

Digital Media and Social Movements: The Role of New Media in the Outcome of Proposition 8

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Using Proposition 8 in the state of California as a case study, this article examines whether new media can be effectively used to aid social and political movements. The author analyzes the digital rhetoric involved in the campaigns surrounding the debate over marriage equality to demonstrate that these technologies were a deciding factor in the passing of Proposition 8. A framework is presented that demonstrates the applicability of new media to all social movements.

There were many pressing political issues faced during the first decade of the twenty-first century, but few seemed to capture the attention of the nation quite so thoroughly as the debate over marriage equality in California during the latter half of 2008. The four and a half months during which various groups campaigned for and against legal same-sex marriages in California were rife with discourse over a variety of media, none more significant than the digital media, which I argue played a key role in the outcome of the vote. Indeed, I believe there is no better example of the different ways that new media can impact social movements in the twenty-first century, especially regarding issues specifically affecting the United States.

In order to understand how new media impact social movements, it is first important to understand what new media are. According to Wikipedia, the use of new media means on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the “democratization” of the creating, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. Another aspect of new media is the real-time generation of new, unregulated content.

While Wikipedia is not a particularly scholarly source, it seems a fitting example to cite from because in many ways it exemplifies new media in the digital age, and the definition it provides also adequately describes the essence of new media.

Participation and user-engagement in a digital setting are perhaps the most essential characteristics of new media, and this rings true especially in regards to social movements. New media allow the messages tied to these movements to have a broader reach, more instantaneous accessibility, and a higher degree of interactivity. Not only do these characteristics support more targeted use than traditional media, they also create an environment conducive to widespread advocacy, allowing individuals to participate in a debate on public policy regardless of their geographic location. But are these characteristics really beneficial to burgeoning social movements?

The effects of new media on social and political movements are still being analyzed, and the conclusions drawn by scholars are often inconsistent. Some argue that new technologies are hurting the efficiency with which social changes are enacted; others hail these new technologies as exciting tools to improve communication and organization amongst activists. Anecdotal evidence is offered on both sides of the argument, but there is a large gap between these individual cases and the broader scope which is necessary to understand if these tools really can be effective. Because so much of digital media involvement in social movements has been limited to one or two very spe-

cific online tools, we have been previously unable to see a clear answer to the question of whether these tools are actually beneficial.

My examination of the role digital media played in the debate over Proposition 8 in California offers solutions to these queries; as a case study, Proposition 8 makes an excellent example of how digital media can be used effectively and efficiently to promote social change. Additionally, the issue provides valuable insight into the unique challenges and potential constraints that accompany the use of new media in social and political movements. Not only does my research reveal that online campaigning made a tangible contribution to the passing of the initiative, it also addresses the variety of roles digital media played throughout the course of the campaigns surrounding Proposition 8. Many of these roles were beneficial to their respective campaigns, but in some instances a failure to address and overcome the constraints of new media was detrimental to the cause. The analysis of these roles brings forth distinct uses for various types of online media and creates a framework for how digital media can effectively aid social movements; it also demonstrates the ways that the broad reach and sense of involvement social media offer can be used ineffectively.

Review of Literature

Discussions of the usefulness of new media in social movements have been plentiful over the past decade, and there are a variety of theories on the issue. Some schools of thought argue that social media are detrimental to movements, offering individuals a way to feel as though they are participating without having to actually take action. Others argue that social media can be an effective tool, depending on whether one's goal is to effect real change or merely to engage individuals in a discussion of the issues. Digital media's applications are celebrated by others who cite their broad scope, instantaneous accessibility, and interactivity as revolutionary in terms of enacting social change.

