationship to my overarching theoretical concepts, the problem of uncertainty can be likened to the ancient Jain fable that tells of six blind men on their first encounter with an elephant. The fable recounts that each man touched a different part of the animal – the first, who touched its leg, concluded elephants were like pillars; the second touched its tail and reasoned that elephants were like rope; upon feeling its trunk, the third insisted elephants were like tree branches, while the fourth who touched its ear said they were like fans. The fifth man touched the animal’s belly, and was adamant that elephants were like huge walls, while the last man argued that elephants were, in fact, like pieces of pipe because he had touched its tusk. We can think of the difficulty the blind men had comprehending an elephant as analogous to the problem I seek to address in this thesis. In other words, are my specific ideas parts of an elephant and, if so, have my overarching theoretical concepts successfully described that beast?

I have looked at a number of different Internet forums and so drawn conclusions about the nature of forums overall; however, if others look at the same parts will they see different things, and so interpret the whole differently as well? One way to answer this question might be to have multiple different observers look at the different parts, and then compare their understanding of the whole. In other words, we can test the validity of my central thesis by exposing it to peer review or independent audit. Such a process would measure the plausibility of the key theoretical distinctions I am proposing by opening my ideas themselves, as well as the data from which they are derived, to testing against the judgements of a panel of independent others.
Although techniques for this specific process are not currently clearly defined in either Internet research or social psychology, there are some conceptually related resources in other scientific fields. For example, in the area of genetic research the National Center for Biotechnology Information operates an on-line data bank that allows genetic researchers to make their own data available for view, and access data made available by other scientists (see http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/). A comparable on-line database has recently been developed for environmental chemistry (http://chemxseer.ist.psu.edu/), while the Australian Social Sciences Data Archive performs a similar role for the social sciences in Australia (including hosting some psychology-specific data, see http://assda.anu.edu.au/). Although these resources do not aim to make data available for audit purposes per se, they do share a common scientific rational with the audit process and that is to enforce values of good scientific research. These include that research should be public, verifiable, open to criticism, and reproducible – all key principles behind the idea of the audit process I propose here.

Qualitative researchers have a similar tradition of seeking methods to ensure validity of concepts and theoretical assumption. Thus Miles and Huberman, writing about ways of assessing standards for the quality of conclusions, specifically addressed the issue of “Reliability/Dependability/Auditability” (1994, p. 278, emphasis added). In part, they suggested that researchers address these issues by asking if “multiple observers’ accounts converge, in instances, settings, or times when they might be expected to?” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). More directly relevant to social psychology, Fiske (2004) encouraged researchers to try the “cocktail party test” to see if their ideas make sense and are interesting to non-specialists, and she urged that advice and comment about method and theory be sought from colleagues and peers during the development of research programs.

Haslam and McGarty point out that expressions of certainty about research validity are usually based on the “degree of agreement among researchers about the validity of a particular conclusion” (2003, p. 425). As scientists, we already employ a number of standard research practices that are broadly designed to achieve similar aims at the level of individual experiments and studies. For example, we use replication, control, and tests of inter-rater reliability as formal guards against bias in experimental and non-experimental research design. Meta-analyses are increasingly
common devices used to test theory replicability and robustness through cumulation and comparison of results and methods across studies and, at a more general level, the peer review process in publication opens theory, method and results to scrutiny from independent others.

Arguably, however, none of these techniques offers the same test of original theory as does the form of audit I propose in this chapter. Of the techniques I have noted above, peer review through publication probably comes closest to the audit concept in that it affords the opportunity for independent others to assess one’s own theory and practice. However, even this process does not usually include examination of the original data by independent others. Instead, reviewers and readers alike rely on descriptions of data and method, and tend to take it on faith that these descriptions are accurate and robust until they are given reason to doubt, as in the Burt case (Samelson, 1997).

I propose that an independent audit might serve as a useful additional stage in the development and testing of my ideas, falling between study-specific techniques such as replication and inter-rater testing and higher level processes such as meta-analyses and peer review. Given the complexity of information and still developing methodological precedent in the field of Internet research, I argue that this form of intermediate procedure is particularly relevant in this domain. It is also possible, however, that the audit process described here might, more generally, be a useful tool for researchers in domains relying on qualitative methods to test their ideas and methods.

The independent audit is designed to test the validity of the central ideas and principles presented in this thesis. I discussed the importance that action should hold for social movements in my initial theoretical chapters, however, in Chapter 4 my first empirical study of the S11 OLC cast some doubt on role of action in on-line forums. From those results I suggested that there might be two types of forum – action and interaction. My most basic principle, therefore, is that it is possible to distinguish between the facilitation of action and the facilitation of interaction as roles that forums can undertake, and that forums can explicitly position themselves to carry out either of those roles. Further to those results I suggested that, over time, many forums that originally positioned themselves as action facilitators might change to facilitating interaction and that, aligned with this interaction orientation,
evidence of decision-making, planning, and argument resolution should be absent in forums that do change. In Chapter 5 I investigated these hypotheses by surveying and interviewing actual OLC participants. The results of that empirical work led to my final key idea that a newspaper opinion page provides a good metaphor for the role that many on-line forums actually play in their broader social movements. I have distilled these broad, empirically derived theoretical concepts into four specific hypotheses for testing by independent audit:

H1: There would be high levels of agreement between auditors about the definition of forums as action or interaction based on the initial forum descriptions, and between auditors and the researcher about the definition of forums as action or interaction based on the initial forum description.

H2: Based on their analysis of forum content, auditors would predominantly judge that forums changed over time from facilitating decision-making and action to providing information and facilitating discussion.

H3: Based on their analysis of forum content, although auditors might find some evidence of community dialogue (in the form of message threads) in forums, they would find low rates of actual argument resolution or decision making.

H4: Based on their analysis of forum content, auditors would predominantly judge the role of forums as 'opinion pages' rather than 'town-hall meetings'.

Method

Overview

The intention of this study was to test my major theoretical ideas by exposing them to review by independent auditors, and so the background and characteristics of auditors were central to the audit process. Given the Internet-based nature of my overall research project, and the specific use of computer-based resources during the audit process, auditors were required to have a reasonable level of familiarity with the Internet. However, it was essential that auditors not have specific experience or expertise in research looking at on-line interaction or on-line communities, or
existing preconceptions in relation to the domain of research. For the audit process to be of use auditors needed to approach the exercise free of normative expectations about how interaction in on-line communities did or should occur. For similar reasons, it was important that auditors had no significant history of on-line activism, or participation in on-line forums about social issues or causes. One of the key points of the thesis I am proposing is that participation in on-line forums can change perceptions of action. Clearly, if this were the case, then frequent OLC participation would bias perceptions of the forums reviewed in the audit.

During the process auditors accessed and reviewed the content of actual on-line forums. All forums came from a pool of those that had been sampled in earlier studies described in this thesis. For example, on-line surveys had been administered in some forums, whereas others had provided interview participants. All forums in the overall pool had already been nominally categorised as either ‘action’ or ‘interaction’ by the researcher (this original categorisation was based on the descriptions provided by the forums themselves). The total pool of potential forums was divided into two groups – one group that had initially been categorised as action and the other that had been categorised as interaction. The 9 most active interaction forums and the 21 most active action forums were selected from the two groups. These 30 forums were randomly allocated to audit participants so that each auditor reviewed 3 interaction and 7 actions forums (note that auditors were unaware of original forum categorisation). The complete list of forums, and their original researcher categorisation, appears in Appendix C.

One forum, MoveOn, was reviewed by all auditors. The broad MoveOn organisation is a large social movement community based in the United States, but involved in activism around a range of issues. The organisation makes significant use of the Internet, and the MoveOn on-line forum included in the audit sample was one of the largest and most active of these types of forums operating at the time of the study. As such the forum, arguably, presented some of the best examples of the types of on-line interaction that were of interest to this thesis and thus all auditors assessed that particular forum.

Before the audit took place, concise questionnaires were developed designed to measure how well auditors perceived the key conceptual ideas (as specified in the hypotheses above) applied to actual data, the level of certainty that auditors had
about the application of each of those ideas to the data, and the level of agreement between auditors about the application of ideas to the data. Questionnaires and instructions are provided in Appendix C.

After questionnaires construction, auditors were selected based on the requirements for independence and familiarity with the Internet. I also ensured that all auditors were naïve to the specific research program. The audit process took place in a single sitting. Auditors were given initial training on how to access and read forums, and then questionnaire items were administered to all auditors individually and in pairs. Auditors were debriefed together as a group immediately after they had completed the individual and joint exercises.

Participants

Auditors were 6 post-graduate psychology students at the Australian National University, who received payment for their participation. All auditors were female, with a mean age of 28. Auditors had a variety of specialisations within the field of psychology, including cognitive, clinical, and social psychology. All auditors were regular users of on-line communication, with 5 auditors indicating they used email for both work and non-work purposes at least once per day, and 4 similarly using the web at least once per day. The remaining auditors used both email and the web for work and non-work purposes at least every 2 to 3 days. None had ever participated in an on-line forum related to a social or political issue or cause, and only 2 had ever regularly participated in an on-line forum of any type. None were currently regular participants in any type of on-line forum.

Procedure

The study took place in a lab of networked computers in the School of Psychology at the Australian National University. Each auditor sat at a separate computer, and computers were configured so that individual auditors were presented on screen with a folder containing links to a number of live on-line forums. All auditors were provided with written instructions and two questionnaires, and instructions were also given verbally to the auditors as a group. Auditors completed one questionnaire individually and the other as part of a pair with another auditor (see below for details). The entire audit process took three and a half hours to complete.
A total of 31 live on-line forums related to social or political issues or causes were accessed during the study. Individual auditors each viewed 11 forums each. The forums were randomly divided into 3 groups of 10, and these groups were randomly assigned to auditors so that 2 auditors viewed one of each group (i.e., all 10 forums in each group was assessed by 2 different auditors). All 6 auditors viewed the remaining forum (MoveOn.org).

Auditors individually completed the first questionnaire for each forum they viewed. Generally, questionnaire 1 measured the extent to which auditors judged each forum to conform to characteristics representing action or interaction, and if they judged that the forum’s purpose changed over time. For example, auditors were initially asked to choose if a forum described its own purpose as the facilitation of action or the facilitation of interaction. Based on their assessment of interaction on the forum, auditors then answered a series of forced choice questions about if and how the forum had changed over time. Auditors were asked to choose if the metaphor of a newspaper opinion-page accurately described the forum, or if a town-hall meeting provided a better description. Finally, auditors were given the opportunity to write comments about any omissions in or problems with the questionnaire, and to provide their own alternative representations other than action or interaction that better described the forum they were assessing. For forced choice questions, auditors were also asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 how well their chosen answer fit the forum they were viewing (where 1 = “Does not fit very well” and 10 = “Fits extremely well”).

When all auditors had assessed their forums individually, they completed a second, joint questionnaire together with the auditor who had viewed the same group of forums. Auditor pairs were given 30 minutes to review and discuss their individual questionnaires, and jointly complete questionnaire 2. Questionnaire 2 measured the level of agreement between auditors about their assessments of each forum, and allowed auditors to provide brief comments about any disagreement. Finally, auditors were given the opportunity to provide feedback about the study design and procedure and, during debriefing at the end of the session were advised of the researchers general thesis about an action / interaction distinction in on-line forums.
Results

Table 4. Numbers and proportions of category answers for questionnaire 1 items.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Int</th>
<th>Cha</th>
<th>no Cha</th>
<th>to Act</th>
<th>no Int</th>
<th>to Act</th>
<th>no Thr</th>
<th>Res</th>
<th>no Res</th>
<th>Op</th>
<th>TH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>no to Act</td>
<td>no to Int</td>
<td>no Thr</td>
<td>no Res</td>
<td>Op</td>
<td>TH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>no to Act</td>
<td>no to Int</td>
<td>no Thr</td>
<td>no Res</td>
<td>Op</td>
<td>TH</td>
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<td>Q3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>no to Act</td>
<td>no to Int</td>
<td>no Thr</td>
<td>no Res</td>
<td>Op</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>no to Act</td>
<td>no to Int</td>
<td>no Thr</td>
<td>no Res</td>
<td>Op</td>
<td>TH</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>no to Act</td>
<td>no to Int</td>
<td>no Thr</td>
<td>no Res</td>
<td>Op</td>
<td>TH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.44)</td>
<td>(.56)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>no to Act</td>
<td>no to Int</td>
<td>no Thr</td>
<td>no Res</td>
<td>Op</td>
<td>TH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.61)</td>
<td>(.39)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Act = action, Int = interaction, Cha = change, no Cha = no change, to Act = change towards action, to Int = change towards interaction, Thr = message threads, no Thr = no message threads, Res = evidence of resolution, no Res = no evidence of resolution, Op = opinion page, TH = town hall

Numbers and proportions of responses to Q1 displayed in Table 4 show that auditors generally interpreted forums to be action oriented based on the forum description, however, the data for Q2 indicate that, after reading an initial sample of messages from forums, auditors’ perceptions changed so that they judged there to be a more equal split between interaction and action. Q3 results show that, in most forums, auditors did not perceive changes in message type over time – note that ‘type’ here refers to the structure and form of messages (e.g., did messages tend to be verbose or concise, contain original content or repeat old information, etc.). Similarly, responses to Q4 show that auditors generally did not perceive forums to change over time between their roles as facilitators of action or interaction. Interestingly, however, Q4 data also shows that where auditors did perceive a change in role, it was largely a change from action to interaction. The breakdown of responses for Q5 and Q6 show that auditors did moderately judge forum interaction to be more structured around themes (i.e., threaded), however, they also tended to judge that forum interaction did not to lead to argument resolution or decision-
making. Finally, figures for Q7 show that a majority of auditors thought the opinion-page metaphor better described forums than did the idea of a town hall.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of means of fit scores for questions 1 to 7 in the first questionnaire. For all scale items in the first questionnaire auditors indicated on a scale of 1 to 10 how well they thought their answer fit the current forum. Thus, fit scores provide a measure of the level of certainty auditors had in their responses.

Figure 2. Mean fit scores and 95% confidence intervals for items in questionnaire 1

The comparison of the means of fit scores displayed in Figure 2 shows that certainty about responses was, overall, similarly high for most items in questionnaire 1. However, results for questions 4 and 6 suggest that auditors were generally less certain in their responses to these items (nonetheless, at 6.85 and 6.67 mean certainty for questions 4 and 6 respectively are still above the scale mid-point).

Table 5 shows the mean fit scores for auditors and individual questions. Larger differences between means within items or auditors suggest less overall certainty for that item, or within an individual auditor.
Table 5. Means fit scores within items and auditors for questionnaire 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>8.1 (2.0)</td>
<td>7.5 (1.6)</td>
<td>7.5 (0.9)</td>
<td>7.0 (1.3)</td>
<td>7.4 (1.8)</td>
<td>6.1 (1.7)</td>
<td>7.4 (1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>7.5 (1.5)</td>
<td>7.2 (1.2)</td>
<td>7.3 (1.4)</td>
<td>7.7 (1.5)</td>
<td>7.8 (0.6)</td>
<td>6.5 (1.5)</td>
<td>7.0 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>7.7 (1.6)</td>
<td>7.2 (1.7)</td>
<td>7.2 (2.0)</td>
<td>5.0 (2.2)</td>
<td>6.8 (1.2)</td>
<td>6.6 (1.6)</td>
<td>7.3 (2.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>7.8 (1.1)</td>
<td>7.0 (1.0)</td>
<td>6.7 (1.1)</td>
<td>6.6 (1.3)</td>
<td>7.3 (1.3)</td>
<td>6.5 (0.9)</td>
<td>7.2 (1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>6.5 (0.5)</td>
<td>6.6 (0.8)</td>
<td>6.3 (0.8)</td>
<td>6.5 (0.8)</td>
<td>6.4* (1.0)</td>
<td>6.3 (0.6)</td>
<td>6.2 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>9.1 (1.3)</td>
<td>9.3 (0.6)</td>
<td>8.7 (1.1)</td>
<td>8.2 (1.6)</td>
<td>7.6 (1.1)</td>
<td>8.0 (1.2)</td>
<td>8.1 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * one score missing from P5 data for Q5; SD shown in brackets

A comparison of mean scores within individual questions shows that all auditors generally displayed similar levels of certainty in their responses. Similarly, auditors themselves were generally consistent in their certainty across questions. Although one score (P3:Q4) fell at the scale mid-point, all others were above that mark and, by and large, in the higher range (i.e., more than 7).

Table 6. Mean fit scores and agreement between auditor pairs for questionnaire 1 items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Fit Score</td>
<td>7.79 (1.6)</td>
<td>7.47 (1.4)</td>
<td>7.29 (1.5)</td>
<td>6.85 (1.8)</td>
<td>7.23 (1.3)</td>
<td>6.67 (1.4)</td>
<td>7.18 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>28 (0.85)</td>
<td>29 (0.88)</td>
<td>25 (0.76)</td>
<td>22 (0.67)</td>
<td>27 (0.82)</td>
<td>26 (0.79)</td>
<td>19 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5 (0.15)</td>
<td>4 (0.12)</td>
<td>8 (0.24)</td>
<td>11 (0.33)</td>
<td>6 (0.18)</td>
<td>7 (0.21)</td>
<td>14 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (Res)*</td>
<td>59 (0.89)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree (Res)*</td>
<td>7 (0.11)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. SD shown in brackets for mean scores, in all other table rows numbers in brackets indicate proportions.

* agreement/disagreement between researcher and auditors for all forums

Table 6 shows that auditors generally had a very high rate of agreement with their partners about item answers. Auditor pairs strongly agreed in their judgements about initial forum description (Q1), content and changes in forum interaction over time (Q2, Q3, Q4), and their perceptions about forums as mediums for community dialogue and resolution seeking (Q5, Q6). However, auditors agreed less about the
description of forums as opinion-pages or town hall meetings. Although a higher proportion of auditors agreed on their descriptions for forums (0.58) than disagreed (0.42), the proportion of agreement was relatively low in comparison with that for other items. Finally, all forums had also been originally categorized as action or interaction by the researcher based on the forum description. There was very strong agreement between auditors and researcher about the purpose of the forum based on its initial description (0.89 agreement on forum description).

Analysis of subset of MoveOn forum data

All auditors reviewed the MoveOn forum and the subset of results for MoveOn were also analysed separately to the overall dataset. Table 7 and Figure 3 below presents the results for the analysis of the MoveOn forum subset.

Table 7. Numbers and proportions of category answers for MoveOn forum, and agreement rates between auditors and researcher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Int</th>
<th>Cha</th>
<th>no Cha</th>
<th>to Act</th>
<th>to Int</th>
<th>Thr</th>
<th>no Thr</th>
<th>Res</th>
<th>no Res</th>
<th>Op</th>
<th>TH</th>
<th>A (R)</th>
<th>D (R)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Key. Act = action, Int = interaction, Cha = change, no Cha = no change, to Act = change towards action, to Int = change towards interaction, Thr = message threads, no Thr = no message threads, Res = evidence of resolution, no Res = no evidence of resolution, Op = opinion page, TH = town hall, A(R) = agreement between auditors and researcher, D(R) = disagreement between auditors and researcher
In the main, Table 7 shows high levels of agreement between auditors themselves for most questions, and between auditors and researcher for question 1. Auditors generally interpreted the forum description as positioning MoveOn as an action-oriented community (Q1), but judged that the initial interaction better reflected an interaction community (Q2). Although auditors did not perceive changes in the type of messages over time (Q3), there was less agreement about whether or not the forum’s purpose changed towards an action focus (Q4). Auditors perceived evidence of on-going dialogue (Q5) in forum interaction, but not decision-making or resolution (Q6). Finally, all auditors thought that the opinion-page metaphor was a better description of the forum than the metaphor of a town hall (Q7).

Figure 3. Mean fit scores and 95% confidence intervals for subset of MoveOn data

Figure 3 shows that Mean fit scores for the MoveOn data subset were similar to that for the overall dataset indicating that auditors were relatively certain of their responses. Moreover, a comparison of confidence intervals around mean scores
shows that auditors were similarly certain about their responses to all questions, somewhat in contrast to the overall data where auditors were less certain about questions 4 and 6.

Qualitative feedback – auditors’ own interpretations of the data

Auditors were given the opportunity to comment on aspects of the study in the final item of the first questionnaire, and in questionnaire 2 items. Five auditors provided feedback in these items, much of which was directly relevant to the aims of the overall study. Although items in questionnaire 1 addressed the action / interaction distinction, auditors were not aware of the researchers hypotheses about this distinction until the debriefing session after the study. Discussion during debriefing confirmed that auditors had not deduced the researchers hypotheses during the study itself.

Although the quantitative data suggest that auditors were generally clear about the distinction between action and interaction, some participant feedback was more equivocal on this point. For example, auditors 2 and 4 noted that it was sometimes difficult to draw a clear distinction between action and interaction:

A2: This one was a little more difficult to assess – there seemed to be quite a few messages that were broadly related, and in some cases difficult to ascertain their purpose

A4: It is related to info about action... [and] discussion about how to do it.

In spite of this, feedback generally did support a distinction between action and interaction, and a change from action towards interaction. So, auditor 2 commented that one forum

A2: ...began as a community dialogue, but this changed later in the forum messages to be more like sharing info. than dialogue for meetings/opinions

while auditor 4 noted that

A4: After reading a bunch of threads, the forum description doesn’t seem to match. It’s more about info than the ‘action’ that they promise.

In a similar vein, auditor 6 found

A6: All of the calls to action I read about (only 3) originated from another group and were merely posted (then ignored) on the website.
Auditors 6’s (somewhat light-hearted) comment about one specific forum that “it started out so well (action-wise)!" also provided a good summary of one clear theme that ran through much of the discussion during the debriefing session. In many cases auditors said that they did distinguish a difference between the original intentions of forums, and what those forums actually ended up achieving. Moreover, when reflecting on the differences between forums’ statements about facilitating action, compared with the actual content of their interaction, auditors viewed a change towards interaction as a retrograde step; in the context of forums that were supposedly action, auditors saw a predomination of interaction as a corruption of that purpose.

Finally, auditors reflected on the difficulty they sometimes had in making clear distinctions between forums acting as town hall or opinion pages. For example, commenting about a particular forum, auditor 4 suggested that

A4: It’s a bit of both – although it seems to be more information based than discussion based.

Auditor 2 had similar comments about another forum, noting

A2: The forum does both – act like a town hall and an opinion page,

while, more generally, auditor 3 remarked that

A3: Questions 5, 6, and 7 could be answered very differently depending on whether you are considering [the] beginning or middle/end of [a] forum…

Feedback on these points provides some insight into the relatively lower rate of agreement within auditor pairs over the description of forums as opinion-pages or town hall meetings.

Discussion

The overall intention of this study was to examine the validity of the key theoretical ideas underpinning my core thesis by testing the empirical data those ideas were based on, and the ideas themselves, against independent auditors. Based on work described earlier in this thesis, I presented four specific hypotheses. Firstly, I suggested that there would be high agreement between auditors themselves, and between auditors and researcher about the way that forums originally defined and positioned their role. I hypothesised that auditors would perceive a change in forums over time from an action to an interaction orientation. I also anticipated that,
although auditors would find evidence of community dialogue in forums, they would detect little decision-making or resolution of arguments. Finally, I hypothesised that auditors would agree that a newspaper opinion page presents a more accurate metaphor to describe on-line forums than does a town hall meeting. Generally, the results offered good support for these specific hypotheses.

There was strong agreement within auditors and between auditors and researcher about the initial nature of forums, indicating that ‘action’ and ‘interaction’ are accurate and appropriate definitional terms. Somewhat against predictions, auditors did not perceive high rates of changes in role within forums over time. In line with expectations, however, where such changes were judged to have occurred they were largely perceived as changes from action towards interaction. Also in line with predictions, auditors did generally perceive that forum interaction took the form of ongoing dialogue, but they did not observe high rates of decision-making or resolution of arguments. Auditors also judged that the opinion-page metaphor better fit the actual nature of interaction in most forums. Mean fit scores indicated that, although overall, auditors were reasonably certain in their responses, they were most similarly certain about the threaded structure of forum dialogue and the opinion-page metaphor. Analysis of the subset of data for the MoveOn forum found a similar but even stronger pattern of results. Auditors themselves, and auditors and researcher strongly agreed about the MoveOn forum description, and auditors perceived initial forum content to be interaction rather than action. As with the broader sample of forums, auditors did not generally detect other changes in the forum over time, but where they did so it was change from action towards interaction. They did clearly perceive the presence of ongoing community dialogue but no resolution, and unanimously favoured the opinion-page metaphor over the metaphor of a town hall as a description of the forum. Finally, auditors were highly and consistently certain about their answers for the MoveOn forum.

I noted in my introduction to this chapter that, although I have sought to test each piece of my thesis as it has progressed, I had not to this point interrogated the unified theoretical ideas that I have drawn together from those pieces. I also suggested that the relative novelty and developing methodology of Internet-based research in general, coupled with the (largely empirically driven) way that my ideas have evolved throughout this thesis made it particularly important that these unifying
concepts be tested. I presented an independent audit as one way to carry out that test. The results of that audit have provided good evidence that the broad theoretical thrust of my arguments is sound. Based on their analysis of content across a range of different ‘live’ on-line forums a selection of naïve auditors generally agreed on the core concepts of my work. Furthermore, these auditors expressed relatively good levels of certainty in their responses, and also generally agreed with each other about ideas and concepts they were interrogated on. However, the results have also highlighted areas where further work needs to be done.

Interestingly, although auditors as a whole were most consistently certain about their responses about the opinion-page metaphor, there was also a relatively higher rate of disagreement between auditor pairs about which forums acted as opinion-pages and which as town hall meetings. These results, combined with the qualitative data suggesting some debate about the distinction between action and interaction, as well as the expressed difficulty auditors sometimes had deciding between an opinion-page and town hall, further point to the subtle relationship between action and interaction on-line. These results lend further support to the argument I have been developing throughout my thesis, but also provide an opportunity to further refine that argument.

My earlier empirical work has suggested that, to some extent, participants in on-line forums redefine the nature of action so that it comes to include interaction (i.e., talk). I have argued that this redefinition can even occur to the extent that interaction can become action for forum participants. These results have confirmed that the actual content of forum interaction sometimes does change from the facilitation of action to purely talk (even though study participants did detect less change than predicted). That auditors sometimes had difficulty deciding what actually constituted action, and their view that forums occasionally act as both opinion-pages and town halls points to exactly the issue faced by forum participants themselves. Put another way, it seems that auditors in this study found that the instantiation of action on-line requires a more subtle or nuanced understanding of the relationship between action and interaction. It is therefore plausible that this might mirror a problem that forum participants themselves face – what actually is action in an on-line setting?
Study participants clearly accepted that the distinction between interaction and action itself was legitimate, and that a change from action towards talk was a bad thing. They also found that, although forum participants did engage in conversation (i.e., community dialogue, threaded conversations) such themed interaction did not lead to on-line decision-making or resolution of arguments; in other words, they found discussion but no consensualisation. Nevertheless, many of these types of forums continue to prosper as venues for communication and interaction while at the same time maintaining their (at least public) face as vehicles for action. Following my earlier work, this seems to suggest that interaction as an end in itself comes to be seen as legitimate action on-line.

These results also suggest that the distinction between opinion-page and town hall, while retaining value, may require some refinement. Auditors were less able to agree between each other about which forums acted as opinion-pages and which as town hall meetings, even though they themselves were certain about which was which. There are at least two possible explanations for this apparent dichotomy. Firstly, it may simply be that the two distinct concepts were not defined clearly enough for auditors. Alternatively, the concepts themselves may not accurately capture the nature of on-line forum interaction as it manifests for forum participants. If talk does become action, and forum participants engage in recognisable and ongoing discussions (albeit without resolution) then it seems plausible that for them, an opinion-page actually is something of a town hall. Issues around the opinion-page / town hall distinction will be explored in further studies.

Finally, of the 31 forums included in the sample, 30 were divided into 3 groups of 10, and 2 auditors each individually analysed one of those three groups. The remaining data set, the MoveOn forum, was analysed by all auditors and their responses compared. MoveOn presented a very good opportunity for auditors to review a forum associated with a high profile face-to-face social movement, one that has successfully engaged in face-to-face action, and continues to interact, organise, and protest on a range of issues (see http://www.moveon.org for further information). As I have noted, the results from the subset of MoveOn data offered very strong support for my original predictions.

One of the notable issues that arose from the qualitative data and during the auditor debriefing session is the difficulty that auditors had in some forums
interpreting the intentions of the forum participants who posted specific messages. While most other forums were structured as traditional message boards where messages appeared in chronological order, the MoveOn forum used a different structure. Its messages were displayed according to rank assigned by member vote so that the most popular and relevant messages were filtered to the top. Arguably, this type of structure offers a unique opportunity to analyse forum interaction that should represent the ideal of the forum as its members wish it to be. In other words, in MoveOn, forum members have the opportunity to explicitly filter out non-action related interaction if they so wish. That the results in this study for the MoveOn data provided the strongest support for my ideas is significant as it suggests that, even where they had the best opportunity to do so, forum members chose talk over action. Given the high profile and success of the MoveOn movement as a whole, and the high (and on-going) volume of interaction in its on-line community, this result bears further investigation. In my next chapter I will analyse the MoveOn on-line forum in more depth to explore if and how issues of forum structure affect participant interaction.

The Independent Audit as a Methodological Contribution

In this chapter I have introduced the concept of an independent audit as a new methodological device that I used to test the validity of specific key theoretical components developed throughout my thesis. I also argued that this device might prove broadly useful as an extra step during the development of more general programs of research. The audit process as I have described involves a number of key steps, each demanding care and attention to detail.

For the audit process to succeed, researchers must first be able to clearly and simply define and articulate their key theoretical concepts and conclusions (much along the lines of Fiske’s “cocktail party test”). During the audit process itself, the concepts auditors are asked to test must be straightforward (for a relatively informed audience). If auditors cannot easily grasp the concepts that are presented to them, researchers are at risk on at least two fronts. Firstly, results are more likely to vary between auditors because of differences and confusion about interpretation. Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, an inability to clearly articulate an idea may indicate that the researcher themselves needs first to better develop or understand that idea.
A dataset must be available for use during the audit. This must comprise ‘real’ data from the actual research program that has either already been analysed by the researcher, or is suitable for analysis using the standard techniques used in the research program. Depending on the area of research, the dataset may need greater or less preparation for the audit process. For example, if confidentiality and/or anonymity are issues, then the data may need to be stripped of identifying information before testing. Again, depending on the specific area, ethical approval may first need to be sought before the audit process can proceed. In some cases, of course, it may not be possible to secure such approval, in which case an independent audit cannot go ahead.

Once the ideas have been laid out and the dataset prepared, the researcher must decide on appropriate measurement instruments to use during testing. These instruments will vary depending on the specific domain of research; again however, they should be kept as simple and concise as is possible to minimise effects related to fatigue, misinterpretation, etc. At the very least, however, researchers should include measures of fit for each question so they can determine auditors’ certainty about each of their responses. It is also desirable that auditors complete at least two test instruments – one individually, and another in jointly with a second auditor. The paired test acts as another measure of validity for the researcher. Auditors must be provided with open-ended items at the end of each instrument to allow them to comment on the process itself. Researchers may find that qualitative feedback about own research processes is as useful as information about their ideas and concepts. Along these lines, a debriefing session at the end of the audit is also essential so that auditors can provide further feedback. Optionally, researchers may also consider recording the audit session for later review by another independent researcher as a further guard against experimenter bias.

Selection of auditors requires careful thought. Auditors should be sufficiently sophisticated to understand the terminology, concepts, and procedures that they will be required to test and undertake. As with a number of the points above, this will vary to some extent depending on the area of research. However, it is unlikely, for example, that researchers will be able to draw auditors from the pool of undergraduate students that typically act as participants in many university research programs. The audit process requires a level of understanding and attention to detail
over a relatively lengthy period of time that may be difficult to sustain for many students. For this reason, researchers may find post-graduate students better suited to the role of auditors. It must be stressed, however, that auditors need to be naïve to the researchers’ specific hypotheses and so people who work in the same or similar areas may not be suitable as auditors. It is preferable that the audit be completed in a single sitting so, due to the length of time that the process will likely take, researchers may also need to consider offering compensation for the auditors’ time.

The actual conduct of the audit must also be carefully planned. The process requires a setting where auditors can access data and complete measurement instruments both individually and in pairs. The researcher must be present during the entire audit process to answer questions and ensure that auditors complete the process according to the instructions given them. At the start of the audit, the researcher should give instructions about the process verbally to the auditors as a group, and should also provide written instructions to each individual auditor. Depending on the data under review, auditors may also need to undergo training before commencing the audit proper. If that is the case, the researcher should ensure beforehand that a separate data set is available for training purposes. Furthermore, the researcher should ensure that they have practised both training delivery and provision of instructions. It is essentially the process run as smoothly and as professionally as is possible. The use of electronically administered measurement instruments can also greatly enhance and streamline the audit process, however, researchers may be constrained in their ability to utilise such technology depending both on access to the technology itself, and on the suitability of their data and test materials to electronic delivery.

As can been seen from this brief summary, the audit process can be time consuming and relatively labour intensive. However, I argue that the results I have presented in this chapter demonstrate its utility as an extra arrow in researchers’ methodological quiver. As I have presented it, an independent audit seems particularly useful for researchers in the early stages of their research programs. However, this process may also present an opportunity for the development of new collaborative methods of data and theory analysis and testing, and I will explore that potential later in this thesis.
In this chapter, I briefly review and summarise the empirical work to date. I argue that my research thus far has broadly supported the idea that on-line social-action communities can be thought of in two ways – as action communities, and as interaction communities. Although participants recognise these two community forms, they are less able to distinguish the qualitative differences between them. I propose that structural qualities of forums might influence participants’ ability to accurately differentiate between action and interaction in some on-line communities. I then present the results of a study that investigated the MoveOn.org community; an OLC that I argue overcomes many of the structural issues present in other forums that militate towards such uncertainty. I explore those results in light of my ideas about community forms, and briefly discuss other methods of analysing the content of forum interactions that might add value to my ideas about the role of interaction in action-based communities.

Introduction

The empirical work reported so far has painted a picture of evolving on-line communities oriented around collective action. My original study looking at the SI1 anti-globalisation OLC suggested that these communities do not engage in the types of behaviour that might reasonably be expected of them. Often, for example, they display little evidence of decision-making or action planning. Then, the idea that there might be two forms of collective action OLC – interaction or action – was tested and generally supported. However, even though community participants were willing to accept a distinction between the two proposed forms of OLC, the evidence also suggested that they saw those forms as interchangeable so that in some communities the definition of action included interaction; or, in other words, to talk became to act. I explored how OLC participants understood interaction to cause change by investigating whom participants saw as the target of their interaction. Results there provided some evidence that participants recognised that their interaction might influence external (non-community) and internal (community) targets. I also looked at the deeper meaningfulness of the concept of redefinition of action through interviews with actual OLC participants. Here, once again, broad
support was found for the key themes suggested by the earlier research – that participants accept the idea that there are two forms of OLC, that interaction is viewed as a legitimate form of action, but that why this might be so was not clearly thought about or even important to OLC participants. An independent audit of my results and general theoretical conclusions then broadly confirmed my earlier results.

So far, it is clear that some open un-moderated OLCs can rightly be seen as forums designed to bring about social change, and that they provide a medium through which their participants legitimately believe they can enable such change. However, unambiguously assessing participants’ judgements of the utility of interaction relative to action in those forums has been problematic. The inability to clearly distinguish between the value of interaction and action suggests that participants perceive that their communities are effective even where the predominant community norm is interaction, but it has been difficult to establish clearly why this should be so in these on-line communities.

One of the important features of the OLCs I have investigated is their largely uncoordinated and unstructured nature – they have been open, un-moderated forums with little or no formal use of measures of consensus, and only rudimentary ‘physical’ structuring of communications to facilitate interaction and understanding. What is more, within the forums themselves there has been no explicit demarcation between action and interaction communications and, consequently, for participants the delineation between interaction and action may not be clear-cut. Put another way, it seems reasonable to suggest that the lack of demarcation between action and interaction may make it difficult for participants to quantify the degree and quality of action versus interaction related messages in their forums. If such difficulty exists it may lead to uncertainty about the relative frequency and popularity of the different types of message content (action versus interaction) and the influence that those content types have within their forums. In other words, if forum participants cannot easily judge what their fellow participants agree with or prefer, then it seems reasonable to infer that the formulation of intra forum consensus may be affected.

Some communications researchers have worked with computer-mediated groups designed to explore just how this type of awareness of the levels of intra-group agreement influence group-based decision-making. For example, Lemus and colleagues (2004) proposed a number of ways that agreement in computer-mediated
groups might be predicted by factors such as member numbers and differences in members’ reactions to arguments. Their work followed Gouran’s (1990) proposals about the relationship between the process and structure of group arguments, and perceptions of the valence of discrete comments within those arguments. More specifically, Lemus et al., (2004) hypothesised, in part, that in computer-mediated groups endorsement and acceptance of proposals would be positively related to a) increasing differences between numbers of group members supporting rather than opposing a proposal and b) increasing differences between favourable and unfavourable reactions to arguments in support of proposals. Their research showed that these two factors acted independently as significant predictors of ‘decision outcomes’. Furthermore, they also found that an increasing difference between the number of initial reasons supporting proposals and initial reasons rejecting proposals was positively related to proposal acceptance, as was the development of better supporting arguments relative to opposing arguments. Note that although Lemus et al.’s work was based on organisational work groups, the processes at play in organisations do have some relevance for the larger types of communities under consideration here, as I have previously argued. In part, Lemus and colleagues argued that their results suggested “…group members might not only be paying attention to the arguments advanced but also to the proportion of members offering endorsements or objections to the proposals” (2004, p. 314).

