

**POLITICAL OUTCOMES OF DIGITAL CONVERSATIONS: A
CASE STUDY OF THE FACEBOOK GROUP “CANADIANS
AGAINST PROROGUING PARLIAMENT”**

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Abstract: Since the emergence of the Internet, scholars have had mixed opinions regarding its role in influencing levels of political participation. Two frameworks, the mobilization and the reinforcement theses, were created from these opposing views. The introduction of social networking websites (such as Facebook) offers new platforms with which to test these opposing theories on.

This study investigates the Facebook group “Canadian’s against Proroguing Parliament,” to determine: 1) what the members' motivations were for participating in the group, 2) whether the group attracted formerly marginalized voices to participate on the group, or simply reinforced those who were already active in the political process, and 3) whether the participation of members on the group translated into offline or real world political participation. The findings suggest that the group’s members had a variety of reasons for joining the group. As well, the findings suggest that the group both mobilized reinforced its participants. Finally, the data indicates that in some instances, the group’s members translated their online participation into real world political activity.

It seems to me shallow and arrogant for any man in these times to claim he is completely self-made, that he owes all his success to his own unaided efforts. Many hands and hearts and minds generally contribute to anyone's notable achievements.

- Walt Disney

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Internet emerged in the shadow of the radio and television, and onlookers suggested that it had the capability to transform human communication. In many ways, scholars agreed that the Internet was like its predecessors, as it shared commonalities with television, such as sound and images; and similarities with broadcast media, such as text and pictures. Roger Hurwitz, a research scientist at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at M.I.T., suggested that the Internet was like a huge copy machine, duplicating the formats of all other media (as cited in Selnow, 1998a). However, the Internet took the media to a new extreme by creating a tool with which users could simultaneously interact and observe information.

Initially, the Internet was quite restricted, as it only catered to academics. Thus, the Internet as a mass political forum is a relatively new phenomenon. The first major innovation that allowed the Internet to move beyond a technologically elite environment was the development of e-mail in 1972 (Selnow, 1998b). The World Wide Web was introduced in 1991, but did not have the potential to be a mass political forum until the development of the Mosaic browser in 1993 and the subsequent Netscape browser in 1994 (Selnow, 1998c), which enabled data and images to be read in a user-friendly manner.

The Internet became a dominant form of communication by the mid-1990s, and political parties and politicians generally agreed that the Internet's "economical integration of visuals, sound, and data would revolutionize the election campaign" (Marland, 2003: 18). More specifically, onlookers believed that the Internet offered its users an interactive capability that would allow an unregulated platform for the exchange

of ideas. This exchange of ideas was ideally made possible because the Internet afforded its users the ability to communicate directly with one another. Thus, the Internet was said to offer a bridge between political actors, activists, and citizens. Finally, the Internet was touted because its resources were fairly inexpensive and were widely available to all (James and Sadow, 1997). By the end of the 20th century, western democracies recognized that the Internet, just like the television and the radio, had become a staple in political communication (Selnow, 1998d).

The emergence of the Internet was characterized by many claims about the suggested role that this new technology could serve in the political arena. For instance, former President Clinton's aide, Dick Morris, said of the Internet that "there [was] a quiet but radical revolution shaking the very foundation of our politics" (as cited in Selnow, 1998e). Similar to Morris, many scholars recognized the potential of the Internet in shaping citizen engagement, suggesting that:

"the Internet could have a significant impact on broadening political participation by lowering the cost of involvement, creating new mechanisms of organizing groups and opening up new channels of information that bypass traditional media gatekeepers" (Di Gennaro and Dutton, 2006a: 299).

The above claim has come to be known as the mobilization thesis. While Di Gennaro, Dutton (2006b) and other scholars of the mobilization thesis have been confident about the changes that the Internet could bring to politics and democracy, not all have been as convinced. Those scholars, working from what has come to be known as the reinforcement thesis, have suggested that the Internet only reinforces and reflects familiar social structures and patterns. These researchers have not disagreed with those who have argued that the Internet will profoundly change politics; however, they have

disagreed about the nature and scope of the change, suggesting that it will not be radical or dramatic, but rather subtle. Thus, supporters of the reinforcement thesis¹ have argued that

“...the rise of the virtual political system seems most likely to facilitate further knowledge, interest, and activism of those who are already most predisposed toward civic engagement, reinforcing patterns of political participation” (Norris, 2001a: 228).

A major limitation of previous empirical studies (see: Tolbert 2003; Kruger, 2002; Bhuiyan, 2004; Dalton, 2007) has been the focus on the traditional forms of political participation as conceptualized by Verba and Nie (1972a) and Verba et al. (1995a). Their research has assessed the extent to which individuals attended rallies, donated money, or worked for a political organization prior to the emergence of the Internet. The Internet's introduction has changed the ways in which individuals can undertake the aforementioned actions. By not expanding the definition of civic engagement to include the Internet, the research continues to overlook those citizens who are now turning to the Internet as means to obtain information, engage in communication, and ultimately participate in political interactions.

Another limitation of the existing research has been its overemphasis on how citizens can use the Internet to elect and influence public officials. While this is undoubtedly important, studies have overlooked all too often how individuals can utilize the Internet to activate and organize around a common issue of concern. Many scholars have identified this shortcoming, including Schudson (2000) who suggested that people are reinventing what it means to be the ideal citizen. As such, he noted, we need to

¹ Some empirical studies have shown that a middle ground exists, between the mobilization and the reinforcement theses (see: Norris, 2001).

recognize new forms of participation and action. Despite these recommendations, studies are still lacking in this area.

A final shortcoming may be worth mentioning. The vast majority of published literature that exists has focused on a few western democracies. The studies to date have mainly focused on online participation in the United States and Britain, but have largely overlooked Canada. The few web-based studies that have used Canada as a case study have focused on e-government (see: Ho, 2002; Roy, 2006), party websites (see: Small, 2008a), and Blogs (see: Jansen and Koop 2005a, 2009b), thereby overlooking social networking websites (this will be expanded further in Chapter 3). Related to this point, many of the web-based studies on Canada have not considered whether social networking websites could mobilize or reinforce the participation of citizens. This research is important, because the Internet (particularly, social networking websites) has become a potential site for political mobilization in recent years. For example, many credited the inclusion of Elizabeth May, the leader of the federal Green Party in the 2008 leaders' debates to the pressure that was exerted on Stephane Dion by MySpace users (Diebel, 2008). Thus, much work, both theoretically and practically, needs to be done in the area of political participation and the Internet.