It seems naysayers are always prevalent when new technologies emerge, and the case of digital media and their applicability to social movements is no exception. Some argue merely that social media, while certainly being used to discuss revolutionary action, are not participating with nearly the degree we suspect, and in fact offer individuals a way to passively participate. Malcolm Gladwell addresses the idea of passive participation in "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted." He analyzes the 2009 Iranian protests, exploring the overly credited role of Twitter in these uprisings. While the social networking site is often viewed as having played a large part in the organization and execution of these protests, Gladwell argues that the role of Twitter was far more minimal than Westerners believed it to be. He states that the vast majority of tweets surrounding the issue actually came out of the West, and that the absence of texts in Farsi is a clear demonstration of this. Gladwell concludes that social media are useful for inspiring social activism only if the stakes are not too high—not an especially glowing endorsement of social media's ability to create lasting social change. This idea that low-risk activities are the only types of actions that will arise from individuals using social networks to promote change has been termed "slacktivism." Proponents of this viewpoint essentially believe that social media activism is "long on bumper sticker sentiment and short on any real useful action" (Shirky). Evgeny Morozov, a notable writer who studies the social and political implications of new technologies, also notes the "Twitter revolution" in his "Iran: Downsides to the Twitter Revolution." He addresses the ways that individuals are quick to attribute successes to social media without a diligent analysis of the situation. Morozov suggests that those praising social media's role in events such as Iran's revolution "invariably flounder when it comes to analyzing technology's role in global politics, offering a very parochial and superficial analysis of the situation" (11). He goes on to address how a lack of familiarity with Internet culture in other nations makes understanding the use of social media in inter-

national politics very difficult to contextualize. Journalist Jon B. Alterman has also offered criticisms of the exaggeration of new media's role in the Arab Spring uprisings, suggesting that evidence supporting this claim is lacking and that while a small portion of activists may have relied on the Internet to organize, the vast majority of involvement was spurred on not by new media but instead by an old twentieth-century standard—television. Alterman suggests that watching these events unfold through standard news media spurred far more individuals to action than did Twitter or Facebook (108).

Some are more ambivalent when it comes to theorizing on the usefulness of social media in fueling social movements, arguing that the factors surrounding a movement are just as important as the role social media plays in it. This stance, which addresses both the benefits and banes of Internet technologies, emphasizes the importance of context when studying technology. In "Technology, Community, and Technical Communication on the Internet: The Lotus MarketPlace and Clipper Chip Controversies," Laura J. Gurak examines the ways that online communities can have a real impact, citing how during the early 1990s online privacy advocates successfully prevented the release of marketing software containing large amounts of personal information. However, Gurak concedes that there are certain downsides to such advocacy—the sharing of generalized information through new media can lead to a wealth of misinformation and misunderstanding. Clay Shirky discusses the situational effectiveness of digital media and social networking in "The Political Power of Social Media." He argues that the "effects on political action are too often reduced to dueling anecdotes" and goes on to suggest that the effectiveness of social media is largely defined by the political climate of the location where it is being utilized. According to Shirky, China provides a prominent example: government censorship of the Internet can greatly reduce the effectiveness of social media in fueling social action, whereas countries boasting a greater degree of communicative freedom, such as the United States, provide a climate which better allows for effectiveness. In this regard, the ability of new media to play a prominent role in social or political action is subject to the same affordances and constraints as any other tactics.

In spite of the vocal naysayers, it seems there are plenty who feel more optimistic about the social and political possibilities within social networks and online media. In "Information and Expression in a Digital Age," Eveland et al. discuss research that indicates online political discourse increases the likelihood of civic engagement, especially during times of high political activity such as elections. Media scholar Henry Jenkins also offers a glowing endorsement of social media as means to fuel social movements. He cites recent movements such as Kony 2012, in which the organization Invisible Children succeeded in creating a viral video about noted war criminal Joseph Kony, and the Occupy Wall Street movement, which has used Facebook and Twitter as its primary means of organization. Jenkins argues that digital media such as these videos or social network pages play an important role in connecting people to causes or organizations that they can then go on to be involved with in other ways. Others argue that since social media have already been demonstrated to impact protest behavior and other real-world activities, how that impact occurs should be examined (Valenzuela 921).