There is some evidence then that perceptions of the frequency of message content and of the popularity of message themes can influence consensus and decision-making in forums. As would be expected, Lemus et al. and others working predominantly in the communications sphere have not focussed on aspects of identity formation or self in their work. However, I have already highlighted the important role that social identity theorists have assigned this type of consensus for groups. As discussed in earlier chapters, researchers such as McGarty (1999), Haslam et al. (1999), and Reicher (2000) have argued that consensus and consensualisation (the consensus building process) are key elements in the formation of identity leading to collective understandings and action. These researchers have further argued the reciprocal nature of the relationship between consensus, identity, and behaviour such that identity based on perceived reality influences group-based behaviour that, in turn, acts to inform assertions of reality. Thus, from an identity-based perspective, it is also reasonable to conclude that if uncertainty about the
content and value of messages at least influences intra forum consensus then this should affect the way members understand and assert community reality.

It follows then, that in general, the more transparent are community members’ evaluations of message content, the easier it should be for consensus between community members to occur. Furthermore, this should also be true for on-line communities and forums. Thus, where participants’ evaluations of action versus interaction content are explicit, judgements about the utility of content types ought to be easier and so consensus around appropriate message content norms should be stronger. For example, where interaction predominates and is demonstrably valued above action then in-group participants should concur that the reason the forum exists is to interact. However, participants’ highlighting and explicitly preferring action rather than interaction should result in consensus that the OLC should be an action content forum. Therefore, one way to better understand the simultaneous use of action- and interaction- related communications might be to look more closely at the value that forum participants place on such communications themselves.

Communications from the forums used in the empirical work so far have been suitable for categorisation based on the type of message content – in broad terms, it has been possible to categorise messages both effectively and consistently based on content advocating either action or interaction. As I have already noted, this has provided support for the idea that participants endorse both interaction and action as legitimate forms of OLC. Now though, an analysis using a more explicit measure of how participants view the relative merits of interaction as opposed to action could add clarity about the action/interaction relationship. MoveOn.org (http://www.moveon.org), arguably the largest and one of the most high profile social-action OLCs currently in operation, provided an opportunity to analyse forum interaction in exactly that way.

The MoveOn.org organisation and web site developed around a partnership between two independent social action initiatives – an online political action committee aimed at influencing congressional elections in the United States, and an online peace campaign founded shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. Since the merger of these two bodies, MoveOn.org has grown to include over 3 million members, and to encompass campaigns and actions on a wide range of social and political issues (although most of these have been centred around issues
relevant to its main target population in the United States - see the MoveOn web site for further information).

Although the organisation itself engages in a mix of both face-to-face and online actions in support of the issues it champions, the MoveOn.org website and associated email lists and forums are the main focal point for membership recruitment, distribution of information, and announcements and reviews of future and completed actions. In other words, MoveOn.org displays the ideal characteristics of a social-action OLC.

MoveOn.org operates an online forum, the ‘ActionForum’, where posters are able to comment on, suggest, and debate topics related to the wider MoveOn organisation. MoveOn state that their forum explicitly enables any organisation member to “Help set the agenda of MoveOn.org Political Action …”; thus, it fits the essential criterion of action-relatedness that characterise the communities of interest to this thesis. Moreover, the way that interaction on the forum is technically structured should specifically militate towards decision-making and action. According to MoveOn, the forum should “… promote a productive dialogue … make clear where agreement and disagreement lie and foster collaborative problem solving” ("MoveOn.org Action Forum : How does it work?"). The forum endeavours to achieve this aim by arranging messages not by thread, but by importance ratings assigned to them by other forum members. In other words, not only does the forum encourage action content, it allows participant to explicitly evaluate the worth of messages, and displays all messages hierarchically according to their merit as judged by other forum users. Thus, in contrast to many other online forums that rely mainly on non-structural approaches to reinforce decision-making and action planning (e.g., mission statements, suggested posting etiquette), the posting structure of the MoveOn.org forum itself facilitates those results, thus reinforcing an action-based context for participants. The MoveOn.org forum is open to view by community members and non-members alike, and can usually be accessed from a prominent link on the MoveOn homepage. Note that MoveOn.org has currently suspended the ActionForum for the term of the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election so that they can better manage their technological resources. According to MoveOn.org, the ActionForum will resume operation after the 2008 election (a similar interruption to the ActionForum’s operation occurred during the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election).
Another important feature of the MoveOn OLC is that it is effectively able to position itself as a successful social-action community. For example, by displaying descriptions of a range of successfully completed actions on its website MoveOn.org reinforces for its members that they can achieve actual change through their OLC participation. Through a link on its web page to work by Neils (2004) the organisation also overtly uses recent academic analysis to support its credentials as a successful force for social change. In a largely descriptive work, Neils mainly gauged the community’s effectiveness by referring to numbers of people mobilised in protests and dollar amounts collected during fund-raising campaigns. According to Neils, on both of these measures, MoveOn displayed considerable success (e.g., more than two million dollars raised for political campaigns, over one million phone and fax contacts during an organised ‘virtual’ protest). She also briefly addressed the community’s utilisation of ‘two-way communications’ through the ActionForum concluding that the forum provided an “… incredibly fluid, bottom-up approach to decision-making, allowing MoveOn to adapt and change as they go” (Neils, 2004, http://www.jneils.com/moveon/06influentials.html).

MoveOn certainly promotes itself as an effective social-action movement, and it also seems plausible that MoveOn can and does create social change; moreover, its participants know this to be so. That the community is perceived to be effective fulfils one of Klandermans main requirements for a successful social-action organisation, namely that such organisations must be seen to be effective to maintain the commitment of their members over time (Klandermans, 1997). Reicher touched on similar themes when he argued that a social identity could not truly be ‘claimed’ without group members first acting on the consensually agreed behaviours associated with that identity (Reicher, 2000). Thus, increased awareness of the successful completion of action by members of social-action communities should reinforce group commitment and participation, and influence consensual characteristics of group identity including appropriate behaviour and interaction norms.

To summarise, then, my empirical work has thus far examined open, unmoderated social-action OLCs. However, there may be structural factors inherent in the communities I have looked at that militate towards interaction at the expense of action. For example, the mechanism that allows open-ended, free-flowing discussion may also promote perceptions of the normative value of such interaction over action.
Alternatively, however, an open, un-moderated social-action OLC that not only has action as a goal, but that is also explicitly structured to focus attention on reoccurring and popular intra-community themes should make an action orientation more normative than interaction. In MoveOn.org we have an online community where this possibility can be tested. I therefore made the following hypotheses with regard to the MoveOn OLC:

H1: The MoveOn ActionForum will exhibit an action orientation manifested by –
   
a/ the presence of a clear majority of action messages compared with non-action messages
   
b/ higher agreement and importance ratings attached to action messages compared with non-action messages.

Furthermore, analysis of the subset of action only messages should reveal a focus on message targets internal to the community (i.e., action messages should be focussed on planning, deciding on, or conducting action for the community itself). Thus, I further hypothesised:

H2: Within the subset of action only messages in the MoveOn Action Forum –
   
a/ messages aimed at either community members or community organisers would be present in higher proportions than messages aimed at non-community targets
   
b/ messages aimed at either community members or community organisers would have higher agreement and importance ratings than messages aimed at targets external to the community

Method

Description of Broad Data Set

This study sampled an archival data set consisting of messages posted to the MoveOn.org Political Action Goals On-line Forum (hereafter referred to as the ‘ActionForum’). All potential posters to the ActionForum must register with a legitimate email address on the ActionForum site before they are able to post, however registration is not otherwise actively moderated (although see below) and, therefore, the ActionForum can be regarded as an open forum. The ActionForum is
divided into two sections - 'Top' and 'Recent'. On first posting, messages appear in the Recent messages section. Messages can be assigned importance ratings by other forum members (all messages are subject to such ratings, and registered forum members may enter an importance rating for any message). When a message has been rated by a number of participants it then also appears in the Top messages section, ranked according to its average rating; thus messages rated to be more important by members rise to the top of the Top Messages section. Members can also indicate their level of agreement with any message. Although these levels have no effect on where a message appears within the forum, they do provide another means for assessing intra forum consensus as the higher the level of agreement with a message, the more intra forum consensus can be said to exist in a way that is visible to forum members.

As noted above, the ActionForum is not actively moderated, however, according to their standard 'Terms of Use', MoveOn.org does reserve the right to remove posts that do not comply with forum rules. However, notwithstanding the potential for direct moderation, the user controlled nature of the forum is heavily emphasised, thus as well as being an open forum, the ActionForum can also be legitimately viewed as effectively un-moderated (see Appendix D for a copy of the ActionForum FAQ).

Procedure

Data Collection

The sample messages were drawn from the ActionForum on the twelfth and thirteenth of October 2005, thus the overall population included messages posted to the forum before October 13th, 2005. Both the Recent and Top message sections were divided into quartiles and 100 messages were randomly sampled from each quartile, for a total sample of 800 messages representing 2.6% of the all messages on the forum. The 400 messages sampled from the Top section represented 4.1% of the total messages in that section, while the 400 from the Recent section corresponded to 1.9% of messages in that section. Messages were analysed in two phases. In the initial phase, all sampled messages were categorised. Phase two only involved messages categorised as Action in the first phase of analysis.

The relative frequency of action versus interaction messages, and the relative importance and agreement ratings assigned to each of these content types were
assumed to provide an accurate measure of the overall nature of forum communication. With this in mind, and based on research in earlier studies, four primary coding categories were developed that represented the types of action and interaction that might most likely be expressed within the content of forum messages. The four initial categories and their definitions are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Phase I category labels and definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Label</th>
<th>Category Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Not Applicable – messages that were blank, spam, unrelated to MoveOn’s purpose, contained no original content, exclusively ironic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Action Calls – messages that planned or called MoveOn or its members, or third parties or organisations, to engage in action(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>Community Behaviour – messages that advocated MoveOn structure or intra-forum behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP</td>
<td>Opinion – messages that contained only general arguments about issues or philosophies or statements intended to establish positions about principles or goals but did not contain any form of action call(^a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All sampled messages were categorised. Categorisation was based on original content. AC and CB categories were not mutually exclusive. NA and OP categories were exclusive (i.e., messages classed either NA or OP were not further categorised). See Appendix D for detailed category descriptions and examples.

\(^a\) If any part of a message contained an action call or was related to community behaviour it was not coded OP.

Although, in total, the ActionForum comprises messages in both Top and Recent sections, the two sections also form distinct message sets. By design, a number of members have rated and ranked messages that appear in the Top section of the forum in order of importance. Therefore, and as explicitly intended by the organisation, messages in that section best reflect the activities and ideas that are most important to forum members. Issues and ideas that feature in the Top section are thus also presumably those that are most relevant to intra-community debate, and that contribute most to any processes of consensus building that may occur in the forum and the orientation that forum consensus moves towards. Messages in the Recent section, on the other hand, provide a background upon which the seeds of important debate may be found. They should not, however, be as important to community consensualisation, nor directly contribute as much towards any action versus interaction orientation that the forum may adopt (i.e., because by definition
Recent messages are on average seen as less important than Top messages. Thus, the remainder of this analysis and discussion excludes Recent messages and focus in more detail on the Top message section.

As in Phase 1 relative frequencies and relative importance and agreement ratings were used to measures forum communication. For this phase, five coding categories were developed that corresponded to targets towards which action messages were directed. These five categories and their definitions are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9. Phase 2 category labels and definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Label</th>
<th>Category Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>MoveOn Members – messages that call for community and/or forum members to take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>MoveOn Organisers – messages that call for community and/or forum organisers to take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>MoveOn Community – messages that could be interpreted as calling for members or organisers to take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>Third-party Explicit Instructions – messages that call for third parties to take action and that are explicit about what those actions should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>Third-party No Instructions – messages that call for third parties to take action but are not explicit about what those actions should be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All messages initially coded Action were categorised. Categorisation was based on original content. Categories were not mutually exclusive. See Appendix D for detailed category descriptions and examples.

^ Third-parties were defined as individuals or organisations that did not officially belong to MoveOn.

Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability testing followed a similar procedure to that used in previous studies. In Phase 1 of the analysis, a subset of 120 messages was drawn randomly from the sample message pool and messages in that subset were categorised by three independent raters. Raters were provided with printed instructions that included a) general guidelines explaining the overall categorisation exercise, b) definitions of each category as per Table 8 above, c) examples of actual categorised messages (example messages were drawn from the message sample population but were not rated during the reliability testing exercise). As well as the
printed material, raters were also provided with a verbal explanation of guidelines and category definitions.

Raters received printed copies of every message in the test subset (all 120 messages were categorised by each rater), and an answer sheet comprising a list of messages identified by number. Raters categorised messages by marking a tick box on the answer sheet that corresponded to the category they wished to assign. Raters were given three hours to read and categorise all 120 test messages. After the initial categorisation of test messages, all messages in the test subset were reviewed as a group by the researcher and all independent raters to measure where categorisation agreed and disagreed. Where disagreement was found, categorisation definitions were reviewed and message content was discussed among raters to see if agreement about a common categorisation could be reached. Note that raters were repeatedly advised during this process that they were not obliged to change their initial categorisations, and reviews of individual messages where disagreement occurred were concluded very quickly (i.e., typically within two minutes or less).

A similar process was used to test inter-rater agreement in Phase 2 of the analysis. A subset of 50 messages was randomly drawn from the sample message pool of action only messages. Each rater categorised every message in the subset and ratings were reviewed to measure agreement and disagreement.

Again, following the procedure used in earlier studies, kappa scores were calculated to test levels of inter-rater reliability. Table 10 shows the post review inter-rater reliability scores for both phases of analysis.
Table 10. Post-review inter-rater kappa scores for analysis Phases 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rater 1</th>
<th>Rater 2</th>
<th>Rater 3</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Individual rater scores show the agreement between each rater and the researcher. For example, in Phase 1 for the category AC (Action) agreement between Rater 1 and the researcher was .78, between Rater 2 and the researcher .83, and between Rater 3 and the researcher .81. The mean agreement between all raters and the researcher in Phase 1 for the category AC was .81.

According to Armitage and Berry (1994), kappa scores falling between .40 and .75 show ‘fair to good’ agreement whereas scores greater than .75 demonstrate ‘excellent’ agreement. Inter-rater agreement did not fall below .50 for any individual rater and the researcher, and was not less than .65 on average across raters. Thus, post-review kappa scores generally indicated strong agreement between raters and the researcher for all categories in both phases.

**Results**

**Phase 1 - Message frequency as a measure of action and non-action**

Table 11 presents the results of the initial phase of message categorisation. Messages were placed into four categories and the data comprises the numbers and proportions of messages in each category.
As shown in Table 11, the incidence of messages coded CB (Community Behaviour) were very low relative to other categories. Further, during inter-rater testing, the lowest kappa scores were obtained for the CB category, signifying that raters disagreed most about the content and meaning of that categorisation. Three main reasons leading to the low level of messages in the CB category and the uncertainty about category meaning were identified during formal discussions about category disagreement, and informal discussions with raters after coding had been completed. Firstly, raters had difficulty differentiating intra-community behaviour from externally focussed community action. The non-exclusivity of the Action Calls and Community Behaviour categories exacerbated this difficulty (i.e., if a rater had already coded a message as an action call, they were less likely to worry about community behaviour coding where there was uncertainty about the message content). Finally, the occurrence of CB messages may, in fact, have actually been very low. The Community Behaviour category was originally conceived as one particular type of action that the on-line forum might engage in. However, because of the low incidence of such messages and raters’ uncertainty surrounding differentiation between action calls and community behaviour, subsequent to the inter-rater testing the CB and AC categories were merged into an inclusive Action categorisation (ACcomb). This merger did not affect the reasoning behind the study,
nor the original hypothesis, as the study's underlying rationale was to compare action related behaviour with non-action related behaviour in the forum. Thus, unless otherwise stated, the inclusive ACcomb category is used as the base categorisation for overall action orientation in the forum, whereas the overall non-action (interaction) orientation is represented by the combined opinion (OP) and not applicable (NA) categories.

Generally, where forum participants expressed a point of view (i.e., in those messages that were coded either OP or ACcomb), the levels of action related messages relative to the levels of opinion related messages were similar and consistent across quartiles, with the exception of the fourth quartile where there were fewer opinion than action related messages. Thus, overall, message numbers did not indicate strong preferences for either action above opinion, nor opinion above action.

*Agreement preference as a measure of action and non-action*

As already noted forum participants were also able to specify the extent to which they agreed with messages. Table 12 presents mean agreement rating across quartiles for the first phase on analysis.

Table 12. Mean agreement rating by quartile and category for action and no-action messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>92.17</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>89.23</td>
<td>95.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NoAC</td>
<td>88.94</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>86.06</td>
<td>91.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>83.64</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>80.57</td>
<td>86.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NoAC</td>
<td>83.62</td>
<td>9.03</td>
<td>80.88</td>
<td>86.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>82.71</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>79.53</td>
<td>85.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NoAC</td>
<td>80.40</td>
<td>11.29</td>
<td>77.66</td>
<td>83.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>74.06</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>71.29</td>
<td>76.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NoAC</td>
<td>68.88</td>
<td>16.08</td>
<td>65.70</td>
<td>72.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A 4 (quartile: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) x 2 (category: action, no action) analysis of variance carried out on categorised messages found no interaction effect between quartile and category on agreement preference, $F(1, 380) = 1.03, p = .38$. However,
significant main effects were revealed for quartile, \( F (3, 380) = 55.38, p < .001 \) and category, \( F (1, 380) = 6.43, p < .05 \). Thus, forum participants agreed more with more important messages. Further, participants agreed more with action related messages than with non-action related messages.

**Phase 2 - Action message frequency as a measure of target of action**

Table 13. Numbers and proportions of action messages by target and quartile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MM</th>
<th>MO</th>
<th>MC</th>
<th>TEI</th>
<th>TNI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>11 (0.33)</td>
<td>5 (0.46)</td>
<td>29 (0.26)</td>
<td>1 (0.07)</td>
<td>3 (0.11)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>11 (0.33)</td>
<td>1 (0.09)</td>
<td>24 (0.21)</td>
<td>4 (0.29)</td>
<td>7 (0.25)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>5 (0.15)</td>
<td>3 (0.27)</td>
<td>27 (0.24)</td>
<td>3 (0.21)</td>
<td>9 (0.32)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>6 (0.18)</td>
<td>2 (0.18)</td>
<td>32 (0.27)</td>
<td>6 (0.43)</td>
<td>9 (0.32)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \( Q1 = 100^{th} \) quartile, \( Q2 = 75^{th} \) quartile, \( Q3 = 50^{th} \) quartile, \( Q4 = 25^{th} \) quartile. Proportions are calculated across quartiles and within categories – i.e., figures show the total proportion of messages coded to a category across all four quartiles.

The data displayed in Table 13 show that messages coded MC (i.e., advocating action and targeted at the overall community) greatly out-numbered all other messages. Within the MC category however, little change was found across quartiles, that is, proportions of MC messages were not found to vary by message importance. Two general trends are observable; proportions of both MM (action messages targeted at community members) and MO (action messages targeted at community organisers) messages increased with importance and, conversely, TEI (explicit action messages targeted at third parties) and TNI (non-explicit action messages targeted at third parties) messages decreased with importance. Overall, participants rated action messages targeted at the community as a whole as more important than any other type of action message. Although they also tended to view action messages aimed at other community members or organisers as more important than action messages aimed at third parties, the overall numbers of messages in these categories were relatively low and so this trend should be treated with some caution.
Agreement preference as a measure of type of action

Table 14. Mean agreement by quartile and category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>91.73</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>85.75</td>
<td>97.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>90.60</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>81.73</td>
<td>99.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>92.56</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>88.90</td>
<td>96.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>75.17</td>
<td>114.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>92.33</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>80.89</td>
<td>103.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>81.82</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>75.84</td>
<td>87.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58.17</td>
<td>97.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>84.57</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>80.43</td>
<td>88.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>70.09</td>
<td>89.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>85.29</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>77.79</td>
<td>92.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>72.40</td>
<td>12.18</td>
<td>63.53</td>
<td>81.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>78.33</td>
<td>19.55</td>
<td>66.87</td>
<td>89.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>80.93</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>77.11</td>
<td>84.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>80.33</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>68.87</td>
<td>91.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>88.78</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>82.17</td>
<td>95.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>20.22</td>
<td>66.91</td>
<td>83.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>63.50</td>
<td>16.26</td>
<td>49.48</td>
<td>77.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>75.72</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>72.21</td>
<td>79.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>74.33</td>
<td>9.18</td>
<td>66.24</td>
<td>82.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>71.44</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>64.84</td>
<td>78.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *N=1

A 4 (quartile: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) x 5 (category: MC, MM, MO, TEI, TNI) ANOVA was carried out to test the relationships between participants' levels of agreement (agreement preference), category, and message importance (represented by quartile). No interaction effect was found between category and quartile on agreement preference, $F(12, 177) = .83, p = .61$; nor was there any significant effect on agreement preference by category, $F(4, 177) = 1.27, p = .28$. However, echoing
the analysis of action versus non-action messages, a significant main effect was found for quartile, $F(3, 177) = 13.32, p < .01$. This analysis lent support to the earlier finding that participants generally agreed more with more important messages. However, participants did not significantly differ in their agreement preferences across categories (i.e., they agreed equally with messages in all types of categories). Further, there was no interaction between cross-category agreement and message importance (i.e., participants agreed equally with important messages in all types of category).

*Examples of opinion and action in forum participants' communication*

One of the features of MoveOn is the breadth of issues that the general community addresses. A review of the campaign archives on the MoveOn website reveal activism on issues ranging from funding for public broadcasting, to global warming, to election reform, and many others besides (Moveon.org, Campaign Arhive - http://moveon.org/archive.html). More specifically, the open nature of the on-line ActionForum both enables and encourages participants to canvass a wide variety of topics, ideas, and activities. The effective lack of restraint on that forum also means that participants are free to address multiple issues at the same time, and that, potentially, action and non-action related ideas and themes can be present and interwoven within individual participant communications (although, interestingly, during the coding process relatively few messages were coded to multiple categories).

As well as addressing a range of issues through their content, participants’ messages also varied in structure and style. Some messages were succinct and focussed, allowing little doubt or room for interpretation about their aims; other messages, however, adopted a looser, more narrative approach to establish their point. Not uncommonly, messages also directly quoted third-party information in support of their ideas (although, as already discussed, messages were coded based on their original content, and messages comprised exclusively of non-original content were excluded from analysis).

In the original round of coding, a key distinction was between messages that only expressed an opinion and messages that advocated an action. An important difference between opinion and action messages was that opinion messages often
described a poster’s desired outcome, but did not include information about how to achieve that outcome. For example, the following message was coded as opinion:

Title: Impeach Bush

Content: Move-On is doing a Great Job, now it is up to us the masses to do our job. But will we! I don't think so, as we are a spoiled nation of people who have grown selfish and arrogant, just like our President Bush and his cohorts. (Message number: 5293)\(^a\)

\(^a\) Note that all message examples in this chapter are from the Top section of the forum, and that 'Message number' refers to the unique identifying number of the message on the forum.

Clearly, as indicated in the message title, the poster of message 5293 views the impeachment of President Bush as a desirable outcome. Put another way, they are presenting their opinion that the president should be impeached. However, the message does not provide any material information about what steps either MoveOn, or other groups or individuals, should take do to achieve that aim.

Although the ActionForum lacked some of the technical mechanisms that other forums use to facilitate ongoing ‘conversations’ (e.g., it has no facility to display message threads), direct replies to messages still occurred. Message 11, also coded as opinion, was posted in response to an earlier message, which it directly quotes:

Title: Re: Shannon

Content: You write: "300 million people were killed by Saddam." I suggest you check the population of Iraq. Your number is way off. It is true that Saddam is responsible for the death of a lot of innocent people, but then so is Bush. (Message number: 11)

Message titles generally took one of two forms. Titles either clearly foreshadowed message content (as in, for example, message 5293 – ‘Impeach Bush’), or they were more general, requiring a close reading of message content to ascertain the poster’s point:
Title: WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH??

Content: With all the verbal torpedos we have we ought to be able to sink the Bush ship ... Harken, the Insider trading question by George W. Bush when Poppy was President and his buddies running the SEC never exonerated W, a letter that came to light the day after the investigation closed, saying Bush was warned against insider trading and failed to file notices of his sales. 3 or more times Bush filed late The money involved was $848,560 Gee Martha you were a piker compared to him! Too bad your daddy wasn’t in power! ... Iraq”fixed policy” to go to war, pressure on analysts by Cheney and Bolton, Investigation promised then denied by Pat Roberts in the Administration’s fallibility in 9/11... A UNITER NOT A DIVIDER yeah, sure you are, George! .... It’s time we sank Bush’s ship!a (Message number: 68)

a Only excerpts of the message have been included. The complete message was over 530 words in length, and included other criticisms of the U.S. administration in the same form as the passages presented.

The title of message 68 generally indicates that the poster is dissatisfied with an issue or issues; alone, however, it provides insufficient information to understand the point of the message. The message is long and consists of a diverse series of criticisms of the Bush administration. These numerous criticisms, along with the title and the final passage (‘It’s time we sank Bush’s ship!’), serve as a whole to convey the complete message – the poster aimed their dissatisfaction at the Bush administration, and he or she is of the opinion that President Bush must go. As with the other examples of opinion messages, however, the message poster provides no specific information about how that goal should be achieved nor, in this instance, whom should work towards that goal.

Action messages were structured much the same as opinion messages. For example, the following two messages address separate and distinct issues but were both coded AC (analysis 1) and MC (analysis 2); that is to say, they were messages that advocated either community members or community organisers should take action:
Title: Supreme Court
Content: Bush has been re-elected, and probably feels like he has a free hand to do whatever he likes. We must work to block his dangerous appointments to the Supreme Court. Those appointments will continue long after Bush has gone. (Message number 1)

Title: Healthcare for all
Content: With 46 million Americans uninsured, millions more underinsured and when asked, 75% of Americans want some kind of national health insurance like Medicare, I suggest focusing on an issue that most of us, not just MoveOn people, already agree with. (Message number 7339)

The main themes of both messages are clearly identified in their titles – readers are unambiguously informed what the message is about before they read the content. The structure of both messages is direct, and the messages are relatively brief (both are less than 45 words in length). Stylistically, the messages are also similar. Both lead with their rationale for action (‘Bush has a free hand’ and ‘Inadequate health insurance’) and then clearly advocate action on those issues. Finally, there is some ambiguity (particularly in message 1) about who should take action; it is not immediately clear if the posters are advocating action by MoveOn as a community entity, MoveOn members as individuals, or action by both the community entity and individual members.

In contrast, message number 2496, although also coded AC and MC, took a very different form:

Title: Gnats and Black Flies
Content: When doing electrical work in the Adirondacks I’ve had many opportunities to use the business end of a shovel. The second you put your shovel in the ground a cloud of blackflies envelopes your head and the distraction begins. Swatting and slapping at the flies can soon take the place of work if you can't find the discipline to ignore the little buggers. By 10:00 A.M. you hardly notice the bugs anymore. They are still there, you just get accustomed to them. The more you swat at them the less you get done. P.A.,
Joe, and the other posters who Parrot the Ditto-headed Neo-Con Mantra on SS and Iraq, are nothing more than gnats and blackflies. They regurgitate the same old party line posturing we've heard over and over. We have to continue hammering DeLay and de crooks in Texas. We can't do much to stop the pests from swarming as we continue to work, the trick is to focus on the task at hand and after a while they don't bother you anymore. DeLay is like a big rock in the middle of our trench. You can go around it, but the wire needs to be pulled in a straight line to avoid a hernia. We have to dig the rock out. Swatting Neo-Con gnats and blackflies just slows us down. (Message number 2496)

The message title here offers no clue to the message content. Compared with the first two examples, this message is much longer (nearly five times the length). Both structurally and stylistically, this message reads as a story wherein the poster relates a seemingly irrelevant personal vignette, but then ties that experience to a point about other posters (‘...the other posters ... are nothing more than gnats and blackflies’). The message then addresses the central action theme, which is the need to continue action aimed at the Republican majority leader (‘We have to continue hammering DeLay…’). Like the previous examples of MC messages, message 2496 does not make clear from whom the poster expects action (i.e., is it the community as a whole or individual members). There is the potential for added ambiguity here, however, in that the action content contained within the message might itself be unclear out of context. Without the reader having some familiarity with other messages on the forum that have also addressed similar issues, the action content in this message might easily be dismissed as too vague. Thus, the context in which communications in the forum should be understood is set not only by the content of individual message and ‘real-world’ events taking place outside the forum, but also by the surrounding communications in the forum itself (c.f. Reicher, 2000, and others).

Message 7329 provides an example of a communication that provides contextual background that enables a more clear appreciation of the action content of a narrative-like message such as 2496:
Title: DCCC @Stake - Trapped in Tom DeLay's Web of Corruption

Content: Keep the pressure on, call or email your Senate and Congress, give them the message DUMP DELAY! For all the Republicans have done, you have to hand it to them on one thing: they have never, and we mean never, questioned Tom DeLay over his ethics problems, even under extreme pressure to distance themselves during the elections. Until this week, that is. Starting Monday came a slew of reports that the great Republican monolith under the iron-fisted control of Tom DeLay is showing cracks.¹ (Message number 7329)

¹ This message concluded with a verbatim copy of a 554 word article about Tom DeLay sourced from the Washington Post.

While initially coded as an action message (AC), during the secondary analysis message 7329 was coded MM (i.e., as an action message calling for MoveOn members to take action). The message title here identifies the broad theme that the poster believes should spur action, then the first line of the message unambiguously states the specific action call. The remainder of the message (including the omitted third-party article) provides background supporting the poster’s argument, and identifying weaknesses in the proposed action target’s defences (‘the great Republican monolith ... is showing cracks’).

As well as advocating actions aimed specifically at external issues, some forum participants explicitly addressed their posts at organisers of the forum and of the wider MoveOn community. Such posts (coded MO in the secondary analysis) contained efforts to influence the methods through which MoveOn should conduct action.

Title: Lack of organisation at Cindy Sheehan Vigils

Content: I’ve just returned from a vigil held in solidarity with Cindy Sheehan that took place in Park Slope Brooklyn, which I found to be dispirited and dispiriting. There were perhaps sixty persons present for the vigil and many had brought candels. However, there was not one single sign--not one--so not one of the cars or pedestrians passing by had a clue what was going on. (It struck me that they might have thought we were a religious group of some sort or a group protesting some local condition.) There was also no one
present from one of the local newspapers, which would likely have found this event newsworthy. So we had a small group of people milling about for a short while who then started to drift away. I would urge the MoveON.org staff that before calling for another of these spontaneous manifestations that you consider establishing some suggested protocols for those who come forward to host local activities. These would include forming a committee which would take responsibility to put in place the various pieces that would help ensure that this be a worthwhile event both in terms of its effect on the participants and its influence on others. Thank you. (Message number 5)

Title: Petition should ask that Karl Rove go to JAIL

Content: Why is Move On passing around a petition asking President Bush to "Fire" Karl Rove, when he committed a federal CRIME and should go to JAIL?!?! Revealing CIA agents is a imprisonable offense under federal law. The feds were willing to send newspaper reporters to jail for not disclosing Rove's name for God's sake! Rove himself should be locked away FOREVER! Move On should be passing around a petition asking that Bush INDICT Rove for treason ...or whatever crime has been committed! Firing goes without saying. (Message number 71)

Messages 5 and 71 are both critical of actions undertaken by MoveOn at the time of the postings. Like the earlier examples of messages aimed at community members or organisers (MC), the message titles here also explicitly identify the action advocated by the posters. In both structure and style, message 5 is similar to message 2496. The message offers a narrative of a personal experience to support its argument for more organised protest vigils. Message 71 on the other hand has more similarities to messages 1, 7329, and 7339, presenting a relatively brief justification based on a key 'factual' argument (that disclosing the identity of CIA agents is a crime).

Finally, for some posters the forum offered a way to advocate action by third parties (i.e., individuals or organisations not affiliated with MoveOn):
Title: Restructuring the Party

Content: From the grassroots to the top, the Democratic Party needs to be restructured so that we are all on the same page and are moving as one to the common goal of reclaiming the title of being the party of the people. We must win back the hearts and minds of the people so we can win back control of the House, Senate and Presidency. Our political process is on the line as the Republicans' goal is a one party state. There must be a citizens advisory board created within the DNC, also to actively promote policy. Freedom is on the line. (Message 7385)

The MoveOn organisation has no affiliation with any political party (although, broadly, its goals are more in line with those of the U.S. Democrats). However, message 7385 offers quite specific advice to the Democratic Party about how it needs to restructure if it wants to regain power in government. The terminology used in the message ('we must', 'moving as one', etc.) directly links the two by implying that those most likely to be reading the forum (MoveOn members) will also be in a position to take action within the Democratic Party (i.e., that they will be Democrats). Messages that contained such specific instructions for action targeted at third parties were coded TEI (Third-party Explicit Instructions).

In contrast to this targeting of readily identifiable third parties with quite explicit suggestions for action, however, there was more ambiguity in some other messages. For example, some posters were less clear about the actions they were advocating or the targets that they believed should carry out those actions. Where content was clearly aimed at third parties, but where the advocacy of particular actions was unclear, messages were coded TNI, or Third-party Non Instructions:

Title: Cindy Sheehan

Content: It's side track messes like this that make the Democratic party look like a bunch or idiots instead of a party that could lead America and the Free World. I'm sorry her son is dead. I think everyone is.. Now take some of this web sites advice and MOVE ON!!! (Message 20)
Title: The re-secularization of America

Content: Since the 1980's, the so-called "Moral Majority" has been working, quite effectively, to undermine the constitutionally-mandated separation of church and state. Today, Bush's faith-based initiatives are giving money to churches; countless school boards are slapping stickers on science textbooks that deny evolution; children are being directed to pray and swear allegiance to god in school; and we are fighting a holy war - described by the president himself as a "crusade" - in the Middle East. Fundamentalist Christians are banding together to deny women the right to make decisions about their own childbearing, and to deny the right of same-sex couples to do such mundane things as visit each other in the hospital, and appoint each other as heirs. In a recent poll reported by NPR, 54% of Americans believe in "creationism" and only 28% accept the Theory of Evolution. This is a return to the Middle Ages, a trend that, followed to its logical conclusion, will undermine democracy and science (a fundamental underpinning of our economic success) in America. It is essential that progressives in this country oppose this injection of superstition and mysticism into public life. (Message 2444)

Message 20, although referring quite clearly to the Democratic Party, is not so clear in its description of the action it expects the Democrats to take (the admonishment to ‘move on’, while adroit in context, offers no specific advice about how that should happen). Message 2444 contains ambiguities not only about action, but also about the target audience. It is certainly apparent that the poster is against what they argue is the encroachment of the church on the state, and that they are advocating some form of action against this encroachment. It is also clear that they believe that arbitrators of such action should not be limited to members of the MoveOn community, but that they should include all ‘progressives in this country’. More ambiguous, though, is who ‘progressives’ are and exactly what they should do to stop the identified phenomenon.

Discussion

The intention of this study was to measure if an action orientation predominated over interaction in participant communications on the MoveOn forum. Following Lemus et al.’s (2004) arguments about numbers and favourability of
messages, I argued that the relative proportions of messages advocating community action compared with those messages containing only interaction would provide an accurate measure of the overall nature of forum orientation, as would comparisons of their respective agreement and importance ratings. Specifically, I hypothesised that action messages would be present in higher proportions than interaction messages, those action messages would be primarily targeted at internal targets (i.e., community members) rather than external targets, and that agreement and importance ratings would be higher for action as opposed to interaction messages and internal as opposed to external targets.

Results partially supported my hypotheses. Against expectations, in the first phase of analysis, message content did not clearly show participants preferred action to interaction; generally, proportions of action and non-action messages were similar across all quartiles. Similarly, when comparing only those messages where the poster’s viewpoint was transparent (i.e., in action and opinion messages) there was no difference between categories. However, as expected, participants did tend to agree with action related messages more than non-action messages. On the other hand, there was no interaction effect on agreement preference between the importance of a message (i.e., quartile) and message category (i.e., action or non-action). Thus, also counter to expectations, participants agreed equally with important and non-important action, and important non-action messages.

Likewise, my second phase of message analysis provided mixed support for the idea that the ActionForum would evidence a clear action orientation. As predicted, the proportion of internally targeted action messages was markedly higher than the proportion of action messages aimed at external targets – although, interestingly, internal messages aimed at the community as whole far outweighed messages aimed at either members or organisers specifically. In this phase of analysis, forum participants again agreed more with more important messages. Contrary to predictions, however, forum participants did not differentiate in their agreement between important messages across categories; in other words, as in the first phase of analysis, participants equally agreed with important messages no matter their category.

Taken as a whole, the results present some evidence that the ActionForum should be seen as action oriented because participants tended to agree with action-
related messages whether or not they saw those messages as important. Alternatively, however, participants also agreed with non-action messages that they regarded as important, and there was little difference in the proportions of action versus non-action messages regarded by forum members as important. Perhaps more convincingly for my original predictions, messages that advocated action by the community itself occurred in much higher proportions across all quartiles than messages advocating action by third parties. Here too, however, participants agreed equally with important messages aimed at both internal and external targets.

One interpretation of my results is that they demonstrate that the MoveOn OLC is, nominally, more action oriented than the other OLCs that we have studied. Notwithstanding this interpretation, however, the results do not suggest that the ActionForum is as clearly action oriented as might reasonably be expected, given both the vigour with which MoveOn promotes itself as a forum for action, and the demonstrable ability of the community itself to carry out action.

For example, we can compare the ActionForum with the S11 OLC that I sampled in my first study. MoveOn and S11 shared a number of broad similarities. Both were high profile OLCs that enjoyed large and active participant bases. Both also boasted responsibility for the completion of successful issue-related actions, although on this dimension the utility of the actions conducted by the S11 community may have been more open to contestation by out-group members than those conducted by MoveOn. As well as these similarities, there were also some points of difference; the S11 community existed over a discrete time-period, whereas the MoveOn OLC is ongoing and addresses a wider range of social issues.