This thesis will attempt to address the aforementioned limitations by drawing on multiple models of participation, distinguishing between online and offline modes of political participation, and by evaluating political participation in the context of Canada and Facebook (a commonly used social networking website). More specifically, this thesis will evaluate the engagement of those individuals who were members of the Facebook group "Canadians against Proroguing Parliament."

1.1 The Context of This Research

Before delving into the questions and hypotheses that surrounded the research, it is important to understand the context in which this research was conducted. After speaking with the Governor General Michelle Jean, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced his decision to prorogue Parliament (for the second time) from December 30, 2009 until March 3, 2010 (Dearing, 2009a). The suspension of the House of Commons meant that dozens of pieces of pieces of legislation died (Paulsen, 2010a). Moreover, prorogation meant that a Parliamentary committee would be unable to investigate the accusations that the government ignored warnings about the torture of Afghan detainees (Dearing, 2009b). In response to this, Christopher White, a politically unaffiliated graduate student in Anthropology at the University of Alberta created the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” (Paulsen, 2010b). The group’s message “get back to work” attracted 100,000 members within the first few days of its existence (Paulsen, 2010c).

The creation and subsequent growth generated by the group spawned interest from the Canadian public. Indeed, while some onlookers disregarded the group, suggesting that there was

“no evidence the public [was] up in arms about prorogation, others supported the group arguing that ‘there [were] a significant number of Canadians who [were] not happy with what is being done in their name.’” (Paulsen, 2010d).

A member of the group, Colin Carmichael, also constructed a website as a means to provide individuals with an alternative venue for the anti-prorogation momentum (Carmichael, noprorogue.ca, March 6, 2010a). The site allowed anyone to register and submit a comment about prorogation, and it has allowed more than 100 people to sign up

as contributors (Carmichael, noprorogue.ca, March 6, 2010b). As well, as of January 14, 2010 approximately 50 Blog posts had been published, sparking over 110 comments from visitors. Finally, as of January 14, 2010 more than 15,000 individuals from over 50 countries and 300 Canadian cities had visited the Blog (Carmichael, noprorogue.ca, March 6, 2010c). As with the Facebook group, the website caught the interest of various media outlets from the *Globe and Mail* to *Maclean's Magazine*.

This thesis addresses the following three research questions related to the role that the Facebook group played in facilitating political participation:

- What motivated individuals to join the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament”?
- Did the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” mobilize new participants or does it reinforce existing biases in participation?
- Did the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” help activate the political participation of members in the real world?

In addition to evaluating what was done online through a careful analysis of the activity of the group itself, this study also asked the group’s members to complete a short survey and performed an interview with the group’s founder (see: Chapter 4). Together, these multiple methodologies offered a unique insight into the group and its associated activities.

1.2 Purpose/Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis adds to the mobilization and reinforcement debates by applying these models to a grassroots organization, as opposed to a political campaign. As previously

discussed, the empirical literature has generally focused on how a political campaign or a political party can utilize the Internet as a way to enhance citizen engagement. This study broadens the scope of focus by analyzing how a grassroots organization can employ the Internet for political participation.

1.2.2 Practical Contributions

This thesis illustrates how to build a successful campaign online. In doing so, it will outline what worked and what did not work for the “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” group so that future grassroots organizations can build upon their successes and failures to facilitate political participation in the offline world. By drawing upon the successes and failures of “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament,” other grassroots organizations may be better equipped to successfully implement social networking websites within their campaigns. A greater number of online campaigns may contribute to more opportunities for individuals to get involved in politics. Ultimately, this may reverse citizen disengagement and enhance democracy, both within Canada and worldwide.

1.3 Study Overview

The distribution of this thesis’ chapters is as follows: an in-depth review of the political participation literature and the theoretical framework will be discussed in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the social networking website Facebook will be introduced, discussed, and applied to politics. Specific details of the methodology employed will be examined in chapter 4. Chapter 5 and chapter 6 will address the results from my survey and engage in a content analysis. Chapter 7 will provide a comprehensive discussion of the results and will compare the findings to past research, pointing out both the

similarities and the differences between them and this study. A summary of this study's findings will be provided and various conclusions will be suggested. This thesis will conclude with a presentation of the implications of the study and recommendations regarding future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In order to establish the framework for this thesis, this chapter will begin by reviewing the definitions and the work that has been associated with political participation. As the introduction of the Internet to the political participation literature is fairly new, this chapter will also introduce a definition for online political participation that will be used throughout this work. The second part of this thesis will examine the mobilization and the reinforcement theses, and review the studies that have accompanied these debates. The chapter will end by presenting the few studies that have measured the impact of new technologies on political participation.

2.1 Assessing the Modes of Traditional Political Participation

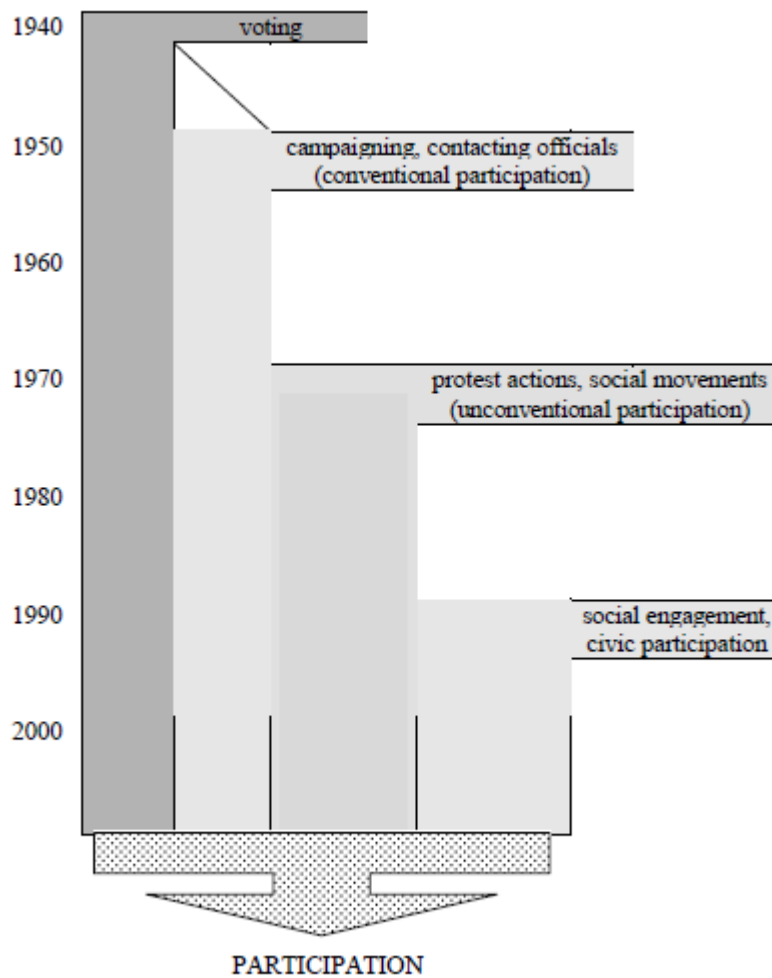
Scholars of political science have long noted that participation and democracy are inseparable. Certainly, the idea that citizen involvement is a precondition for democracy has been stressed ever since Pericles noted that

“An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household; and even those of us who are engaged in business have a fair idea of politics. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as harmless but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of policy” (as cited in van Deth, 2001a: 3).