The divided opinions on digital media are only to be expected; as with all new technologies, thoughts on the affordances and constraints of these innovative media sites are subject to a variety of criticisms and praises. Certainly, digital media have a wide variety of potentially useful applications, such as the ability to unite people more immediately and across greater distances. It seems the larger question is whether individuals will be ambitious or savvy enough to harness the potential benefits and avoid falling into the complacency of passive participation. The contrast between the low-cost activism, which comprises the bulk of social media participation, and the high-risk activism, which creates real social change, is certainly a stark one, and it should not be surprising

that this leaves some analysts feeling skeptical. Proposition 8 is significant in this debate precisely because it demonstrates that proficient use of new media can inspire high-stakes activism.

California and the Same-Sex Marriage Debate

The debate over same-sex marriage in California has a unique and colorful history. While Proposition 8 in 2008 received a flurry of nationwide media attention during the course of the campaigns surrounding it, it is important to understand the context in which the ballot measure was born. Same-sex marriage had been illegal in California since the year 2000, when Proposition 22 was voted into law (California Secretary of State Department). In February 2004, San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples in direct violation of the law, and over the next six months more than four thousand same-sex couples were married in the city. In August the California Supreme Court, holding that the marriage licenses were issued illegally, proceeded to invalidate all marriage certificates held by gay and lesbian couples. Over the next four years a series of lawsuits went through the California judicial system, eventually culminating in a ruling that held that denying marriage rights to couples on the basis of sexual orientation was in violation of the California state constitution. This decision became final in June 2008, and almost immediately same-sex couples again flocked to courthouses within the state to bind themselves in marital union. From this ruling Proposition 8 was born.

During the final months of hearings on whether same-sex-marriage bans were unconstitutional, conservative groups were incredibly busy collecting signatures to get another ban on same-sex marriage onto the ballot for the November 2008 election. The “Limit on Marriage Initiative” achieved ballot status only two weeks before the controversial ruling that deemed Proposition 22 unconstitutional. The vast majority of proponents for the initiative were conservative or religious organizations—groups that have a long history of working together in American politics. These organizations wasted little time unifying themselves against same-sex marriage; only ten days after the California Supreme Court struck down Proposition 22, more than a thousand evangelical ministers met over a conference call to discuss political strategies and arrange financial support for their campaign. As a result, the “Yes on 8” campaign raised millions of dollars, with much of the funding coming from the religious Right (Aiello).

The “Yes on 8” campaign wasted no time determining and implementing its strategy; its focus revolved largely around protecting children and traditional family units. Much of this campaign relied upon scare tactics; many of its television and online advertisements depicted children discussing homosexuality with distraught parents. The “Yes on 8” campaign raised the specters that homosexuality would be taught in schools and that legal same-sex marriage would create an environment in which parents were unable to raise their children in accordance with their personal values. This intensive advertising was supplemented with grassroots movements across the state—churches worked together to unify the tactics they would use to gain the support of their congregations. They were largely successful; thousands of Californians joined these religious organizations in acts of support, such as fasts and lengthy prayer sessions.

While the “Yes on 8” campaign was busy using its strong ties and existing support systems, the “No on 8” supporters were launching their own campaign to ensure that same-sex marriage remained legal in the state. They began with an advantage—initial campaign polls indicated they had a seventeen-point lead in public support (Hogarth). Organizations involved in the campaign included liberal groups such as Stonewall Democrats, Courage Campaign, and Marriage Equality, USA, along with many others focused on working with the LGBT community. Together, these organizations managed to raise a total of \$37 million dollars to fund their campaign, which focused largely on the issue of discrimination—much of their advertising depicted the faces of those who would be hurt by a renewal of the ban on same-sex marriage.