As I concluded in Study 1, the S11 community showed very little evidence of action-related communication; indeed it was the paucity of this type of communication that originally suggested to me that two forms of social-action OLC might exist. At the start of this chapter, I argued that the MoveOn OLC should be more action oriented in comparison with other OLCs because of two key factors. Firstly, I contended that the structure of the forum would emphasise messages with action content and so act to highlight an action-based orientation. Secondly, I reasoned that the success of the community as whole as a mechanism for social change would reinforce action related aspects of forum participants’ identity and so result in increased proportions of action messages.
Certainly, in comparison with the S11 OLC the ActionForum did display greater levels of action relatedness according to some measures. As I have noted, however, on other dimensions the MoveOn OLC displayed characteristics similar to those that I found unexpected in the S11 community. Half of the sampled messages on the ActionForum were judged to be related to action – thus, conversely, half were not action related. There were no real differences in how important action and non-action messages were to participants, and participants agreed with important messages whether they were action related or not. These results indicate that even in the MoveOn OLC where specific structural and contextual factors are ideal (and even specifically designed) to militate towards action, interaction remains a significant component of community participants’ experience and preference.

These results follow the pattern revealed in some of the qualitative data from Chapter 5 that supported the idea that forum participants understand their social-action OLCs to take both action and interaction forms. Moreover, the evidence that MoveOn forum participants viewed action and interaction as equally important also follows the trend of my earlier studies and suggests that participants interpret pure interaction as effective. Once again, participants seem to be viewing talk as a legitimate form of action.

On the other hand, it is possible that these results might be caused by a subtle design factor inherent in my methodology. Given the demonstrated importance of interaction for participants, interaction itself might contain action. In other words, these OLCs may be action communities that interact about action. One way of accounting for this possibility is through a more detailed investigation of the process and content of interaction in relation to a very specific issue might illuminate the role that interaction plays in action-based communities.

In the communities that I have studied participants have been effectively free to formulate and conduct their discussions as they see fit (i.e., forums have been open and un-moderated). The excerpts from the ActionForum presented in this study show that participants make use of a variety of content styles and structures when making posts. These examples demonstrate that the same participant in the same message can present and canvas a range of information, themes and concepts. Therefore, given the potential complexity of participant communications, it is possible that my analysis of interaction on the ActionForum, while successfully
revealing broad patterns of communication form, may have been conducted at too broad a level to expose any nuances of meaning within the content of the individual messages that serve to make up an overall forum-based discussion or argument.

I have noted that it has been common for messages to contain third-party quotes and information to bolster central themes or to challenge ideas in on-going interaction. Further, OLC participants have used the titles or subject lines of message in a variety of ways. Some titles succinctly capture a participant’s central point, whereas other titles provided elaborate, sometimes ambiguous, introductions to message content. I have also observed the varied occurrence of direct replies to prior postings on forums. In other words, the ongoing interaction in these forums has been complex. Such complexity is not surprising given that, as I have argued, at one level forum participants are negotiating the definition and redefinition of a collective identity. Interaction may also serve another function, however. The types of action-directed community that I have studied might not be predominantly forums that enable specific behaviour. The interaction on those forums could, rather, act as a mechanism to resolve difference, coordinate opinion about broad themes related to mass action, or bring together like-minded participants within the broader in-group context. It is these themes that are addressed in my final study.
Chapter 8: A war of words - arguing for action: consensualisation through conversation?

*Working together to make a difference* (slogan on ActionForum website)

In this final empirical chapter I will briefly review important points from my empirical work to date, charting how my original hypotheses about the nature of online communities have evolved in an attempt to better explain my findings. In my preceding chapter I presented a study of the MoveOn.org ActionForum where I found that the MoveOn OLC could largely be characterised as an interaction community (in contrast to my expectations, although in line with the overall direction of my other empirical work). In this chapter I will present a second study intended to further explore and refine my understanding of the MoveOn OLC in particular, and my conceptualisation of social movement online communities in general. I will discuss how my results add to our understanding of the role that OLCs play in advancing social movement goals, and how they impact on my earlier conclusions about action and interaction in online communities.

*Introduction*

Throughout the course of this thesis my assumptions about the nature of online social-action communities have evolved in line with my empirical work. Nevertheless, despite changes in my conceptualisation of the nature of online communities, ideas about identity, action, and consensus have remained important links in explaining why such communities might remain attractive to their members. In my most recent study, I found in the MoveOn online forum some evidence for the forms of planning and action that I predicted. On that forum proportions of action-related messages were not significantly higher than non-action messages, but on the other hand, when asked directly, OLC participants showed that they continued to place a high value on action as well as interaction. Interestingly, in other studies I have also found some evidence that OLC participants value their ability to communicate with other active community participants, and with non-participating on-lookers (i.e., lurkers). Overall then, although my observations have shown a predominance of interaction over action, it has also highlighted the sophistication of participants’ interpretation of the action/interaction relationship. Accordingly, I continue to believe the ideas of identity and consensualisation for action are relevant.
Moreover, my work suggests that we might need a better conceptualisation of the way members of on-line communities perceive themselves and their communities.

One possible explanation for the pattern of my observations lies in Klandermans (1984) idea of ‘consensus mobilisation’ (see also Oegema & Klandermans, 1987, on ‘mobilisation potential’). Klandermans suggested that social movements engage in two types of mobilisation – movements mobilise action, but they also mobilise consensus. He argued that these two components of mobilisation better reflect the separate activities of ‘convincing’ and ‘activating’ that social movements undertake, suggesting movements cannot mobilise action without first mobilising consensus. Klandermans defined consensus mobilisation as the “…process through which a social movement attempts to obtain support for its viewpoints” (1984, p. 586). He described such attempts as involving discussion and argument about a movement’s ‘collective goods’, strategies, ‘confrontations’, and results (or, in other words, the ethos and goals of a movement). Arguing that movements seek to reach agreement about these issues internally (i.e., between participants), he also noted that debate and discussion could be driven by the counter arguments of opponents and rivals. Klandermans portrayed this process as a ‘paper war’ waged by a movement to promote consensus, arguing that the extent to which consensus mobilisation would succeed depended on how well a movement’s collective ethos and goals were valued and known. It is here that we find parallels to the processes that I have observed in on-line forums. Thus, interaction and exchanges of information in on-line forums could be attempts at advancing consensus mobilisation. In this process the mobilisation of action through planning or decision making about specific events or activities is less important than the presentation, consolidation, and advancement of a movement’s aims and goals, the intention of which would be to convince both movement participants and non-aligned observers of the value of the ‘collective good’ towards which the movement is working.

This interpretation clearly also evokes Simon and Klandermans’s (2001) concept of politicised collective identity, where they emphasise the triangulation between ‘awareness of shared grievances’, ‘adversarial attributions’ and ‘involvement of society’. In other words, Klandermans’s (1984) idea of consensus mobilisation is one way that the process of raising awareness of shared grievances might occur. It should be noted, however, that although shared grievance is the area
where consensus mobilisation has most obvious relevance, the same process could well take place when movements are consolidating and advancing the other two ingredients of Simon and Klandermans’s conceptual triangle – blaming an opponent or out-group, and involving broader society in a movement’s struggle.

One significant caveat to the application of Simon and Klandermans’s (2001) model is that their work most easily aligns with movements based on existing social categories (e.g., nationality, race) or clearly identifiable groups or classes (e.g., socio-economic groups such as ‘the middle class’). This focus is also shared by many other explanations of social movement processes, although not all. In earlier chapters I discussed Bliuc and colleagues’ work on opinion-based groups (Bliuc et al., 2007) that I argued better described the foundation of many heterogeneous social movements in general, and their on-line instantiations in particular. Neither the process of consensus mobilisation (Klandermans, 1984) nor the broad model of politicised collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) are incompatible with a description of social movements based around opinion-based groups.

One way of further explaining the details of consensus mobilisation is by considering the inductive and deductive processes described by Postmes et al. in their interactive model of identity formation (Postmes, Baray, Haslam, Morton, & Swaab, 2006; Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005). Postmes and colleagues argue that identity forms interactively in groups in two ways – through a ‘top down’ (deductive) process where identity is inferred from social context, and via a ‘bottom-up’ (inductive) process where interaction and behaviour informs the content of social identity. Again, as I argued in my review of mobilisation and politicised collective identity, the idea of inductive/deductive identity formation is wholly compatible with an explanation of on-line social movements based around opinion-based groups. Thus, for example, identity formation as depicted in the Postmes et al. model could describe the identity-relevant processes occurring within on-line interaction, with an existent social movement providing deductive influences within which identity and behaviour are interactively fashioned thorough ongoing interaction.

This description of on-line movements is given yet more shape by including ideas about consensus mobilisation and politicised collective identity. So, we can imagine on-line social movements acting as opinion-based groups engaging in consensus mobilisation to develop and advance an awareness of shared grievance
and movement ethos through an interactive process of inductive and deductive identity formation. This line of reasoning could offer one explanation for my observations of interaction in the S11 and MoveOn OLCs; it seems reasonable these on-line communities might be engaging in (inductively/deductively derived) consensus mobilisation about broad movement ethos rather than specific decision-making or action. However, if this were the case it follows that we would expect to find evidence of argument and consensualisation within social movement interaction (although not explicitly about action as I had originally predicted). Why then have we not?

In Chapter 7 I noted the complex nature of communication on the MoveOn ActionForum. Indeed, such complexity was a characteristic of many of the forums that I examined. This is unsurprising, given that the Internet provides an easy and accessible medium for participants to present their thoughts and ideas in a relatively unrestricted, free-flowing manner. At the same time, as well as making it easy for participants to present thoughts and opinions, so too do Internet forums provide comparatively accessible settings for researchers to sample and study those thoughts. As with other examples of archival, real-life data, the advantage for researchers is clear; on-line forums can enable analysis of interaction outside of the laboratory setting and not limited to a format and structure influenced by the researcher. The disadvantages are equally apparent, however. The quantity and complexity of the available data can militate against the researcher accurately extracting patterns and themes contained in the data, or of developing a clear understanding of the overall meaning of the data to participants.

Following work by Lemus et al. (2004), in my initial study of MoveOn I reasoned that the way communication was presented on the forum would influence participants’ perceptions of levels of support for opposing arguments and, in turn, that this perception would determine consensualisation around either interaction or action. I tested this idea by applying a similar categorical analysis to the one I used in my study of the S11 on-line community. This form of analysis enabled me to measure broad patterns in forum messages, and the make conclusions about the general nature, subject, and content of participant interaction.

The size and popularity of the MoveOn forum were important factors in my decision to include that community in my research. Ironically, however, these very
characteristics that contributed to making MoveOn a compelling object for study might also have played a role in obscuring evidence for debate or discussion. For example, it could be that MoveOn participants are constantly engaging in consensualisation about action but that this process is difficult to detect empirically due to the sheer volume of messages. Put another way, it seems possible that a ‘white noise’ of background messages might have obscured any resolutions about action that did occur in the MoveOn OLC. The categorical analysis I applied did increase our understanding about the relationship between action and interaction in the MoveOn forum. However, as I acknowledged at the end of my previous chapter, given the limited support my results presented for my specific hypotheses, this complex interaction within that relationship could be further elaborated by looking at the data using a different method.

In part, I based predictions for my first study of the MoveOn community on evidence found by Lemus and colleagues (2004) that suggested that groups members’ awareness of numbers of “endorsements and objections” to proposals played a part in the acceptance or rejection of those proposals. However, Lemus et al. also noted that the development of “better supporting arguments” was positively related to decision-making outcomes. In other words, participants’ decisions about the nature of appropriate and legitimate group arguments are not determined exclusively by their perception of the relative quantities of opposing arguments. According to Lemus and colleagues, these types of judgements also depend on the quality of respective arguments.

One way this might be explored is through a detailed analysis of the process and content of arguments about a specific issue. Put another way, if complexity of information is a barrier to a clear understanding of content and meaning, it follows that simplifying the focus of analysis may facilitate our understanding and appreciation of argument quality. Given the nature of the medium and the available data, the most straightforward way to simplify analysis while still retaining interaction integrity is by concentrating analysis on an on-going interaction about one discrete topic; in other words, if we follow a ‘conversation’ about one issue we should be able to more readily assess the nature of that conversation without contamination from interweaving voices presenting unrelated themes and ideas. This form of analysis could also illuminate the broader presence of debate and/or
consensualisation as it would be expected to occur if my reasoning about the use of on-line communities as beds for consensus mobilisation is accurate.

Related to this issue of data complexity, a second factor that might have influenced the results of my first analysis of interaction is the way that messages are structured on the forum itself. Much as I had argued that the nature and extent of the archival data contained within the forum provided an ideal source from which to search for the types of message content I had predicted, so too did I argue that structural characteristics of the forum related to message presentation and rank would provide another way to measure forum participants’ preferences for action or interaction. On one hand, this did turn out to be the case. The agreement and importance ratings that forum users were able to assign individual messages permitted unambiguous calculation and comparison of messages based on those objective characteristics, from which I drew conclusions about the type of message content that forum participants preferred.

However, one consequence of the agreement and ranking system was that messages on the MoveOn forum did not allow the “thread” type presentation utilised by many other on-line forums (a thread is a series of messages related by subject or theme, often grouped and presented chronologically). Many on-line forums allow presentation of messages by thread so that users can quickly organise and read all messages related to any particular issue. One advantage of threaded message viewing is that it gives participants (and researchers) a simple way to follow discrete ongoing interaction and discussion related to specific subjects. That is not to say that the lack of message threads makes it impossible for forum participants to review and appreciate subject-related interaction, only that it may be easier to do so where threaded viewing is available. Note however that not all sites utilise threaded viewing. Organisations other than MoveOn are exploring ranking systems to display messages – see for example the ‘e.thePeople’ web site at http://www.e-thepeople.org/.

It follows then that the lack of threaded message viewing in the MoveOn forum might have at least two practical effects. Because conversations cannot easily be ‘seen’ forum participants may have difficulty recognising the nature or extent of related interaction about particular topics and, more significantly, the level of interrelatedness of messages about specific issues might be difficult to detect in an
analysis of this content. Put more simply, it is possible that the way messages are structured on the forum obscures patterns of interaction. Once again, it follows that such patterns may not be revealed solely by a broad categorical analysis and that an alternative method of analysis specifically designed to extract and examine subsets of interaction about particular issues or ideas presents one way to ensure that relevant forum interaction is not overlooked.

It is worth noting one final point related to my earlier analysis of the MoveOn OLC. Even though I had found little evidence of explicit action in some of the other communities I studied, I argued it was surprising that an action orientation within the MoveOn forum was not more strongly evident given that community’s explicit action focus, and that its structure was unambiguously designed to facilitate and enhance action in relation to the broader MoveOn organisation as a whole. Notwithstanding my reasoning about the role of on-line communities as mobilizers of consensus, it seems reasonable that I should still have detected more traces of action-related interaction than was revealed through my first analysis. Once again, factors of forum complexity and organisation may have militated against easy detection of this phenomenon, and it is plausible that this too may be revealed through an alternative analysis of an appropriate issue-based subset of interaction.

Accordingly, I decided to further test these ideas through an analysis of a message thread extracted from the larger MoveOn dataset of interaction to see if I could detect evidence of consensualisation and/or action resolutions within that less complex interaction subset. As my earlier results have demonstrated OLC forum interaction is usually wide-ranging and often explicitly includes discussions about non-action related issues (e.g., movement philosophies, principles, etc). For this analysis, I wanted to select a message thread that would provide the best opportunity to detect the formation of consensus, and/or the presence of action-related advocacy. The Cindy Sheehan message thread provided an ideal example of this type of thread, and some background to that issue will assist in understanding the context and rationale of our study.

In April 2004 U.S. Army Specialist Casey Sheehan was killed while on active duty in Iraq. Casey Sheehan had originally joined the U.S. Army in 2000, and then re-enlisted in 2003. He had volunteered for the mission on which he was killed, and was later posthumously decorated for his actions. Some months after his death, his
mother, Cindy Sheehan, was part of a group of military families who met with U.S President George W. Bush. Immediately after that meeting she gave an interview in which she was critical of the invasion of Iraq, but also voiced some favourable opinions of the President. In the following months she gave a number of other interviews in which her attitude against the war in Iraq hardened, and in which she increasingly began to speak against the President personally. A growing involvement in the peace movement led to her jointly founding the antiwar organisation ‘Gold Star Families for Peace’, made up of individuals who had had family members die in Iraq. In August 2005 she led a group of supporters in a protest camp outside President Bush’s vacation retreat in Texas, demanding a second meeting with the President. This action in particular gained her widespread publicity within the United States and internationally, and initiated a round of intense, heated and sometimes vitriolic debate between pro- and anti-war supporters in the U.S. (see the Cindy Sheehan entry in Wikipedia for more information – http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cindy_Sheehan&oldid=222424831) . On August 17 2005, MoveOn.org organised and publicised a series of nation-wide candlelight vigil in support of Cindy Sheehan. According to MoveOn, 1,627 vigils were held across the United States, making it, at that time, the largest event that they had ever organised.

Clearly then, the Cindy Sheehan issue was one that resonated not only with the wider MoveOn community and other sympathetic organisations, but also for much of the broader population in the United States. It could legitimately be regarded as a ‘hot button’ political issue that began to reach a peak during Sheehan’s organised protest at the Bush retreat, and it was an issue around which MoveOn had already organised one very public protest action. Thus, I argue that it was a text-book case around which discussion and debate might occur in an on-line forum devoted to action agendas, and one which could be expected to lead towards some measure of agreement or disagreement about current and future action within this type of forum.

Following this reasoning, I expected that the incidence of Sheehan-related messages on the forum would be clearly aligned with off-line (face-to-face) events and activities concerned with the Sheehan issue; in other words, the incidence of overall Sheehan-related messages would rise and fall as the face-to-face activities unfolded and reached a conclusion. I further expected that regardless of the presence
of anti-action messages, messages in favour of action would predominate not only as participants reached consensus, but also throughout the whole life of the relevant interaction. I made the following specific hypotheses about the subset of Sheehan-related interaction on the forum:

**H1:** Evidence of discussion or argument would take two forms –

a/ Forum participants would demonstrate awareness of and engagement with their respective pro- and anti-action blocs by posting messages that countered claims by opposing bloc members, and supported claims by members of their own bloc.

b/ Relationships between themes and ideas used in support of pro- and anti-action positions would remain consistent both within individual messages, and across messages used within pro- and anti-blocs. Thus, the content of pro-action supporting arguments would be logically consistent with a pro-action position and the content anti-action supporting arguments would be logically consistent with an anti-action position.

**H2:** Interaction on the forum would take the form of a discussion or argument leading towards consensus. Specifically, the pattern of interaction would demonstrate the development of consensus in favour of action in support of Sheehan (i.e., as the course of the interaction progressed, pro-action messages would come to predominate over anti-action messages).

**Method**

*Description of Broad Data Set*

This study followed from the analysis of MoveOn described in Chapter 7, and thus drew its sample from the same source. However, whereas the data used in the MoveOn study was sampled from the live MoveOn ActionForum site, for this study an archive of the entire ActionForum was made and saved to a local computer within the ANU School of Psychology. This archive represented a snapshot of all forum interaction as of November 21 2005. All data selection and analysis was conducted using the information contained in this archive (i.e., interaction that occurred on the ActionForum after 21 November 2005 was not considered). As I
have previously noted, the live ActionForum site is currently off-line, and will resume operation after the 2008 U.S. Presidential election.

*Data Collection*

The specific data used in this study consisted of messages posted to the MoveOn ActionForum prior to the archiving of the data set as described above, and related to interaction on the forum about the ‘Cindy Sheehan’ issue. A standard text-editing program was used to perform a (case-insensitive) search of the ActionForum archive for all occurrences of the term ‘Sheehan’. Copies of all messages in which the search term occurred were made as individual text files, resulting in an initial sample set of 599 individual message files.

As I described in Chapter 7, the messages fell naturally into two message groups – the Top and Recent sections. Messages rated and ranked in order of importance by a number of forum members appeared in the Top section. As I have argued, messages in the Top section are those that are most relevant to intra forum debate and consensualisation. Thus, following the procedure in Chapter 7, my initial categorisation excluded the 403 messages in the Recent section and focussed on the 196 messages in the Top section.

I next identified messages that would be specifically relevant to consensualisation about decision-making or action related to the Sheehan issue. Unlike my earlier study of the communication on the ActionForum, in this study my intention was to focus on one message thread (or themed conversation) to ascertain if that thread revealed characteristics of consensualisation, debate, and/or decision-making. Thus, I reviewed the remaining messages in the sample and excluded those that were not related to the processes that I was specifically interested in. The five excluded messages categories are described below (see Appendix E for examples of excluded messages).

*Message categories excluded from analysis*

*Incidental (45 messages)*

Incidental messages were excluded from analysis on the basis that in those messages the Sheehan issue appeared in only a minor role. Thus, in this category Sheehan was mentioned only in the context of a wider issue, or as one example of a broader point addressed by the poster.
Repeats (7 messages)

The forum contained a small number of repeated messages. This type of repetition can be found in most on-line forums and may occur due to participant error, or if forum participants are uncertain if their original post to the forum was successfully processed.

No Original Content (23 messages)

Following the procedure used in my analyses of forum data in other studies, only messages that contained original content were included in the final analysis. Messages in the ‘no original content’ category contained only direct quotes from other posters, or excerpts from secondary sources.

Out-group (12 messages)

The main purpose of this study was to investigate in-group consensualisation around decision-making or action. I reasoned that messages that clearly originated from out-group members would not meaningfully contribute to any debate or consensus formation process developing among in-group members; thus, I excluded messages that clearly had an out-group origin. Out-group status was judged by the use of message content that clearly differentiated between the message poster and the MoveOn community or affiliates – for example, I excluded negative descriptions of the MoveOn community that included terms along the lines of ‘you people’ or ‘your group’, and/or pejorative labelling of MoveOn members (e.g., ‘you liberals are all the same’). The exclusion of messages originating in out-groups also conforms with the methodology of the structural analysis that I applied to the final data set.

No Sheehan Action (45 messages)

Messages in this subset did not contain arguments for or against action in support of Cindy Sheehan (where those conducting ‘action’ may be individuals, the MoveOn community, or non-affiliated third-parties). In excluding these messages, I followed similar reasoning to that I used to exclude out-group messages. I was looking for evidence that forum interaction took the form of a discussion leading towards a consensus about action supporting (or not supporting) Cindy Sheehan. Thus, I judged that messages unrelated to this key issue would not be relevant. In other words, although such messages may have formed a part of a broader background of information exchange, they played no direct part in consensualisation.
around the central issue (however, see the Discussion section for further exploration of this theme).

Finally, eight pro-action posters provided no reasons for their support of action. Messages from these posters advocated or encouraged individuals or community members to act but contained no content explaining why action was necessary, or arguments about any other issues or themes. One way of interpreting advocacy messages without supporting arguments is to see them as action calls in the purest sense. Thus, these types of messages are generally brief and focussed solely on a specific action. As my analysis demonstrates, however, this form of message appeared relatively infrequently in the Sheehan message thread. The bulk of my analysis was based on categorisation of messages by theme and the interpretation of intra-message relationships between themed arguments. As a result, messages where supporting arguments were not used could not be categorised according to theme and so played no substantive part in the analysis.

In summary, 132 messages were excluded from the overall number of Sheehan related messages in the Top section, leaving 64 messages that were directly relevant to this study. My next step was to conduct a more fine-grained analysis of these 64 messages.

*Detailed analysis of final message set*

Of the 64 messages in the final sample the first was posted on August 6 2005 and the last on October 23 2005. The overwhelming majority of communication in the thread (62 messages) occurred between 6–28 August, corresponding to the dates of the first major protests conducted by Cindy Sheehan. This grouping of messages supports the idea that the thread did legitimately reflect a discrete subset of interaction by MoveOn members about this issue. The close constellation of relevant Sheehan-related messages within the overall, wide-ranging communication on the forum points to interaction initiated by external, non-forum events occurring over a fixed period of time, and then naturally fading away as the proximity of the initiating event receded. Therefore, this pattern of messages presents prima facie evidence of an on-line ‘conversation’.

Researchers use a range of different techniques to analyse qualitative data. I will not evaluate all of those various techniques here as an extensive body of literature already does so (see, for example, Miles & Huberman, 1994, for practical
reviews of a variety of analysis techniques). As with all forms of analyses, however, the most appropriate technique is one that allows a researcher to discover within their data answers to their primary research questions. The study detailed in this chapter is located within the realm of social identity, and broadly sought to explore if members of a particular group (the MoveOn on-line community) engaged in consensualisation and, if they did, how that consensualisation manifested. The mechanism through which I chose to elucidate the process of consensus formation was a detailed analysis of rhetoric (i.e., interaction, discussion, and argument) within a message thread in the MoveOn on-line forum.

Along these lines, Reicher and Sani (1998) proposed that intra-group argumentation plays a key role in the definition and re-formulation of social category meanings, identity, and collective action. From earlier work exploring the place of rhetoric in shaping context and mobilising action (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 1996), Reicher and Sani argued that the way intra-category differences are contested, explored and resolved through rhetoric and argument has been largely over-looked. They presented their case in specific relation to group schism, however, their point is also more broadly relevant to groups as a whole, and perhaps particularly to groups that form to engage in social action. Thus, Sani and Reicher suggested that “... all aspects of categorisation ... can frequently be seen to be topics of sustained argument, particularly where issues of collective mobilisation and collective action are at issue” (1998, p. 625, emphasis added). Following this reasoning, Reicher and Sani (1998) suggested that “a focus on the structure of group discussion” is essential to understanding these processes and their outcomes. In other words, one way of understanding the development of group identity, and the role and expression of action for a group, is to look at structural characteristics of specific intra-group discussions and arguments.

Reicher and Sani (1998) developed their own method to analyse and understand the structure of group arguments. They contended that their Structural Analysis of Group Arguments (SAGA) blends aspects of quantitative and qualitative analysis, and facilitates a “theoretical rapprochement” between the two different approaches. As I have noted, Reicher and Sani themselves developed and used SAGA largely to investigate group schism, however, they also explicitly asserted the applicability of the method to reveal meanings of, and patterns in, more broadly-
based group arguments. My intention in this study was to look at a discrete occurrence of a group-based interaction to discover evidence of argument or debate leading towards some form of consensus. Therefore, I reasoned that the SAGA method detailed by Reicher and Sani would be ideally suited to uncover the type of structure that I hypothesised would occur in the sampled interaction.

Reicher and Sani made one further key point about SAGA. They emphasised the flexibility of their approach in that it allows a level of procedural difference at the micro-level of analysis. Broadly, their method involves a categorical, iterative review of interaction content. However, the level at which category definitions are made, and the characteristics of the structure in which arguments are perceived and grouped will be determined by the context in which interaction occurs. Anticipating criticism that SAGA thus lacks uniformity across cases, Reicher and Sani affirmed the usefulness of the method as a means of uncovering relationships between instances of rhetoric, and as a way of illuminating consensual intra-group positions. They argued that the flexibility inherent in their method is, in fact, a strength that allows SAGA to be “applicable to a wide range of issues and hypotheses”. The important point here is that the way in which SAGA is applied may vary according to the communication context. More specifically, although a number of examples of SAGA-based analyses have been published (Reicher & Sani, 1998; Sani & Reicher, 1998, 1999), the extraction from new data samples of categories and patterns of interaction will not necessarily follow the exact process used in prior analyses; rather such characteristics will be revealed by following the broad principles explained in the method’s description.

Reicher and Sani (1998) based SAGA on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), however they argued that it differs in two important ways. Firstly, they noted that where a SAGA analysis is applied, data should be grouped by ‘faction’ before coding. Secondly, rather than categories emerging exclusively from the data, in SAGA, categories should be (at least initially) theoretically grounded. Thus, in SAGA, from the out-set data is considered in light of researchers’ theoretical hypotheses, and then initial categories are constructed. Reicher and Sani then called for an iterative review of content to refine arguments, and to ascertain if patterns exist in the way that arguments are utilised throughout interaction.
Accordingly, applying the principles of analysis defined in the SAGA method, and grounded in my theoretical and empirical work so far, I proceeded to develop and refine a categorical analysis of the content of interaction contained in the message sample. Beginning with standard forum information described in Chapter 7, I initially recorded the following descriptive information for each message: Message Number (unique message identifier), Responses (total number of importance ratings), Importance (mean importance rating), Agreement (mean agreement rating).

The purpose of this study was to discover if, over time, forum interaction demonstrated consensualisation around decision-making or action. Put another way, a key question was “Did the forum move towards a consensus about how (or if) Cindy Sheehan should be supported?” Reicher and Sani suggested that coding should concentrate on arguments that “[retain] a sense of completeness and that characterises either the identity of the group or aspects of the issue…” (p. 273, 1998). I had already identified the messages in the final sample as falling into two crucial categories, namely they were in-group messages and they contained arguments about action (either supportive or non-supportive of Cindy Sheehan).

My next phase of analysis was an iterative review of message content designed to uncover and reformulate categories that would reveal any consistent set of group arguments employed by participants, and that might demonstrate consensualisation through convergence of argument content. I subjected the content of each message to seven iterations of review and analysis before deriving the final categories. Categories were not exclusive (i.e., the same message could be placed in multiple categories). During the iterative analysis, new categories were developed, and existing categories were either incorporated or divided. For example, the first iteration revealed a single category of message that advocated specific action in support of Sheehan (labelled ‘SA’). After numerous iterations, this original category was ultimately divided into three distinct categories – ‘SM’ (messages that supported specific action by MoveOn), ‘SI’ (messages that supported specific action by individuals), and ‘ST’ (messages that supported specific action by third-parties outside of the direct MoveOn community – e.g., the Democratic Party). On the other hand, two original categories (‘EW’ – messages that supported ending the war in Iraq, and ‘TR’ – messages that advocated bringing U.S. troops home) were combined...
into the inclusive category ‘EW’ (immediate end to the war) by the end of the iteration process.

Broadly, categories fit into one of two modes. The first mode, detailed above, provided general descriptive information about messages (e.g., unique message number). The second mode, more directly relevant to a SAGA analysis, comprised thematic categories. Thematic categories could be identified by the existence and the direction of arguments (i.e., categories in this mode exhibited the potential for valence). So, for example, a message categorised as ‘MS’ (Motives – Sheehan) not only contained references to Sheehan’s motives for engaging in protest, but also presented those motives as positive (negative) in a way that supported the message poster’s arguments (and thus also allowed for the possibility of rebuttal arguments including negative (positive) portrayals of Sheehan’s motives). From the perspective of the SAGA method, categories that exhibit the potential for valence best reveal any on-going process of consensus development because, looked at over time, they expose convergence or divergence around an issue.

The final coding iteration revealed twenty-three content categories. As noted, six of these categories provided basic descriptive information about each message; the remaining seventeen were more directly related to potential consensualisation through themed arguments. Category names and definitions are presented in Table 15.
Table 15. Names and definitions from the analysis of the MoveOn Sheehan message thread

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>Message number</td>
<td>Unique message number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Ratings</td>
<td>Number of ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>Mean agreement rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Mean importance rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Date of message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>Reply</td>
<td>Message is direct reply to earlier post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Descriptive categories**

**Thematic Categories (categories display valence)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Action advocacy</td>
<td>Pro-(anti)-action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Sympathy</td>
<td>(Non-)Sympathetic towards Sheehan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>Honour</td>
<td>Protests honour (dishonour) soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EW</td>
<td>End war</td>
<td>Pro-(anti)-immediate end to war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Public relations</td>
<td>Action is good (bad) public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Republican administration</td>
<td>Pro-(anti-)Republican administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BU</td>
<td>President Bush</td>
<td>Pro-(anti)-President Bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Motives (Sheehan)</td>
<td>Sheehan’s motives are positive (negative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Motives (Others)</td>
<td>Other’s motives are positive (negative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>Establishment is honest (corrupt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>Iraq war deaths are (not) justified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td>Soldiers are (not) in Iraq willingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>Public opinion</td>
<td>Public opinion is for (against) the war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>War has had a positive (negative) effect on Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Action is a positive (negative) way to voice discontent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Action is (not) a legitimate response to action by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX</td>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>Sheehan issue has (not) been over exposed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results**

*Organisation of categories – the evidence for debate*

Reicher and Sani (1998) suggest that categories (or ‘arguments’) can fall into one of three groups – common, asymmetrical, or unilateral. Common arguments are those used by both pro- and anti-message posters; asymmetrical arguments are those where the position of one side (e.g., pros) is opposite to that of the other (e.g., antis); unilateral arguments are those used by only one faction (e.g., pro- or anti- but not both). As I am primarily concerned with interaction about action, the category of ‘Action Advocacy’ is central to considering how participants frame their positions. Pro- and anti-action categories form blocs under which arguments in the remaining thematic categories are further organised and understood. Following Reicher and
Sani's definitions of common, asymmetrical, and unilateral arguments, after category membership of messages was finalised categories were grouped according to their use by pro- and anti-action message posters.

Table 16. Organisation of pro-action and anti-action argument blocs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments by Pros</th>
<th>Arguments by Antis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common arguments</strong></td>
<td><strong>Common arguments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/15 Anti-Republican administration (AD)</td>
<td>2/16 Anti-President Bush (BU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/16 Anti-President Bush (BU)</td>
<td>3/17 Establishment is corrupt (CO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17 Establishment is corrupt (CO)</td>
<td>4/18 Sheehans's motives are negative (MS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/18 Sheehans's motives are negative (MS)</td>
<td>5/19 Iraq war deaths are not justified (DE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/19 Iraq war deaths are not justified (DE)</td>
<td>6/20 War has had a negative effect on Iraq (IQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/20 War has had a negative effect on Iraq (IQ)</td>
<td>7/21 Sheehan issue has been overexposed (EX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sympathetic towards Sheehan (SY)</td>
<td>22 Non-sympathetic towards Sheehan (SY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Protests honour soldiers (HO)</td>
<td>23 Protests dishonour soldiers (HO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Pro-immediate end to war (EW)</td>
<td>24 Anti-immediate end to war (EW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Action is good public relations (PR)</td>
<td>25 Action is bad public relations (PR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asymmetrical arguments</strong></td>
<td><strong>Asymmetrical arguments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Public opinion is against the war (PO)</td>
<td>26 Others' motives are negative (MO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Action is a positive way to voice discontent (VO)</td>
<td>27 Soldiers are in Iraq willingly (EN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Action is a legitimate response (RE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16 presents arguments grouped by pro- and anti- blocs. Following Reicher and Sani (1998), common arguments appear first in the table, followed by asymmetrical then unilateral. Arguments made by the pro-action bloc are displayed on the left, while those by the anti-action bloc are on the right. Arguments are numbered consecutively, beginning with all pro-action arguments. Common arguments have two numbers because the same arguments are present in both pro- and the anti-action blocs. For example, BU:2/16 refers to anti-President Bush arguments made by both pro- and anti-action blocs. On the other hand, asymmetrical and unilateral arguments have one number each because they represent arguments that are unique to each block. So, EW:10 refers to arguments in favour of an immediate end to the war made by the pro-action bloc, while EW:24 refers to opposing arguments against an immediate end made by the anti-action bloc.

Organising categories in this way indicates, at face value at least, that some form of debate or structured interaction did occur within the message thread. In the ‘common’ group, messages in both pro- and anti-action blocs contain the same topic argued in the same direction, thus, message posters did not overtly disagree about these issues. The ‘unilateral’ groups show arguments presented by both blocs that
were not rebutted, or even referred to, by the opposing side. The ‘asymmetrical’ groups, however, contains topics where the arguments presented by one side oppose those presented by the other and so suggests the presence of contestation of position – or, in other words, argument or debate.

**Inter-rater reliability**

Following the procedure used in earlier studies, two independent raters categorised a random sample of messages 20 messages, or .31 of the total sample set. Raters were given printed instructions and examples of actual categorised messages (see Appendix E for copies). Overall inter-rater reliability was good. The mean kappa score between rater 1 and the researcher was .62 and between rater 2 and the researcher .67, where scores falling between .40 and .75 show ‘fair to good’ agreement (Armitage & Berry, 1994).

Kappas across most individual categories were also generally good, with scores ranging from .49 (acceptable) to .96 (excellent). However, one rater’s scores for ‘corruption’ (CO) and ‘response’ (RE) were low. Rater 1 scored .48 for both CO and RE (rater 2’s scores were acceptable at .65 for CO and .66 for RE). Given the complexity and number of categories I argue that, as CO and RE scores for rater 1 are only marginally low, both categories should be viewed as reliable.

On the other hand, both raters scored less than .25 for ‘voice’ (VO), indicating low agreement with the researcher about that category. I have retained the VO category in my analysis as it comprises only one of the overall group of categories I use in support of my arguments; nonetheless, some caution should be used when viewing results that refer to ‘voice’.

**The logical arrangements of arguments**

SAGA also encourages us to view the logical relationships between arguments to gain a better understanding of the nature of that interaction. For example, Table 16 presents the relationships between thematic categories (arguments) and pro- and anti-action blocs (note that this table only indicates direction, not quantity, of arguments) from which we can examine in more detail how arguments about action conformed with associated arguments about thematic categories. From Table 1 we know that forum participants employed seventeen thematic arguments overall. All of those arguments had the potential for valence (i.e., any participant who used a particular argument could have adopted either a pro-
or anti-stance). For example, looking at asymmetrical arguments, Table 16 shows that pro-action participants argued that protest honours soldiers (HO:9), whereas anti-action participants argued that protest dishonours soldiers (HO:23). Despite arguments about honour following this pattern, pro-action participants could conceivably have argued that protest dishonours soldiers, and vice-versa. That they did not tells us something about the relationship between arguments about action and arguments about that particular thematic category.

It seems reasonable, in fact, that pro-action participants should argue that protest is a way to honour soldiers while those opposed to protest should attempt to portray that action as being dishonourable because those argument directions are consonant with the position of their respective blocs. Likewise, we can make assumptions about the expected directions of other thematic arguments. Thus, it is probable that those opposed to action will argue that it is bad public relations, whereas the opposite will likely be true for those in favour of action (arguments about the public relations value of protest (PR:11/25) were asymmetrical, and Table 16 shows that they did fall in those expected directions).