This statement suggests that it is an individual’s obligation to participate in the political life of a society. However, democratic theorists working from the Aristotelian tradition would resist this perspective, as they have conceived of political participation as individuals recognizing their potential through engaging in public affairs (van Deth, 2001b). While the basis of these definitions—that democracy implies rule by the

people—still reigns true today, the study of political participation has undergone many changes in recent years (see: Figure 1).

Figure 1
Political Participation Timeline



Source: Van Deth, 2001c. “Studying Political Participation: Towards a Theory of Everything?” Paper Presented at the Joint Sessions of Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research, Europe.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, political participation was conceived of as voting and electoral participation in the 1940s and the 1950s (see: Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Berelson, 1952; Barnes and Kaase, 1979a). The field of political participation grew considerably in the 1960s to include those conventional modes of participation such as working in campaigns, donating money to individuals, contacting government officials, circulating petitions, and running for office (Lyons, 2002). However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, this definition was no longer dubbed as adequate, as societal developments made it clear that political participation was not restricted to conventional activities only. Thus, political participation broke into two streams—conventional activities and unconventional activities; the latter denoted those activities that differed from the societal norms of the day such as attending rallies or protests (Barnes and Kaase, 1979b). The most recent expansion of political participation took place in the 1990s (Kavanaugh, Kim, Perez-Quinones et al., 2008). In this final stage, the “disappearing borderline between political and non-political spheres of modern society and the revival of Tocquevillean² and communitarian approaches led to an expansion of political participation with ‘civil’ activities, such as volunteering and social engagement” (van Deth, 2001d: 6).

Empirical studies emerged in unison with the modes discussed and listed above in figure 1.³ These studies emphasized the expressive functions⁴ of political participation, measuring, for example, the number of hours or dollars spent by an individual (see:

² This term refers to Alexis de Tocqueville who was a French political thinker who believed that liberty and equality - or the individual and community - were necessary preconditions for democracy.

³ Due to space constraints, the following list of empirical studies only represents a snapshot of the work that exists on political participation.

⁴ Political expression entails to extent to which the public expresses their political orientations.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995b; Verba and Nie, 1972b). Thus, whereas engaging in conversation with one's family or friends was not considered to be expressive political participation, going to a public forum to express one's political views was. Milbrath (1965a) was among the first to study political participation. In his study, Milbrath (1965b) proposed a pyramid that ranged from active to passive forms of political participation. He referred to those activities at the top of the pyramid as "gladiator" and to those activities at the bottom as "spectator" acts. Whereas those activities at the top of the pyramid ranged from holding public and party office or soliciting political funds, those at the bottom of the pyramid consisted of voting or exposing oneself to political stimuli. The middle range of the pyramid was represented by "transitional" acts and included contacting a public official or leader, for example. Following Milbrath (1965c), Verba, Nie, and Kim (1971) sought to extend the definition of political participation. They assessed a total of 12 activities, which they then classified as four modes of political participation. These included, voting, campaign activities, communal activities, and particularized contacts. Barnes and Kaase (1979c) further expanded the repertoire in their study where they ranked nine forms of conventional participation from high initiative to low initiative behaviour. High initiative activities included campaigning for candidates and attended political meetings, while voting in elections and reading about politics were considered to be low initiative acts. Building on their previous work, in their study of American engagement, Verba et al., (1995c) categorized political participation into: time-based acts, political contributions, voting, and political discussion. Their study found that the "elements that had the greatest impact for fostering time-based acts included education and free time; income was the best predictor for making contributions; political

interest, knowledge, education, and partisanship were among the best predictors for voting, and political interest was the strongest predictor for political participation” (Winneg, 2009:12).⁵

2.2 Definition of Political Participation for this Study

As it currently stands, the most widely cited definition for political participation is that of Verba and Nie (1972) and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995). They define political participation as private citizens engaging in activities to influence the government and the actions that they take. Scholars who cite Verba and colleagues have generally referred to traditional or offline activities (such as voting, contacting public officials) to make arguments about level of participation in society (see: Zuniga et al., 2010). However, the introduction of the Internet (and social networking websites) has created the need to reassess the definition of political participation. If political participation is an action intended to influence political decision making, then online engagement can be seen as political participation if that activity is intended to influence decisions.

In the context of the Canadian’s Against Proroguing Parliament group, if a member joined the group to simply garner information about prorogation, this would likely not be constituted as political participation. This is because the intention of the individual was not to actually participate or contribute, but rather to act as an observer. If, on the other hand, an individual joined the group to add weight to the group’s presence

⁵ In their study of American engagement and volunteering, Verba and collaborators, added to their list 12 modes of political participation, and not less than 22 modes of involvement in organizations, thereby expanding the definition of political participation to include more than 40 modes of political participation (see: Kavanaugh, Kim, Perez-Quinones et al., 2008).

and to have it be noticed, then this may be constituted as political participation as the individual's behaviour was actively pushing forward a political goal. Thus, for this study, political participation will be classified as the intention of the group's members to influence the political process, either online or off.

2.3 Perspectives on the Internet and Civil Society

Scholars of the Internet and political participation have focused on three general perspectives that exist regarding Internet use and civil society. Two of the views are polarized (optimistic and pessimistic), and have been referred to as the mobilization and reinforcement theses (see: Park and Perry, 2007a; Bimber, 2003a; Norris, 2001b). The third view seeks a middle ground between the former and the latter.

2.3.1 Mobilization Thesis

Many scholars have argued that the Internet could profoundly change the way in which individuals participate in the political process due to its inherently interactive, non-hierarchical, low cost, and easy to use nature. These researchers have argued that the Internet has the ability to politically inform, educate, and organize individuals (Norris, 2001c; Strandberg, 2008). The proponents who have shared this optimistic view of the Internet have sided with the mobilization camp, and provide several arguments to support their claim.