In the weeks leading up to the vote, the “Yes on 8” campaign gained increasing support, while the “No on 8” campaign was losing advocates at an alarming rate. This trend continued right up to Election Day, when the “Yes on 8” campaign emerged victorious. The Public Policy Institute of California provides us with voter demographics that may not be surprising; those who voted to pass Proposition 8 and effectively end marriage equality were overwhelmingly older, more conservative (the majority of Republicans voted to pass the proposition), less educated, and concentrated in less urban areas (Public Policy Institute of California). Most of those identifying as liberals voted against Proposition 8, and the opposition was largely localized in the San Francisco Bay area. More surprising is the data on what appears to have been the deciding demographic in the election: middle-aged, white Democrats (Aiello). They were the individuals most swayed by the media blitz orchestrated by the “Yes on 8” campaigners.

While this was a devastating blow to California’s LGBT community and its allies, the “No on 8” campaign wasted no time reacting. Once again, lawsuits were filed within the state charging that the initiative was unconstitutional and discriminatory. The trial began in 2010 and was subject to many appeals—after a U.S. Supreme Court panel of three judges ruled that the ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional, the case was presented before all nine members of the high court in June 2013. The high court ruled that the proponents of Proposition 8 did not have the authority to appeal the court panel’s ruling as the state of California had chosen not to, and the ban on same-sex marriage was lifted.

Tactics in Online Campaigning

So the question remains—just how did digital media influence the outcome of the “Limit on Marriage Initiative” in California? In order to answer this question, I engaged in a complex analysis of the digital strategies (or lack thereof) that defined the debate for marriage equality in the state. While traditional print media and television were used by both sides of the campaign, digital media played the most important role in the victory of the “Yes on 8” campaign. In many ways, the mismanagement of digital media resources was equally significant when compared to the savvy use of new technologies, and as such these factors must also be examined thoroughly.

In looking critically at the online discourse surrounding Proposition 8, I was able to identify three distinct uses for new media: advertising, advocacy, and activism. Advertising, a traditional fixture in American society, is a tool used to persuade individuals or groups to buy a certain product or idea. Advocacy is the process of championing or speaking on behalf of specific causes or groups. Activism is taking action to bring about a desired result. While there is some degree of overlap between these three categories, especially in the case of advocacy and activism, they all serve different functions within social movements. How these functions are employed makes all the difference in answering the question of whether digital media can be effective in creating social change. In this regard, Proposition 8 provides an ideal example of how, with careful strategizing and intense focus, digital media really can influence social or political movements.

Online advertising offers many benefits to those looking to convince individuals to buy into their ideals. Its reach is extensive and can be timed more effectively than television advertising. Advertising services such as Google AdSense allow organizations to ensure their ads are seen by individuals whose demographic information corresponds with the values being promoted. Contrarily, these advertisements also have the ability to surprise people by being placed in different contexts—advertising space can be bought on any website, regardless of whether the values reflected in the ad mirror those held by the website an individual is viewing. Another advantage of online advertising is that it can be limited to targets within a certain geographic region. Perhaps the last great affordance of online advertising is simply that it is unavoidable—it can appear on some of the most high-traffic websites on the Internet.

Internet advocacy is much different than advertising. It relies largely on user participation and tends to spread in a more organic fashion. It can have a broader reach as well; while the sharing of advertisements is relatively uncommon, links to videos, memes, or websites that promote certain causes are plentiful on the Internet. It also allows for the dissemination of information to individuals who may be unfamiliar with certain issues or causes. While in certain scenarios this is the most desirable outcome, it can be a bane to those who are looking to rally supporters for a cause with limited geographic implications. Grassroots advocacy offers no guarantees about who will see the information, or where they may be located.

Online activism is arguably one of the most discussed and controversial aspects of digital media's involvement in social movements. Evidence demonstrates that online activism can be a powerful tool, especially when it comes to organizing real-world actions. It also allows for greater immediacy; online activists are capable of coordinating actions very quickly and are able to facilitate simultaneous actions in different locations. However, there is also a danger that actions beginning online may remain online; individuals with weaker ties to a movement may participate through new media but lack the required commitment to a cause to participate in real-world actions. I would argue, however, that this complacency is not necessarily the fault of social media, but merely of some individuals' limited investments in social or political movements. Even before the advent of social media, there were those whose support of an issue never led to real-world activism.