Figure 4. Relationships between pro- and anti-action arguments and other category arguments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Common</th>
<th>Asymmetrical</th>
<th>Unilateral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. see Table 16 p. 157 for category key; + = direction of category argument is consonant with direction of action argument; - = direction of category argument is dissonant with direction of action argument;

Figure 4 elaborates these relationships by displaying how thematic arguments fell by bloc and showing whether those arguments were presented in the expected directions. The consistency of arguments is specified by a ‘+’ or ‘-’, where ‘+’ indicates that the actual arguments presented in a thematic category fell in the expected direction based on their bloc and ‘-’ shows that they did not. Thus, where pro-action posters included arguments about the public relations value of action (PR:11) they argued that action was good public relations whereas anti-action posters
who argued about public relations (PR:25) contended that it was bad public relations. Both positions are consonant with their respective stances on action as is indicated by the + notation used in Figure 4.

On the other hand, Table 16 shows that pro-action posters presented arguments that were anti-President Bush (BU:2), as did anti-action posters (BU:16); thus both pro- and anti-action posters agreed on their position about the President. However, from Figure 4 we can see that, whereas anti-Bush arguments are consonant with a pro-action stance, the same anti-Bush arguments are dissonant with an anti-action stance. In other words, we might expect members of an anti-action bloc to adopt a pro-Bush stance. Similarly, pro- and anti-action posters agreed on their position about Sheehan’s motives (Table 2 – MS:4/18); where arguments on this issue were present, both sides agreed that Sheehan’s motives were negative. However, although this stance is consonant with anti-action arguments we would expect that those in favour of action should argue that Sheehan had positive motives (i.e., the opposite of what was actually argued). Perhaps most noticeably, Figure 4 shows us that most (although not all) arguments that were common across both blocs were consonant with a pro-action position but dissonant with an anti-action stance.

Interestingly, viewing the relationships between arguments this way reveals intra-category disagreement within anti-action poster categories related to sympathy for Sheehan. Thus, Figure 4 shows that some anti-action posters expressed sympathy for Sheehan whilst others were non-sympathetic (SY:22). Figure 4 also shows that anti-action posters did not use arguments about public opinion while those pro-action posters who presented arguments about that issue all argued that public opinion was in favour of action (PO:12); in other words, this was a unilateral argument. Figure 4 shows that all unilateral arguments were consonant with their respective action stances.

While Figure 4 shows where participants’ overall arguments are congruent with their position on action, this technique can also be used to reveal more detailed information about relationships between other arguments. A number of the argument themes are open to this form of more detailed assessment; however, I selected the two specific themes that I believed were most relevant to my thesis – a more fine-grained analysis of messages that advocated action, and an examination of how messages about Sheehan relate to those specifically about protest.
As examination of message content progressed, it became clear that messages related to action advocacy had different focuses; many forum participants were being explicit about who they were advocating should carry out any action. I identified three different sub-categories of action advocacy: messages about action by the MoveOn community (AC); messages about action by individuals (AI); and messages about action by third-parties external to MoveOn (AT).

Figure 5. Relationships between arguments and pro- and anti-action posts by sub-category of action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Common</th>
<th>Asymmetrical</th>
<th>Unilateral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/</td>
<td>2/</td>
<td>3/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACPro</td>
<td>+ + + + -</td>
<td>+ + + +</td>
<td>+ + +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIPro</td>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>+ + +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATPRO</td>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACAnti</td>
<td>- - + + -</td>
<td>+/ -</td>
<td>+ + +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIAnti</td>
<td>- + -</td>
<td></td>
<td>+ +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAnti</td>
<td>- + +</td>
<td>+/ -</td>
<td>+ +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: see Table 16 p. 157 for category key; + = direction of category argument is consonant with direction of action argument; - = direction of category argument is dissonant with direction of action argument.

Figure 5 shows the relationships between argument themes and these three more detailed action related categories. Thus, for example, posters who advocated third party action (ATPro) used no anti-administration arguments, but those who advocated action by the community (ACPro) and individuals (AIPro) did, and in a way that was consonant with the direction of their action argument (AD:1). Similarly, posters who advocated community (ACPro) and individual (AIPro) action noted the negative effect of the war on Iraq in their arguments, while those advocating third party action (ATPro) did not refer to these effects at all (IQ:6). Some anti-action advocates (ACAnti) also referred to the war’s consequences on Iraq, but in a way that was dissonant with their position on action. Figure 5 also shows that no anti-action posters presented arguments about individual actions, rather, their arguments concentrated on action by the MoveOn community and third parties. On the other
hand, pro-action posters used arguments about all sub-categories, arguing for action by individuals, the MoveOn community, and external parties. Generally, asymmetrical and unilateral arguments used by pro- and anti-action blocs were consonant with their positions on action.

Figure 5 elaborates the pattern of consonant and dissonant common arguments displayed in Figure 4 where we saw that common arguments were mostly consonant with a pro-action stance and dissonant with opposition to action. Thus, with regard to Sheehan’s motives (MS:4/18), exceptions to the general pattern occurred when pro-action arguments about third-party action were advanced, and anti-action arguments about community and third-party action were used. Pro-action arguments about overexposure of the Sheehan issue (EX:7/21) were only advanced by those who argued for community action, but these arguments were dissonant with their action stance. On the other hand, the same arguments about overexposure were consonant with an anti-action position, but were only used by anti-action posters who argued against third-party action (i.e., no anti-action arguments about community or third-party action occurred).

**Connections between arguments**

My original seventeen thematic categories were derived from an iterative review of relevant Sheehan-related forum interaction, and reflect arguments about issues connected to ‘Sheehan’ and ‘action’. In spite of this focus it is clear that the list of categories covers a broad scope; for example, included themes range from ‘President Bush’ through to ‘voice’. However, notwithstanding this variety, if we exclude the specific category of ‘action advocacy’ each of the remaining categories seems to fall naturally into one of four broad sets (note that these category sets occurred not by design, but were rather a serendipitous outcome of the original category iteration process). For example, categories about the Republicans (AD), President Bush (BU), corruption (CO), and others’ motives (MO) all primarily focus on groups or individuals external to MoveOn. Alternatively, SY (Sympathy for Sheehan), MS (Sheehan’s motives), and EX (overexposure of Sheehan) are all specifically about Cindy Sheehan. All four of these category sets and their included categories are displayed in Table 17 below.
Table 17. Thematic category sets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set</th>
<th>Opponents</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Validity</th>
<th>Sheehan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arguments about out-groups or the</td>
<td>Arguments about the war in Iraq or</td>
<td>Arguments about the validity or</td>
<td>Arguments about Cindy Sheehan or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>establishment</td>
<td>the effects of conflict</td>
<td>legitimacy of action</td>
<td>the Sheehan ‘issue’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included Categories</td>
<td>AD, BU, CO, MO</td>
<td>DE, IQ, EW, PO, EN</td>
<td>HO, PR, VO, RE</td>
<td>SY, MS, EX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: see Table 16 p. 157 for category key

I have emphasised the connection of all thematic categories to the broad question of whether or not the forum moved towards consensus about action or action-support for Sheehan. It follows then that all four of the broad category sets presented in Table 17 must also have this connection. Nevertheless, I identified two sets from this grouping that were worth more scrutiny. While thematic categories in the ‘Opponent’ and ‘Conflict’ sets provide indirect support for arguments about action, those in the ‘Validity’ and ‘Sheehan’ sets speak directly to the key issues of ‘action’ and ‘Sheehan’. Thus, my final analysis of argument relationships is between the categories that appear in those two sets.

Figure 6. Relationships between thematic arguments related to action validity and arguments about Sheehan, by action bloc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>MSPro</th>
<th>EXPro</th>
<th>SYPro</th>
<th>MSAnti</th>
<th>EXAnti</th>
<th>SYAnti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Action</td>
<td>MSPro</td>
<td>EXPro</td>
<td>SYPro</td>
<td>MSAnti</td>
<td>EXAnti</td>
<td>SYAnti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
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<td>11/25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: see Table 16 p. 157 for category key; + = direction of category argument is consonant with direction of action argument; - = direction of category argument is dissonant with direction of action argument
Figure 6 shows that anti-action advocates employed only asymmetrical arguments when discussing the validity of action; they used no common or unilateral arguments. In fact, neither pro- nor anti- blocs used common arguments about validity (note that although reliability of the VO category was low, reliability for all other categories was acceptable). Further, although anti-action arguments about Sheehan’s motives were consonant with arguments about validity (\(MS^{\text{anti}}\)) this was not always the case with regard to sympathy for Sheehan (\(SY^{\text{anti}}\)). Where anti-action advocates discussed both the public relations value of protest (PR) and sympathy (\(SY^{\text{anti}}\)) their arguments were dissonant, and where arguments about sympathy (\(SY^{\text{anti}}\)) and honour (HO) were present they adopted both consonant and dissonant positions. On the other hand, the pro-action bloc used both asymmetrical and unilateral arguments about validity and, where they discussed both validity and Sheehan, their arguments were always consonant. Finally, the pro-action bloc did not present arguments about Sheehan’s motives (\(MS^{\text{pro}}\)) when arguing about validity and, similarly, anti-action advocates used no arguments about overexposure of the Sheehan issue (\(EX^{\text{anti}}\)) when they posted about the validity of action.

The chronology of interaction

I have thus far considered the organisation of categories and the relationships between thematic arguments as ways to understand forum interaction about key issues. Another way to look at these themes is through a chronological display of relevant interaction as presented in Table 18 below.
Table 18. Pro-action, anti-action, and total numbers of messages and arguments by date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Anti</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>by Pros</th>
<th>by Antis</th>
<th>by week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Totals 62 51 11 147 108 39

Note. 1 numbers show quantities of arguments, not argument direction.

2 'by week' totals include all messages/arguments falling within the seven-day periods beginning 6 and 13 August. As no relevant messages appeared after 28 August, the final 'by week' totals includes all messages/arguments between 20 and 28 August.

The chronological display of message and argument numbers in Table 18 suggests that forum participants were cognisant of and engaged with external events. There were significant differences between the quantities of messages posted across the three weekly periods with 32.3% of messages posted in period one, 48.4% in the second period, and 19.3% in period three, $\chi^2(2, N = 62) = 7.87, p < .05$. Quantities of arguments used by message posters also differed significantly across each of the periods; 25.2% of arguments were presented in the first period, increasing to 54.4% in period two and reducing to 20.4% in the final period, $\chi^2(2, N = 147) = 29.92, p < .01$. Cindy Sheehan had relocated her camp to be closer to President Bush’s ranch on 16 August, and the MoveOn.org ‘candlelight vigils’ organised to support Sheehan took place on August 17. The clustering of both pro- and anti-action messages around those dates indicates discussion stimulated by those external events.
Interestingly, anti-action messages sharply peaked on 16 August and outnumbered pro-action messages on that day.

Table 18 also shows that the overall number of messages in favour of action supporting Sheehan, and the number of arguments used within those pro-action messages outweighed both messages and arguments used by anti-action forum participants. In conjunction with the face-value evidence presented in Table 16 above pointing towards the existence of argument in the forum, one interpretation of the pattern of messages over time is that they show a process of consensus building among forum participants. More specifically, it is plausible that, in line with my expectations, these results show evidence of consensualisation in the forum in favour of action supporting Sheehan.

**Mapping individual participant interaction**

As the final stage of the SAGA analysis Reicher and Sani (1998) suggest examining how the actual use of arguments by individual participants conformed to the expected use. Tables 19 and 20 below present all of the argument categories used by pro- and anti-action participants respectively, and show if those arguments were consonant or dissonant with their stance on action. The tables also summarise the presence of consonant and/or dissonant arguments for each participant.

In their original presentation of the SAGA method, Reicher and Sani (1998) discussed the utility of recording the actual numbers of consonant or dissonant arguments for each participant, versus simply recording if a particular type of argument relationship (consonant or dissonant) did or did not exist for participants. In their analyses they have most often settled on showing presence and not quantities of relationships. I have adopted the same stance below and follow their reasoning on this point. However, an interesting feature of my data is that, in both pro- and anti-blocs, participants almost always communicated only once. In other words, nearly every participant only posted a single message to the forum (the only exception occurred in the pro-action bloc where participant ‘Pro4’ posted twice). As a consequence, even though I have not specifically stated the numbers of times that individual posters used particular arguments or argument relations, this information can easily be derived from the data. Thus, for example, Table 19 shows the presence of dissonant arguments about overexposure (EX:7/21) for participant Pro8. Because we know that this participant only posted one message to the forum, we can be
certain that only one use of this dissonant relationship occurred in their interaction (i.e., they did not post multiple messages including the same argument).

Table 19. Arguments used by individual pro-action supporters

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Note: see Table 16 p. 157 for category key; + = direction of category argument is consonant with c- indicates argument is consonant with action stance; d - indicates argument is dissonant with action stance; Con – indicates that poster used consonant arguments; Dis – indicates that poster used dissonant arguments.
Immediately apparent from Table 19 is that the overwhelming number of individual pro-action forum participants used arguments in ways that were consonant with their action stance. Put another way, Table 19 shows that, where pro-action advocates employed arguments about other issues, they almost always applied them in a way that fell in line with their action advocacy. In fact we would expect this to be so – it seems reasonable that participants in an interaction would maintain an overall consistency through their arguments.

Table 19 also shows that dissonant arguments were only used by two pro-action participants, and then only in one instance by each participant (Pro8, EX:7/21 and Pro25, MS:4/18). Moreover, the dissonant argument offered by participant Pro8 was the only non-action related argument included in their pro-action post. Following Figures 4 and 5 above, Table 19 also shows that the dissonant arguments offered about Sheehan’s motives (MS) and overexposure (EX) were the only arguments offered by pro-action participants about those themes (i.e., no consonant arguments were offered on those themes). Furthermore, only a single argument was offered for one other theme (HO), and only two pro-action participants addressed the theme of the public relations value of protest (PR).

I constructed a similar table to show how individual anti-action posters employed arguments. Once again, only the occurrence (not quantities) of arguments are shown, however, as with pro-action posters, each anti-action advocate only made a single posting to the forum and so quantities can be easily deduced.

Table 20. Arguments used by individual anti-action supporters

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Note. see Table 16 p. 157 for category key; + = direction of category argument is consonant with c – indicates argument is consonant with action stance; d – indicates argument is dissonant with action stance; Con – indicates that poster used consonant arguments; Dis – indicates that poster used dissonant arguments
Table 19 showed that the use of consonant arguments by those in favour of action far outweighed the use of dissonant arguments. Table 20 shows a very different pattern for anti-action posters. The summary of occurrence of consonant and dissonant arguments shows a similar use of both among anti-action advocates. Furthermore, if actual numbers of consonant and dissonant arguments used by each participant are counted, we see that exactly the same number of these arguments was used. Anti-action advocates employed thirty-eight arguments in total, nineteen consonant and nineteen dissonant.

The presence of consonant and dissonant arguments about sympathy (SY) is also worth noting. As Table 20 shows, although nearly all anti-action advocates presented arguments relevant to sympathy, only a single consonant argument was detected. Put another way, nearly all posters who were against action expressed sympathy towards Sheehan. Finally, there were four themes where only a single argument was proffered (CO, IQ, EX, EW) by anti-action posters, and two themes with only two arguments (PR, EN).

Discussion

My intentions for this study of were two-fold. I identified and extracted a specific subset of messages from the wider MoveOn ActionForum that would be particularly likely to contain evidence of the debate and consensus development that I argued should be present if the community was engaging in attempts at consensus mobilisation. I also used that data to test the reliability of my earlier observations about the ActionForum. In particular, I wanted to determine if an alternative, more fine-grained analysis of interaction content would support my original results indicating a relative lack of action-related discussion and debate on the forum, or if it would reveal an action focus that had previously been masked by the complexity of overall interaction data. In effect, I wanted to test my ideas by examining a message thread that represented the best-case scenario under which my predictions would be met.

I generally expected that the relative frequency of forum messages over time would conform to relevant face-to-face events and that, despite the existence of both pro- and anti- Sheehan blocs, pro- messages would generally out-number antis. Following ideas about consensus mobilisation (Klandermans, 1984), politicised collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), and interactive identity formation
I hypothesised that the pattern of messages across the life of the discrete interaction would display evidence of discussion and debate through claims and counter-claims in the content of messages, and through the use of logically consistent arguments within opposing (i.e., pro- and anti-Sheehan) argument blocs. I further predicted that, as the interaction progressed, pro-messages would come to predominate over anti-messages and thus demonstrate evidence of consensus formation about action. Overall, my results provided some support for my specific predictions.

I found prima-facie evidence that a structured debate took place. For example, the presence of asymmetrical arguments showed that opposing blocs adopted conflicting positions on key issues. Further, use of supporting themes included in the asymmetrical arguments proffered by both pro- and anti-blocs were generally logically consistent with their bloc positions; in other words, where blocs used directly conflicting arguments, the content of their own arguments were mostly (although not always) consistent with their stated position. Moreover, the chronological occurrence of messages was also broadly consistent with the presence of debate – as I had predicted, over time messages in favour of action supporting Sheehan came to predominate over those against such action. The chronology of interaction also provided strong support for my general expectation that the overall interaction would be driven by external face-to-face events, which I argue reinforces my original rational for the study and selection of the Sheehan message thread for analysis.

Notwithstanding this evidence, a closer examination of the logical relationships between themes used within messages proffers a different view on the extent to which the interaction could be characterised as a debate. The results showed that pro- and anti-blocs actually adopted the same position on many supporting arguments, and in directions that were consistent with a pro-Sheehan stance. Consequently, when all argument groups are considered (common, asymmetrical, and unilateral) pro-arguments retain a high level of internal consonance, while anti-argument are largely dissonant. Moreover, anti-Sheehan posters did not always engage with their opponents on seemingly relevant themes. For example with regard to specific action, pro-Sheehan advocates argued for community, individual, and third party action whereas the anti-bloc offered no arguments at all about action by
individuals. Focusing more specifically on the ‘Validity’ and ‘Sheehan’ category sets underlines the lack of confrontation between blocs – Sympathy was the only theme for which asymmetrical arguments were presented by both blocs relevant to the validity of action, and even here anti-action advocates mostly fell in line with a pro-action direction (i.e., they were mainly sympathetic to Sheehan).

Similar patterns are also present in breakdowns of pro- and anti-posters which show that both individuals and supporting arguments used by members of the pro-Sheehan bloc were almost always consonant with their bloc position, contrasting with the anti-Sheehan bloc which displayed a high level of dissonant individuals and arguments – anti-Sheehan posters very often agreed with pro-Sheehan arguments. Furthermore, the display of individual posters also revealed that nearly all participants (pro- and anti-) only contributed once to the interaction (and only one direct reply occurred), also pointing towards a lack of ongoing debate.

Taken together then, these results lend more weight to the specific findings from my earlier study of the MoveOn forum, and to my evolved general thesis about action versus interaction in on-line social-action forums. As with that earlier work, these results demonstrate that forum participants were not engaging in decision making about, planning, or mobilising action. More importantly, however, they also show that participants were not engaging to mobilise consensus either. There is little trace that OLC interaction was a discussion or debate leading towards any type of consensus (i.e., I found little evidence of consensualisation). The interactions I observed can best be described as a series of statements that most participants (both pro- and anti-) already agreed with.

This of course brings to mind an idea that I canvassed earlier in this thesis. I suggested that a newspaper opinion page might provide an appropriate comparison for the role that many open on-line forums play in social movements. Most contributors to an opinion page probably do not expect their letters to form part of a discussion that will lead towards consensus between other letter writers. Likewise, participants in on-line forums might also see the value of their forums as more akin to an opinion page (where the process of consensus formation is less relevant) rather than a planning meeting or town hall debate to decide a specific course of events (where the development of a consensual position largely determines success or failure). This use tallies with the characteristics of the interactions I have thus far
observed, and with the importance forum participants place on communicating with other movement participants and lurkers.

Clearly, however, there is at least one key difference between a newspaper opinion-page and the on-line forums that I have studied. On-line community interaction commonly (although not exclusively) occurs between in-group audiences (or at least audiences who are loosely aligned to a cause or issue). One way I have described such communities is as opinion-based groups (Bliuc et al., 2007), a characterisation also compatible with my opinion-page comparison.

In my introduction to this chapter I suggested that social movement OLCs could be opinion-based groups whose aim was to promote awareness of and mobilise consensus about an issue or cause through inductive/deductive identity formation and development. The results from my current study now allow a refinement of this argument, and in a way that also provides insight into the overall pattern of the results in this thesis. It appears as if some social movements do not use on-line forums as venues to plan events, or overtly argue or debate the merits of relevant issues, or even to work towards consensus in any meaningful form. Instead, participants in these OLCs already agree about key issues and ideas and so use their forums to present a common, consistent face for their goals and ideals, and to define and capture the prevailing mood (the zeitgeist) as they would ideally have it be. Thus, the overt process of consensus formation becomes unimportant, perhaps because participants understand the problems and limitations associated with seeking this type of resolution (e.g., sabotage by agent provocateurs). Instead, the forum is used to advertise or promote a general movement zeitgeist to observers (e.g., forum lurkers, the general public, etc.) through the overall tone and nature of posts, and even to strategically demonstrate the popularity and effectiveness of the movement (e.g., through continued forum activity, quantity of posts, etc.). Accordingly, on-line forums may be less about identity formation than identity presentation.

The distinction between formation and presentation highlights one key issue related to identity that is worth brief review. Following work on inductive and deductive identity formation (Postmes, Haslam et al., 2005; Postmes, Spears et al., 2005), I suggested that the place of identity within an on-line community might be explained through the interactive processes described by the Postmes et al. model. However, following my latest results, I have subsequently argued that formation or
development might not best describe what is taking place in these forums. On the other hand, the framework used by Postmes and colleagues seems to have clear utility for the interactions I have studied. For example, it seems plausible that the wider social movements within which many on-line forums exist provide a framework or context through which participants deductively construe identity. Similarly, deduction is implicit in my suggestion that OLC participants already have a consensual understanding of movement identity. Moreover, OLC interaction (even though it may not be consensualisation) clearly conforms to the intention described by Postmes et al.'s inductive identity process. Accordingly (and somewhat serendipitously), my work might offer a further insight into the processes described by Postmes and colleagues. Whereas it is clear that social identity does form or develop, it might also be that the descriptor of 'formation' does not adequately capture the processes that occur in all groups all of the time. Thus, although induction and deduction may play a role in social-action on-line communities, I suggest that sometimes these processes are more about understanding or consolidation rather than formation. The distinction here is subtle and although my current results do not allow me to speak more authoritatively to this point, at the very least they suggest an important future line of investigation.

One final point is also worth reviewing. Following the methodology of my earlier studies, I derived the sample for this study by excluding messages that I argued would have no bearing on my research question. My selection of the Sheehan issue was driven by the goal to examine a series of messages that would be most likely to contain debate or discussion. Within that broader issue, I further narrowed my focus to a subset of interactions about support for action. Specifically, I was seeking evidence that interaction would demonstrate consensualisation and so excluded messages unrelated to that key process. This was an appropriate strategy to investigate the question I posed, and left a sample that provided the very best opportunity to detect the phenomenon I sought. As my results demonstrate, even with that 'ideal' sample of data I did not detect real consensus development.

One consequence of my reasoning is that some of the messages I excluded may likely be instantiations of the phenomenon that I have ultimately detected. In other words, I correctly excluded data based on the assumption that it would be irrelevant to the consensualisation processes I hypothesised would be present.
Ironically, however, I have discovered that some of the information irrelevant to my original conceptualisation of these OLCs may have an important role in their actual purpose. Thus, the main purpose of many of these forums may not be to build consensus within the forum, but to present information that points to a consensus well beyond the forum itself.
Chapter 9: Words and actions in on-line socio-political communities: summary and conclusions

*Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes* (Marx, 1844)

*An a dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality* (Yoko Ono, circa 1970)

My research has explored the processes involved in the development of social-action on-line communities, and the role those communities play for their participants and the movements around which they are based. From an initial focus on the development of OLCs as either ‘common identity’ or ‘alliance of convenience’ groups, my work grew to look at the relative importance of interaction and action, and how those manifested and were interpreted in communities. Although my original ideas about the organisation and role of OLCs changed, a number of key supporting theories remained relevant to my growing understanding. For example, work on multiple pathways towards collective action (e.g., Simon et al., 1998; van Zomeren et al., 2004), provided important information about identity in the types of on-line community I studied. The role of consensus in social movements (e.g., Klandermans, 1984), and work on the interaction of identity and action (Klandermans et al., 2002; Reicher, 2000) also continued to be important. I explored Bliuc et al.’s (2007) conceptualisation of opinion-based groups as one way to explain the diversity of membership inherent in most social movements, and Simon and Klandermans’s (2001) idea of politicised collective identity that demonstrated the role of out-groups for social movements. I also considered how consensus might develop in on-line communities through interacting inductive and deductive identity processes (Postmes, Haslam et al., 2005). Finally, I examined what the focus of consensus might be, and how that focus could determine the overall value of placed on consensus within on-line communities.

*Prospective thesis restated*

My central ideas about on-line communities evolved during the course of my work according to the empirical evidence I gathered. Originally, my broad prospective thesis was that on-line communities would show the same processes of development as their face-to-face counterparts and, therefore, that social action
OLCs should develop according to the patterns and rules followed by face-to-face social movements. Accordingly, I predicted that basic processes related to identity, agency, and consensualisation would work in social-action OLCs so that those communities developed as one of two forms. I proposed that development as either an ‘alliance of convenience’ or a ‘common identity’ group would mitigate factors common in social movements that should otherwise lead to the disintegration of those groups.

As my research progressed and I gathered empirical data from actual on-line communities I revised that central thesis. I developed the idea of social-action OLCs as forums for interaction rather than overt action. The key difference I proposed in my revised thesis was that identity and consensualisation processes in on-line social action communities would coalesce more around talk than actual action, even though those OLCs professed to be action groups. I suggested that an important consequence of this change towards interaction would be that participants in those communities would come to perceive talk as action in their on-line social movements.

Summary of research

My first study tested the idea that social action on-line communities would develop as either alliances of convenience or as common identity groups by categorising the content of messages on one specific OLC, the S11 forum. Although I did find higher proportions of messages advocating an alliance of convenience, agreement between raters was low about that category distinction. However, higher proportions of messages about ‘behaviour’ rather than ‘principles’ also suggested that participants favoured an AoC. Overall, therefore, I did find limited evidence that the S11 forum developed as an alliance of convenience. However, the more interesting finding was that I detected a much lower level of communication related to decision-making and action than I expected from my reading of the literature on social movements. Similar patterns of interaction on other ostensible social-action groups on the Yahoo web portal also suggested that a lack of overt action might be commonplace on-line. If this were so, it became problematic to view these types of groups as action OLCs, and this raised two important questions. Firstly, if social-action OLCs do not engage in action, what do they do, and secondly, why do their members keep participating?
Following these unexpected findings, I reasoned there might be a distinction between action and interaction OLCs. I suggested that communities could adopt either interaction or action orientations, and proposed that participants would judge how effective their communities were based on how well their communities performed in relation to their orientation. I specifically hypothesised that social-action OLCs would change orientation from action to interaction, and that participants' judgements about effectiveness would shift from judging communities as being effective in the domain of action to judging them as being effective in the domain of interaction. Consequently, over time participants' perceptions of their OLCs would change from expecting them to be action communities to accepting them as interaction communities. In an on-line survey and interviews participants did endorse the idea of interaction and action communities. However, against expectations, participants' expected and preferred their communities to be both action and interaction oriented, and judged them to be effective at both action and interaction. Moreover, community identification was correlated with variables related to an interaction orientation, but not with an action orientation. These results implied a more sophisticated relationship between action and interaction than suggested by my original predictions. Participants appreciated the value of action and maintained a desire for their forums to act. However, rather than seeing interaction and action as distinct, they viewed the two as linked. So, for example, participants noted that interaction could affect other forum members, but also external (out-group) observers, raising the possibility that participants perceived their forums as mechanisms through which to raise consciousness.

I used my third study to validate my own observations and key theoretical ideas by exposing my data and conclusions to an audit by independent peers. Like OLC participants themselves, auditors agreed about the legitimacy of the action interaction distinction, and accepted that there was a real difference between action and interaction OLCs. On the other hand, auditors seemed to agree less about what actually constituted action, and sometimes found difficulty in clearly differentiating between action and interaction. Furthermore, auditors did not generally detect changes in forum orientation over time. Therefore, although the results broadly validated my general point about drawing a distinction between action and interaction, they also provided confirmation that the line between action and interaction is difficult to distinguish, and that, on-line, interaction can sometimes be
seen as action. Interestingly, although auditors identified structured discussions or debates in communities, they detected little evidence of argument resolution or decision-making. Accordingly, it seemed that forums did not appear to be acting as environments where consensus was important, and that interaction in and of itself might be perceived as a legitimate form of on-line action.

Notwithstanding the general pattern of my earlier results, one important factor that had the potential to influence perceptions about the orientation of an OLC was the ease with which action and interaction related communication could be differentiated (e.g., both OLC participants themselves and independent auditors sometimes had difficulty in discriminating between the two). Therefore, in my fourth study I investigated whether forum structure influenced perceptions of orientation. Specifically, I tested if interaction would still predominate over action in a context where participants had the ability to easily choose one over the other, and so more explicitly shape the nature of their community towards either action or interaction.

An analysis of the MoveOn ActionForum did reveal some evidence of an action orientation in that community. For example, although participants tended to prefer action and interaction messages equally, they did agree more with action over interaction-oriented messages. Conversely, overall proportions of action and interaction messages were very similar. Overall then, even though the MoveOn forum did seem to be nominally more action-oriented than other OLCs the rates of action detected were not substantial, especially given how the structure of the forum enhanced participants’ ability to identify and therefore promote action-related messages if they chose to do so. On the other hand, results closely followed the general pattern I had observed in other OLCs where an interaction orientation remained a major component of participants’ forum experience. Moreover, participants’ relative preferences for action and interaction on MoveOn supported the idea that participants’ perceived equivalence between action and interaction.

Although the body of my evidence confirmed the intricacies of the relationship between action and interaction within on-line communities, a simple yet important doubt remained. I reasoned that it was still possible for the volume and complexity of forum interaction itself to mask underlying threads of action. For example one reason that the auditors in Study 3 might have detected discussion but
not resolution is that they did not sufficiently follow discussions through to their conclusion. My final study sought to test for this possibility.

I returned to the MoveOn forum for my fifth study where I investigated the idea that OLC interaction might be the mechanism through which participants seek to mobilise consensus for a relevant cause. Adopting the SAGA method to conduct a fine-grained analysis of the content of a specific message thread, I predicted that interaction would show evidence that participants engaged in debate leading to resolution through consensus about a course of action. The structure and use of opposing arguments adopted by the two different sides in the message thread suggested that a debate did occur. However, a closer analysis of content revealed that both sides of the argument actually agreed on the majority of supporting issues. Moreover, I found little evidence of engagement between the two sides about specific issues. In other words, rather than replying to opposition points of view, participants most often posted standalone items of information supporting their own views unrelated to earlier posts. Once again these data were consistent with my earlier findings, and suggested that participants did not seem to be mobilising action. More significantly, however, they also did not seem to be mobilising consensus.

Major theoretical implications

I have found broad and consistent support for my revised thesis that the role of social-action OLCs is to facilitate interaction rather than action, and that the effectiveness of forums as interaction communities drives community identification. Nevertheless, my research has also highlighted the need for two critical adjustments to this thesis. My results support my contention that forums do change orientation from action towards interaction, and that participants come to view talk as action. However, this is because, in the context in which it takes place (i.e., on-line), talk is action. Participants recognise and appreciate the ability of their interaction to influence others from their in group (e.g., by fostering unity, providing support), out group members (e.g., by representing a united face, providing information to counter opposing arguments), and strategic neutral others (e.g., presenting information to the media).

This relates directly to an idea I raised early in my thesis. I suggested that one interpretation of my work is that it positions the Internet as the ‘new opium of the masses’. Such an interpretation would be wrong. A popular reading of Marx’s
The second, more finely drawn adjustment relates to the place of consensualisation in these communities. I had proposed that one key difference between on-line and face-to-face social movements was that within face-to-face movements consensualisation would be driven by action whereas in on-line movements participants would consensualise around interaction. In fact, my work suggests that on-line forums are not venues in which the process of consensus development plays a major role. Participants in these forums already broadly agree about major relevant issues – in other words, consensus already exists. Instead, participants use their OLCs to present a consistent and united worldview that represents the ideal essence or *zeitgeist* of their movement.

This point has some bearing on another association I made earlier. In Chapter 5 I compared on-line communities with newspaper opinion pages where the primary objective is not to convince or work towards common agreement. In some respects this comparison remains apt, however, in the on-line communities I have researched interaction is generally (although not exclusively) between in-group members.

Interaction between in-group members recalls the comparison I have drawn throughout this thesis between OLCs and opinion-based groups. I have noted how the idea of a group formed around a shared opinion offers one way to explain the heterogeneity found in social movements. The on-line movements I have investigated are, like their face-to-face counterparts, typically diverse and their participants are commonly linked by a shared opinion. Furthermore, McGarty and colleagues (2008) are testing the idea that interaction within opinion-based groups can be used to stimulate commitment to collective action. Interestingly, however, their work seems to suggest that interaction itself is not sufficient to bolster commitment. They suggest that groups need to agree on appropriate goals and actions, in contrast with my observations of on-line communities where process of consensus building is not important to community participants.
Consensus also plays an important role in Simon and Klandermans’s (2001) proposal that groups can be used to raise awareness of and mobilise agreement about shared grievances (see also Klandermans, 1984). Although my results show that the process of intra-forum consensus development was not a major part of OLC interaction, participants did recognise the ability of their interaction to influence others not part of the interaction itself. This idea of ‘indirect’ influence comes close to the heart of my final thesis about the function that on-line communities serve for social movements; however, I argue that my work points towards a more precise explanation.

*Final thesis – on-line communities as “ideology banks”*

OLC participants’ acknowledged the ability of interaction to lead to change by, for example, building connections between like others, influencing recruitment, persuading important non-aligned parties, etc. However, I contend this is not the primary reason people engage in OLCs, nor is it the main role that the combined body of interaction in an OLC plays. Participants did not commonly work towards consensus within discrete interactions (i.e., specific conversation threads), but more importantly my results show that they had no desire to work towards consensus. The exchange of information through interaction was sufficient reason, and had sufficient value, for participants to continue that interaction.

Although each thread of conversation that makes up the collective body of an OLC certainly remains important for the each of the participants in those threads, it is in the collective body of interaction itself that participants’ perceive the primary value of their OLC lies. I argue that my work shows participants understand and appreciate their body of interaction as a resource for the provision of information about their movement – information about ideals and goals, support and membership, strategies and arguments, etc. Thus, I contend that on-line communities are *ideology banks* for social movements and their participants.

The image of a commercial financial institution conjured by this description is not entirely in keeping with the spirit in which I intend this idea to be understood (on the other hand, it may not be wholly inappropriate either). Collaborative seed banks or voluntary food or blood banks potentially better capture the essence of the concept. The most appropriate comparison, however, might be with a cooperative building society, owned by its members and run primarily for the benefit of its
members. Thus, an ideology bank operates so that individuals deposit information through interaction that adds to the greater value of the bank’s holdings. Those holdings remain open and accessible for others to view and absorb. Although anyone can add to the bank (e.g., current supporters, potential members, adversaries, the non-aligned), deposits from in-group members predominate by far in successful OLCs and so those communities accurately present a movements’ idealised zeitgeist or, in other words, reality, as the movement would have it be.

Clearly this idea echoes Reicher’s (2000) work about the nature and role of group-based collective assertions. What my work highlights, however, is the extent to which interaction (c.f. assertion) itself represents action in on-line communities. This is quite a subtle point, and one way to better understand it is by reference to the idea of entrepreneurs of identity (e.g., Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005). Reicher and colleagues argue that one method movement leaders can use to mobilise action is by shaping and defining the definition of categories around which social action occurs. Category definitions espoused by these entrepreneurs of identity have, in turn, the potential to influence social reality as experienced by movement participants. My work does not challenge this idea. My contention is, however, that OLCs are not necessarily forums for participants to shape categories, and so their participants are not entrepreneurs of identity. A better way to describe OLC interaction is that it arms people to be entrepreneurs of identity. In other words, forum interaction itself is not an instantiation of entrepreneurship, but an ideology bank that participants can draw on to enable them to be entrepreneurs. Simply put, ideology banks are where entrepreneurs of identity raise their capital.

The ideology bank concept also has some bearing on literature that I briefly reviewed leading up to my first empirical study where I looked at the S11 OLC. I originally proposed that the S11 community might develop along one of two lines—as an alliance of convenience or as a common identity group. I associated particular characteristics with those two kinds of community that I suggested also called to mind two types of norms— injunctive norms and descriptive norms (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1990). In this thesis (and, arguably, in social psychological research more generally), norms are constantly important but receive varying attention. Along these lines, Louis and Taylor, noting the potency of conformity even in a context as banal
as a typical psychology experiment, suggested their readers “imagine how powerful group norms are with respect to subjective judgments such as attitudes, beliefs, values and ideology, which are even less tangible and even more socially important!” (Louis & Taylor, 2002, p. 90). Touching on themes resonating with the idea of an injunctive/descriptive difference, Terry and Hogg (1996) argued that “behaviourally relevant reference groups” were important in determining how subjective norms influenced behaviour, where subjective norms referred to people’s perceptions of the extent to which others think they should behave (Ajzen, 1991; Terry & Hogg, 1996).

The relevant point here is that an important body of work links norms related to perceptions of peers’ actions and peers’ approval to social identity and behaviour. In other words, it seems that behaviour can be influenced by people’s perceptions of what important others think, and their perceptions of how important others act. This type of information is one of the things an ideology bank provides, it gives people information about what others believe and what they do.