They begin by arguing that the Internet has provided opportunities for individuals to express their views and opinions to others. Indeed, these scholars have claimed that the applications provided by the Internet, including e-mail, online discussion groups, and chat-rooms provide a unique ability for citizens to engage with each other. To date, the research has indicated that the functions offered by the Internet have facilitated vibrant

and energetic discussions (Whillock, 1997a; Schwartz, 1996; Budge, 1996). The proponents of the mobilization thesis have argued that the Internet will strengthen the communication between citizens, thereby enhancing community affairs (Norris, 2001d).

Second, the Internet optimists have suggested that the Internet will reduce the barriers for individuals to inform themselves about politics (Johnson and Kaye, 2003a; Grossman, 1995a). They have contended that the limitless information provided by the Internet will make the public more knowledgeable about public affairs (Norris, 2001e). Once armed with this information, the mobilization theorists have argued that individuals will become more articulate in expressing their views and in participating in civic life.

Third, Internet optimists have claimed that the Internet allows individuals to connect with others from around the globe. This, according to scholars of the mobilization thesis, has increased a sense of community among citizens (see: Schwartz, 1995). The Internet has the capacity to restore community by providing a meeting space for people with common interests to inform themselves and engage in open and democratic discourse, thereby mobilizing collective action both online and offline (Wellman, Haase, Witte et al., 2001). Indeed, Alexander (1999a) argued that online discussion forums can enhance the level of discourse on community issues, thereby strengthening participation in community politics offline.

Finally, the supporters of the mobilization thesis have claimed that the “Internet shifts power away from lobbyists, large corporations, and other special interests toward the average person because it reduces the cost of acquiring and distributing information” (Johnson and Kaye, 2003b: 11). This could enhance political efficacy because it enables

citizens to interact with private and public officials and to hold them accountable (Kenski and Stroud, 2006a). More importantly, however, this could enhance trust in public bureaucrats by making the government more transparent and accountable. Furthermore, Internet optimists have argued that the Internet may offer alternative channels for lobbying and campaigning. For example, it may make it easier for grassroots organizations to compete with lobbyists by using the functions of the Internet (such as e-mail and websites) to rally individuals for a common cause (Johnson and Kaye, 2003c).

2.3.2 Reinforcement Thesis

While supporters of the mobilization thesis have been confident about the changes that the Internet could bring to politics and to democracy, the supporters of the reinforcement thesis have argued that the Internet will fail to dramatically alter the engagement of citizens. These scholars have also used several rationales to support their argument.

First, reinforcement theorists have agreed with supporters of the mobilization thesis that the Internet could increase the availability and the accessibility of information; however they have argued that a higher knowledge base does not necessarily mean a greater likelihood of political participation among citizens (Johnson and Kaye, 2003d). Certainly, exposure to information alone cannot spawn an individual's interest in politics, nor can it increase an individual's likelihood to vote (Bimber, 1998a; Dimaggio et al., 2001a; Whillock, 1997b). Rather, they argue, that the Internet has acted as a pull medium, insofar as it has catered to those with a predisposed interest in politics, rather

than attracting those individuals who lack a pre-existing motivation (Ward, Gibson, Lusoli, 2003).

Second, the supporters of the reinforcement thesis have argued that Internet will not “make it easier for individuals to contact political representatives or activists to mobilize. Rather, they have suggested that the Internet will only offer a faster and a more efficient way for lobbyists, who already have the ear of the government to articulate their view more effectively” (Johnson and Kaye, 2003:13).

Finally, the proponents of the reinforcement thesis have argued that far from lowering participation costs, the Internet could actually increase them. These scholars have suggested that the Internet is responsible for a “digital divide,” insofar as it reflects the familiar social structures and patterns that are found offline. Thus, these researchers have argued that “more educated individuals with higher incomes and managerial and professional occupations are more likely to have higher levels of political efficacy, a perception that they can influence government, generally with respect to the Internet” (Di Gennaro and Dutton; 2006c: 300). Thus, those individuals with higher incomes, more education, and an increased sense of political efficacy will likely express their concerns to the government, thereby skewing political participation in favour of the elite socioeconomic groups in society (Di Gennaro and Dutton, 2006d; Xenos and Foot, 2003).

2.3.3 A Middle Ground

The discussion above illustrates the scholarly debate about the empirical discrepancy regarding the use of the Internet by citizens. Whereas proponents of the

mobilization and the reinforcement theses have varied in their opinions of whether the uses of the Internet could lead to advantages or disadvantages for political participation, some scholars have sided with neither of the above camps; they have argued that these rigid frameworks share a middle ground (Park and Perry, 2007b; Bimber, 2003b; Katz and Rice, 2002; DiMaggio et al., 2001b; Norris, 2001f). As with the mobilization and the reinforcement theses, these scholars have drawn upon a few arguments to support their claims.

First, these skeptical scholars argue that the Internet will not improve or reduce political participation (Putnam, 2000a; Uslaner, 2004; Bimber, 2003c). They support this claim by arguing “that the Internet is taking on the features of everyday life” (Kim, 2009: 22). Thus, they argue, that if traditional modes of communication are unable to stimulate political participation, then we should not expect that the Internet can.

Their second argument paints a far bleaker picture of the Internet, suggesting that it is likely to displace personal engagement thereby failing to generate social capital (Putnam, 2000b). Put more bluntly, these scholars have argued that the Internet is likely to reduce personal face-to-face connections, rather than increase them. The scholars working from this perspective point to the various studies that have failed to find a significant relationship between Internet use and civic engagement (Bimber, 2003d). The next section will review the empirical research that has supported these three perspectives. The research has been broken up into the following three categories: demographics, the politically interested or the apathetic, and online or offline political participation.

2.4 Empirical Research

2.4.1 Demographics

The majority of the studies that have tested the mobilization and the reinforcement theses have been concerned with uncovering whether the Internet provides the opportunity for users from traditionally unrepresented groups such as the young, the poor, or the less educated to participate in politics. These studies have largely found evidence supporting the reinforcement thesis, thereby concluding that the Internet tends to favor older white men who are educated and from higher income brackets. For example, in their study “Online Participation in the UK: Testing a ‘Contextualized’ Model of Internet Effects,” Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward (2005c) found that those who engaged politically online were far more likely to be male, to be highly educated, and to be of higher socioeconomic status.

As well, in his study that examined the Internet and voting in the Democratic primary in Arizona, Solop (2001a) found that the Internet favoured the more traditionally advantageous demographics. Indeed, his study revealed that Internet voters tended to be white, non-Latino, male, middle-aged, educated, and from a higher income bracket. Of these demographic characteristics, through a logistic regression, Solop (2001b) showed that the best predictors for online voting were age, education, and income.