It is important to consider how the "Yes on 8" campaign was effective within the context of the debate. The campaign was successful because its tactics best served its goals, and it is through this lens that the effectiveness of digital media can be seen. In comparison, the "No on 8" campaign's online tactics were ineffective not because they were necessarily less valuable in the broader context, but because they were inappropriate for the situation. This distinction is significant—when examining the effectiveness of digital media in creating social or political change, it is important to realize that any given tactic has the potential to help or hinder a cause depending on the immediate goals and needs of the group using these technologies. In the case of the Proposition 8 campaigns, it was incredibly important that the online campaigns persuade local voters over a limited time frame, and as such the ability of online tactics to match this goal was vital. The need to target geographically specific voters may have been one of the largest determinants in the outcome of the campaigns.

Advertising, Advocacy, and Activism in Proposition 8

My research shows that advertising, advocacy, and activism played key roles in both the "Yes on 8" and "No on 8" campaigns. "Yes on 8" used the affordances of online advertising while simultaneously avoiding many of the potential constraints of online advocacy and activism. Its focus on using advocacy and advertising as a way to join individuals with existing ties to the movement helped it avoid the dangers of passive participation. In many ways, this is what led to its success; the "No on 8" campaign relied far more on advocacy and activism, but failed to understand the importance of organizing and involving individuals both geographically able and willing to vote against the initiative. I believe this simple truth offers a convincing demonstration that digital media can be effective in social movements.

Before defining the role that new media played in the passing of Proposition 8, it is important that I first dispel the many misconceptions surrounding what factors led to victory for "Yes on 8." Perhaps the most widespread fallacy is the notion that African American and Latino/a voters were largely responsible for the passing of the initiative; while there is a small grain of truth in this assertion—a majority of African Americans did support Proposition 8 (Public Policy Institute of

California)—it ignores the fact that minority support for a ban on same-sex marriage remained relatively stable throughout the campaign. The surprising truth is that the victory was earned by persuading voters who were initially against the initiative to support it. Analysis of poll numbers shows that almost 1 million voters changed their minds during the course of the campaign; given that Proposition 8 passed with a fairly narrow margin, I do not believe it is unreasonable to state that these voters held the key to victory for “Yes on 8.” What is perhaps even more surprising than the general overwhelming persuasiveness of the “Yes on 8” campaign is the identity of the individuals they succeeded in convincing—the vast majority of swing voters were white Democrats with children under the age of eighteen (Fleischer).

Other analyses of the campaigns cite an incredible ineptitude in the “No on 8” campaign as the responsible factor in the passing of Proposition 8. In large part this may be true—the “No on 8” campaign had a fairly wide lead in public support at the beginning of the polls, which it managed to lose during the course of the campaigns. However, it is how the campaign was lacking that is significant, not simply the fact that it was. The “No on 8” campaign’s advertisements have been roundly criticized. Most of its television advertisements appealed to viewers on a rational, intellectual level, instead of using any of the abundant and popular footage featuring touching stories of same-sex couples finally able to marry (which was largely being spread through social media). Additionally, the campaign failed to integrate itself effectively with the grassroots movements that sprang up in support of marriage equality. All of these factors contributed to the campaign’s loss, yet evidence strongly suggests that much of this mismanagement could have been avoided had it matched the opposition’s savvy use of digital media. Many of the grassroots efforts to preserve marriage equality in the state took place online. The “Yes on 8” campaign used online media to spread its message with great success, and it was there it held its main advantage.

As I examined the “No on 8” campaign’s failures, it became clear that a lack of focus on the digital battlefield was largely responsible for its inability to maintain voter support throughout the course of the campaign. Instead of leveraging its marginally more technologically savvy supporters’ skills to secure the digital frontier early on in the debate, the “No on 8” campaign instead focused its efforts largely on television advertising. This apparent complacency likely arose from two misconceptions held by campaign strategists—one, that victory was already secure because initial polls showed public support was in their favor, and two, that their older, more rural opponents would be less technologically savvy and as such were incapable of waging a digital media battle with the resourcefulness that they eventually did.