Perhaps the best way to think about an ideology bank is to consider the difference between ‘formation’ and ‘presentation’. In Chapter 8 I discussed the place of inductive and deductive processes in relationship to identity (Postmes et al., 2006; Postmes, Haslam et al., 2005). I noted the value of Postmes and colleague’s work for explaining some of the processes that occur in on-line communities (e.g., deductive interaction within a defined context, inductive interaction between individual OLC participants). As with Reicher et al.’s conceptualisation of entrepreneurship, however, Postmes and colleagues’ goal is to explain formative or developmental aspects of category and identity definition. My thesis is that the place of OLCs in these explanations is best understood as not being directly implicated in the process of formation, but indirectly empowering participants to engage in that process.

One important point worth re-emphasising is that my conclusions are based on the study of a particular form of on-line community. I have specifically focussed on open, un-moderated OLCs throughout this work, and I present my final thesis as an explanation of the role of that form of community. Clearly there are other ways of organising an OLC that social movements can adopt instead of or in addition to an unrestricted model. For example, many social-action communities operate moderated forums where contributions are screened for appropriate content. Forums that anyone can read, but where only selected members can post are another relatively common
form of OLC. Along these lines, Earl and Schussman (2003) identified a range of community forms in their study of on-line action related to the 2000 U.S. Presidential election, while Clark and Themudo (2006) also looked at various forms of on-line activism within the anti-globalisation movement.

Notwithstanding the variety of potential forms a community can take, however, the open model is common and remains extremely popular – for example, at any particular time the Yahoo web portal lists tens of thousands of groups under its ‘Issues and Causes’ banner, thousands of which are open and un-moderated, while any standard web search typically yield thousands more of this form of OLC. Moreover, many of these communities are comprised of passionate people engaging in regular and lively interaction. Therefore, I contend that, although they represent a subset of all possible forms of on-line community, open, un-moderated OLCs occupy a significant place in the wider body of Internet-based social interaction and so are legitimate targets for focussed research.

The astonishing growth and development of Internet technologies represent another reason that a specific focus on on-line interaction in general is worthwhile. As relevant technologies advance at an increasing rate, so to is access to those technologies growing (e.g., see http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm). In other words, more people are more able to use the Internet, and are also actually doing so. In conjunction with this increasing use, the transportability of on-line interaction is also rapidly evolving. For example, recent advances in mobile phone technology mean that the Internet is now easily accessible from portable, hand-held devices; effectively, wide distribution of such devices will make on-line interaction pervasive.

With specific regard to my thesis that OLCs act as ideology banks, one consequence of pervasive on-line interaction will be ubiquitous access to those banks, allowing both easy deposit of and engagement with movement ideologies. It is not my intention to overstate the significance of this widening of access, however, it could potentially mean, for example, that movement activists and their nominal supporters have a greatly enhanced exposure to the presentation of movement zeitgeists, and so are better and more commonly equipped to act as entrepreneurs of identity for associated movements. At the very least, this possibility seems to warrant further thought and investigation.
Methodological contributions

I made two central methodological contributions in this thesis. Firstly, in Chapter 6 I described the implementation of an ‘independent audit’, a new procedure that I argued enhanced the validity of my analysis of data and my interpretation of results. In that chapter I presented the audit as particularly useful for the relatively new domain of Internet research. I also contend, however, that the methodology has wider application, and may be especially helpful during the early stages of a research program.

The independent audit is one tool that can assist in removing the methodological uncertainty identified by Haslam and McGarty (2003) related to doubt about the suitability of original methods to address specific research questions. Haslam and McGarty noted the desirability of reducing internal uncertainty connected to a researcher’s confidence in their ability to interpret their results. Uncertainties about methods and interpretations are likely to be at their highest in the initial stages of a program of research. It is crucial that, if such uncertainties exist, they are dealt with expeditiously to facilitate confidence in ongoing research processes. Moreover, it is even more essential that any faults in research design, implementation, or interpretation be revealed in a timely manner before research has progressed so far that the detection of mistakes results in significant loss of resources (e.g., expenditure of research funding, researchers’ time, etc). As its name suggests, an independent audit exposes existing methodologies to the gaze of impartial peers who, through the process, buffer against the methodological uncertainty identified by that Haslam and McGarty.

As well as a protective mechanism, I also argue that an independent audit might present a suitable model around which to more generally base collaborative research. So, for example, one key aspect of the procedure is the exposure of actual research data to independent peers. Although I detailed the process in the context of a test against uncertainty, the procedure clearly lends itself to minor modification such that research collaborators could replace independent peers. The ongoing development and utilisation of Internet-based resources for the conduct of research enhances this potential application. For example, collaborative use and analysis of data, results, and interpretations across widely spread research nodes could be greatly facilitated by sharing those materials on-line (c.f. the Australian Social Sciences Data...
Archive, http://assda.anu.edu.au/). In summary then, I suggest that an independent audit represents a potentially worthwhile addition to the praxis of broader social psychological research.

The second main contribution related to method contained in my thesis is the extension of the structural analysis of group arguments method (SAGA, Reicher & Sani, 1998) to a new domain of enquiry. Reicher and Sani originally developed SAGA as a tool to investigate and explain group schism. Although they noted its suitability for use in other areas, it principal application had thus far been mainly in that original domain (but see Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006, for another application). My application of the method to an analysis of a discrete interaction on the MoveOn forum demonstrated that SAGA could be applied to communication that was not specifically related to the disintegration of a group. More importantly, however, I used SAGA to analyse an interaction where participants did not engage in the process of building a consensus, or even actively take part in adversarial debate. In other words I demonstrated that the mere existence of two clear two points of view was sufficient for a SAGA analysis to be effective.

My application of the method generally followed the prescription laid out by Reicher and Sani. However, at times I also modified their ideas to better fit the form of the data under analysis. In presenting the logical arrangement of arguments I expanded pro- and anti- blocs so that they included argument sub-categories (e.g., see Figure 5, Chapter 8). I also used the idea of sets of thematic categories (e.g., see Table 17, Chapter 8), and applied those sets to guide further analysis of the data. Both procedures highlight the flexibility of the method, and again suggest its potential suitability for application to a variety of domains of interaction.

Apart from the two specific methodological contributions related to the independent audit and SAGA, my work also points more generally to the value (and perhaps necessity) of mixed-methods design in the domain of Internet research. In Chapter 5 I noted the difficulty of retaining participants in both qualitative and quantitative phases of my research, and outlined some likely reasons. It is worthwhile briefly following up one of those reasons here as it potentially has a wider bearing on Internet research more generally.

I raised the possibility that the very nature of the communities I was interested in might have militated against participation in my research. The idea was
that participants in social-action OLCs likely focus on issues directly relevant to their movements' cause and so are reluctant to engage in unrelated and irrelevant interaction. That I was unable to gain specific endorsements for my research from forum organisers could have exacerbated this issue. Certainly research conducted over the Internet can attract large numbers of respondents; for example, in his review of the technical aspects of Internet-based research design Birnbaum (2004) cited some studies with participation rates in the thousands. On the other hand, non-response can also be a problem as evidenced by topics covered in an exploratory workshop on Internet survey methodology (Vehovar & Bosnjak, 2005).

To be clear, I do not suggest that the threat of low participation is a reason to avoid research designs that require direct participation (e.g., surveys, interviews, experimental designs). Rather, I suggest the use of mixed-methods research offers one way around the potential issue of low participation. Thus, including surveys and interviews in a single study as I did in Chapter 5 can add validity to research findings. In a similar vein, incorporating techniques designed to interrogate archival data into broader programs of research not only has the potential to increase research validity, but can also lead to very real insights about data and theory. For example, my final thesis was greatly enhanced as a result of my conclusions about consensus development driven from my detailed analysis of interaction about Cindy Sheehan in the MoveOn forum. The Internet clearly provides an ideal environment to access and understand a wide range of data types.

**Final remarks**

It has been my contention throughout this thesis that on-line social-action communities are phenomenon worthy of investigation in their own right. I have argued that, although we can understand the basis of those communities by applying our existing understanding of social identity and behaviour in face-to-face contexts, the on-line environment does affect the content and nature of social interaction. I argue that I have presented persuasive evidence that the principal role of social-action OLCs is to act as ideology banks for their movements. This idea sits well with the existing literature I have reviewed on identity, consensualisation, and group formation and development, however, it also adds to our broader understanding by highlighting the role and value of interaction itself as a legitimate and effective form of action. On the other hand, my idea that OLCs are more about the presentation of
identity rather than the formation of identity raises interesting questions about, for example, the nature of inductive and deductive processes in on-line groups and the role of OLCs in forming entrepreneurs of identity.

The empirical work I have undertaken in support of my developing thesis has incorporated a number of different methodologies. I have described the development of a new research method, an independent audit, aimed at improving research validity, and I have extended the application of SAGA, a methodology relatively untested outside of the analysis of group schism. In each of my empirical chapters, I have adopted research designs that are best suited to answer my specific research questions. I also suggest though that the mixed-methods research I have utilised presents a potentially useful model for future Internet-based research.

There is a growing focus on the Internet as both a target of research and a mechanism through which research can be conducted. Inevitably, as Internet technology and access becomes more pervasive and commonplace, we as researchers will increasingly turn our gaze towards the medium. In a small way, my work has shown how current Internet research can advance our understanding of theoretical and methodological concepts and ideas, and it has also highlighted potential fruitful avenues for research into the future.
Throughout Chapter 5, I present my proposals and associated predictions based on a dichotomy of on-line community development; in other words, I discuss the proposal that OLCs can develop as action or interaction communities. In my original conceptualisation of this idea, I included three potential community types – action, interaction, and opinion. Under that original typology, I proposed that opinion fell between interaction and action, and defined an opinion community as one that exists to promote broad agreement about relevant topics or issues. Moreover, I considered that OLCs would follow a development path from interaction through opinion to action, and that a community could consensualise and so assess its effectiveness around any one of those three types. The on-line survey I developed for the study in Chapter 5 included all three OLC types. However, analysis of the results revealed little difference between the interaction and opinion types for the scale data, and it was evident from the qualitative data that participants did not distinguish between these community types (i.e., their feedback strongly suggested that they saw interaction and opinion types as the same thing). For these reasons, I have removed opinion from the final typology, and the analysis and discussion of data has been conducted based on action and interaction types only.
References


Brooks, C. D. (2004). Faction in Movement: The Impact of Inclusivity on the Anti-


Appendixes

Appendix A - Chapter 4: Anti-globalisation and the Internet
Appendix B - Chapter 5: Action versus Interaction – expectations, preferences, and perceptions of participants in on-line communities
Appendix C - Chapter 6: A review and audit of theoretical concepts
Appendix D - Chapter 5: Moving on – interaction in action.
Appendix E - Chapter 8: A war of words - arguing for action: consensualisation through conversation?
Appendix A

Chapter 4: Anti-globalisation and the Internet

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Guidelines Summary

Note - These coding guidelines contain references to two entities -
- S11, and
- the wider Anti-globalisation movement

S11 is the on-line community centered around protest action against the World Economic Forum meeting in Melbourne. S11 exists within the wider anti-globalisation movement.

Coding Procedure

1. Review message and decide if it should be coded N/A, or not (Please note - messages classed N/A can be excluded from further coding)

2. Decide if message should be coded S11 Community (S11) or Anti-globalisation Movement (M) - or both (Please note - all messages that are not coded N/A must be coded to at least one of these two categories)

3. Decide if message should be coded Alliance of Convenience (AoC) or Superordinate Community (SO), or neither (Please note - AoC and SO are mutually exclusive categories, ie. if a message is coded AoC it cannot also be coded SO)

4. Decide if message should be coded Discussion of Principles or Positions (PP) or Discussion of Behavioural Norms (BN) - or both, or neither

5. Decide if message should be coded Plans or Calls for Action (PC) or Reviews of Action (RA) - or both, or neither

6. Decide if message should be coded Response to an Out-group Position (RO), or not

7. Decide if message should be coded Relevant Out-group (OG), or not

8. Decide if message should be coded Long-term Identification (LTI), or not
General Guidelines

When classifying messages, primary attention should be given to original content, not included portions of earlier postings to which messages may be in response.

For example, a message may be in response to an earlier post so quote sections of that initial post, then contain original comments about those quotes. In such instances, although the quoted sections may determine the nature of the original content, the message should be coded based on the original content.

Note, however, that the quoted section will need to be read to provide the context for the original content.

- Original content will be highlighted
- Messages that contain no original content should be classed ‘N/A’

Except for those classed ‘N/A’, messages may be classified into multiple categories.

For example, the same message might be classified ‘S11’, ‘AoC’ and ‘Discussion of Behavioural Norms’; or, a message might be classified ‘M’, ‘Relevant Out-group’, ‘SO’, and ‘Reviews of Action’. However, if a message is classified ‘N/A’, it may not be placed in any other category.

Note -
- messages that are not classed N/A must be coded either S11 or M, or both
- the categories AoC and SO are mutually exclusive - a message may be coded AoC or SO, but not both AoC and SO.

All messages must be placed into at least one category. You may return to messages you have already classified and change their category.

Please ensure that all messages have been classified into at least one category before you finish.
Virtual Community Style

Messages that advocate or support either an Alliance of Convenience (AoC) or Super-ordinate (SO) community style for S11 or the wider anti-globalisation movement.

AoC

An AoC is where a community has one or more objectives (and may even agree on courses of action) but has diverse reasons for seeking those objectives, and does not seek to reduce diversity in reasons, opinion, or actions among community members - so long as they are consistent with the community's purpose.

If a message contains the following it should be classed AoC:

- Advocacy or support of a decentralised structure; or
- Advocacy or support of autonomous decision making (ie. where it is argued that people don’t have to follow decisions made by an over-arching organisation, but have the right to make their own decisions); or
- Advocacy or support of independent action (ie. where it is argued that people don’t have to follow plans made by an over-arching organisation, but have the right to act or behave as they see fit)

The following should also be classed AoC -

- Messages that argue against, or support arguments against, shared norms, rules, and/or behaviours
- Messages that advocate or support an ‘Affinity Group’ structure (ie. collections of small groups who share an overall goal, but who decided within their own small group the forms of action most appropriate for their individual group)
- Messages that promote or support the right of diversity of opinions and actions for individuals or constituent groups
- Messages that stress or support the autonomy of individual protestors or constituent groups
SO
A SO is where a community develops, and expects members to adhere to, rules, structures, and norms that govern the relevant behaviour of all community or movement members.

If a message contains the following it should be classed SO:

- Advocacy or support of a centralised organisational structure; or
- Advocacy or support of centralised decision making; or
- Promotion or support of the need for consensus about appropriate aims and/or unified behaviour; or
- Advocacy or support of formation of, and adherence to, shared norms, rules, and/or behaviours for the whole community or movement

The following messages should also be classed SO -

- Messages that advocate or support an explicit leadership structure
- Messages supporting regular, organised meetings for the whole community or movement
- Messages supporting a common decision making structure/process shared by the whole community or movement
- Messages that criticise, or support criticism of, diversity and/or disunity
Discussion of Principles or Positions

These are messages that contain arguments for and/or against globalisation and related phenomena, and statements that are intended to establish positions for the movement in terms of its goals and principles.

If a message contains the following it should be classed Discussion of Principles or Positions:

- Advocacy of, or engagement in debate on, general principles or positions for the S11 community or the wider anti-globalisation movement

The following messages should also be classed Discussion of Principles or Positions:

- Messages that present arguments for or against, or support or oppose arguments for or against, international organisations eg. the WEF, World Bank, IMF, trans-national corporations etc.
- Messages that present arguments for or against, or support or oppose arguments for or against, legislation or government initiatives related to globalisation or the anti-globalisation movement
- Messages that present arguments, or support or oppose arguments, about the broad effects of globalisation on the protest movement, and/or people in general
- Messages that advocate, debate, support or oppose, appropriate political orientations for S11 or the movement eg. pro-socialist, pro-anarchist, anti-Marxist etc.
- Messages that debate what groups, based on their political philosophies, should be included under the S11 banner or in the wider movement
- Messages that advocate, support, or oppose, general principles of behaviour orientations for S11 or the movement eg. advocacy of non-violence
- Messages that state positions that S11’s or the movement’s members should have, with or without presenting any rationale/justification for those positions
Discussion of Behavioural Norms

These are messages that advocate or discuss non-specific, general opinions or ideas about appropriate behaviour within S11 or the wider movement.

If a message contains the following it should be classed Discussion of Behavioural Norms:

- Advocacy or support of, or engagement in debate on, appropriate and/or non-appropriate community, protest, or movement behaviour

The following should be classed Discussion of Behavioural Norms -

- Messages that support or oppose organised marshalling (marshals are appointed to act as coordinators and leaders of action at protests)
- Messages that support or oppose decentralised or unstructured protest action
- Messages that support, or oppose, particular protest methods eg. non-violent protest, direct action, property damage etc.
- Messages that support, or oppose, appropriate methods of communication and/or interaction eg. internet based communication, bike messengers at protest events etc.

Note - messages should be classed Plans or Calls for Action if they

- Advocate or support specific actions (eg. by specifying dates, times, and/or places)
Plans or Calls for Action

These are messages that plan or call for specific events related to the S11 community or wider movement.

If a message contains the following it should be classed Plans or Calls for Action:

- Advocacy or support of, or arguments for, a specific action (eg. a message calling for a puppet show outside the Crown Casino on the 12th of September); or
- Advocacy or support of, or suggestions for, a series of defined actions at a specific instance, or over time (eg. a message calling for a series of sit-ins over a 3 day period)

The following should also be classed Plans or Calls for Action -

- Messages that contain requests for information about specific S11 events or activities (eg. “Can someone send me the timetable for the march down Elizabeth St on Monday? Do you still want the Perth contingent there?” should be classed as ‘Plans or Calls for Action’).

Note - messages should be classed ‘Discussion of Behavioural Norms’ if they
- Advocate or support non-specific appropriate or non/appropriate modes of behaviour

Reviews of Action

These are messages that talk about action(s) already completed by S11 or the wider movement.

If a message contains the following it should be classed Reviews of Action:

- Discussion of a past action conducted by S11 or the wider movement
Relevant Out-group

These are messages sent by posters who do not consider themselves to be a part of the S11 community.

Message should be classed Relevant Out-group if they are:

- From posters who clearly identify themselves as out-group members, for example - by referring to S11 as ‘you’; **and**
- Have also been coded to at least one of the following categories: AoC, SO, PP, BN, PC, RA, LTI

these messages may

- Attempt to engage community members in reasoned debate; **and/or**
- Be overtly hostile

Note - messages should be classed ‘N/A’ if they

- Only contain abuse without any specific argument about community or movement factors

N/A

Message should be classed N/A if they are:

- Comprised solely of advertising or jokes
- Blank
- About topics unrelated to S11 or globalisation (eg. a message that debates the merits of Freudian psychology would be classed N/A)
- Direct forwards or copies of secondary information with no original content, or repeats of earlier messages with no original content
- Clearly and exclusively ironic (eg. a message whose only content was “Let’s take all the CEOs out back and beat them with wet towels” would be classed N/A)
- Exclusively requests for general information with no arguments for or against community or movement factors (eg. a message whose only content was “What’s going on in Perth for S11?” would be classed N/A)

Note - messages should be classed ‘Plans or Calls for Action’ if they

- Pose questions in support of specific actions (eg. “Got the agenda for the sit-in on the 16th. Do you still want Farmers Against Globalisation there? If so, where?” should be classed as ‘Plans or Calls for Action’).
Examples of Messages Classed AoC

• “Affinity groups form and have open consensus based decision making meetings, they are tight, it is just a way of saying non-hierarchical organising network without the mouthful of words, or federalism as anarchist or whatever.”

• “So I don’t think S11 will be how you describe it, i.e., “a few thousand people... mill[ing] around”. The extent to which this is true will be the extent to which organising for S11 has failed: I don’t want to be part of an inert mass waiting to be ‘lead’ but a vibrant street party, full of people who know why they’re there and what they plan on doing.”

• “No one is actually bound by any decisions that S11 makes. Anyone can, if they wish, form there own “affinity group” outside the weekly meetings and do “whatever” they like.”

Examples of Messages Classed SO

• “What the s11 stuff is about, for some of us, at least, is trying to get the revolutionary ball rolling a bit faster - not only doing it for its own sake, but also using it as a springboard to bigger and better things.”

• “So therefore our aim in Melbourne is to build this anti-capitalist movement and the focus is the World Economic Forum. So the goal of the action may be to shut down the WEF, but only to increase the size of the movement and push us further along the path to international revolution.”

• “I’m a member of the ISO and so have some resources behind me, and aim to involve a spectrum of Anarchist, Socialist, Environmental and community groups, and if possible Unions. Hopefully linkages made between these groups in the lead up to S11 can be maintained and form a vibrant activist community in Perth.”
Examples of Messages Classed Discussion of Principles or Positions

• “I think that the ICC will become a machine for the legitimation of new relations of power - a new institutional framework being constructed to sustain the extension of the world market.”

• “Well, minimally speaking, I envisage that hierarchical social relations (such as capitalism, patriarchy and the state) would be abolished and that numerous communities of human beings living in harmony with non-human nature established in their place.”

• “So, the anarchist approach to ending corporate dominance is as varied as we anarchists are. The perception that anarchism = violence is (and always has been) a false one, consciously designed to act as a filter through which all anarchist thought and practice is to be forced through. It also promotes the idea that all anarchists are somehow engaged in some kind of vast conspiracy, viz the destruction of law, order and, most importantly, the ability of Mr. and Mrs. Average (and their 2.5 children) to engage in the thoroughly decent and normal act of consuming pieces of dead cow. Please!”

Examples of Messages Classed Behavioural Norms

• “As long as you continue to host these rallies and as long as they continue to turn violent then you must except responsibility for what occurs there. The thing is that if you would only direct your energies at a more effective means of combating these problems rather than just protesting you could be so much more valuable to the fight against poverty.”

• “But the organisation doesn’t necessarily have to be top-down and we should be trained in NVDA and self defence, whether we will need either is unsure in our situation.”

• “It’s been argued that “non-violent direct action” is about doing your thing without having to hurt people. Activists who engage in violent action don’t usually end up physically hurting anyone but themselves. The point is more about risk assessment, and about fighting to win.”
Examples of Messages Classed Plans or Calls for Action

• “Got the agenda about the Teach In. Do you still want Jubilee 2000 there? If so, Where?”

• “This is a reminder to emerging affinity groups etc. who are planning actions, or planning to participate in actions around the country/world to please write directly to: peace@s11.org with a brief description of your group and your contact details so that can go up on the web-site asap.”

• “The next S11 planning meeting: 6 or 6.30pm Wednesday 1st march upstairs trades hall Lygon St Carlton Melbourne, and then every Wednesday same time. At this next meeting: SUB GROUPS may be formed; SLOGANS may be voted on; MARCH 17 will be discussed and more!”

Examples of Messages Classed Reviews of Action

• “That is what thousands of youth were trying to do when 20 people took it on themselves to trash a McDonalds, terrifying the workers inside, and giving the police an excuse to wade in and seal off Whitehall. Meanwhile, the union demo was also sealed behind a wall of riot police. Some determined demonstrators forced their way through on both sides”

• “Meeting minutes S11 alliance meeting 12th July, 2000 l. What do we do on the day? The meeting came to consensus on the following motion: “The S11 Alliance adopts the central slogan: Shut down the World Economic Forum” The meeting passed the following motion by voting as consensus could not be reached.”

• It’s a little after 5 p.m. Friday. As I’m unlocking my bicycle, I look up. Around 70 people are marching towards Flinders Street, protesting. Some carry placards, such as “Lock Up The Bosses” and “Shut Down the World Economic Forum.” They’re chanting ‘Human need, not corporate greed!’ A small bunch of cops follows. It’s a pre-S11 protest event. As the group marches past MSD, everyone chants ‘Shame Nike, shame!’ Further down the road, we stand outside McDonalds, and chant ‘Shame, Maccas, shame!’ I wonder if the loudhailer messages are really advisable. In any case, it has been a successful trip - empowering, with messages.”
Examples of Messages Classed Relevant Out-group

- “On your page you bring up some good points, the repulsive truth of the ‘sweatshop phenomena’ is an especially important one. But throughout your entire page does not once mention what it is that you are doing to help these people. I may only be a student, but I know that should you attempt to become a reputable, successful and highly effective organization geared towards helping those living in the conditions you are fighting to stop.”

- “Having just returned from overseas & having experienced first hand may day “activism” (and I use the word very lightly. perhaps it should read riots) I am interested to hear what sll thinks about what happened during these so called peaceful gatherings. Not only was there widespread damage to private & public property but also the intimidation & assault of people going about their everyday lives, ie going to work. Is this type of action going to be repeated in Melbourne?

- “I understand that members of SII were flown over here for the protests, I admit I don’t know how many representatives you sent, nor what it cost you to get here but what I do know is this, the continuation of these radical tactics to protest globalisation merely alienates you from the mainstream of society. Not only can society not condone violent protesting but for the main it will see the protesters as ‘crazy hippies’.”
Examples of Messages Classed N/A

- “The Democrat interpretation of the Fifth Amendment was further clarified by the arrests of alleged white supremacists. Alexander Curtis, Michael DaSilva, Robert Morehouse and Kevin Holland were arrested by FBI agents for leaving leaflets and stickers outside the Offices of Rep. Bob Filner, La Mesa Mayor Art Madrid and the local leader of the ADL, Morris Casuto. It is alleged that Morehouse and Holland spray-painted ‘swastikas’ on a Synagogue. This act, if true, was a very stupid thing to do. If you are a Christian, stay away from this sort of behaviour. Individual acts like this discredit organizations like the National NAAWP. They have been indicted for ‘harassment.’”

- “I was the one who went *home* exhausted after being up for 18hr on 3 hrs sleep... drug free!!!”

- “I heard that their was an accusation made against me of spreading the Mellisa virus to them, last night. I am of the understanding this Virus is only transmitted by opening attachment files, it is not spread from general emails or from opening web pages etc.”
Appendix B

Chapter 5: Action versus Interaction – expectations, preferences, and perceptions of participants in on-line communities

**Contact email, interview transcripts, and correlation table**

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Table AB-1. Full correlations for variables from phase 1 survey. 229

Table AB-2. Key to correlation table AB-1. 230
Initial contact email to forums

Hi - My name is Girish Lala, and I am studying toward a PhD at the Australian National University, located in Canberra, Australia.

I am working in the School of Psychology studying communities that develop on the internet. I am interested in finding out why people join on-line communities, and how their expectations about those communities influence their continuing participation.

There are many theories about why people become members of on-line communities, and what those communities provide for those people who take part in them. Surprisingly, however, there has not been a lot of formal Psychological research about these issues.

As part of my research, I am conducting web-based surveys asking people about their membership in on-line communities formed around a social issue or cause. I am sending this message to a limited, random selection of people in these types of communities asking them to complete my survey.

The survey is anonymous, and takes about 10-15 minutes to do. You will not be required to provide your name or contact details, and your email address will only be recorded if you send me a specific question about the study.

If you do choose to take part in the survey, your IP address and the date & time of your visit will be logged for statistical purposes. However, no attempt will be made to identify you or your browsing activities except, in the unlikely event of an investigation, where a law enforcement agency may exercise a warrant to inspect the service provider’s logs.

If you follow the link below, the first page you see will explain more about the purpose of my study.

The survey can be found at http://psycresearch.anu.edu.au/olcstudy/<forumname>/index.html

Please Note - Following the link does not obligate you to take part in the survey and, if you do decide to start the survey, you will be free to withdraw at any stage.

• The survey is being hosted on a server operated by the School of Psychology at the Australian National University.
• If you would like more information about the survey, please use the contact details that appear in the signature of this message.
• The study has been approved by the ANU Ethics Committee (ethics protocol number 2002/24).
• Questions can also be directed to Mrs Sylvia Deutsch, the ANU Human Ethics Officer, at Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au.

I would very much appreciate it if you could take the time to complete my survey - your participation would be of great help to my work.

Thanks for your support.

Girish Lala

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Acton, Canberra ACT 0200
Australia

Phone : (02) 6125 5043
Fax : (02) 6125 0499
email : olc.study@anu.edu.au
web : http://www.anu.edu.au/psychology/staff/girish/
An Investigation of Web-based Community

INFORMATION & CONSENT PAGE

Computer use has grown rapidly in the last few years. At work and in personal life, computers are an important tool for many people.

This research project is designed to find out more about the ways in which people use web sites to interact and form communities. More specifically, we are trying to discover if people use the web-based communities they belong to for particular types of interaction. We are interested in what members of web communities want and expect from their interactions with other community members, and the ways in which participants think their communities could function better.

This study uses both scale-based and open-ended questions. If you choose to take part, you will be presented with questions asking for your thoughts about your web community membership. You will also be asked some basic demographic questions so that a general profile of community users can be built up. Questionnaires take 10 to 15 minutes to complete and will be administered over the web.

The Australian National University is constituted under Australian federal legislation and so adopts best privacy practice to comply with the Privacy Act. The following information is particularly important in respect to this on-line study:

- In addition to your completed questionnaire data, this site logs your IP address and the date & time of your visit, for statistical purposes. No attempt will be made to identify you or your browsing activities except, in the unlikely event of an investigation, where a law enforcement agency may exercise a warrant to inspect the service provider's logs.
- This is an anonymous survey. Should you choose to continue, you will not be required to provide your name or contact details. However, if you require an individual response to a specific query, you may provide your email address via our contact page. Your email address will only be recorded if you send us a message or supply it on the form provided. Your address will only be used for the purpose for which you have provided it and will not be added to a mailing list. We will not use your e-mail address for any other purpose, and will not disclose it, without your consent.

CONSENT

This is a consent form between myself and the researchers, and lists my rights as a participant in this study. I understand that:

- I do not have to finish the study once I have started.
- I do not have to answer any questions I don't want to.
- Any personal information I supply will be kept confidential, so far as the law allows.
- Personal information will not be used in the presentation of results. Any such information will be destroyed after completion of the project.

I have read and understood the information presented on this page and am willing to participate in this study.

If you accept these conditions, click the button below.

I Accept These Conditions

If you would like more information about this study please use the email link or feedback form on the contact page.

This study has been vetted and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian National University. If you have any concerns or questions regarding the ethical approval of this study, please contact the Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au.
An Investigation of Web-based Community

INSTRUCTIONS

There are two main types of question in this study. In one type you will be presented with a statement, and a scale with a range of options. For example, your options might be from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree".

If you 'Strongly Disagree' with the statement, select the button labeled '1': if you disagree less strongly, select the button labeled '2' (which stands for 'disagree reasonably strongly'), and so on. You should select the button that most closely fits how you feel about the statement.

For example, if the statement was

I think that the internet is too complicated

and you disagree reasonably strongly, your answer would look like this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second type, a field will be displayed where you should type in the word or phrase that you think best answers the question. For example, if you were asked:

What email application do you use?

In the field displayed you might type

eudora

The questionnaire is divided into 2 sections. There is a button at the end of section one that will submit the questions you have just completed, and pass you on to the next section. Please try to answer all relevant questions in each section. The entire set of questions takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Section One

Web communities can be formed for many different reasons. For example, communities can form to talk about a particular issue, or they can develop so that their members can reach broad agreement about an opinion, or they can be established so that members can discuss and plan actions that they want to conduct outside of their on-line forum.

Based on these three different reasons for web community formation, we can describe three different forms of web community (there are, of course, others):

An Interaction web community
- a web community that exists to promote discussion about relevant topics or issues.

An Opinion web community
- a web community that exists to promote broad agreement about relevant topics or issues.

An Action web community
- a web community that exists to promote planning of relevant actions to take place outside the on-line forum.

It is possible for a community to take more than one of these forms, or for it to be none of
these forms of community. This study is about different forms of web community, and the different things people expect from, and experience in, their own web communities.

The survey below asks you about your own web community membership. When answering the questions, please keep in mind the three forms of community outlined above - Interaction, Opinion, and Action web communities.

| How long have you been participating in [[the web community]]? |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Less than 2 weeks | 2 - 4 weeks       | 1 - 3 months     | 4 - 6 months    | 7 - 9 months     | 10 - 12 months   | More than one year |
|                  |                  |                  |                 |                  |                  |                  |

Why did you first become interested in [[the web community]]?

List four words that best describe [[the web community]].

1.
2.
3.
4.

I identify with [[the web community]].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I see myself as part of [[the web community]].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Being a member of [[the web community]] is important to me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the three forms of web community described above, the following statements look at your thoughts about [[the web community]] when you first started participating, compared with what you now think about the community.

When I first became interested in [[the web community]], I expected it to be an Interaction community.

I think that the [[the web community]] should be an Interaction community.

[[the web community]] is an Interaction community.

If [[the web community]] is an Interaction community, how do you rate it as an Interaction community?

When I first became interested in [[the web community]], I expected it to be an Opinion community.

I think that [[the web community]] should be an Opinion community.

[[the web community]] is an Opinion community.

If [[the web community]] is an Opinion community, how do you rate it as an Opinion community?
When I first became interested in [[the web community]], I expected it to be an Action community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I think that [[the web community]] should be an Action community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

[[the web community]] is an Action community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If [[the web community]] is an Action community, how do you rate it as an Action community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely Bad</th>
<th>Extremely Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why is [[the web community]] worthwhile?

There are many web communities devoted to different topics. How sure are you that [[the web community]] is the right one for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all sure</th>
<th>Extremely sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am confident that I will be able to convince members of [[the web community]] that the things I want to discuss are relevant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am confident that I will be able to convince members of [[the web community]] that my opinions on relevant topics or issues are correct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

I am confident that I will be able to convince members of [[the web community]] that my views about plans for relevant actions to take place outside the on-line forum are correct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

I would stop participating in [[the web community]] if members were not able to reach broad agreement about which things to discuss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

I would stop participating in [[the web community]] if members were not able to reach broad agreement on relevant opinions or issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

I would stop participating in [[the web community]] if members were not able to reach broad agreement on plans for relevant actions to take place outside the on-line forum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</table>

Send this information and move on to section 2. (please try to answer all relevant questions in this section)
## Section Two

Members of [[the web community]] share a sense of identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Members of [[the web community]] share common ideals or values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Members of [[the web community]] share common goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Where members of [[the web community]] behave in the same way about issues relevant to the purpose of the community this is usually because of their shared identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Where members of [[the web community]] behave in the same way about issues relevant to the purpose of the community this is usually because of their shared ideals or values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Where members of [[the web community]] behave in the same way about issues relevant to the purpose of the community this is usually because of their common goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I am confident that being a member of [[the web community]] reflects who I am.
I am confident that I will maintain my level of commitment to \([\text{the web community}]\).

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I intend to continue participating in \([\text{the web community}]\).

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

What would make you cease your participation in \([\text{the web community}]\)?

At the start of this survey, we introduced a distinction between three different forms of community:

An **Interaction** web community
- a web community that exists to promote discussion about relevant topics or issues.

An **Opinion** web community
- a web community that exists to promote broad agreement about relevant topics or issues.

An **Action** web community
- a web community that exists to promote planning of relevant actions to take place outside the on-line forum.

Web communities sometimes change their focus as they develop. Using the three different forms of web community described above, the following statements look at ways \([\text{the web community}]\) might change.

If \([\text{the web community}]\) changed so that it was more clearly an **Interaction** community, I would stop participating.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

If \([\text{the web community}]\) changed so that it was more clearly an **Opinion** community, I would stop participating.

Strongly
If [[the web community]] changed so that it was more clearly an Action community, I would stop participating.

How appropriate for describing actual web communities do you think that the distinction between Interaction, Opinion, and Action communities is?

Do you have any thoughts about how relevant the three forms of web community described above are to actual web communities?

In what ways, if any, would you like to see [[the web community]] change?

How old are you?

What is your gender?

What country are you living in at the moment?
Table AB-1. Full correlations for variables from phase I survey.

| Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction | Par | Imp | Ide | Exp | Interaction |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|
|     | .82** |     | .81** | .85** |     |     |     |     |         |     | .40* | .49** |     |     |     |     |         |     | .73** |     |     |         |     |     |     |     |         |     |     |     |     |         |     |     |     |     |         |     |     |     |     |         |
| Exp | .30  | .27  | .34* |     | .47** | .43** | .65** | .69** |     |     | .36* | .25  | .43** | .65** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Pre | .24  | .25  | .38* | .45** | .41* | .39* | .28  | .14  | .89** |     | .32* | .36* | .29  | .24  | .32* | .22  | .13  | .82** | .80** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Per | .13  | .20  | .23  | .35** | .40** | .46** | .41* | .66** | .65** | .74** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Int | .90  | .15  | .16  | .38* | .45** | .28  | .18  | .57** | .58** | .13  | .22  | .11  | .31  | .15  | .01  | .10  | .71** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Op  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Act | .42** | .28  | .38* | .06  | .13  | .27  | .31  | .05  | .16  | .88  | .12  | .31  | .43** | .23  | .28  | .69** | .59** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Int | .03  | .06  | .02  | .14  | .03  | .07  | .02  | .11  | .22  | .19  | .34* | .13  | .05  | .07  | .23  | .17  | .16  | .15  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Op  | .07  | .09  | .17  | .10  | .07  | .10  | .04  | .08  | .21  | .13  | .28  | .25  | .30  | .25  | .28  | .19  | .18  | .32  | .72** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Act | .22  | .15  | .16  | .36* | .32* | .13  | .10  | .04  | .01  | .04  | .50** | .50** | .36* | .25  | .13  | .20  | .45** | .58** | .68** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Con | .66** | .77** | .83** | .39* | .29  | .29  | .34* | .21  | .28  | .21  | .12  | .08  | .10  | .18  | .01  | .51** | .46** | .32  | .02  | .14  | .07  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Con | .52** | .62** | .52** | .44** | .25  | .14  | .18  | .07  | .06  | .09  | .05  | .16  | .03  | .19  | .04  | .22  | .28  | .28  | .06  | .25  | .18  | .23  | .68** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Int | .15  | .22  | .37* | .53** | .59** | .30  | .31  | .27  | .21  | .14  | .26  | .31  | .18  | .15  | .10  | .00  | .10  | .39* | .08  | .07  | .43** | .20  | .38** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Op  | .06  | .11  | .26  | .58** | .37* | .31  | .36* | .48** | .50** | .26  | .33* | .21  | .13  | .09  | .03  | .26  | .25  | .10  | .01  | .34* | .22  | .15  | .62** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Act | -.21 | -.35* | .26  | .04  | .23  | .02  | -.12 | .19  | .02  | .11  | .15  | -.17* | -.47** | -.34* | -.14 | -.16 | -.13 | -.40* | .10  | -.18 | -.36* | -.31 | -.18 | -.08 | .10  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01 (see overleaf for key)
Table AB-2. Key to correlation table AB-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Par</td>
<td>Length of OLC participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp</td>
<td>Importance of OLC membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ide</td>
<td>Identification with OLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>Expectation about OLC orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Preference for OLC orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Perception of OLC orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eff</td>
<td>Perception of OLC effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interaction OLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op</td>
<td>Opinion OLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>Action OLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com</td>
<td>Confidence in maintaining commitment to OLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Intention to continue participation in OLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Confidence in ability to influence other participants based on orientation relevant factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit</td>
<td>Likelihood of ceasing participation if participants could not reach consensus about orientation relevant factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cease</td>
<td>Likelihood of ceasing participation if OLC changed towards specified orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 2 Interview Transcripts

Participant 1 (email interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the armchairactivist forum?
A - You know, I don't remember -- I run several listservs -- I think I received a message from a listserv and was interested in sending on - so subscribed and was hooked from then on!