Finally, Bimber (1999a) found evidence of demographic inequalities in his study that was designed to test access to the Internet, the frequency of Internet use, and the political uses of the Internet. Findings from his study revealed that the participants’ age, gender, and political connectedness were similar across the various communication

technologies. It is worthwhile to note that Bimber (1999b) did find small effects in his model showing that younger individuals were more likely to use e-mail to contact the government. Sadly, once older citizens had tried contacting the government through e-mail, they were more likely to do so, and to do so frequently. Obviously, since the time of this study the Internet has evolved. As such, his results should be evaluated in conjunction with more recent studies.

Only a few studies that have evaluated the demographic characteristics of Internet users and political participation have found that online engagement sites can sometimes enhance the participation of younger generations. For example, Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001a) found that whereas the television was found to be the most important indicator for the generation of social capital by Baby Boomers, and the newspaper was found to be the most important indicator of social capital by the Civic Generation, the Internet was found to be the most important indicator for the generation of social capital for Generation X.⁶ Their findings showed that the most likely demographic to be mobilized by the Internet was Generation X, and those who possessed the greatest familiarity of the Internet regardless of their socioeconomic standing were Generation X.

Similarly, Pasek et al., (2006a) found that 58.3% youth (between the ages of 14 and 22) in their study used the Internet as their primary means for obtaining information within a seven day week. Moreover, they found that doing so was correlated with regularly participating in civic activities. While the authors found education and age to be

⁶ The authors describe those younger than 35 years as being a part of “Generation X,” those between the ages of 35 and 53 as being a part of the “Baby Boomers,” and those 54 and older as being a part of the “Civic Generation.”

the strongest predictors of Generation X's political knowledge, neither age nor education was found to be a significant predictor of civic activity.

The majority of the studies to date that have tested the correlation between the Internet and demographics have found support of the reinforcement thesis. Specifically, these studies have found that those individuals who are educated, white, and men with higher household incomes are more likely to utilize the Internet as a means to participate in politics. The research has shown some hope in mobilization taking hold, as some authors have found that when the younger generation utilizes the Internet they are more likely to engage in politics.

2.4.2 The Politically Interested or the Apathetic

A large proportion of the studies have focused on whether the Internet favours those with a predisposition to politics. For example, in their study, Chen and Lee (2008) employed a sub-sample of survey data collected from a research project titled “Taiwan’s Social Change Survey” to analyze whether the Internet could be used as a means to encourage civic engagement. Findings from their study revealed that higher Internet usage was correlated with increased levels of online civic engagement. However, these findings should not be overstated, as the results from their study also indicated that the effects of the Internet tended to favour those individuals who were already engaged offline.

Xenos and Moy (2007b) came to similar conclusions in their secondary analysis of American National Election Studies (ANES) data. Results from their analysis revealed that regardless of the individuals’ political interest, the Internet was responsible for

increasing their political knowledge. However, their results also showed that those with a higher level of political interest were more likely to use the Internet for participatory purposes (such as volunteering for political campaigns or engaging in political discussions), thus supporting the reinforcement thesis.

Similarly, in their analysis of survey data, Weber, Loumakis and Bergman (2003a) found that their sample was highly engaged in political life, with more than half reporting that they had signed a petition and one-third suggesting that they had attended a town hall or school meeting. However, while approximately 40 percent of their respondents noted that they had performed one or two political acts, only 10 percent of their sample claimed that they had performed 4 or more political acts. This suggests that political acts tend to be dominated by a few individuals.

Similar findings were reported by Jennings and Zeitner (2003). Their study found that the connection between Internet use and civic engagement tended to be specific to the individuals being analyzed, insofar as the extent to which the individuals were engaged depended on the degree to which they utilized the Internet for political purposes. Thus, their findings revealed that the individuals who used the Internet for political purposes, scored higher on several measures of involvement. Moreover, their results indicated that the individuals' frequency of Internet usage was insignificant for all civic engagement indicators. Thus, they concluded that other factors, such as a previous level of civic engagement were responsible for generating the relationship between political participation and the political usage of the Internet; this relationship was particularly true for younger cohorts.

Kavanaugh et al (2008a) found that politically-active⁷ and politically-passive⁸ participants reported using the Internet to enhance their relationship with other community members (Kavanaugh et al., 2008b). However, their findings were not as optimistic for apathetic respondents,⁹ as they revealed that the Internet did not increase their level of involvement in the community or in decision-making spheres. Again, it appears that the Internet does not facilitate apathetic individuals' interest in politics; rather, its effects are limited to those who are already politically engaged.

Norris (1999) and Kroh and Neiss (2009) also found evidence of the Internet catering to those politically engaged. Indeed, their findings suggested that Internet activists were among the most motivated, interested, and informed in the electorate. Moreover, their studies concluded that politically interested citizens are most likely to obtain Internet use, and therefore more likely to exploit the benefits of it. Furthermore, their studies concluded that the Internet only provides access to traditional news information.

As previously stated (see: Chapter 2), participation in local community groups has been found to enhance democracy. According to Verba and Nie (1972d), volunteer associations have been an important potential source leveling the field of participation between the advantaged and disadvantaged. Some recent studies have found that the

⁷Active respondents are characterized as those most active in the community. They are generally those individuals who demand responsible government and engage in various political acts (Kavanaugh et al., 2008).

⁸ Passive respondents are those individuals who are less likely to engage in political activity either individually or in a group to which they belong. Despite this, these individuals generally have knowledge about their neighborhoods, business, and recreation (Kavanaugh et al., 2008).

⁹ Kavanaugh et al (2008) describe apathetic individuals as those with no interest in politics. Thus, these individuals do not vote, do not discuss politics do not engage in political activity, and do not join groups.

Internet can provide the same function by facilitating the means for political participation offline (Kavanaugh et al., 2007). These studies are evaluated below.

2.4.3 Online or Offline Participation

The Internet has the potential to facilitate political participation offline. For example, findings from “Campaign Ads, Online Messaging and Participation: Extending the Communication Mediation Model” (2007) revealed that as the participants used the Internet to gain more political information or to express their opinions about public affairs through e-mails, they were more likely to engage in political participation. More importantly, the findings from the study revealed that interactive political messaging spawned civic and political participation and campaign involvement (Shah et al., 2007).

Kenski and Stroud (2006b) found evidence for the mobilization thesis, as their results showed significant associations between Internet access and online exposure to campaign information and political efficacy, political knowledge, and political participation. With regards to political participation the authors found that even when controlling for political interest, online campaign exposure was still found to contribute to political participation. Thus, the Internet was found to motivate those citizens who may have not otherwise participated to participate politically, and was also found to help those citizens who were already politically motivated to participate in politics more intensely and frequently.