Because of the “No on 8” campaign’s lack of focus in the digital arena, the online conversations that occurred during the course of the campaign were based largely on grassroots advocacy—while this was certainly beneficial in inspiring individuals to talk about Proposition 8, it did little to rally support in California specifically. Numerous Facebook groups opposing the initiative were created during the course of the campaign, many of which still exist on the site today. However, an examination of members of these groups makes it abundantly clear that most are not located in California and thus were not actually capable of voting on the issue. Their support, for all practical purposes, was useless.

The “No on 8” campaign fared little better in online activism. Most of its actions seem to have fallen into Gladwell’s “slacktivism” trap—the loosely veiled advocacy presented in the form of passing around memes and trending topics on Twitter (most notably #fuckprop8 and #rejectprop8). This is a great example of the minimal investment and weak-tie support that some critics of digital media point out; while individuals likely felt as though they were supporting the cause, national discussion is largely irrelevant in the resolution of a statewide issue. In many ways, there is an irony in this lack of real activism—a large number of protests were held in opposition to Proposition 8, but the overwhelming majority did not occur until after the initiative had passed.

There are few better examples than this of critics' contention that one reason for the "No on 8" campaign's failure was that it was largely reactionary instead of offensive. It seems that only in the wake of this devastating blow were individuals able to use social media to mobilize their strong-tie connections and come together in any meaningful way.

The "No on 8" campaign also failed to cash in on the effective advocacy that circulated on the Web. At the time many videos in opposition to the initiative went viral on sites such as YouTube, often emotional in tone, featuring same-sex couples who married during the brief window of opportunity when the practice was legal in the state. In spite of the abundance of quality user-created media, the "No on 8" campaign waited until two days before the election to make use of this content, and then only in the form of a memo requesting supporters to share the campaign's new thirty-second video, which featured parents discussing how they wanted their children to grow up in a world free of hate (Equality California). While the memo demonstrates that the campaign was aware of the enormous online community that rose up in support, the vital question of why it waited until the very last moment to attempt to leverage this community is still unanswered.

In contrast to the "No on 8" campaign, which largely neglected digital forums, "Yes on 8" organizers launched a savvy and surprising online campaign that served to effectively raise awareness and garner support for their cause. The online campaign launched by "Yes on Prop 8" won multiple awards after the campaign ended (Kaye). Perhaps most ingenious (and devastating to the "No on 8" campaign) was their targeted online advertising blitz aimed at ensuring the support of voters within the state of California. This was a multipronged approach, the first part of which targeted initial supporters of the initiative to secure their continued support. The campaign employed Google AdSense software to specifically target Internet users in California who searched on topics relating to conservatism, religion, or Proposition 8. It also harnessed user registration data from sites such as MSN and Yahoo to target demographics that tended to support traditional marriage definitions (Kaye). However, this was only part of the campaign's strategy—in the two days before the election, when the "No on 8" campaign was only just involving itself in the digital realm by requesting that voters spread a single video, the "Yes on 8" campaign was saturating Web users in California with advertisements on a wide variety of websites, some conservative but many liberal-leaning or gay-themed. This "surge," as the "Yes on 8" campaign referred to it, is likely part of what helped to convince those initially supporting marriage equality to instead vote against it.

While the use of targeted advertising played a large role in the successful passing of Proposition 8, it was not the only online avenue supporters of the initiative utilized. Online advocacy in favor of the initiative was also prominent, with YouTube channels and Facebook groups cropping up in solidarity throughout the course of the campaign. It is important to note that the "Yes on 8" campaign's videos differed greatly from the "No on 8" videos. Those of the former tended to be traditional, campaign-style works, while those of the latter were overwhelmingly unscripted, personalized monologues on the subject of marriage equality (Thorson et al.). Significant also is the fact that, in contrast to the "No on 8" campaign's abundance of reactionary material, the vast majority of the "Yes on 8" campaign's content was created during the course of the campaigns, not afterward.