Q - What made you interested in the forum?
A - The quality and accuracy of the articles.

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - Oh, knowing me, probably within a couple of days of first subscribing. Date? I don't remember.

Q - How often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post? (For example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week).
A - Every day.

Q - Do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the armchairactivist forum? If so, what are they?
A - Yes, Move On, Truth

Q - Do you use on-line forums related to other causes or issues?
A - Yes

Q - Do you think that it's fair to say that the aim of the forum is to achieve positive change related to the cause of the armchairactivist forum? Was that important to you when you first started using the forum?
A - Yes that would be fair and accurate. YES -- very important and still is.

Q - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving its aims? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc). Were you involved in that?
A - By sending out postings related to positive change -- information about issues and causes that would effect change. A few petitions, not too many meetings or protests, mostly ways to connect and organize.
Q - Back when you first became a member, how much did you think the armchairactivist forum would be used for things like planning and taking part in action (e.g. organising meetings or events) compared with discussing and debating relevant issues and ideas?
A - More for organizing and taking part than discussing and debating relevant issues and ideas. Quite frankly I would not've signed on if a debating forum.

Q - Was there much discussion or debate about issues or ideas on the forum when you first started using it? If so, was that useful?
A - Not that much.

Q - How important was the forum in your life back then?
A - As far as effecting change- important.

Q - When you first started using the forum did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - I think we all did and still do share many of the same values and ideals and goals.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term and that you would be a long-term member?
A - I hoped so!

Q - Back when you first started using the forum how was the forum making a positive difference?
A - Not sure -- just knew it was if only by disseminating valuable information -- and truth.

Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed, or if it should be moderated, etc)? Was that type of interaction important?
A - No

Q - What do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself and how well is the forum achieving those goals?
A - Honestly I don't know.

Q - Do you think that those goals have changed over time? (If so, how?)
A - No.

Q - Has the amount of communication devoted to organising actions like meetings or petitions changed over time? For example, has it increased, decreased, or is it about the same as when you first used the forum?
A - About the same.

Q - Are debates or discussions about issues more common now on the forum than when you first started using it?
A - Less common.

Q - Why do you use the forum now - have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?
A - Same reasons.

Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now - how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - About the same -- not very much.

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - Still very important

Q - Are you familiar with the term 'lurkers'?
A - Yes, I am.

Q - When you post opinions or views on the armchairactivist forum, how aware are you of the numbers of lurkers that might be reading your messages?
A - Don’t really care!

Q - How important are lurkers to the forum? Do they have a role?
A - They have a role - they might just not want to post -- but take action in their own way.

Q - How do you think that debate and discussion on the forum influences lurkers?
A - Probably not much -- if they’re lurking to find out what the “enemy” is doing. Depends upon the reason why they lurk.

Q - Do you think that discussion and debate about important issues is as effective as direct action in advancing the armchairactivist cause? Why?
A - Yes -- in different way. Education is always a growing experience.

Q - How has being a forum member changed the other ways you support the overall cause of armchairactivist? (for example, have you decreased your attendance of meetings or events, or increased your number of letters to newspapers or politicians as a result of your membership?)

A - N/A

Q - Do you think that the forum has changed over time so that it is now more about interaction rather than action - for example, do people use it more for debate and discussion than planning events and activities than they used to?

A - More for action I think.

Q - 'Forums that were created to achieve action quickly change so that their main focus becomes talking about ideas and principles rather than planning action.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?

A - Yes, I think most people would rather talk about -- rather than engage in -- action or planning action.

Q - 'Many individuals originally join forums to engage in action, but change their on-line focus so that they talk about ideas and principles rather than planning action.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?

A - Yep!

Q - 'Participants in open forums come to accept that talk is a desirable form of action.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?

A - Not necessarily, I think a lot of folks become very frustrated - then talk about it to try and resolve... :-

Q - 'Participants in open forums talk not because they expect to achieve consensus, but because they hope to convince lurkers to accept their points-of-view.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?

A - Hmm, don’t know for sure.

Q - 'Open forums generally don’t use structured, formalised, processes to allow members to make decisions about the organisation and/or activities of their forum.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?

A - Don’t know.
Q - 'Planning of action rarely takes place in open, un-moderated forums.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - No, I don't think so -- sometimes but there are actions as a result of forums.

Q - How appropriate for describing actual issue-based on-line forums do you think that this distinction between Interaction and Action forums is?
A - Very appropriate -- necessary actually.

Q - How old are you?
A - 57

Q - How long have you lived in the USA?
A - entire life -- born here

Q - How often do you use the internet (for example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week)?
A - several times a day.

Q - Before today, when was the last time you used the internet?
A - last night.

Q - When you use the internet, do you mainly use email, or look at web sites, or both (or some other activity)?
A - both, also develop web sites.

Q - Do you mainly use the internet from home or another location? (If another location, where?)
A - home and work.
Participant 2 (chat interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the RWTO forum?
A - I have been doing online writing since my experience in the streets of Seattle during the WTO. I joined a discussion list about the nonviolent responses and somehow got an invitation to join rwto.

Q - When did you first start reading the forum?
A - I think it has been at least 3 years, if I am not mistaken.

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - No. I think it would be in the history of the list that is online. I could go back and look sometime.

Q - That's OK. Do you remember if it was soon after you started reading the forum, or did you read the forum for a while before posting?
A - I am so involved in human rights work that I posted right away.

Q - How often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post?
A - When I am on the road, it is hard to use. But when I am home, I post more often, though lately I cannot use my email to reply to the list, so I have not posted for about an week or so.

I read it everyday I have access to a computer. It has inspired a lot of my writing to have responsive activists interacting.

Q - Do you currently use any other online forums that are related to the same cause as RWTO?
A - Yes, I am part of several such lists, though most of them lean towards feminism, nonviolence, antiracism.

Q - OK, Great, now I want to talk a little more in depth about what the RWTO forum was like when you first started using it, so I'd like you to think about when you first started reading the forum. Why did you first become interested in the forum?
A - It is very important to me to be connected to people who are involved in nonviolent resistance to corporate take over. RWTO includes some very visibly nonviolent activists willing to risk their lives and freedom in opposing killing corporate policies. I love being involved with such people and the forum gave me that chance.
Q - Do you think it's fair for me to say that the aim of your forum is to achieve positive change related to the RWTO cause?

A - The serious situation during the WTO made it even more crucial for me to make such connections. My friend was shot in the eye and partially blinded for life, we both were tear gassed. I was shot several times and rammed in the ghut with a billy club. My friend was also beaten by police the days before she was shot. We are devoted to Gandhian nonviolence and the assaults were out of line.

Yes, it is a move towards positive change.

Q - And the fact that it is a positive force was important to you when you first joined?

A - I am a single mother living very remotely. Not only have I been able to attend one demo in DC due to the monetary assistance I received from members, but several people have sent me money for my art as well as helping me when my van broke down when I was the driver on a caravan to bring attention to the murderers of young women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Yes, it was of utmost importance to me that the forum was a force for positive change.

I am not interested in forums for the sake of talk. I am interested in those who are committed to frontline nonviolence and living solution.

Q - That's interesting because it leads well to my next question - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving its aim? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc).

A - Basically, rwto is for information. The livriv list is more towards specific organizing for the pagan cluster, which I joined when I went to DC in 2002. The rwto is open to broader activist info, writings and forwards, whereas livriv is not.

Q - So RWTO isn't really a good forum for organising specific actions?

A - I feel that thru the rwto I have been able to educate other activists about my work with indigenous peoples, my work addressing the murders of marginalized peoples, my work with amerikkan untouchables, as well as my position as a frontlinemom.

The forum educates people to take action. Then the planning can happen on livriv.

Q - When you first started using it, how much did you think RWTO would be used to plan and take part in specific actions?
A - Mistakenly, I did think it was for planning and taking part in actions. It took me awhile to figure out how the approach was divided.

Q - So you didn't think it would be so much about debate and discussion back then (when you originally joined)?
A - By dividing it into info and action, it gives people the choice to receive emails that they specifically are interested in. Some people just are not as active as others.

Q - Was there much discussion or debate on the forum when you first started using it (was the forum very active)?
A - I have trouble separating action and discussion, but eventually I figured it out. I have seen how people will go into the action mode once something comes up that has a clear course and those committed to setting it all up wherever it may be taking place.

There has been more discussion at some times and not at others. It has become mostly a small group of people who mostly post. I miss the perspective of those who don't post anymore and then some do every now and then. I have to step back myself when there is a lot going on in my life.

Q - What made you decide to send your first post to the forum?
A - The isolation I felt as an activist living remotely and as one who had experienced first hand the brutality of police while involved in nonviolent protest.

Q - So it was a way of connecting with others?
A - Sometimes I have run into people I have met in the past on the list. I also have become good friends with several people as a result of posting.

Yes, it is very important to connect with others. I live so remotely that keeping connected with activists is a top priority for me. I live in an area known for white supremacy and it is hard to find people to talk to about the issues that come up.

Q - You talked about how the forum was different to how you expected it when you first started using it. Back when you started using the forum, what were you expecting to get out of it?
A - The urgency of coming together with many who oppose the destruction of the planet and the future is so critical.
I think I have gotten out of the forum what I have wanted. I am very careful about where I put my energy. At one time I was on an international anarchist forum and it was so white male dominated I had to quit. I am on another such forum, but mostly just read it til issues affecting women come up. It is when I have taken on issues of racism and sexism that I have met wonderful “lurkers” who don’t post due to the sexism or racism, but thank me for my writings. I have made some very goo

Q - So when you started using RWTO how similar did you think you were to other members? How similar were they to each other?
A - The similarity is really around the commitment to frontline nonviolence. Alot of people are so different from me in their outlooks that I do not interact much with them. Others are responsive to the information I share or they share with me. It is often a satisfying exchange.

Q - Did you identify with the other forum members back then? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - At first, I thought I shared alot of the same values and ideals, but discovered that some of the men in particular were kind of right wingish in their attitudes towards women and people of color. I stopped interacting with those guys. Alot of the women are wonderful and some are now my friends.

Q - That’s interesting, so back then did everyone agree on the best way to achieve the forum’s goals despite these differences?
A - Yes, I was happy with the perspectives of others that balanced out the more ignorant outlooks. The acceptance was pretty remarkable given the freedom of expression that existed and still exists.

Q - How important was the forum in your life back then?
A - It was something I looked forward to each day. It is not quite like that now, but it comes and goes.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term?
A - I get some very vital information now and have always received good posts and forwards that is send to others and use in my writings.

I did not really even think about it. I assumed it would keep going til we figure out how to save the planet.
Q - :-) Did you expect that you would be a member for as long as it took?
A - I suppose. I am in this for life and am drawn to others who feel similarly. I am happy to have meaningful info and connections with such quality people.

Q - Back then how was the forum making a positive difference (when you first joined, I mean)?
A - By keeping people up to date on critical issues, like signing petitions, contacting representatives, offering support to people under assault by the police state, info about the Patriot Act, anti War demos, casualties, organizing around the global protests, etc.

Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed)? How important was that?
A - Administrative issues came up occasionally, but did not usually interfere unless someone was spamming or sending emails that repeatedly included long personal descriptions of their philosophy that was taking too much space. Seems like people really worked well together, tho one or two people were kicked off. That was very rare.

Q - OK, in the next part of the interview I’d like you to think about the forum now and how you currently use it. You have touched on this a bit, but what do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself?
A - Currently, the posters are few. Seems like the issue of recruiting youth for the military is a main one. I wish there were more discussions instead of posts from webnews sites. I know that when someone is impacted directly by oppression, there continues to be good response. I met a chicano man who liked my anti racist, feminist writings and asked if i would be on the Pacifica radio station in Houston to talk about femicide. He called last week and we talked for a long time about the i

(my posts keep getting periodically cut off)

Q - Sorry about that - not sure why. Can we keep going as it is?
A - yes, it has happened 3 or 4 times. i am doing ok

Q - Sorry. Not sure if you got this question - how well is the forum achieving its goals right now?
A - It is not as vibrant. I don't know what is up. I miss the testimonies and struggles of frontline nonviolent solution livers.
Q - Do you think that the forum's goals have changed over time?
A - Too many disheartening realities. I think the goals are listless at this point.

Q - Has the amount of interaction on the forum devoted to organizing action changed over time? For example, has it increased, decreased, or is it about the same as when you first used the forum?
A - Decreased.

Q - And debates or discussions about issues are less common now on the forum than when you first started using it?
A - Yes, less discussion

Q - Why do you read the forum now - have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?
A - Yes, i read it cause i know it is still important

Q - Sorry :-) What about posting messages - are your reasons for posting now the same as when you first started posting?
A - i am realizing that little is motivating people to take a stand. It has become very scary. Very. Tho it was scarier in some ways in the few years after the wto, the undercurrent of a police state is painfully silencing.

My reasons remain the same.

Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now - how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - I feel connected ot the spirit of info, nonviolence and cooperation. It is there.

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - I identitfy iwht the commitment to peace, justice and a livable future for all

From the beginning it was important and it still is.

[Interview terminated by participant before completion]
Participant 3 (email interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the Ambasos forum?
A - I was a co-founder of Ambasos forum and back then as Spokesperson for the Restorationist movement, I wrote a lot of postings to that effect, while also inviting people to the forum.

Q - When did you first start reading the Ambasos forum?
A - I think we started Ambasos in October 2000.

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - Yes, it was in response to demands for unity of all factions fighting to restore our sovereignty--of Ambazonia Republic (Southern Cameroons), currently under Camewroun illegal annexation.

Q - How often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post? (For example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week).
A - Usually several times a day and sometimes. When I skip a day or two, I usually come back with heavy load of postings, either responding to messages and attacks on our cause or making new postings.

Q - Do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the Ambasos forum? If so, how many and what are they called?
A - Yes. About eleven others.
scmg-noticeboard@yahoogroups.com, fdrsoutherncameroonspeople@yahoogroups.com, camnetwork@yahoogroups.com, camnet@listserv.cnri, nationalforum@yahoogroups.com, (for Ambazonia/Southern Cameroons cause) and abujanig@yahoogroups.com, naijanet@yahoogroups.com, Africa-politics@yahoogroups.com, Naija-Politics@yahoogroups.com,
trueblackness@yahoogroups.com, mwananchi@yahoogroups.com, (for African and African American issues).

Three more on alumni (Boba-List@yahoogroups.com, exnucs-zaria@yahoogroups.com,) and pinyinnewsforum@yahoogroups.com for my clan or village of origin issues.
Q - Do you use online forums related to other causes or issues? Yes, as listed above.
A - Now I'd like you to go into a little more depth about what the Ambasos forum was like when you first started using it. When you're answering the following questions, please think back to when you first started reading the forum:

Q - Why did you first become interested in the forum?
A - We were constantly bombarded with many irrelevant issues on predominantly Cameroonian fora such as camnetwork, camnet. So we decided to have some focus by creating ambasos for Ambazonia (Southern Cameroons) issues.

Q - Do you think that it's fair to say that the aim of the Ambasos forum is to achieve positive change related to the cause of the forum? Was that important to you when you first started using the forum?
A - Absolutely and even more, a specific outcome: Independence for Ambazonia. In fact, ambasos is like a war-zone on cyberspace!

Q - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving that aim? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc). Were you involved in that?
A - All of that was actuated and still continues till date. It was interesting to watch the membership grow from under ten to over two hundred regular contributors!

Q - Was the forum a good or effective place for doing that sort of thing?
A - Yes, it was effective and from every indication, it has contributed enormously towards letting the world and even the UN understand the demise of our masses under Cameroun's dictatorships!

Q - Was there much discussion or debate about issues or ideas on the forum when you first started using it? If so, was that useful?
A - No, not much debate about issues but mostly the main idea was properly understood by every participant. Sometime we had infiltrators who attempted detracting from the main idea and focus on liberation by bringing issues such as soccer or women and some porno which we vehemently rejected.
Q - Did everyone agree about the ideas that should be discussed on the forum, and the best way that the forum could achieve its goals?
A - The forum took a natural shape and based on the introductory page, almost everyone understood its focus and it was not hard to pin-point detractors or sabotuers sponsored by the Cameroun government to counter our attacks on its policies towards our masses.

Q - What made you decide to send your first post to the forum?
A - We created to forum to have a better focus than being bombarded with much irrelevant stuff on predominantly Cameroon fora.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum, what were you expecting to get out of it?
A - Focus and increasing membership so as to create a following for our cause and eventually be able to cause pressure to bear on the Cameroon government and the international community.

Q - When you first started using the forum did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - Often. Oppression in Africa is almost a plague. So nothing was new about our cause as compared to other hotspots in Africa, except the fact that we were breaking a new ground in legalism and diplomacy as opposed to outrightly confronting our percieved enemies with a war of liberation--which is common in Africa and other parts of the world.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term and that you would be a long-term member?
A - Oh yes. We were determined to see our liberation to the end and ambasos was a good propaganda as well as educational ground.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum how was the forum making a positive difference?
A - In terms of history, it corrected much misperception about Cameroon unity with erstwhile Southern Cameroons. Others who asked us hard questions led to us doing much research to back-up our demands for independence. And increasing membership was a show of such support and gains in the education of our masses.
Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed, or if it should be moderated, etc)? Was that type of interaction important?
A - To some extent, yes. I was second moderator to Edwin Ngang who first came up with the idea. But we were more open to free speech than limiting personal expression with censoring. We hate censorship!

Q - What do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself and how well is the forum achieving those goals?
A - The forum has remained consistent in emphasizing the message that Cameroun is illegally occupying Ambazonia (Former United Nations Trust Territory of the Southern Cameroons under United Kingdom Administration). The forum continues to draw on contemporary international and local experience to show that Cameroun authorities exhibit ill-will on Ambazonia nationals and so must leave the territory as peacefully as possible. But we do not rule out confrontations as recent pictures arriving from the Ambazonia capital of Buea today suggest as one student was killed and five others wounded--raising the total killed in the last two weeks to seven and over twenty wounded.

Q - Do you think that those goals have changed over time? (If so, how?)
A - Somewhat, yes. In the sense that previously, we were totally for a peaceful settlement but given the continuous attacks, killings and maiming of innocent peaceful demonstrators, we are sure that the youth wing of our struggle is likely going to respond to these killings and though we are not in support of these actions, we cannot stop them now... Initially the goal was to attain independence by relying solely on diplomacy and legalism, but that is not the case any more. A political Party has been formed and they equally think use of force is a possibility.

Q - Has the amount of communication devoted to organising actions like meetings or petitions changed over time? For example, has it increased, decreased, or is it about the same as when you first used the forum?
A - It has increased since the ambasos is now in two factions--one following a Political Party known as Ambazonia Liberation Party (ALIP) embracing pro-socialist ideology while diplomatically dealing with such regimes, or better still wooing them and the other Ambazonia People's Emancipation Council (APEC) which still maintains the pro-western stance and relies on Diplomacy and legalism to drum up support from foreign principals. The public meetings have intensified and more are now being held behind close doors!
Q - Are debates or discussions about issues more common now on the forum then when you first started using it?
A - Yes, discussions are now more common especially with increase events from both the Cameroun government and anti-Cameroun camps typically of the Restorationist movements which include but are not limited to the Ambazonia Movement (APEC, ALIP, ARC), The Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), The Southern Cameroons Peoples Organization (SCAPO) and the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM).

Q - Why do you use the forum now - have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?
A - My reasons have not changed. Only, I am tempted to embrace armed resistance as the other groups have.

Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now - how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - Most forum members have come to understand the importance of legalism--which from the beginning, we of the Ambazonia Movement were told to “Go to Hell with your legalism”! Now every faction has seen the importance of the rule of law and diplomacy--thanks to ambasos forum!

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - Very important. It remains the main medium of concrete and indisputable information about the tempo of our struggle against Cameroun oppression and for our total independence.

Q - Are you familiar with the term 'lurkers'?
A - Sure, once in a while some silent members make surprising moves and do respond, but for the most part, there is a core group that make most postings.

Q - When you post opinions or views on the Ambasos forum, how aware are you of the numbers of lurkers that might be reading your messages?
A - Firstly, the number of responses; secondly, some of these by-standers who leave their offices have messages informing us that they were not in office when our message arrived and third--some do forward our messages to other fora as a show of the importance of the message/post.
Q - How important are lurkers to the forum? Do they have a role?
A - They help spread the message as well as consume and digest it; they also increase the number of readers, even if they don't do anything else. This is significant as far as publicity in liberation goes.

Q - How do you think that debate and discussion on the forum influences lurkers?
A - I think their perception improves over time and they become educationists on person to person contact, inasmuch as they also forward the message to show that what we are doing and say is the truth and important.

Q - Do you think that discussion and debate about important issues is as effective as direct action in advancing the Ambasos cause? Why?
A - Absolutely. This is because direct action without enough grassroot support might not have the necessary impact and would backfire, as well as fail to move the cause forward.

Q - How has being a forum member changed the other ways you support the overall cause of Ambasos? (for example, have you decreased your attendance of meetings or events, or increased your number of letters to newspapers or politicians as a result of your membership?)
A - Writing on the net takes much time which could be used otherwise. But my overall momentum has continued to grow with each passing day, though once in a while I slip into doubts as to whether the strategiues are worth continuous utilization of should be changed.

Q - Do you think that the forum has changed over time so that it is now more about interaction rather than action - for example, do people use it more for debate and discussion than planning events and activities than they used to?
A - The forum has changed a little and most meetings have also gone underground with the seeming schism even in the Ambazonia Movement which is the primary group that not only began the struggle back in 1985 but has remained the most consistent and the most understood! domestically and internationally by the intellectual core of our masses. With the last case against Cameroun having been decided upon by the UNHRC, we are hoping that the judgment would be made public and that the United Nations would then step in to enforce the judgment and thus have Cameroun republic leave Ambazonia national territory!
Q - ‘Forums that were created to achieve action quickly change so that their main focus becomes talking about ideas and principles rather than planning action.’ Please comment on this statement.

A - I think from the Ambazonia and ambasos perspective, the above statement does hold true. This is in part because other activities were going on well, (such as leaglism) and in part because of the shifting dynamics of the struggle vis-a-vis international security concerns. An impediment to open discuss, I think, has been USA laws and the Patriot Act--which from the American perspective downplays the role of defining who is a terrorist and who is a freedom fighter or when does one cease to become the other, or when does one become the other. This has made people to hold back discussing freely and so much action talks are done behind close doors--for fear of the unknown interpretations that might be given to legitimat action plans that intend to challenge some status quo not different from American concerns over old Iraq and Afghanistan!

[Interview terminated by participant before completion]
Participant 4 (email interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the UnitedMalaysianIndianClub forum?
A - Through a forwarded email

Q - What made you interested in the forum?
A - related to issues which i am interested in indian community

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - dec 2003

Q - How often do you use the forum either just to read or to post? (For example once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week).
A - few times a day, if in office or have internet access

Q - Do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the UnitedMalaysianIndianClub forum? If so, how many and what are they called?
A - yes, such as MIClub, MIHYA, Indian-Malaysian

Q - Do you use on-line forums related to other causes or issues?
A - Yes

Q - Do you think that it's fair to say that the aim of the forum is to achieve positive change related to the cause of the UnitedMalaysianIndianClub forum? Was that important to you when you first started using the forum?
A - It is fair to say so. I think the aim/objectives of the forum is a big motivating factor to join up.

Q - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving its aims? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc). Were you involved in that?
A - I found that mostly it was social activities like get-togethers and sports. But some community services were also done like visits to disabled folks home, bringing orphans for outing, school visits, donation drives etc. I was involved in a few of the activities, at least 5 events, but not more than 10.
Q - Back when you first became a member, how much did you think the UnitedMalaysianIndianClub forum would be used for things like planning and taking part in action (e.g. organising meetings or events) compared with discussing and debating relevant issues and ideas?
A - not much. I had my reservations. But as time went by, the activities became more focused and membership grew. However, the ratio of participating members to silent members is still high.

Q - Was there much discussion or debate about issues or ideas on the forum when you first started using it? If so, was that useful?
A - Yes, especially on gender and relationship issues. Sometimes on religion, race, ideology, Tamil school, temple, MIC, euthanasia, politics etc. Useful in providing a different view, on what others think and also give new information.

Q - How important was the forum in your life back then?
A - Not so important. It is still a virtual group. The core people keep it going.

Q - When you first started using the forum did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - I thought not much. Most were fun-loving and outgoing people. I'm not the nightlife person. But the ideals and certain issues can bond us together. However, information sharing was the main focus of the group, especially on topics like job, accommodation etc.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term and that you would be a long-term member?
A - Yes, I think it would. And I would be a long-term member.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum how was the forum making a positive difference?
A - Provided avenues for business, interaction, activities to occupy time, and lots of info.

Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed, or if it should be moderated, etc)? Was that type of interaction important?
A - not much. my guess is about once a month, the administrative issues will pop up. but it is important, so that members understand the rules, or can give feedback to improve administration.

Q - What do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself and how well is the forum achieving those goals?
A - the forum has initiated activities that cater for the community. I’ll say that it is a long journey to achieve the goals, and UMIC has just taken the first few steps of that journey by having games, get-togethers, treasure hunt, charity programs, donation drives etc.

Q - Do you think that those goals have changed over time? (If so, how?)
A - nope

Q - Has the amount of communication devoted to organising actions like meetings or petitions changed over time? For example, has it increased, decreased, or is it about the same as when you first used the forum?
A - i think about the same

Q - Are debates or discussions about issues more common now on the forum then when you first started using it?
A - yes

Q - Why do you use the forum now have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?
A - nope, still same

Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - changed a little since i’ve met a few of them in person.

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - the same as before. it is a place to exchange views, get some latest info and meet new ppl.

Q - Are you familiar with the term 'lurkers'?
A - not familiar with “lurker” term, but i called them as sponges. this is common. i think quite a number of research will show that the active participation by members is lower that the number of members.

Q - When you post opinions or views on the UnitedMalaysianIndianClub forum, how aware are you of the numbers of lurkers that might be reading your messages?
A - i’ll assume that about 80% are lurkers.

Q - How important are lurkers to the forum? Do they have a role?
A - they may not reply, but they may forward to others, or take action offline. worst case, at least information is disseminated.

Q - How do you think that debate and discussion on the forum influences lurkers?
A - not much. they may tend to pick topics that interest them only or delete everything.

Q - Do you think that discussion and debate about important issues is as effective as direct action in advancing the UnitedMalaysianIndianClub cause? Why?
A - marginally less important. action speaks louder than words!

Q - How has being a forum member changed the other ways you support the overall cause of UnitedMalaysianIndianClub? (for example, have you decreased your attendance of meetings or events, or increased your number of letters to newspapers or politicians as a result of your membership?)
A - increased meeting attendance and attentiveness to current issues

Q - Do you think that the forum has changed over time so that it is now more about interaction rather than action for example, do people use it more for debate and discussion than planning events and activities than they used to?
A - due to fluctuating members and new members coming in all the time, hard to say. but activities are still happening.

[Interview terminated by participant before completion]
Participant 5 (chat interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the forum?
A - From another yahoo groups called DrumCircles@yahoo.com, i think

Q - And when did you first start reading the Up-Drums forum?
A - about 4 months ago

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - no, but it was when somebody shared something interesting about drumming

Q - Alright, how often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post?
A - i read it everyday, i post about once every 2 weeks.

Q - And do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the Up-Drums forum?
A - up drums combines drumming with peace activism, which is pretty unusual. i am on other politically oriented groups, and other drumming groups, but none that combine the two.

Q - Yes, it is unusual. How many other forums are you on?
A - about 8, i think.

Q - Why did you first become interested in the forum?
A - because i'm a drummer, and because i think if we don't do something about the world situation, we will destroy the world. There is a strong connection between sound vibration and spirituality. It’s hard to explain in a short contest. But take the OM sound that people use in meditation. Sound, and vibration connects all things. Like I said, it's hard to explain.

Q - So do you think that it's fair for me to say that the aim of your forum is to achieve positive change related to the Up-Drums cause?
A - yes

Q - And I guess that aim was important to you when you first started using the forum?
A - Yes! It’s always been important tome. I beleive in non-violent change.
Q - So, when you first started using the forum (to read or post), what was it doing to achieve that aim? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc).
A - They were using it to organize a drum wave around the world. Many people drummed at different times, in different time zones. People organized meetings to drum at the prescribed time to make the sound go around the world.

Q - How were you involved in that?
A - My group drummed that Sunday, March 20th, but not necessarily at the right time, but we drummed for 2 hours and I lead some of the drumming. I was too shy to mention about drumming for peace though, I wish I had, it was our regular Sunday drum circle really. But I was drumming for peace.

Q - Does your regular drumming circle meet for a reason besides just loving to drum?
A - Many people posted after that day, that they had successfully gotten a group together to drum for peace.

No, our aim is to promote unity in the community between different cultures, races, etc. and to have fun! A lot of people come who are not drummers, but by the time they leave, they feel uplifted, and joyful. When I lead I sometimes do a thing at the end where we drum quietly and say what we wish for the world.

Q - About the forum - do you think it was it a good place for organising that sort of thing?
A - Yes, they were successful. It was not just that forum, there were many groups promoting that particular drum wave around the world. I saw it on sever different forums being discussed. Including the DrumCircles group which is for professional drum circle facilitators.

Q - When you first started using it, how much did you think the forum would be used to plan and take part in actions like organising meetings or events
A - I had no opinion about that in the beginning

Q - What about discussing and debating relevant issues and ideas? How much did you think it would be a place to do that?
A - I didn’t have any preconceived ideas really. I guess from the name I knew there would be talk about peace.
Q - Was there much discussion or debate on the forum when you first started using it?
A - yes, about 5 or 6 emails a day
they try to keep the discussion related to the subject

Q - And what sorts of things were people talking about?
A - mostly just organizing the drum wave, when somebody got too politically hot the moderator would step in and tell them to cool it

Q - Does the moderator step in much?
A - they tried to keep things in a pretty upbeat, positive light, not a place to rail on about how horrible the world is.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum, what were you expecting to get out of it?
A - no, not too much, people know the right way to behave, and want to stay friends
I had no expectations accept talking to other people who believe in the same things I do.

Q - When you first started using the forum, how similar did you think you were to other members? How similar were they to each other?
A - Pretty similar! It's a pretty narrow range of topic!

Q - Did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - the forums are great 'cause in each community in the real world there might not be that many people interested in what you're interested in.
I thought we definitely shared the same values.

Q - Did everyone agree on the best way to achieve the forum's goals?
A - some were more against the government then others, some were more like, everything will be alright. but everyone agrees on the method of using the drum to heal. so there was a range of feelings, within a certain band. do you know what I mean?

Q - Yes, I think so. You may have had some disagreement about some ideas, but everyone agreed on the important things - is that fair to say?
A - yes
Q - How important was the forum in your life back then?
A - interesting, and thought provoking, all my email groups are important to me. because i live in a very rural area, and only really see my husband, and the people at work, and my drum group, the email groups are pretty important. on a scale of 1 to 10 i’d say about a 6. Real life is obviously much more important. But I really look forward to the forums in the evening!

Q - Does the on-line forum seem different to real life?
A - the things discussed in the forums also impact real life in many ways, now that i think about it.

a few months ago i was struggling to become a vegetarian, i received a lot of support from a forum, or 2 that i’m on, whereas nobody else i know is a vegetarian. I also go involved with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, through a forum, and now I’m doing a literature table for them on earth day. so it definately spills over into the everyday world. and is a positive thing.

just the up drums forum

Q - Back then how was the Up-Drums forum making a positive difference?
A - People would post different peace related quotes I had never heard. Like what Mahatma Ghandi said. Be the change you want to see in the world... that really hit me. Just talking to people with the same interest is positive. People say some very thought provoking things, and it helps to open your mind up.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term?
A - probably, they are a planning a monthly thing.. a monthly peace wave.

Q - Did you think that you would be a long-term member?
A - yes

Q - Was much was the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed)? How important was that?
A - not important at all. we had a moderater named jerry, he only stepped in when things got to politically heated up. there didn’t seem to be much problem.
Q - What do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself?
A - the activity has died down a little after the ig drum wave, but people are talking about the next one. the march 20th one was all over the world. they happen about twice a year, so activity may die down for a few months.

Q - So how well is the forum achieving its goals at the moment?
A - i don’t know if that answers your question, i’m not one of the most active participants.

i’m not really sure, i think the main goal wa acheived. as far as bringing about world peace, well, it;’s all the differant groups, with all the differant goals, each group is just a small part of a wider movement,that hopefull will be successful.

the main goal was the drum wave.

Q - Do you think that the forum’s goals have changed over time? (If so, how?)
A - maybe, from just the one wave to an every month wave, but there’s less activity now.

the focus is still pretty much the same as far as values, and ideals go.

Q - You said that the amount of interaction devoted to organising events has decreased. Are debates or discussions about issues more common now on the forum then when you first started using it?
A - actually you could say that was an expansion of the goals.

no.

Q - So there’s not more discussion now?
A - no, less

that group was organized specificaly to organize drummers for the drum wave.

Q - Can you explain a little more about how the goals have expanded?
A - because now people are talking about doing it every month, but hthere is not as much energy behind it as for the world wide one.
Q - Why do you think that is?
A - the world wide one had native peoples involved all over the world.
not necessarily on that forum, but as a world rythms drummer i was reading other things about the drum wave.

Q - Why do you read the forum now - have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?
A - no, to see what’s going on with other drummers.

Q - What about posting messages - are your reasons for posting now the same as when you first started posting?
A - yes, to talk to others with similar interests.

Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now - how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - I still identify a great deal, it hasn’t changed.

Q - And how important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - i guess a little less important. i like all the forums i’m on.

Q - Is it less important now because there’s less talk about a big central event?
A - probably, it’s just not a main focus right now.

Q - Do you know how many members the forum has?
A - no

Q - Of the members, how many would you guess actually post messages?
A - about 20, or 30 probably

Q - Do you think most members pay attention to forum posts even if they don’t post themselves?
A - yes, definitely.
Q - Are debates or discussion that take place on the forum useful - how do they advance the cause?
A - i guess, an it’s just an opinion, it gives people support they might not find among their families and co workers.

Q - So it tells them other people might also agree with their ideas?
A - yes

Q - Are you familiar with the term ‘lurkers’?
A - yes that’s true. some forums do not encourage lurkers and have a posting requirement, others don’t care.

Q - When you post opinions or views on the forum, how aware are you of the numbers of lurkers that might be reading your messages?
A - not aware, i don’t say anything that can’t be read by anybody. thre is an order in the universe. if a person is lurking they might need the input a list has, there is a reason for them to be there. people can lurk all they want! some people are just shy, or afraid to say anything. they think they will get flamed. most lists have a code of behavior though, with no flamming allowed.

Q - So are lurkers important to the forum? Why?
A - people have an inbred “boy am i stupid program” that keeps them from posing.

well it’s good to have a lot of members I guess. maybe some of the lurkers saw where the drum circles were going to be and went to them, participated.

Q - Why do people keep using the forum?
A - they get to know each other and develop on line friendships. I’m one of the more quiet ones.

Q - Do you think that discussion and debate about important issues is as effective as direct action in advancing your cause?
A - it’s part of it. definately, it leads to action. it’s an easy way to organize, no phone bills, and open to everybody

Q - So is debate and discussion a legitimate form of action?
A - yes! it helps to wsort out your feelings, and to sort out information.
Q - How do you think that debate and discussion on the forum influences people who are following the debate but not participating (i.e. lurkers)?

A - i could only speak for myself on that one, my groups have influenced me and opened me up to all the possibilities in the world.

i can’t guesss about others feelings

Q - And that influence has come about through you reading but not necessarily participating in the discussions?

A - yes, i participate less than a lot of people, but more than a lurker

Q - Do people always agree about everything on the Up-Drums forum? How important is that?

A - no, they don’t, it’s always interesting to hear different sides of a discussion.

it’s important.

Q - So how important is it that there is consensus on the forum?

A - not important, people can have different opinions and still reach a goal

Q - Do you think that the forum has changed over time so that it is now more about interaction rather than action - for example, do people use it more for debate and discussion than planning events and activities than they used to?

A - not really, it’s quiet now, but remember the forum you’re asking about was organized for a specific event in time, which has now passed. the forum is still open, when the next such event comes around on the calendar, activity will probably pick up.

Q - So what is it about the forum that keeps you committed to it?

A - i don’t want to miss out on anything that might be related to drumming!

Q - What advantages do on-line forums have over forums that meet face-to-face? And what about vice-versa: what advantages do face-to-face forums have over on-line ones?