As well, Weber and Bergman (2001a) found support of the mobilization thesis, noting that those survey respondents who reported using the Internet’s applications, such as the e-mail or the chat-room functions, were more likely to engage in offline political

activities. Interestingly, while their findings revealed that the Internet did facilitate offline political participation, they also found that the respondents used the offline and online realms to participate in politics differently. For example, the individuals reported that the Internet did not make them any more likely to contact political officials, attend political rallies, or sign political petitions. It should, however, be noted that my survey employed by Weber and Bergman (2001b) was self-selected and non-random, and therefore was subject to selection bias, which may have made their findings unrepresentative of the entire population.

Finally, in a study of 16 year-old Belgium youth, Quintler and Visserss (2008a) found that those individuals who accessed political applications online were likely to participate in similar political activities offline. Their findings revealed that “chatting with unknown people, participating in blogging/discussion groups, purchasing or selling things, following the news, and forwarding political e-mails had a positive effect on [an individual’s] level of political participation” (Quintler and Vissers, 2008b: 421). Furthermore, their research indicated that not all behaviour online needed to be political for individuals to participate in political activities offline. In particular, they found that even through discussing mundane issues, individuals were able to increase their levels of self-efficacy, thus making them more likely to confidently discuss similar issues in an online or offline context. Previous research has indicated that “political attitudes, interests, efficacy, and knowledge are linked to political participation,” (Quintler and Vissers, 2008c: 421) thus by participating in online communication forums, individuals are able to garner the necessary skills, thereby making them more likely to participate politically either online or offline.

While the studies above have provided evidence of participants using the Internet to mobilize in the real world, some research suggests the opposite conclusion. For example, results from Di Gennaro and Dutton's (2006e) survey revealed that only 38% of their participants noted that they had engaged in at least one of the six listed political activities: e-mailing a member of Parliament; e-mailing a councilor; searching for information about central government services, local council services, schools, or education; or about a Member of Parliament, local councilor or politician mentioned in the survey. More importantly, of the six listed activities, they found that the most common form of political participation was searching for information about politics or public affairs for online-based political activities. The authors offered two potential reasons for why this may be. First, they suggested that it may be that individuals are consciously choosing to not participate in offline activities. Second, they suggested that individuals from lower socioeconomic groups may be unable to afford to participate in offline political activities. For example, some individuals may be unable to afford the cost of transport to and from events or the costs that they incur while participating. Further research would have to be conducted to confirm why political activity on the Internet seems to be restricted to the online world.

2.5 Empirical Research on New Technologies

To date, few studies have tested the impact of the Internet on political participation. Those that have studied the latter have found evidence in favour of both the mobilization and the reinforcement theses. The former will be dealt with first.

In their study of political participation via Facebook, Feezell, Conroy and Guerrero (2009a) examined the extent to which group membership on Facebook translated into offline political participation. Their study consisted of a multi-method design that incorporated a survey administered to political science students that was supplemented by a content analysis. The findings from their study demonstrated that membership in Facebook groups online, was associated with increased political participation offline. However, despite increased political participation offline, the authors were unable to find evidence of increased political knowledge among Facebook users.

However, while the members of Facebook groups were more likely to participate in offline political activities, the authors found no evidence of increased political knowledge among Facebook users. A serious limitation of this study is that the authors only sampled political science students. It should come as no surprise then, that either by choice, or by nature, these political science students were far more likely to engage in political events than non-political science students would be.

Similarly, in their study of Blogs, Zuniga, Puig-i-Abril, and Rojas (2009a) found that offline participation increased among those participants who wrote, read, or commented on Blogs. For example, they found that those participants who had used Blogs were more likely to sign a petition or to donate money to political parties. Moreover, those participants who had written, read, or commented on Blogs were also more likely to engage in political discussions. However, while the results for Blog usage

were positive, findings from their study also revealed that Blog usage had no effect on offline political participation.

Another study, “Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election,” (2008) revealed that most students did not use Facebook for political purposes. Those students who were found to use Facebook as a venue for political participation were already politically engaged. Thus, their results echoed the reinforcement thesis, indicating that those participants who were politically engaged offline sought multiple outlets to express their political behaviour, while those participants who were unengaged remained unaffected by the political aspects of Facebook. It is worthwhile to note that this study’s sample was drawn from a single institution (Vitak et al., 2009), thus the results may not be representative of the entire population.

2.6 Conclusion

The studies presented above show that the majority of the research to date has been focused on the applications of Internet 1.0 (see: Chapter 3), neglecting whether the new technologies (offered by Internet 2.0) could enhance political participation. As well, the majority of the literature that has evaluated the features associated with Internet 2.0 has focused on their effects in the United States. Because Internet consumption and participation varies by country, any lessons learnt from America cannot always be applied to Canada. By drawing upon the theories presented in this chapter, this thesis will strive to address whether the social networking website, Facebook, can stimulate political participation. The next chapter begins by providing an understanding of Facebook.

Chapter 3: Social Networking Websites and Facebook

While the scholars of the mobilization and reinforcement theses have drawn conclusions about whether the Internet could foster political participation among citizens, most of their analyses have largely been confined to examining the Internet in its most basic form. The expansion of the Internet (referred to as Web 2.0) has brought with it new modes of communication, such as social networking websites including MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. These websites give users the opportunity to interact with others and to collaborate in the creation of site content (Small, 2008b). The introduction of Web 2.0 has prompted a necessity for scholars to reevaluate whether the newer applications offered by the Web could enhance civic engagement. In the next section, I will provide an overview of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, followed by a basic understanding of social networking websites.

3.1 Web 1.0 versus Web 2.0

The term Web 1.0 was created to denote the release and the characteristics that accompanied the World Wide Web in 1991. This version of the web consisted of static web pages that contained portals of information. Thus, when the users of the Internet accessed these web pages they were greeted by a front page that provided them with links to various subpages. The subpages were augmented by crosslinks and search functions to provide easy navigation for the users (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008). Web 1.0 only gave users a passive experience, allowing them to be the recipients of previously produced information.

The more modern version of the web, referred to as Web 2.0, emerged in 2001, and is quite different from its predecessor. This version of the web has been called the “wisdom web, the people-centric web, and the reading and writing web” (Murugesan, 2007) because it utilizes the web’s interactive and collaborative capabilities. Thus, unlike Web 1.0, the users can both access the web’s content and contribute to it, thereby providing every user with a different experience. While various applications have accompanied the birth of Web 2.0, the most important for this thesis are social networking websites. They are discussed below.