These reactionary campaigns were not necessarily useless. While the "No on 8" campaign proved ineffective in California, many online groups rose up as advocates of same-sex marriage immediately after the proposal passed. Adam Bouska created "No H8," a photo campaign which allowed supporters of same-sex marriage to demonstrate their support through specifically styled photographs posted on the campaign's website (No H8 Campaign). American Apparel partnered with the Human Rights Campaign to create a line of T-shirts featuring the slogan "Legalize Gay," and many advocates of same-sex marriage circulated photos of themselves in these shirts as a way of demonstrating their support; this has become just one part of the company's continuing cam-

paign to support gay rights (American Apparel). Numerous advocacy groups also found a foothold in the online community and continue to be involved in the fight for marriage equality in the United States. Since the passing of Proposition 8, ten states have voted to legalize same-sex marriage, and while the role these advocacy groups have played in changing public perception requires further analysis, I believe it is not unwarranted to suggest that the online advocacy arising from Proposition 8 played a significant part in raising support for same-sex marriage.

Conclusion

Proposition 8 demonstrates that digital media can play an important role in social movements; effective use of advertising, advocacy, and activism via online forums can help individuals or groups to create a lasting impact. While “No on 8” supporters failed to use these tools effectively during the course of the campaign, the continued reactionary movements may have helped stimulate the intense rise of public support for gay marriage in subsequent years. As I previously noted, many of the prevalent campaigns surrounding marriage equality grew out of the backlash to the passing of Proposition 8.

Since the passing of Proposition 8, the options for using social media to gather support for same-sex marriage have also increased. The new and innovative online tool Amicus allows Facebook users to access their social graph—the summary of available digital knowledge about friends and acquaintances—and utilize it to help campaign for a specific cause. A modern version of door-to-door campaigning, Amicus allows individuals to reach out to those in their extended social circle via telephone or email and encourage them to take action. This tool can help eliminate some of the geographic constraints of online activism—if an individual is concerned about legislation in another state, Amicus allows him or her to find friends or acquaintances who are eligible to vote on the issue. This tool was employed by many individuals to help support the marriage equality initiatives that passed in Washington and Minnesota in November 2012 (Scola).

In addition to contributing to a shift in public opinion, the campaigns of the Proposition 8 debate have also impacted other causes. Former New York State Representative Scott Murphy successfully used the same “blitz” technique “Yes on 8” employed during his campaign (Kaye). Other campaigns have utilized many of the “Yes on 8” campaign’s tactics to harness the power of digital media. For example, in the 2012 presidential election Obama campaign managers used voter-registration data to target supporters and accurately predict the campaign outcome (Issenberg). An analysis of Twitter-based content also provided an impressively accurate prediction of the election results: 52.4% for Obama, 47.6% for Romney (Fitzgerald). Actual results showed Obama with 50.6% of votes and Romney with 47.8% (Andrews et al.).

More recently, social media have once again been utilized as a way to organize reactionary protests—in mid-July 2013 Texas passed a controversial bill banning abortions after twenty weeks of pregnancy and requiring all abortion providers to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital. Social media were involved in the debate over this bill from the beginning, helping to share information about the proposed legislation and organize protests at the Texas Senate when the votes were cast. Only two days after the legislation was approved, simultaneous protests in cities nationwide had been organized via Facebook and Twitter (Whately).

These cases are only a few of the many which provide evidence that the uses for digital media so perfectly depicted in the debate on Proposition 8 are not isolated tactics effective only when applied to certain social issues. My research demonstrates that when the affordances and constraints of online advertising, advocacy, and activism are considered and accounted for, these tools can play a prominent role in a variety of organized or grassroots campaigns surrounding social and political issues. Additionally, the increasing use of these tools is breeding innovations which only increase their effectiveness.

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