A - online forums an attract people from all over the world who would never meet otherwise! right now i’m on a forum of vegetarians that is mostly people in asia! i guess face to face would be harder to organize. one disadvantage of online forums is because it’s harder to express emotion on a key board, sometimes there are misunderstandings, people take something for criticism that was not meant that way.
Q - 'Forums that were created to achieve action quickly change so that their main focus becomes talking about ideas and principles rather than planning action.' Is this statement generally true of open forums?
A - no

Q - 'Many individuals originally join forums to engage in action, but change their on-line focus so that they talk about ideas and principles rather than planning action.' How true do you think this is?
A - not the ones i've been on

this has not been my experience

Q - 'Participants in open forums come to accept that talk is a desirable form of action.' Do you think that's true?
A - yes

Q - 'Participants in open forums talk not because they expect to achieve consensus, but because they hope to convince lurkers to accept their points-of-view.' Is this generally true?
A - i don't know, people who continually preach one idea without listening to others don't get much respect.

i would say no

Q - OK - what about: 'Open forums generally don't use structured, formalised, processes to allow members to make decisions about the organisation and/or activities of their forum.' How true is that?
A - true i guess, most forums have already existed when i joined them, there was no need to get involved in administrative duties

Q - 'Planning of action rarely takes place in open, un-moderated forums.' What about this?
A - i don't know i've never been on an unmoderated forum

Q - How appropriate for describing actual issue-based on-line forums do you think that this distinction between Interaction and Action forums is?
A - very appropriate.
Q - Does Up-Drums fit into one of those types?
A - yes, it is an action based forum.

Q - What about the other forums you’ve been on? Have they been Action or Interaction (or some other type)?
A - both types. some of the ones i’im on are mainly about spirituality. i’m on 2 or 3 action based and 6 or so interaction based

Q - Do you prefer one type over the other?
A - no, i get a lot out of them all, and i hope what i contribute helps, or informs other people.

Q - How old are you
A - 54

Q - How long have you lived in the USA?
A - all my life

Q - How often do you use the internet (for example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week)?
A - once a day

Q - Before today, when was the last time you used the internet?
A - yesterday

Q - When you use the internet, do you mainly use email, or look at web sites, or both (or some other activity)?
A - both, also talk to friends that live around here, and communicate with co-workers and others i do things with.

Q - Do you mainly use the internet from home or another location? Where?
A - home, at work, only with work related things
Participant 6 (email interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the Buddhist-News forum?
A - I learnt about it through Senaka Weeraratne, moderator of the forum

Q - When did you first start reading the Buddhist-News forum?
A - Nearly two years ago

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - Cannot remember the exact date. But it was almost a year back.

Q - How often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post? (For example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week).
A - I read the forum almost every day (except in unavoidable circumstances). But my writing to the forum depends on the time available and the issues that are being debated.

Q - Do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the Buddhist-News forum? If so, how many and what are they called?
A - No

Q - Do you use on-line forums related to other causes or issues?
A - So far no

Q - Why did you first become interested in the forum?
A - It’s exposure of aggressive Christian evangelism and its intensive campaign against LTTE separatism in Sri Lanka were two of the issues that attracted me to the forum. It gave me an opportunity to express my feelings on matters that were close my heart. These included not only Buddhism but other society-related issues like politics, history etc.

Q - Do you think that it’s fair to say that the aim of the forum is to achieve positive change related to the Buddhist cause in Sri Lanka? Was that important to you when you first started using the forum?
A - To both questions the answer is yes

Q - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving that aim? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc). Were you involved in that?
A - The most important achievement was that it has helped many Sri Lankan Buddhists scattered all over the globe to share information as well as build up friendships and also attract even non-Sri Lankan Buddhists/Hindus to contribute to the forum. Some people used the forum to send petitions on certain issues. I used it mainly to make suggestions and proposals and also to share with others whatever useful information I had on important matters.

Q - Was the forum a good or effective place for doing that sort of thing?
A - Yes.

Q - Was there much discussion or debate about issues or ideas on the forum when you first started using it? If so, was that useful?
A - The answer to both questions is yes.

Q - Did everyone agree about the ideas that should be discussed on the forum, and the best way that the forum could achieve its goals?
A - Well, there have been agreements and disagreements - even heated debates. But on the whole I think the forum is making some impact, although no hard and fast rules have been set towards achieving objectives.

Q - What made you decide to send your first post to the forum?
A - I cannot remember the exact post I sent first, but one of the issues that I raised at the start was about the scant attention paid to Sinhala King Vimaladharmasuriya I who ruled the Kandyan Kingdom, which he saved from Portuguese-Catholic domination in the 16th Century. Except for one person in the forum, almost everyone else accepted my point of view on the King and even went to the extent of commemorating him at a Sri Lanka cultural heritage exhibition in Canada last year. It was his 400th death anniversary.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum, what were you expecting to get out of it?
A - Nothing special, except access to information on various issues, subjects and people and also to build up contacts.

Q - When you first started using the forum did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - With many forum members I share almost the same thoughts on many issues. But there are one or two who are hold totally different views.
Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term and that you would be a long-term member?
A - Yes, I hope so.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum how was the forum making a positive difference?
A - I believe it was so and I think it’s continuing

Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed, or if it should be moderated, etc)? Was that type of interaction important?
A - There were a few people who touched on this subject. To me that type of interaction is not that important. I’ve however suggested that more Buddhist scholars and historians should be invited to contribute to the forum to make it more effective and reliable as a source of information and a source of profound thinking.

Q - What do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself and how well is the forum achieving those goals?
A - I think it is achieving its goals by raising Buddhist consciousness worldwide on important issues like aggressive Christian evangelism and the need to form organizations to deal with other problems affecting Buddhists. The BNC played an important goal in organizing the March 19-20 Global Buddhist conference that was convened to launch an international Buddhist relief organization on the lines of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Q - Do you think that those goals have changed over time? (If so, how?)
A - No I do not think the goals have changed.

Q - Is the forum used much now to organise actions in support of its aims - e.g. meetings, petitions, etc? Are you involved in that?
A - To some extent, yes. I am indirectly involved in the sense that I news coverages of these meetings for online news services

Q - Has the amount of interaction devoted to organising actions like meetings or petitions changed over time? For example, has it increased, decreased, or is it about the same as when you first used the forum?
A - I do not think there has been vast difference between then and now.
Q - Are debates or discussions about issues more common now on the forum then when you first started using it?
A - Basically the same.

Q - Why do you read the forum now - have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?
A - Reasons are the same - but I read mostly what I want to know and issues to which I can and like to respond.

Q - What about posting messages - have your reasons for posting changed from when you made your first post?
A - Changed slightly in the sense that as far as possible I avoid wasting my time on issues that are beyond my power to resolve (for example what the Sri Lanka Government should do to restore lasting peace in the country or deal with the LTTE)

Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now - how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - No basic change. I always identify with those who share my views on important issues.

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - Basically the same.

Q - Do you know how many members the Buddhist-News forum has?
A - Not exactly

Q - Of those members, how many would you guess actually post messages?
A - There are around 18 people who post messages - some regularly others occasionally.

Q - Do you think most members pay attention to forum posts even if they don’t post themselves?
A - Yes, I think so.

Q - Why are debates or discussion that take place on the forum useful - how do they advance the cause?
A - Because they widen your horizons and makes you sit up and think on issues from different angles
Q - Are you familiar with the term 'lurkers'? 
A - No, this is the first time I came to know the term in relation to online forums. Undoubtedly, there could be lurkers in BNC too.

Q - When you post opinions or views on the Buddhist-News forum, how aware are you of the numbers of lurkers that might be reading your messages? 
A - No clear idea. But one proof of these lurkers was that an anonymous anti-Buddhist crusader began attacking us on the BNC for a couple of weeks, soon after the tsunami. This person refused to identify himself/herself despite being challenged to do so several times. After we dealt with this individual on an ideological level the attacks ceased.

Q - How important are the lurkers to the forum? Why? 
A - It is important since if some of the lurkers are not favourable to Buddhist objectives, they will get our message when we write to the BNC. We are making our stance clear to them.

Q - Why do people keep using the Buddhist-News forum? 
A - It offers an avenue to express their thoughts and feelings on issues and people while acquiring knowledge and information.

Q - Do you think that discussion and debate about important issues is as effective as direct action in advancing the Buddhist-News cause? Why? 
A - I think it is effective since it creates public opinion on issues and thereby galvanizes people into action.

Q - How do you think that debate and discussion on the forum influences people who are following the debate but not participating (i.e. lurkers)? 
A - It influences people since the debates and discussion makes them think about the issues we are dealing with.

Q - Do people always agree about everything on this forum? How important is it that forum members agree most of the time? 
A - No not always. But by and large agreement is necessary if we are to create a consensus of opinion in dealing with issues concerning Buddhists.

Q - How has being a forum member changed the other ways you support the overall cause of Buddhist-News?
A - No significant change. My support for the overall cause of BNC has been virtually the same, though I believe improvements to BNC may be necessary.

Q - Do you think that the forum has changed over time so that it is now more about interaction rather than action - for example, do people use it more for debate and discussion than planning events and activities than they used to?
A - No I do not think the forum changed very much. But there has been a trend towards planning events and activities too during the past one year.

Q - What is it about the Buddhist-News forum that makes you committed to it?
A - The BNC is one of a very few online services (the others being the Buddhist Channel and Dhamma Times) that serves the Buddhist cause worldwide and also gives a special attention to Sri Lankan Buddhists. It is a forum where you can express any opinion (as long as you do not try to defame individuals) without subjecting it to editing or censoring by anyone.

This is a clarification of a answer given to one of your questions in Part II about the Buddhist News Centre Group. In my answer I said that BNC is one of the few online services that cater to the Buddhist cause and that the others were Buddhist Channel and the Dhamma Times. Please note that the BC and DT are not forums but only news services whereas BNC functions both as a news service and a forum. If what we write to BNC is of good news value, the moderator sends it to the BC. This helped me to get my report on the March 19-20 Global Buddhist Conference held in Colombo in the BC.

Q - What advantages do on-line forums have over forums that meet face-to-face and what advantages do face-to-face forums have over on-line ones?
A - The online create a relaxed atmosphere where you can take your time to think carefully and express your feelings in clear and precise language. Face to face forums on the other hand helps to understand people better and build up closer ties with them - though it may sometimes lead to heated debates.

Q - ‘Forums that were created to achieve action quickly change so that their main focus becomes talking about ideas and principles rather than planning action.’ Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - Not necessarily. For example the BNC has helped to co-ordinate activities opposed to unethical Christian conversions as well as to inform Buddhists worldwide on the March 19-
Q - 'Many individuals originally join forums to engage in action, but change their on-line focus so that they talk about ideas and principles rather than planning action.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - To some extent yes, but it cannot be applied always to all persons writing to the forum.

Q - 'Participants in open forums come to accept that talk is a desirable form of action.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - To some extent, yes.

Q - 'Participants in open forums talk not because they expect to achieve consensus, but because they hope to convince lurkers to accept their points-of-view.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - May be true of some individuals - but cannot be generalized.

Q - 'Open forums generally don't use structured, formalised, processes to allow members to make decisions about the organisation and/or activities of their forum.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - Very often yes.

Q - 'Planning of action rarely takes place in open, un-moderated forums.' Is this statement generally true of open, unmoderated issue-based forums?
A - Not necessarily.

Q - Do you think that this distinction between Interaction and Action forums is valid?
A - I think the dividing line is rather blurred. They have to develop debating important issues or causes, AND they should also develop to plan and take part in action relevant to important issues or causes. We are however yet to reach that stage. But this does not mean that everyone can participate in all the planned activity. Each one may contribute in the way he/she can on the issue. Developing Action Forums only is rather an uphill task due to various limitations including financial constraints - especially in Third World countries like Sri Lanka. Hence, the greater focus on interaction forums by which people can be influenced in matters of voting as well as to brief others (those who are not involved with the forum but have financial and political clout) to take appropriate action.
Q - What is your gender
A - Male

Q - What is your age
A - 60 years

Q - What country do you currently live in?
A - Sri Lanka

Q - How long have you lived there?
A - Since birth

Q - How often do you use the internet (for example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week)?
A - Once day - except on days I am away from home

Q - Before today, when was the last time you used the internet?
A - Last night

Q - When you use the internet, do you mainly use email, or look at web sites, or both (or some other activity)?
A - Mainly e-mail

Q - Do you mainly use the internet from home or another location? (If another location, where?)
A - From home
Participant 7 (email interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the UMIC forum?
A - When a friend and I were talking of starting it. He became the owner while I, the moderator.

Q - When did you first start reading the UMIC forum?
A - On the first day it was created, 25th August 2003.

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - On the same day the club was launched.

Q - How often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post? (For example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week).
A - Mondays to Fridays, from the time I start work until I leave my office; to read, post, edit, approve or reject postings.

Q - Do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the UMIC forum? If so, how many and what are they called?
A - 15 (more or less) clubs - M'sia Indians, Malaysian Indians, Annai Illam, ASTROvanavil, Child Abuse forum, dls petaling groups, Indian Malaysian, Indian Network, malaysianindians, malaysian_tamils, malaysian_indian, Malaysia Innovative Indian Youths, MCLUB to name a few.

Q - Do you use on-line forums related to other causes or issues?
A - Define other causes pls.

Q - Why did you first become interested in the forum?
A - Because I as supportive of a friend who was highly dedicated to have something done for the Indian community.

Q - Do you think that it's fair to say that the aim of the forum is to achieve positive change related to the cause of the UMIC forum? Was that important to you when you first started using the forum?
A - Yes
Q - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving that aim? (For example, were people using it or organise meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc). Were you involved in that?
A - When the club first started, most members were mutual friends found in other e-groups. UMIC became a place where members could keep in touch and make arrangements to meet and have gatherings. Nothing to do with protests, politics or petitions.

Q - Was the forum a good or effective place for doing that sort of thing?
A - Yes

Q - Was there much discussion or debate about issues or ideas on the forum when you first started using it? If so, was that useful?
A - The postings sent during the begining were basically fun chats and forwards.

Q - Did everyone agree about the ideas that should be discussed on the forum, and the best way that the forum could achieve its goals?
A - No. Some people still dont. But we cant please everybody. We just do what we think is right for the club, its members and the community.

Q - What made you decide to send your first post to the forum?
A - Nothing. I just did as the members who were already my friends were exchanging posts.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum, what were you expecting to get out of it?
A -

Q - When you first started using the forum did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - Not much. Not all members join the club to do good for the community. Some join just to have fun, to find contacts, for business purposes, or basically just to build their network, be it for work or fun. Some remain, some leave when they dont get what they want.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term and that you would be a long-term member?
A - YES for both.
Q - Back when you first started using the forum how was the forum making a positive difference?
A - When UMIC first started, members were not moderated. Everyone was free to post anything, unlike other e-groups we came from together. But soon when we got serious about the club, we moderated everyone.

Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed, or if it should be moderated, etc)? Was that type of interaction important?
A - Not really. The administrators discuss and decide these issues offline. Forum is basically for members who wants to discuss their issues, or post other articles. They also sometimes post suggestions on how umic could improve. Administrators do take them seriously and discuss during meetings.

[Interview terminated by participant before completion]
Participant 8 (email interview)

Q - How did you first learn about the Talsik forum?
A - It was sometime in February of 2004.

Q - When did you first start reading the Talsik forum?
A - The same month.

Q - Can you remember when you made your first post?
A - It was the 2nd of March.

Q - How often do you use the forum - either just to read or to post? (For example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week).
A - At first, I checked my emails twice a day for some notes coming from my friends and people I used to work with, but when the topic or subject that are being discussed interest me, I almost checked it once in every two hours.

Q - Do you use any other on-line forums that are related to the same cause as the Talsik forum? If so, how many and what are they called?
A - I heard that there are some groups but I never joined them for moderating reasons as well as the way issues are being argued or discussed.

Q - Do you use on-line forums related to other causes or issues?
A - Yes, from overseas worker concerns, religion, social groups, government and intelligence aspects.

Q - Why did you first become interested in the forum?
A - The forum dealt mainly on problems in the Philippines, their agenda is to create and offer solutions while majority of active participants, indicating their real names or group affiliations, are based overseas. The alarming demographics in the Philippines, such as the abject poverty, abysmal unemployment, corruption, ballooning debts and fiscal crisis are among the hot topics, though most members, frequently dwell in criticism and personal attacks because of their indifference’s from political point of view or party affiliations, but the proper moderation put the group on a decent level of argument.
Q - Do you think that it's fair to say that the aim of the forum is to achieve positive change related to the cause of the Talsik forum? Was that important to you when you first started using the forum?

A - Achieving the desired level of changes that is also being aimed by Talsik forum, depends on members and their attitude in resolving any given problems. I believe that any forum which discusses any issue reflects on how well the people or its members confront the challenges to achieve positive change, as the majority of the Filipinos are so fragmented and to add, the arrogance of its leaders as well as the apathy of the people, probably due to hopelessness and despair. When I first join the forum and in my mind, people should be brought to a certain level of unity or common desire before we can push for change.

Q - When you first started using the forum (to read or post), how was it achieving that aim? (For example, were people using it or organize meetings or protests, or maybe to arrange petitions, etc). Were you involved in that?

A - When started using the forum, it was the election season in the Philippines, and many of the postings pertains or relates to their candidates of choice from presidents, senators, congressmen and down to the respective local level. There were actually few efforts in finding solutions or creation of proposals to eradicate, if not, lessen corruption but most members, were actually the beneficiary of its network. Talsik as a group, has its own agenda, and I can say that involvement of members really depends of their interests, being the venue of forum for people advocating good governance. Yes, I was also involved on few petitions and protest about law enforcement and high-level corruption in the government.

Q - Was the forum a good or effective place for doing that sort of thing?

A - Yes, it is an effective place because the forum has an extensive networks that provides mutual support in our campaign for good governance even though and at that time, most of its members are engaged in partisan politics. It was also an effective place for majority of the members came from academe, media, non-governmental organizations as well as politicians themeselves.

Q - Was there much discussion or debate about issues or ideas on the forum when you first started using it? If so, was that useful?

A - Yes, there were many but issues or ideas that are being posted caused them to be more familiar with each other while it compeled other members to join the argument. At that point, the level of discussion were translated into more productive level and one can determine its worth.
Q - Did everyone agree about the ideas that should be discussed on the forum, and the best way that the forum could achieve its goals?
A - I believed the ideas that are being discussed on the forum are more on collective approach as any subjects or issue can be brought to fore by anyone. There are some disagreements but one of the criterion of the forum was to create or explore issues or any ideas in order for the forum to achieve its goals.

Q - What made you decide to send your first post to the forum?
A - I was interested on the agenda they are trying to accomplish.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum, what were you expecting to get out of it?
A - Information and more importantly, learn something from other members.

Q - When you first started using the forum did you identify with the other forum members? (For example, how much did you think you shared the same values and ideals, or the same goals?)
A - The forum is just like an small community. I believe that before anyone can share the same values and ideals, they have to be familiar with each other first.

Q - Did you think that the forum would keep going long-term and that you would be a long-term member?
A - It really depends on the moderator and in my opinion, it will be around as long as rampant corruption exist in the Philippines and I will continue to be its member.

Q - Back when you first started using the forum how was the forum making a positive difference?
A - I was quite reluctant on their efforts to make a difference but the more I read each and everyones posting on a daily basis, I did realize that most members regardless of their indifferences, wanted the same goals, that is to fight graft and corruption in the Philippines.

Q - Was much of the interaction on the forum about administrative issues (for example, how the forum should be set up and managed, or if it should be moderated, etc)? Was that type of interaction important?
A - There were few incidences of administrative issues being questioned by new members who are unaware of rules and regulations. Perhaps, it is very important that each member should be familiar with those rules in order for them to interact.
Q - What do you think the forum is doing now to achieve the goals it originally set out for itself and how well is the forum achieving those goals?

A - The goals of the forum depends on the agenda or initiative of each member or group, none of us can really tell if someone did achieve anything nonetheless if they posted it publicly or we were part of the initiatives. In my own view, most of us achieved certain part of those goals mentioned in the forum, as we both know, those goals are only possible if members of the government or non-government organization, civic leaders or groups will actively participate in those efforts. It will be hard for me to determine if how well the members achieved their goals but for me, it did quite well. The forum is a loose network to determine each and everyones goal.

Q - Do you think that those goals have changed over time? (If so, how?)

A - According to the moderator and the last time he posted a sort of polls to determine if we moved a little bit, there were improvements, good improvements actually. There were more networking, more actions on referrals, campaign, solicitation, petitions while several appeals has been answered by authorities or people concern and few complains was treated fairly.

Q - Has the amount of communication devoted to organizing actions like meetings or petitions changed over time? For example, has it increased, decreased, or is it about the same as when you first used the forum?

A - I dint know how members are devoting their time in organizing or creating such initiatives but it increased than before.

Q - Are debates or discussions about issues more common now on the forum then when you first started using it?

A - No. There were common discussions before.

Q - Why do you use the forum now - have your reasons changed from when you first started reading it?

A - I use the forum because it discusses the corruption issues in the Philippines and more people are are well aware of the implications on its society or its people, as it was also my duty and responsibility. Life is continuing process - we learn, we seek better solutions to some problems, we change things to become better but on a particular change, it all depends of what kind of aspect are to be discussed.
Q - How much do you identify with other forum members now - how has that changed from when you first started using the forum?
A - I'm not sure if how I am known to them but being a member, I guess we all know each other.

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started using it?
A - It is all the same though the level of interest grew than before.

Q - Are you familiar with the term 'lurkers'?
A -

Q - When you post opinions or views on the Talsik forum, how aware are you of the numbers of lurkers that might be reading your messages?
A - I guess almost entire members.

Q - How important are lurkers to the forum? Do they have a role?
A - I dint exactly feel how much role or what feels to be a lurker but given the importance of sensitive issues, they must initiate solutions to any problems, one way or the other.

Q - How do you think that debate and discussion on the forum influences lurkers?
A - Lurkers have different views or agendas on why they never join any argument or discussions. They are readers and often times, readers just want to read and they never interact. Influencing them is hard for me to determine but if the issue labors on corruptions and good governance, silence meant three things, they dint know and would want to learn more on issue given, they dint want to be known or identified with allies or supporters of corrupt and inept government officials and or they are learning from us who usually interact with other members.

Q - Do you think that discussion and debate about important issues is as effective as direct action in advancing the Talsik cause? Why?
A - It depends on how the issues are being brought up and if it really needs discussion. By way of example, in discussing corruption, the problem is the government and their officials and most people who will oppose to any ideas are them or if not their friends or allies, and that is the time when discussion or debate will start. By defying their stand to defend the crooks serves as important and effective action. Its just like sending a message that here in this part of the world, someone is taking action and it counts on that kind of fight.
Q - How has being a forum member changed the other ways you support the overall cause of Talsik?
A - If you can just elaborate more?

Q - Do you think that the forum has changed over time so that it is now more about interaction rather than action - for example, do people use it more for debate and discussion than planning events and activities than they used to?
A - I guess the question is redundant but please correct if there is a need to answer.

[Interview terminated by participant before completion]
Participant 9 (chat interview)

Q - What made you form communiversity?
A - Do you mean the online group or the actual communiversity?

Q - The on-line group (but actually, thinking about it, when were both started?). Sorry - I'm mean 'why were they formed'
A - The communiversity was started in 1995, through an article my mother wrote for a community arts magazine called Mailout. The Communiversity online discussion came out our second international conference in 1999.

Q - Why?
A - That community development/grassroots community groups and universities find it hard to talk or work together.

Q - And was the on-line forum a way to make that easier to do?
A - For Universities to work in so called poor areas they need create dialogue and partnerships called Communiversity.

so the word communiversity is constructed out of two words community and university.

The online forum was created to keep people informed who had come to the first conference (we had 125) several from Australia and create an online discussion about communiversity and what it means.

Q - So a way to define your work and facilitate its progress?
A - Yes, and a way to make the communiversity concept contemporary. The word and concept date back to 1965.

Q - Is it fair for me to say that the aim of your forum is to achieve positive change related to the communiversity cause?
A - Yes, the aim is to move the agenda forward

Q - When you first started the forum, how did you think it would achieve its aims? (For example, did you think would people use it or organise meetings, exhibitions, or events, etc).
A - When it first started it was directly related to the conference, but because at the beginning it seemed like a good idea I kept it going.
Q - *And did you keep it going because you saw it as a way of organising and planning events, etc?*

A - I just had to go and have a look at the messages to remember what it was like.

Yes it was a great way of keeping thing going.

Q - *So back then it was working well and achieving its aims?*

A - Yes it started in June 1999

It started off with lots of people from the conference and through the years it has changed

Q - *How often do you have your conferences? When was the last one?*

A - We have just had our biggest event ever which was a big exhibition and a conference. It was called Art the catalyst.

Q - *So the organisation as whole is growing and getting stronger?*

A - Our online membership is at present 174. Again our biggest so far

Yes it is getting bigger and more influencial.

Q - *Thinking about the forum specifically, back in '99 did you think it would be used more for things like planing and taking part in events compared with discussing or debating issues and ideas?*

A - I thought it would be about discussing and debating, but that has not really happened. It is more as you say and information board.

What happens which annoys me a bit is people send me the info to put on the board. I would far rather they do it.

Q - *Why do you think they send it to you first?*

A - I dont know

I think it is a bit like the exhibition

A small group organised it.
Q - Do you think people have just gotten used to one or two people doing things?
A - Through the exhibition we attracted 6000 people to the city arts centre. In the exhibition we over 150 artefacts that contained 100s of people in photographs, etc.

in the conference we had over 100 people

but the organisation of the events was done by only a few

Q - Yes - and I guess that's fairly typical of these types of things?
A - yes it is partly people used to one or two people organising things, but it more about the nature of how to spin a web of people who have similar views

Q - Do you think the forum's goals have changed over time?
A - Yes I think it is more arts based at present because it is becoming more about celebration and positive thinking, rather than negative debate

also you move forward much more by being positive.

Q - But would you like to see more debate and discussion on the forum?
A - the web is fantastic at creating a web, connecting people who would not usually connect and i think that is what the discussion group is about

Q - Do you think that people feel that connection even though they may not post messages themselves, but only read other peoples' postings?
A - recently araine burgess in ny got a email from reg bolton in australia, both had worked in craigmillar.

only ariane posts email (via me) on the discussion group, so that is New York and Australia talking now.

Q - That's interesting about araine - so people develop connections not necessarily on the forum, but because of info they find on the forum?
A - I know the discussion group is influentially people, but they may not put a message on it
Q - So do you think that discussion about issues is as effective as direct action (meetings, events) in advancing your cause?
A - I also often see information I put on the discussion on other discussion groups the day after.

I also know that people take our ideas and use themselves, without consulting us

Q - Is the lack of consultation an issue for your community?
A - Lack of consultation is sad because we could help, but the nature of communiversity is to share.

the discussion group is very effective.

Q - Can I come back to something you said earlier about people being influenced even though they don't post. When people do post, do you think they explicitly realise that they can influence others who are just reading but never 'engaging' in dialogue?
A - Oh, yes Rosa from Mexico, regularly post messages about petitions, etc.

Q - So really, discussion/debate is actually a form of 'action' here on-line because it causes positive change?
A - There is little discussion really, but where the action comes in is where the information flows to and who then uses it.

Q - How important is the forum to you now compared with when you first started it?
A - In the beginning I thought it would do certain things, but in fact it has done other things. The discussion can be really proactive with all the uploads any member can do and I would like to try and take it that way. Yes it is important because without our voice would not have heard on a day to day basis.

Sorry I keep missing out words

Q - So if you could change the forum, or the way that people use it, how would you do so? How would your ideal forum operate, and what would the interaction on it be like?
A - Well, it would great if others became moderators and I could stand back a bit. More messages would be good, but not chit chat. People upload interesting links, files would be great. A discussion group is so much better that a website because Yahoo have made it so proactive.
Q - What does your role as moderator involve? For example, do you find yourself screening messages for content etc?
A - yes, screening all messages, screening uploads, keeping the files tidy. I notice a public art site I am a member of is just full of junk because the moderators don’t keep an eye on it.

inviting people to join I do all the time, but the vast majority of members I do not know about about a third I have invited

Q - Do you have any level of interaction with the members you don’t know? For example, have they ever exchanged a message with you, maybe introducing themselves?
A - sometimes, but a lot just sit there quite happy to take the messages

gosh I could spend all day on the discussion group, but I have a live to led

Q - How appropriate for describing actual issue-based on-line forums do you think that this distinction between Interaction and Action forums is?
A - well yes, as for communiversity we are really an action forums. It is a good way of describing it.

if you go down the issues based line, often all you get is somebody’s opinion, sort of blogging, which can be really boring.

Q - How old are you?
A - 45 years old

Q - How long have you lived in the UK?
A - 45 years

Q - How often do you use the internet (for example - once a day, once every 2 or 3 days, once a week, less than once a week)?
A - twice a day

Q - When you use the internet, do you mainly use email, or look at web sites, or both (or some other activity)?
A - mainly email, but internet also
Q - Do you mainly use the internet from home or another location?
A - more at home i am an artist and my studio is computer free.

Q - I have some ideas about how peoples intentions of action on-line change over time so that they debate and sicsuss more than plan and act.
A - well it is talking about the discussion group i now know we are action based

Q - But I also think that, as you said, discussion (or talk) can be a legitimate form of action. Talk gets thing done...
A - if it leads to action.
Appendix C

Chapter 6: A review and audit of theoretical concepts

List of forums and auditor instructions

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Table AC-1. Forums reviewed by independent auditors

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*Note. Original Categorisation shows how forums were initially categorised by the researcher; a = action orientation, i = interaction orientation.*
Introduction

One of the ways people interact on the internet is through on-line forums. On-line forums form for many different reasons. For example, some forums are for people with the same hobby or interest. Other forums form because people want to share technical knowledge about a subject, and some develop just because people want to get to know each other. This study looks at on-line forums that have formed around an issue or cause.

There are many different on-line forums devoted to a wide range of issues or causes. People can take part in on-line forums because they are concerned about international issues or causes (e.g. globalisation, the environment), national issues or causes (e.g. immigration, gun control), or local issues or causes (e.g. town planning, school funding). Forums also develop because people are concerned about the same issue at one or more of these levels - international, national and local.

There are also at least two purposes for which participants use issue-based on-line forums. On-line forums can be used mainly to exchange information about and/or debate or discuss an important issue, or they can be used mainly to make decisions and/or plan and take part in on-line or off-line action relevant to an important issue (e.g., street marches, email campaigns, fund raising, product boycotts, organising meetings etc.).

A range of on-line forums formed around a number of different issues has been selected for this study. Today, you will be looking at eleven different on-line forums. Taking one forum at a time, your task is to read some of the interaction on that forum, and then complete a series of questions about the forum.
Instructions

- Write the forum name in the space provided on each questionnaire
- Complete the full set of questions (1 – 8) for each forum
- Questions are generally comprised of two parts. In part ‘A’ you will be given a choice of statements and required to pick the one that best fits the forum. In part ‘B’ you will be asked to indicate how well you think the statement you picked fits
- Please ensure that you have answered all questions related to the current forum before moving on to the next forum
- Please wait for further instructions before proceeding to the final forum – Forum 11
- If you have any questions while completing the task please raise your hand
- Please do not discuss the questionnaires or the forums you are reviewing with any of the other study participants while the study is in progress

You have 140 minutes to review all eleven forums.

You should spend approximately 10-15 minutes per forum reading posts and answering the questions.
Question 1

A. Read the forum description. Please indicate which statement fits best:

☐ Based on the description, the main purpose of the forum is to facilitate decision making and/or on-line or off-line action related to an issue or issues

☐ Based on the description, the main purpose of the forum is to facilitate information exchange and/or discussion related to an issue or issues

B. Please indicate how well you think that the statement you have selected fits the forum description:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well

Question 2

A. Read a sample of messages from the start of the forum. Read at least 20 messages, and enough messages so that you get an idea of the types of interactions taking place. Which statement fits best:

☐ The content of the messages is mainly related to decision making and/or on-line or off-line action

☐ The content of the messages is mainly related to providing general information and/or discussions about issues

B. Please indicate how well you think that the statement you have selected fits the message content:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well
Question 3
A. Now read a sample of messages from the middle and end of the forum.
Read at least 20 messages from the middle of the forum and 20 messages
from the end of the forum, and enough messages so that you get an idea of
the types of interactions taking place at both periods. Based on a comparison
of the messages at the beginning, middle, and end of the forum, which
statement fits best:

☐ Over time the types of messages in the forum have changed
☐ Over time the types of messages in the forum have remained consistent

B. Please indicate how well you think that the statement you have selected
fits the way messages have changed:

☐ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well

Question 4
A. Comparing the messages at the beginning, middle, and end of the forum,
which statement most accurately describes the forum over time:

☐ There has been no change in the forum
☐ Over time, the forum has changed from mainly facilitating decision making
and/or action to mainly providing information and/or facilitating discussion
☐ Over time, the forum has changed from mainly providing information and/or
facilitating discussion to mainly facilitating decision making and/or action

B. Please indicate how well you think that the statement you have selected
fits the way the forum has changed:

☐ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well
Question 5

A. Scan the list of message headings on the forum. Thinking about the message headings, and the content of messages that you have read, which statement is most accurate (you can read more message content before you answer this question if you need to):

- The messages on the forum display strong evidence of a community dialogue made up of themed conversations or message threads
- The messages on the forum display very little evidence of a community dialogue made up of themed conversations or message threads

B. Please indicate how well you think that the statement you have selected fits the messages on the forum:

\[ \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well

Fits extremely well

Question 6

A. Thinking about the list of message headings, and the content of the messages you have read, which statement is most accurate (you can read more message content before you answer this question if you need to):

- The messages on the forum display strong evidence of the forum community making attempts to resolve arguments and/or make decisions
- The messages on the forum display very little evidence of the forum community making attempts to resolve arguments and/or make decisions

B. Please indicate how well you think that statement you have selected fits the messages on the forum:

\[ \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well

Fits extremely well
Question 7

A. Thinking about the list of message headings, and the content of the messages you have read, which statement is most accurate (you can read more message content before you answer this question if you need to):

☐ The metaphor that best describes the forum is that it acts like a town-hall meeting where people can address an issue or issues

☐ The metaphor that best describes the forum is that it acts like the opinion page in a metropolitan newspaper where people can post their own opinions about an issue or issues

B. Please indicate how well you think that the statement you have selected fits the forum:

☐ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not fit very well

Fits extremely well

Question 8

If there is anything else that you think is crucial to describing the forum that was not included in the descriptive statements you were given in the questions above, please add it in your own words now:

(continue on back of page if necessary)
Demographic Information

1. Age: ________ years

2. Current enrolment (e.g. PhD, M.Phil): ____________________

3. Area of specialisation (e.g. Perception, Social, Clinical): ____________________

4. How regularly do you use email for work related communication?

☐ Once a week or less  ☐ Every 4 - 6 days  ☐ Every 2 - 3 days  ☐ Once a day or more

5. How regularly do you use email for non-work related communication?

☐ Once a week or less  ☐ Every 4 - 6 days  ☐ Every 2 - 3 days  ☐ Once a day or more

6. How regularly do you use the web to look at work related information?

☐ Once a week or less  ☐ Every 4 - 6 days  ☐ Every 2 - 3 days  ☐ Once a day or more

7. How regularly do you use the web to look at non-work related information?

☐ Once a week or less  ☐ Every 4 - 6 days  ☐ Every 2 - 3 days  ☐ Once a day or more

8. Do you currently have home access to the internet (e.g. via modem, broadband)?

☐ Yes  ☐ No
9. Are you currently a regular participant in an on-line forum related to a social or political issue or cause?
   □ Yes  □ No

10. Have you ever been a regular participant in an on-line forum related to a social or political issue or cause?
    □ Yes  □ No

11. Have you ever contributed to an on-line forum related to a social or political issue or cause?
    □ Yes  □ No

12. Have you ever taken part in an on-line action related to a social or political issue or cause?
    □ Yes  □ No

13. Are you currently a regular participant in any type of on-line forum?
    □ Yes  □ No

14. Have you ever been a regular participant in any type of on-line forum?
    □ Yes  □ No

15. Are you currently a regular participant in a face-to-face group related to a social or political issue or cause?
    □ Yes  □ No

16. Have you ever been a regular participant in a face-to-face group related to a social or political issue or cause?
    □ Yes  □ No

17. Have you ever taken part in a face-to-face action related to a social or political issue or cause?
    □ Yes  □ No
Appendix D

Chapter 5: Moving on – interaction in action.

**MoveOn ActionForum FAQ and category descriptions and examples from phase 1 & 2**

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How does ActionForum Work? The forum serves as a public meeting place where people can share their thoughts and ideas with MoveOn and others. The forum consists of two lists: a top comments list ordered by how important people feel the comment is, and a recent comments list ordered by time with the most recent at the beginning. The front page shows the top five top comments with links to view more top comments. After this is the five most recent comments followed with links to more recent comments. If you register, you can indicate if you agree—or not—with the comments and how important you feel the comments are. You can also submit your own comment. The forum is open to all, so the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of MoveOn or its members.

What are the rules? Everyone is welcome to comment, and rate the comments of others. While you can change your ratings at anytime, you can only rate a comment once. You must abide by the terms of use.

To participate you must give your real name, occupation, and place of residence. This information will be shown after your comment as your “signature.” You must have a valid email address to register and participate. Your email address will be kept confidential.

How does MoveOn use ActionForum? MoveOn monitors the forum for input several times a day and uses the information to help set their agenda. Comments that are of immediate relevance are forwarded to the appropriate team member usually within hours. Comments of a more long term nature are compiled weekly in two summaries and passed to the team. Occasionally topic specific summaries are compiled covering a period of a month or more.

- How can I make sure someone at MoveOn reads my post?
- Do you really expect me to read all these comments?
- Why can't I view the forum by topics?
- My post is buried in a few hours, what can I do?
- Why are replies to comments sometimes not allowed?
- How does the Importance Rating work?
- Why is there a separate area for Recent Comments?
- Does agreement influence a comment's position?
- Just what does your moderator do?
- How can I view the older comments in the forum?
- How can I view more than 5 comments per page?
- How do I search the forum?
- How can I find my comment?
- Can/should I rate my own comment? Should I tell others about it?
- How do I withdraw my comment?
- How do I change my occupation in my signature line?
- What does the invalid email address error message mean?
- What does the invalid user name/password error message mean?
- What does the server error message mean?