3.2 Overview of Social Networking Websites

Most scholars agree that in its most basic form, “a social network is a set of people, organizations, or social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships” (Williams and Gulati, 2007: 3). Thus, when a computer “connects people and allows them to carry on a public discussion long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace, it is a social network” (Wellman et al., 2001: 436). Indeed, virtual communities emerge “when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 1993a: 5). Each social networking website is unique; however, they all allow their users to create, to link, and to view other members’ content. Indeed, users can construct a public or semi-public profile and articulate a list of users with whom they share a connection (Boyd and Ellison, 2007a). The social interaction that takes place between users of social networking websites produces a conversation, thereby leading to an exchange of information. This exchange of information has the potential to broaden users’ social ties, and provide them

with valuable wisdom about how to become politically involved (McClurg, 2003; Pasek, More, and Romer, 2008). Moreover, the intention behind social networking websites is to maintain pre-existing relationships; however, they also have the potential to help strangers connect with others who share commonalities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007b). Early research on the usage of social networking sites indicated that individuals used them as a means to connect with people with whom they had an offline connection (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007a). However, this trend differed among those who stated that they used social networking sites as a means to meet new people (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007b). Finally, research on patterns of social network use indicated that “when online and offline networks overlapped, the directionality was online to offline” (Phulari et al., 2010: 93). That is, it was the online connections that fostered the face-to-face meetings.

Recent statistics have indicated that online social networking is growing rapidly. Indeed, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter have all launched social networking websites, but it is Facebook that has emerged as the major player (see: Small, 2008c). As of February, 2010 reports indicated that Facebook had passed the 400 million user mark (Dybwad, 2010) with Iceland, Norway, and Hong Kong leading the other countries with the highest Facebook usage (Oliveira, 2010a). As well, Canada has been reported to be at the top of the list among those countries with a population of over 10 million (Oliveria, 2010b). According to the Research firm Inside Network, over 16 million Canadians (or 47.9% of the population) have Facebook profiles.

3.3 Overview of Facebook

Facebook burst onto the scene as a social networking website created by Mark Zuckerberg (along with Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes, and two other students) in 2004. From its outset, Facebook was dubbed as “a social utility that helps people communicate more effectively with others” (Facebook, 2010a). Facebook was originally intended to be a communication tool for students of Harvard University, but it was soon extended to include students from other American and Canadian colleges, and then to include students from European and Asian colleges. Since September 11, 2006, Facebook has expanded its reach to include all individuals with valid e-mail addresses (Facebook Press Room, 2008). Since then, Facebook has experienced an extraordinary and unforeseen increase. For example, in early 2006, the site had registered 6 million official users, most of them College students (Vogelstein, 2007). A few years later in mid-2009, the number of active Facebook users had expanded to reach over 200 million. Statistics indicate that a typical Facebook user spends “20 minutes a day on the site, and that 2/3 of users log in at least once per day” (Ellison, Stampe, and Lampe, 2007).

3.3.1 Privacy Concerns

Despite its growth, Facebook has recently received attention regarding its privacy settings. At the outset, it offered its users simple and powerful controls over their personal information. Indeed, their privacy policy in 2005 read that “no personal information that [a user] submit[ed] to Facebook [would] be available to any user of the Web site who [did] not belong to at least one of the groups specified [by the users] privacy settings” (Opsahl, 2010). However, as Facebook has grown larger, it has dealt with a backlash from its users regarding changes to their privacy settings. The most controversial of these changes was in December 2009 when the site announced its

decision to make all of the users' information available to the public, by default. This included the users' personal information (profile picture, name, city, employment and/or school information and so forth), friends' lists, and causes that they "liked" (CNBC, 2010a)¹⁰. If the users decided that they did not want this information to be available to the public, their only option was to not post this information to their profile at all.

In addition to disclosing all of the user's personal information, the site announced in April 2010 that it would allow third-parties to access and store some of the member's personal information. The rationale was that providing this information to outside services would better personalize the members experience based on the data it finds (CNBC, 2010b). While Facebook's privacy policy acknowledged that its users would be able to opt out of these sites, by default all of their users were opted in (CNBC, 2010c).

3.3.2 General Features

Facebook profiles are unique pages in that one types themselves into being (Sunden, 2003). Facebook requires individuals to have a valid e-mail address, prior to signing up for the website. After visiting Facebook's website (www.Facebook.com), an individual enters their name, followed by an e-mail address, birth date, and a password. Once an individual's account is active, the first step is to create a profile. The user's profile consists of answers to basic questions that Facebook provides, such as one's gender, sexual preference, and political and religious viewpoints. Following this information, users can opt to reveal their alternate e-mail addresses, instant messaging, telephone numbers, addresses, and any other websites that are of interest.

¹⁰ These features are discussed more in-depth below.

Once the users have successfully completed their profile, the next step is to add friends. Users can add friends who they already know to their friends lists, or they can expand their reach to include other users by joining networks. As the site indicates, these network features allow “you to see the profiles of other people in the selected network, and they will be able to see yours” (Facebook 2010b).¹¹ Once a user finds someone with whom they would like to converse, a friend request is sent. After that request is accepted, not only are the two users’ personal profiles disclosed to each other, but also to their entire social network (Valenzuela, Park, Kee, 2008a). This capability is the backbone of Facebook, as it creates a community for sharing and exchanging information, and interacting with new users.

Another section of the profile includes an area labeled “personal information.” In this area, the users may indicate activities that they engage in or interests that they have. When the users indicate activities or interests, they become links. Clicking on these links allows users to find other members of the Facebook community who share the same interests or activities. The personal information section consists of an area where the users may list their favorite movies, television shows, or books. Additionally, there is a section in which users may indicate quotes and further information about themselves (in the “about me” area).

Once members have an active Facebook profile, they can post messages to the wall, engage in open discussions, share photos, video clips, or media files, write notes, and create events (Williams and Gulati, 2007). All of these applications are available to

¹¹ Users may use the privacy setting to turn this or any other feature off. Doing so ensures that members of the same network are unable to view the user’s profile.

all Facebook members. The wall functions as a message board that allows Facebook members to engage in a virtual conversation with each other. Additionally, the wall “contains short posts that reflect sentiments, common activities between friends, or call attention to external websites or events” (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee, 2008b: 6). As well, the photo and video applications allow users to upload photos or videos into albums. Users may tag their friends in the photos or videos. By doing this, the photos or videos appear on the indicated friends’ Facebook profiles.

The users may also indicate their interest in an external website by posting links to their Facebook profiles. These links appear in a separate box, and allow the users or their friends to comment on them (Wilkes, 2008a). In addition to posting links, the users can write “notes.” These notes function similar to blog posts, as users can post about virtually anything.