How can I make sure someone at MoveOn reads my post? All comments are read at least twice. While there is no single criteria, comments that suggest a possible MoveOn action and are not duplicative are likely to be immediately passed on, or included in a summary to the whole MoveOn team. Ratings, while important, are not definitive and some comments with few or low ratings are included in the summaries. Important issues are sometimes followed up with a survey to a sampling of the membership.

Do you really expect me to read all these comments? No. One of the reasons for the rating system is so you do not have to read all the comments. It is enough to read and rate 30 or 40 recent comments—more if you have time—and a similar number of top comments. Then, if you have something you would like to share you should submit a comment.

Why can't I view the forum by topics? When forums are divided into topics, people tend to only go to those topics they are interested in. MoveOn is interested in what a broad range of people think on the different subjects and not just those interested in a particular topic. MoveOn does occasionally set up single topic forums of limited duration when a specific need lends itself to tapping the creativity of the participants.
My post is buried in a few hours, what can I do?

How fast a comment moves down the recent comments list is a function of how many people are visiting the forum and not a function of time. When a comment is "buried" rest assured that a significant number of people have seen the comment. When a comment receives 10 importance ratings it will automatically appear in the top comments list positioned with comments of a similar average importance rating. Its position there depends on how important people feel the comment is. Repeated posting of the same comment is not encouraged and usually results in lower ratings by people who notice the repetitive posting.

Why are replies to comments sometimes not allowed?

The reply function for forums with a significant number of people commenting is usually turned off. This is because only a few people read and rate replies when commenting is heavy. Yet often the replies contain important information. By having people incorporate their reply into a new comment more people are reached. You may wish to paraphrase, quote, or copy the score link of the comment you are referring to into your comment. Regardless, your comment should be able to stand alone.

How does the Importance Rating work?

For each comment you read, you should rate the quality and appropriateness of the comment on a scale of one to five stars, with five stars being the highest rating. The Importance Rating is used to determine the order the comments are viewed in the forum. Comments with the highest average number of stars are put at the top of the top comments list and hence are seen by the most people. Those rated poorly are put at the bottom and are seen by the fewest people. The comment ratings are submitted when you click on the Submit My Ratings button at the bottom of the page. A reply to a comment (when replies are turned on) is rated the same way, only they are ordered under each comment.

Why is there a separate area for Recent Comments?

New comments are not inserted into the "Top" Comments list until a number of participants have rated them. This number is currently set at ten. This insures that when a comment is inserted it is relatively close to where most people think it should be. Recent comments also serves as a chronological listing of all comments.

Does agreement influence a comment's position?

When you rate a comment you can indicate whether you agree or disagree with the comment. Under each comment, you will see the percentage of participants who agree. This percentage does not influence the comment's position. This reflects the fact that an unpopular comment can still be important and a key part of the discussion. In this way every comment, even about a comment, you can simply log in and change your ratings. Be sure to click on the Submit My Ratings button at the end of the page so your new ratings are recorded, the old ratings deleted, and the score page updated.

Just what does your moderator do?

Our moderators are better described as monitors. They spend the vast majority of their time looking for comments to pass on to the MoveOn team and doing weekly forum summaries. With regard to moderating, their goal is to help create a space to facilitate input. It is not their goal to remove every comment that might be inappropriate. The first line of moderators are our members, who rate inappropriate comments low.

How can I see the older comments in the forum?

First move down into the list to comment 6 or more. Then, modify the url in your browser by changing the number immediately after "offset=", to one less than the number you want to skip down to. Then click return and the desired comment should come up on top of the list.

How can I see more than 5 comments per page?

First go down the list to comment 6 or more, then modify the url in your browser by changing the number immediately after "count=", to one less than the number your want to skip down to. You will then be able to view comments by the number you chose. It is best not to view more than 100 comments at a time.

How do I search the forum?

ActionForum does not have a search function. You may want to use your browser's find function to search each page you download.

How can I find my comment?

After you submit your comment it will automatically appear at the top of the recent comments list. If you go to the front page, scroll past the five top comments you will see the beginning of the recent comments list. Your comment should be among the first few comments on this list. You may have to refresh your screen in order to see your comment. If you bookmark the score link of your comment you will be able to find it in the future.

Can I rate my own comment? Should I tell others about it?

There is nothing wrong with rating your own comment—once—or with sending an email to your friends telling them you just wrote a comment and asking them to rate it.

How do I withdraw my comment?

If you sign in and go to your comment you will see a withdraw comment link directly under your comment. Click on this link and then confirm that you want to remove your comment. Your comment will automatically be removed. The withdraw comment link does not mean we want you to withdraw your comment. It is our belief that people who post comments are able to withdraw their comments for any reason if they wish.

How do I change my occupation in my signature line?

To change your occupation, just click on the following link:
http://www.actionforum.org/forum/change_info.html

and sign in with your user name and password. This page will look like the ordinary sign in page, but after you sign in you will be sent to a page where you can modify your profile. Just follow the directions.

What does the invalid email address error message mean?

This means that your email address is not registered with ActionForum. You should click on the sign in link on the ActionForum toolbar and follow the instructions for first time users.

What does the invalid user name/password error message mean?

It usually means that the password is not correct. Try again and if the same error message comes up you might try the link to change your pass word. If you get a new password, you will be given a chance to change it to something you can easily remember the first time you sign in.

What does the server error message mean?

There are many reasons for the server error message. The system might be down for maintenance, it might be overloaded, or the comment requested may no longer exist. Try hitting the reload button. If the problem persists wait a while and try again.

If you get a server error message while trying to sign in it may mean that your email address is not in the database. If you have not registered in the past to use ActionForum with the email address you should try registering as a first time user. To do this click on the sign in link and scroll down to where it says, "If this is your first time . . ." and follow the directions.
Category Descriptions and Examples: Phase 1

Moveon.org General Coding Categories

(NA) Not Applicable

Blank messages, jokes, messages with no original content

(AC) Action Calls

Messages along the lines of “Moveon should do...” or “Why doesn’t Moveon do...” or “The government should do...” or “This is how to do...”

(CB) Community Behaviour

Messages along the lines of “The Moveon forum should have a poll facility to see what people think” or “This forum should have moderators”

(OP) Opinion

Messages along the lines of “I believe...” or “We shouldn’t believe...” or “The system works like this...”

Moveon.org General Coding Procedure

1. Decide if message should be coded Not Applicable (NA) or not (note – messages classed NA should be excluded from further coding)
2. Decide if message should be coded Action Call (AC) or not
3. Decide if message should be coded Community Behaviour (CB) or not (note – the same message can be coded both AC and CB)
4. If message remains un-coded, decide if it should be coded Opinion (OP) or not (note – a message cannot be coded OP if it is in any other category)
5. If message remains un-coded, return to step 1 (note – messages can be set aside for later coding, but all messages must be coded before you finish)
General Coding Guidelines

When classifying messages, coding should be based on original content, not included portions of third-party information to which messages may refer.

For example, a message may quote sections of a web site then contain original comments about those quotes. In such instances, although the quoted sections may determine the nature of the original content, the message should be coded based on the original content. Note, however, that the quoted section will need to be read to provide the context for the original content.

- Original content in message will be highlighted
- Messages that contain no original content should be coded NA
- Messages that are not coded NA must be placed in at least one other category

The AC and CB categories are not mutually exclusive – i.e. the same message can be coded as both AC and CB

- Messages should be coded AC and/or CB if any part of the message meets the requirements for that category

If a message is coded OP it cannot be placed in any other category – i.e. the same message cannot be coded as both OP and CB, or OP and AC

All messages must be placed into at least one category. You may return to messages you have already coded and change their category.

Please ensure that all messages have been coded before you finish.
Detailed Category Definitions

N/A (NA)

Message should be classed N/A if they are:

- Blank
- Comprised solely of advertising or jokes
- About topics unrelated to Moveon.org’s purpose (eg. a message that only debates the merits of Freudian psychology would be classed N/A)
- Direct forwards or copies of secondary information with no original content, or repeats of earlier messages with no original content
- Clearly and exclusively ironic (eg. a message whose only content was “Let’s take all the CEOs out back and beat them with wet towels” would be classed N/A)

Note - messages that pose questions in support of specific actions (eg. “Does Moveon still need help with the email campaign against deforestation?”) should be classed Action Calls

Opinion (OP)

These are messages that only contain general arguments for and/or against issues or philosophies, and statements that are intended to establish positions for Moveon.org in terms of its goals and principles, and that do not contain any Action Calls or Community Behaviour directives. If a message contains the following it should be classed Opinion:

- Advocacy of, or engagement in debate on, general principles or positions for Moveon.org

The following should also be classed Opinion -

- Messages that only present arguments for or against specific organisations (eg. the World Bank, private businesses or corporations, political parties/organisations, etc.), without specifying action
- Messages that only present arguments for or against legislation or government initiatives, without specifying action
- Messages that only present arguments about the effects that government or business policies have on people, without specifying action
- Messages that only present information about an issue
Action Calls (AC)
These are messages that plan or call for Moveon.org or its members, or third parties/organizations, to engage in actions or events. If *any part* of a message contains the following it should be classed Action Calls:

- Advocacy or support of a specific action (eg. a message calling for a boycott of a specific product or corporation); **or**
- Advocacy or support of a series of defined actions at a specific instance or over time (eg. a message calling for a two week letter writing campaign)
- Advocacy or support of a general course of action that Moveon.org should undertake (e.g. a message calling for people to try to change the electoral system)
- Advocacy or support of action that should be carried out by third parties (e.g. a message calling for the Supreme Court to repeal the Death Penalty)

The following should also be classed Action Calls:
- Messages that contain requests for information about specific Moveon.org events or activities (eg. “How do I take part in the email campaign against drift-net fishing?” should be classed as Action Calls).

Community Behaviour (CB)
These are messages that advocate what structure moveon.org should take, and/or what constitutes appropriate behaviour *within the forum* (note that messages about events or activities outside the forum, e.g. discussions of public information campaigns, *should not* be classed Community Behaviour).

If a message contains the following it should be classed Community Behaviour:

- Advocacy or support of appropriate and/or non-appropriate community structure and/or behaviour

The following should also be classed Community Behaviour -

- Messages that advocate who should be accepted under the Moveon.org banner
Examples of Categorised Messages

Examples of Messages Classed N/A (NA)

- **Message has no opinion or action content**
  
  “Is this going to turn into Cheney-gate? [link] Rove-gate: Who Leaked to the Leakers? This isn’t about Karl Rove by Justin Raimondo”

- **Message has no original content**
  
  “UN makes billion dollar appeal for Palestinian refugees - GENEVA (AFP) - The United Nations (news - web sites) will need 1.1 billion dollars (830 million euros) over five years to support Palestinian refugees as part of the Middle East peace process, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees revealed”

- **Message has no opinion, action, or community behaviour content**
  
  “Carolyn, speaking of Galloway - Galloway’s pdf has gone AWOL from the Senate’s website: “the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs has removed testimony from UK MP George Galloway from its website.” [link]”
Examples of Messages Classed Opinion (OP)

- **Message contains no action content, only states a general opinion about what should be done**
  "Election Reform - Currently, many states have turned their elections over to private companies. They have, in effect, said: You guys count the votes. And after you tell us the results, please burn the ballots. Merely requiring voter-verified paper trails, while necessary, is far from sufficient. Another major security hole, and one not limited to touchscreen voting machines, is the central-tabulating system employed by most jurisdictions that use any form of electronic vote-counting. What is required is a comprehensive set of national specifications for a uniform federal elections system, including registration systems and, perhaps above all, a reliable method for certifying that the systems are in compliance with federal standards AND that they are not hacked subsequent to certification. (Currently, certification is by private companies selected by the manufacturers and subject to no oversight by public agencies.) In short, there's no simple quick fix. As always, eternal vigilance is, again, the price of liberty."

- **Message is a reply to another post but contains no action content**
  "reply to Minky - It is not a contradiction to say that you support the troops but are against the war. It is an oxymoron to say that you are supporting the troops by asking them to stay in harms way."

- **Message contains no action content only states a general opinion about what should be done**
  "control of the Democratic Party - There was a brief report on NPR yesterday that the Kerry team is trying to control the Democratic Party and especially to head off Howard Dean's efforts to become head of the Party. Since I hold Kerry and his team with giving us a weak candidacy and campaign, I want them out of the way. If they have control of the agenda and direction of the Party, I will have trouble getting enthusiastic and energized to participate in the next round. I was part of the problem last spring. I thought Kerry's war record and opposition to the Vietnam War meant that he was a compelling leader. Unfortunately that was not the case. His thinking was muddled and his delivery was uninspiring. Please, no more of him or his team. Let new people take over."
Examples of Messages Classed Action Calls (AC)

- **Message contains an explicit call to action**
  
  "Supreme Court - Bush has been re-elected, and probably feels like he has a free hand to do whatever he likes. We must work to block his dangerous appointments to the Supreme Court. Those appointments will continue long after Bush has gone."

- **Message contains goals and directives about how to achieve those goals**
  
  "Look Forward - The past cannot be changed. (Darn!) But we can alter the direction in our future. There are several essential issues; without resolution in those areas, the United States may disintegrate. I propose that the five most important issues today are (very briefly): 1. Election Reform. Validate voters, count all votes, correctly report the outcome. National standards. I read here one suggestion for a machine vote with a paper "receipt" to use for a recount where needed. 2. Respect the Constitution. This is NOT a nation where "might makes right" - it is a country that is established to defend and respect the rights of the minority, protecting citizens against a bully majority. 3. TRULY separate Church and State. Domestic Partnerships, for example, will apply to any two people. Their rights will be established and protected by the laws. Insurance. Child custody. Property rights. If a church then wants to limit "marriage" to man/woman, or to allow polygamy, that is their choice. But the public laws will apply to everyone, regardless of age, race, sex, nationality, etc. 4. Support/finance/encourage development of alternate energy sources. We cannot continue to plunder the planet. 5. Provide for the National Health and Welfare. Every citizen must be assured basic housing, food, water, education, health care. Doesn't that define a society? People who have bound together to help each other survive?"

- **Message contains directives about what moveon should do**
  
  "Stop the Circular Firing Squads!!!!!!!!!! - Stop attacking the Dems who vote against us! Save the money and effort to get Delay and Santorum! Why don't you attack the Republicans who voted against Patty Murrays amendment to the Emergency War appropriations bill that would have given $2 BILLION to the VA! Please, the right will use your anti Dem ads against us! We need to WIN! Fight like they fight! Use the ammo they give US! Don't give them any ammo to use against us!"
Examples of Messages Community Behaviour (CB)

- **Message contains a suggestion about what moveon should do on the forum to maintain a sense of community**
  
  "Wake up and smell the Fascism - I feel we should periodically post the 14 Points of Fascism to keep reminded of what we are fighting against."

- **Message contains directive about appropriate internal forum interaction**

  "Don’t feed trolls - At any given time there are 3 to 4 trolls. I agreed with your post yesterday, SOFIA Today there are very good comments already with 3 votes in disagreement, Guess Who? This is not right!"

- **Message contains discussion about appropriate use of the forum. Note that this message should also be code Action Calls as it contains calls to act on an issue**

  "Stop Putting Out Fires, Start Building a Progressive Agenda - There are many issues MOVE-ON could put forth a pro-active position on. I think the issue is less important than re-orienting away from the disaster of the week and toward a new paradigm. I’m not even against your action alerts. It’s just all you are doing. So let’s go for broke. I for one am not going to vote for any of the surmised candidates on the Democratic Party guess list for president. I’m ready for a real third party. The main argument has been we can’t afford to let the Republicans take control. They have. We can’t afford to let the Democrats take control either. Am just wondering how many of us who are with MOVE-ON are ready for a real change."
Moveon.org Action Coding Categories

(MM) Moveon Members
Messages along the lines of “Moveon members should write their local representatives” or “We should all go to this web site to register our protest vote”

(MO) Moveon Organisers
Messages along the lines of “Moveon should start a campaign against driftnet fishing” or “Why doesn’t Moveon oppose nuclear testing”

(MC) Moveon Community
Messages along the lines of “We must put pressure on state governments to change the voting laws”

(TEI) Third-party Explicit Instructions
Messages along the lines of “Democratic politicians should all vote against the next unemployment bill” or “The government should ban advertising by the Arms industry”

(TNI) Third-party No Instructions
Messages along the lines of “The Demoractic party should change the electoral system” or “The way that guns are bought and sold in this country needs to be changed”

Suggested Moveon.org Coding Procedure - Action

1. Decide if message should be coded Moveon Members (MM) or not
2. Decide if message should be coded Moveon Organisers (MO) or not
3. Decide if a message should be coded Moveon Community (MC) or not
4. Decide if message should be coded Third-party Explicit Instructions (TEI) or not
5. Decide if message should be coded Third-party No Instructions (TNI) or not (note – the same message can be coded MM, MO, MC, TEI, and TNI)
6. If message remains un-coded, return to step 1 (note – messages can be set aside for later coding, but all messages must be coded before you finish)
General Coding Guidelines

When classifying messages, coding should be based on original content, not included portions of third-party information to which messages may refer.

For example, a message may quote sections of a web site then contain original comments about those quotes. In such instances, although the quoted sections may determine the nature of the original content, the message should be coded based on the original content. Note, however, that the quoted section will need to be read to provide the context for the original content.

• Original content in message will be highlighted

Categories are not mutually exclusive – i.e. the same message can be coded as MM, MO, MC, TEI, and TNI or any combination of these categories

• Messages should be placed in a category if any part of the message meets the requirements for that category

All messages must be placed into at least one category. You may return to messages you have already coded and change their category.

Please ensure that all messages have been coded before you finish.
Category Definitions and Examples - Action

Moveon Members (MM)
These are messages that call for members of Moveon and/or participants in the Moveon forum to take action.

If any part of a message contains the following it should be classed Moveon Members:

• Advocacy or support of a specific action by Moveon participants (e.g. message calling for a boycott of a product by members of Moveon)
• Advocacy or support of a series of defined actions by Moveon participants at a specific instance or over time (e.g. a message calling for an ongoing email campaign by forum members)

The following should also be classed Moveon Members -

• Messages that contain requests for information about specific events or activities (e.g. “How do I take part in the email campaign against drift-net fishing?” should be classed Moveon Members).

Moveon Organisers (MO)
These are messages that call for forum and/or movement organisers to take action.

If any part of a message contains the following it should be classed Moveon Organisers:

• Advocacy or support of a specific action by Moveon organisers (e.g. a message calling for the Moveon hierarchy to organise a boycott of a product)
• Advocacy or support of a series of defined actions by Moveon organisers at a specific instance or over time (e.g. a message calling for the forum organisers to start an ongoing email campaign)
Moveon Community (MC)
These are messages that could plausibly be interpreted as being directed at either individual members or community organisers to take action

If any part of a message contains the following it should be classed Moveon Community:
• Advocacy or support of a specific action by the Moveon community (eg. a message calling for Moveon to organise a boycott of a product, where no clear distinction between community members and organisers is made)
• Advocacy or support of a series of defined actions by the Moveon community at a specific instance or over time (eg. a message calling for Moveon to start an ongoing email campaign, where no clear distinction between community members and organisers is made)

Third-party Explicit Instructions (TEI)
These are messages that call for third party organizations or individuals (i.e. parties that do not officially belong to Moveon) to engage in actions or events and that are explicit about what those events should be. If any part of a message contains the following it should be classed Third-party Explicit Instructions:
• Advocacy or support of a specific action that should be carried out by a third party (eg. a message calling for the 7-Eleven chain to boycott a specific product)
• Advocacy or support of a series of defined actions by a third party at a specific instance or over time (eg. a message calling for Democratic senators to engage in a two week filibuster campaign)

Third-party No Instructions (TNI)
These are messages that call for third party organizations or individuals (i.e. parties that do not officially belong to Moveon) to work for change but do not specify how that change should be achieved

If any part of a message contains the following it should be classed Third-party No Instructions:
• Advocacy or support of a general goal that a third party should aim for with no details about how that goal should be achieved (eg. a message calling the democratic party to change the electoral system)
Examples of Messages Classed Moveon Members (MM)

- “6 Hour Work Day - http://www.6hourday.org/ Sign the Petition!!!!”
- “downing street memo - There is currently a petition being circulated by the office of John Conyers (D-Georgia) demanding that President Bush address the Downing Street Memo. The document asks that the administration offer an explanation to the American people in regards to this memo. John Conyer’s is trying to get 100,000 signatures before sending the letter to the president. Please visit the Randi Rhodes website and follow the links to sign the letter. Maybe MoveOn can research this and help get more attention on the unbelievable lies that Mr. Bush is continuing to spread regarding Iraq.”
- “Cindy Sheehan - We respect her bravery, courage and stand she is taking. There will be a time when Bush must face her and have a one on one. My hats off to her and her many thousands of supporters. In honor of her bravery, we have some T-Shirts we would like to offer everone. Please show your support not only in spoken word, but written. Thanks to everyone who reads this and God Bless.”

Examples of Messages Classed Moveon Organisers (MO)

- “Stick with the TRUTH - According to Fact Check .com, the new ad about Social Security is full of exaggerations and untruths. If you continue in this vein, then your organization will be no different than those whom you oppose and your credentials will be tarnished. The way to change is for the American people to KNOW that you speak the truth. They should never be able to prove that the facts that you produce are untrue or exaggerated. MY ADVICE: stick to the facts even if they are not glorious and exciting!”
- “Steny Hoyer - I would strongly urge MoveOn.org to pull the Steny Hoyer ad. While most of us may disagree with his vote on the Bankruptcy Bill it still constitutes just one vote and instead of focusing on the “Big Picture”, working toward common goals and winning elections we are creating divisions in our own party needlessly instead of spending money toward defeating Republicans.”
- “Media Coverage, Downing St. Mem - Activist groups like MoveOn sponsor petition/e-mail/fax campaigns which is great. I participate in every one. But, why not direct such a campaign toward the media rather that government officials to demand coverage of the Downing Street Memo. This could be a
blockbuster embarrassment to the administration if we could shame the media into doing their job and report on it.”

Examples of Messages Classed Moveon Community (MC)

- “Social Security television ad - The proposed ad about “working retirement” unfortunately does not appeal to the target audience necessary to prevent Bush from succeeding with this latest and biggest swindle of the American People. Let’s show then what it means. Where are the protests in the street? Where is the organized civil disobedience? Or are we going to just stand here and let them dick us again?”
- “Time to Take Action - Yes, thousands support Cindy, but no-one sees it. The protest movements against the war are being conducted in each city on a small scale. Why can’t we do a Million Person March like the black people did on DC to get national attention?”
- “Uniform federal voting standards - It is ridiculous that partisan officials (eg. Kenneth Blackwell) make the important decisions about how votes are counted and who gets what machines and how many. Universal guidelines should be in place so that elections can’t be won by having ‘your guys’ make the rules about how elections are administered. As a single issue for Moveon to champion - calling for uniform federal voting standards enforced across America would have a huge impact on the next election.”

Examples of Messages Classed Third-party Explicit Instructions (TEI)

- “Two quick points on the judiciary debate - 1. When adding up appointments from Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and the Bushes, compared to Carter and Clinton, isn’t the judiciary Republican? If that is indeed the case, couldn’t/shouldn’t the Democrats start calling it “the Republican judiciary” in order to make that point? 2. I know that the talk about “majority rule” is pretend logic, but I fear that even if the nuclear option is avoided, Democrats will be on the defensive and the Republicans will yet again get more of what they want. Couldn’t/shouldn’t Democrats counter by saying that if the Republicans really want to represent the country, the judicial appointments should be something like 55% Republican, 45% Democrat (going on Senate lines, which I don’t know exactly).”
- “Impeach Bush - Impeach Bush for treason.”
• “Medicaid and Medicare - The government must stop cutting funding for Medicaid and Medicare. When the dollars to those programs are cut everyone suffers. Those programs have subsidized the private insurance companies which want, of course, to spend as little money as they can because they are private, for profit institutions, whose only mission is to make more money. They have simply chosen health care as a good way to do that: a good investment... everybody uses health care.”

Examples of Messages Third-party No Instructions (TNI)

• “Election Reform! - How quickly we have forgotten - but WE MUST NOT! There was serious reason to doubt the validity of the 2004 elections in many parts of the country. Questionable Diebold machines (and others), serious issues around ballot counting, improper election procedures, racially slanted citizen disenfranchisement - all have resulted in politicians who feel no obligation or accountability to the electorate. Substantive election reform should be the number one priority, or NOTHING else will make any difference. If we don’t have democratically elected leaders, they can and already do get away with murder.”

• “Karl Rove is keeping copious notes on each and every Democrat - and when any one of them trades their Democratic Party ideals for some little political favor... they are branded a weak, flip flopping opportunist when they seek re-election. The Dems need to circle the wagons, stay the course and keep the faith of their convictions.”

• “The sheeple and the Iraqi war - Sigh. The beleaguered war in Iraq continues and I am losing patience with the American people. I think in the final analysis we are the ones who are responsible for the fact that this war is PERMITTED to go on. To end the war, Americans of all ages have to make it our life’s mission. We have to think of every possible way to put a halt to the Pentagon’s folly: Town meetings, protests, mass hunger fasts, boycotts. I know there are activists that are frantically working to end the war but they are in the minority. All the rest of the Americans who are too pre-occupied with their own lives to make a dramatic stand against the war are starting to look glaringly devoid of soul, compassion, courage or morals, motivation even. We are allowing the government to use our taxes to murder a nation of people that is 50% children, rather than to invest in our education, our economy... We rallied to help the victims of the Tsunami, are the Iraqis not worthy of our compassion?”
Appendix E

Chapter 8: A war of words - arguing for action: consensualisation through conversation?

Examples of excluded messages and inter-rater coding descriptions and examples

Message categories excluded from Sheehan analysis 315
   Incidental 315
   Out-group 315
   No Sheehan Action 316
   No Reason for Action 317
Inter-rater coding descriptions and examples 319
Message categories excluded from Sheehan analysis

Incidental

Messages excluded on the basis that the Sheehan issue appeared in only a minor role. For example, the following excerpt is from a message that fell into the incidental category:

Title: Enforcing the Constitution we have, not the fictional one BushCo wants

Content: With the appointment of new bosses, a continuation of the investigation is not going to happen. During the weeks preceding Katrina, Cindy Sheehan and the Chicago investigation into the outing of Valerie Plame was considered “big news”. (Message Number 622)

Message 622 contained 534 words in total and presented a number of issues that the poster argued demonstrated that President Bush had violated the U.S. constitution. The central theme of this message was that the President should be held accountable for those proposed violations. The Sheehan issue only appeared in passing and was clearly non-central to the overall message content, thus we judged that it played no part of any potential on-going Sheehan themed discussion.

Out-group

These two examples below illustrate the typical characteristics of out-group messages. Both the excerpted text from Message 8595 and the complete text of Message 12197 explicitly establish the posters in an oppositional relationship with MoveOn and its supporters:

Title: Get a Grip!

Content: I think that all of you people that think Cindy Sheehan is an icon, hero, or civil rights activist are simply giving her EXACTLY what she wants!! Attention! She is a disgrace, she is unAmerican, and she should be ashamed of the fact that she is exploiting her son’s death in Iraq for her own personal NUTJOB agenda! … More of you people need to listen to Rush Limbaugh and less to the DRIVEL that
you hear on the news and read in the rags they still call newspapers.
(Message Number 8595)

Title: Cindy Sheehan
Content: Americans by and large do not support Cindy Sheehan. Of course we mourn with her the loss of her son. That being said, she is a product of left wing lunatics like Michael Moore as well as this comical organization. Moveon.org is no better than right wing lunatics, and fanatical ideology whether from the left or the right is not good for the country. (Message Number 12197)

Both are also clearly against Cindy Sheehan and her actions. Interestingly, however, Message 12197 does express some sympathy for her loss, as did some other out-group messages. However, no out-group message supported Sheehan's protests, or actions in support of her protests. On the other hand, not all in-group members supported Sheehan. Thus, the criteria for characterisation as an out-group message did not solely rest on content disagreeing with Sheehan, or MoveOn's stance on her protest. Finally, only twelve messages were excluded based on unambiguous out-group origin. This relatively low number of out-group messages in the Top section was not surprising as the overall context and structure of the forum was so heavily weighted towards displaying and facilitating in-group participation and communication.

No Sheehan Action

Message that did not contain arguments for or against action in support of Cindy Sheehan were also excluded:

Title: Oh Ye Hypocrites!
Content: Cindy tells the truth from her heart, in a simple way, like Christ. Truth is powerful. And with her simple homespun truth, born of sorrow for loss of child in an unnecessary war, she terrorizes the Hypocrites in High Office ... Bush is inauthentically in the White House, having stolen our presidency with the help of Rove and his
Diebold Henchmen, and Katherine JebBush Harris and Florida vote fraud and the Supreme Court, etc., and Ohio vote count fraud etc. ... Cindy is real. Bush is a fake. Bush Bicycles While Bagdahd Burns because he is a fake, a puppet of the Carlylse Group, and military-industrial complex that runs this country. (Message Number 846)

Title: Republicans
Content: I find it so, so sad and a little pitiful that republicans feel a need to attack and try to discredit Cindy Sheehan. What’s the point? It seems so petty and horribly mean spirited. I mean, when some yahoo from the burbs gets on the news and swears unyielding loyalty to Bush, Democrats don’t run screaming to their computers to send out condemnations about that person. She’s just doing her thing, dealing with her grief...what’s the problem? (Message Number 5535)

The excerpts from message 846 and the text of message 5535 are examples of exclusions in this category. Although both messages are clearly sympathetic to Sheehan, neither message contains specific, nor even general, advocacy or discussion of action in support of her cause. Thus, messages excluded here are not action messages but may be better viewed as communications of opinion.

No Reason for Action

Eight pro-action posters provided no reasons for their support of action:

Title: Cindy Sheehan in Washington
Content: I understand that Cindy Sheehan is bringing her protest/vigil to Washington D.C. on Sept. 24th. I think Americans across the country should be there to support her in large numbers. Can MoveOn help to organize this? Is there any organization that is doing this already? I would love to know if this is already underway and how I could help (Message Number 1733)
Title: Hands Across America To Support Cindy Sheehan
Content: I would like to propose that all cities join Cindy Sheehan by making a human chain across highway 10 and all other highways to reach Crawford, Texas and show support. I understand this maybe difficult to organize. Any suggestions welcome. I thought maybe we can organize it by calling an hour when everybody goes to highway 10 local adjacent streets and holds hands (Message Number 11633)
Inter-rater coding descriptions and examples

Moveon.org Coding Categories - General Guidelines

- Please assign all messages to at least one category
- Assign messages to the categories where you think they best fit
- Categories are *not* mutually exclusive – i.e. the same message can be coded to as many (or few) of the categories as you think appropriate
- Messages should be placed in a category if all or part of the message significantly addresses the category description
- You can return to messages you have already coded and change their categories
- Please ensure that you have worked through all messages before you finish

Coding Categories - Summary

Aa (Action advocacy) : Pro- (anti-) action
Sy (Sympathy) : (Non-) Sympathy towards Sheehan
Ho (Honour) : Protests honour (dishonour) soldiers
Ew (End war) : Pro- (anti-) immediate end to war
Pr (Public relations) : Action is good (bad) public relations
Ad (Republican administration) : Pro- (anti-) Republican administration
Bu (President Bush) : Pro- (anti-) President Bush
Ms (Motives (Sheehan)) : Sheehan’s motives are positive (negative)
Mo (Motives (Others)) : Other’s motives are positive (negative)
Co (Corruption) : Establishment is honest (corrupt)
De (Deaths) : Iraq war deaths are (not) justified
En (Enlisted) : Soldiers are (not) in Iraq willingly
Po (Public opinion) : Public opinion is for (against) the war
Iq (Iraq) : War has had a positive (negative) effect on Iraq
Vo (Voice) : Action is a positive (negative) way to voice discontent
Re (Response) : Action is (not) a legitimate response to action by others
Ex (Exposure) : Sheehan issue has (not) been over exposed
**Coding Categories – Details**

Where action is mentioned in category descriptions, the action referred to can be by the MoveOn community as a whole, individuals (including Sheehan), or third parties not officially aligned to the MoveOn community. Messages should be assigned to a category if they match the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aa (Action Advocacy)</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer is either clearly in favour of action in support of (or by) Cindy Sheehan, or opposed to action in support of (or by) Cindy Sheehan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sy (Sympathy)</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer is either clearly sympathetic to Cindy Sheehan or her cause, or non-sympathetic to Cindy Sheehan or her cause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ho (Honour)</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that action honours soldiers, or that action dishonours soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ew (End the War)</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer is either clearly in favour of an immediate end to the war in Iraq, or against an immediate end to the war in Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pr (Public Relations)</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that action is good for public relations, or bad for public relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Ad) Republican Administration</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer is either clearly in favour of the Republican administration in America, or against the Republican administration in America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Bu) President Bush</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer is either clearly in favour of President Bush specifically, or against President Bush specifically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Ms) Sheehan’s Motives</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that Cindy Sheehan has positive motives for acting, or negative motives for acting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Mo) Others’ Motives</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that others’ motives for behaviour are positive, or that others’ motives for behaviour are negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Co) Corruption</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that the establishment is corrupt, or that the establishment is not corrupt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(De) Deaths</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that the deaths caused by the Iraq war are justified, or that the deaths caused by the Iraq war are not justified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(En) Enlisted</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that the soldiers in Iraq are there willingly, or that the soldiers in Iraq are there unwillingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Po) Public Opinion</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that public opinion is in favour of the war in Iraq, or that public opinion is against the war in Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Iq) Iraq</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that the war has had a positive effect on Iraq, or that the war has had a negative effect on Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Vo) Voice</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that action is a positive way to voice discontent, or that action is a negative way to voice discontent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Re) Response</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that action is a legitimate response to others’ behaviour, or that action is not a legitimate response to others’ behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Ex) Exposure</strong></td>
<td>Content where the writer either clearly argues that the Sheehan issue has been overexposed, or that the Sheehan issue has not been overexposed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example A

We need to draw as much press as possible to Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq, who is camping on the president’s driveway. Food, water, company, whatever she needs to continue her mission to make the president face up to what he’s done in Iraq. It appears that the local police department as well as the local residents are harassing her, trying to get her to leave. Let’s not let the president relax on this vacation.

Categorisation

Aa — “We need to draw as much press as possible to Cindy Sheehan…”

Bu — “Let’s not let the president relax on this vacation…”
Example B

First of all, Cindy Sheehan is going to be used and abused by both sides of this issue and I don’t want to be associated with an organization that contributed to it. One woman standing up to the president is a lot more powerful than a mob.

Second of all, I, and many other people, sided with MoveOn to prevent one of the most divisive and dangerous administrations in our country’s history from doing more damage than had already been done. Obviously, we failed. But we didn’t fail by much and it would be a crime to squander our efforts.

I COMPLETELY disagree with Cindy Sheehan’s demand, as I understand it, to bring the troops home immediately. If this is the direction MoveOn is heading then I will, sadly, sever my ties to this group. Unfortunately, I’m sure I will not be alone and our positive efforts will suffer.

Being angry about our dead soldiers is one thing. Irresponsibly withdrawing our troops is another.

Withdrawing our troops before Iraq is capable of self-governance would be a crime equal to invading it in the first place. WE, the United States of America, made the mess that currently exists in Iraq. Yes, WE are very guilty. Bringing the “boys” home early isn’t going to change that.

Condemn Bush and his war mongering, isolationist administration. Condemn the idiots who felt the need to “trust their president” instead of asking questions. Condemn the corporations that will benefit from this war and its aftermath. But... DO NOT condemn the Iraqis that just want to live a normal life and DO NOT condemn the soldiers that have been told what to do and how to do it. Bringing the troops home now would only serve to diminish the sacrifices of our soldiers and leave behind a mess that would devour many more innocent Iraqis and add even more instability to our world.

(continued on next page)
Most American citizens did not ask for this war. Most Americans do not want this war. Unfortunately, as painful as it may be, we are stuck with this war. I would be the first in line to see Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld serve on the front line for getting us into this but, sorry folks... it ain’t gonna’ happen.

We destroyed their country and many innocent lives along with it. The only right thing... The only HUMAN thing to do is to work on rebuilding their country and protecting the people.

Categorisation

Aa – “If this is the direction MoveOn is heading...”; “Condemn the idiots who felt the need to “trust their president” instead of asking questions...”

Sy – “One woman standing up to the president is a lot more powerful than a mob...”

Ho – “Bringing the troops home now would only serve to diminish the sacrifices of our soldiers...”

Ew – “I COMPLETELY disagree with Cindy Sheehan’s demand, as I understand it, to bring the troops home immediately...”; “Withdrawing our troops before Iraq is capable of self-governance would be a crime equal to invading it in the first place...”

Ad – “Condemn Bush and his war mongering, isolationist administration...”

Mo – “Cindy Sheehan is going to be used and abused by both sides of this issue...”; “Condemn the corporations that will benefit from this war...”

De – “We destroyed their country and many innocent lives along with it...”

Iq – “WE, the United States of America, made the mess that currently exists in Iraq...”
Example C

Watching the news last night I was amazed at Cindy Sheehan’s courage and stamina. I do think it’s probable though that Bush will head back to the White House without every meeting with her. Perhaps MoveOn can organize a rally with Ms. Sheehan that moves the media back to Washington -- something of a Million Mom March type of thing -- so that Bush sees he can’t hide from Iraq families and their grief. If you can pull a huge number of people to Washington to stand by her side it would drive the point home that Americans are against the war and want answers -- and soldiers home fast. Somehow he can ignore a mom at the gates of his Crawford home, but can he ignore thousands (or more) at the gates of our nation’s home?

Categorisation

Aa – “Perhaps MoveOn can organize a rally with Ms. Sheehan…”

Ew – “and soldiers home fast…”

Bu – “Bush sees he can’t hide from Iraq families…”; “he can ignore a mom at the gates of his Crawford home…”

Po – “Americans are against the war and want answers…”