Additional features of Facebook include the news and the mini-feed applications.¹² The news-feed application is a built-in mechanism of Facebook, and therefore appears on every user’s homepage. This application provides an updated personalized list of the new posts that have been generated throughout the day by the friends of the users. Moreover, each time the users log onto Facebook, they are provided with an updated list of their friend’s activities. Facebook gives the users the ability to control what type of content shows up on their mini-feed. Thus, the users may block content that they do not find relevant to them. In contrast to the news-feed, the mini-feed

¹² In their introduction, many members expressed concerns over the mini and newsfeed applications. Following this, Facebook compromised by providing its users with additional privacy options, which they deemed as an acceptable compromise. However, in December, 2009, Facebook removed these privacy controls (Jesdanun, 2006).

keeps a record of similar events on each member's profile page (Rosmarin, 2006) Both of these applications connect all users within a network into what is essentially a very large conversation, turning Facebook into something more than just a bunch of individuals ranting into cyberspace.

The events application allows users to create gatherings for their friends to attend, either online or offline—virtually or in person. Once users receive Facebook events, they can select from three different options to indicate whether they are attending, possibly attending, or not attending the event. Once users confirm their attendance, a thumbnail of their profile appears under confirmed guests. The events function displays the user's upcoming events, any pending invitations that the users have, and provides links to the user's events on members' Facebook profiles (Facebook, 2010c).

Another Facebook application is the groups function. The groups application was introduced to Facebook in 2004 as one of its earliest and most pivotal features. The “groups are closed by default (but can remain secret or open) and are designed to be spaces where small groups of friends share information, with each group controlled by the entirety of its members” (van Grove, 2010). Additionally, the users can share their interests by “providing a common space within which users can meet others interested in a specific topic, disseminate information on that topic, and have discussions relevant to that topic” (Feezel, Conroy, Guerrero, 2009b: 8). Within groups, members can engage in such activities as group chats, e-mail lists, document sharing, and photo-tagging.

All groups have two main spaces for interaction. The first is the wall. The group wall functions similarly to a profile wall, as members can post comments and opinions that they wish to share with the rest of the group members. Every time a comment is

posted, it appears on the main page of the group, where it can be read by any of the members. The posts appear in sequential order, which means that in a particularly active group, messages can get moved to the bottom very quickly. The second space for interaction in a group is through the discussion board. The discussion board functions similarly to other forums on traditional websites, with the only difference being once a user is a member of a group, he or she can comment on other users' topics and create new board topics for discussing other issues that can be commented on by other members of the group.

The final Facebook application is the page feature. Although anyone can create a page, this function is geared towards local businesses, brands, products, organizations, artists, bands, or public figures (Facebook, 2010e). This feature offers the possibility for the users to import information between their personal websites and their page (killercampaigning.com, 2010a). As with the group function, pages can be created and administered by single or multiple users. Additionally, the page application allows users to post messages to the wall, create discussion board topics, and so forth. However, while the administrators can send notification updates to their fans, they cannot send inbox messages. The notification updates appear under the updates tab in the user's message center, but is generally not checked as often by the members (killercampaigning.com, 2010b).

3.3.3 Political Possibilities

In addition to the general possibilities afforded to its users, Facebook also provides them with the opportunity to informally and formally utilize its applications for political purposes. In terms of the informal, the users can demonstrate their interest in

social or political causes in the personal activities section of their profiles. Doing so may stimulate political discussion among their friends. Additionally, users can link to or generate notes that contain political information, thereby potentially stimulating conversation among users. Finally, apathetic users may be exposed to political events or political groups that their politically interested friends join via Facebook's news and/or mini-feed. Of course, whether or not these applications produce political participation or dialogue is up to the individual users. "Given the nature of the site and civic engagement, it is likely that such interaction occurs between those users who are already highly interested in such causes. However, Facebook does have the potential to bring 'new' citizens into the political process, given the ease with which such discussion may be generated" (Wilkes, 2008: 15b).

While many of the aforementioned applications provide indirect avenues through which Facebook members can engage in political dialogue, more direct or formal opportunities for political participation also exist. The event, the group, and the page functions are three areas in which Facebook users can formally engage in politics. As previously mentioned, the creation of an event, a group, or a page requires both initiative and motivation on behalf of the administrator. Indeed, beyond the costs associated with setting up any of the three applications (discussed above), the administrator must be willing to promote and grow them by posting links, sending e-mails, or inviting or requesting other users to attend, to join, or to become a fan. The administrator can update the event, the group, or the page with bulk messages or calls to action, and can promote the event, the group, or the page through other websites or online media. While passive or apathetic users may join the groups or the pages, it is likely that the administrators who

set up the application or build the contact list have a basic level of political interest. In the next section, I present a case study of the how the Facebook group “A Million Voices of FARC” emerged and utilized Facebook to stimulate political action.

3.4 Facebook Applications and Political Participation: “A Million Voices against the FARC”

Though a relatively new phenomenon, some members of Facebook have strategically employed the group application to spark political participation both online and offline. An example of this is the group “A Million Voices against the FARC” which was created on January 4, 2008 by Oscar Morales, an engineer from the United Kingdom (Williams, Metro.co.uk, February 8, 2010). The group was generated in response to the kidnapping and subsequent internment of three hostages Clara Leticia Rojas, her son Emmanuel, and Consuelo Gonzalez de Perdomo. The group grew from 3,000 members in the first 24 hours of its creation, to 300,000 members in 2008 (Neumayer and Raffl, 2008a).

The goal of “A Million Voices against the FARC” was to promote activism, and this was evident by the first discussion board topic, which was titled “National Mobilization February the 4.” Following this proposal, the group dynamics began to focus on a common purpose—organizing a rally in the streets. Generating and replying to posts, as well as communicating with other like-minded users, promoted the group cohesion that ultimately led to the protests on February 4, 2008. This message surpassed the national boundaries of Colombia and spread globally, eventually sparking protests in 165 cities with 500,000 to 2,000,000 people protesting across the globe (Neumayer and Raffl, 2008: 1).

It is likely that the characteristics of Facebook's group function were the driving force behind the increase in group members, as well as the magnitude of the rallies. It seems possible that the members of Facebook who joined the group forwarded the invitation to every person on their friends list, who then passed the invitation on to every member of their friends list, and so forth. Indeed, the peer-to-peer communication that was afforded by the group application on Facebook was paramount in mobilizing citizens. It is possible that these invitations were sent to users who were politically uninvolved or apathetic, giving them a chance to get involved, and participate in the group. The culmination of this mobilization was that the group's influence stretched beyond the borders of Colombia and was used as a space for democratic participation.

3.5 Conclusion

When understood in concert with the literature review (see: Chapter 2), one can better gauge how Facebook can mobilize its members for political cause. Indeed, as discussed above, Facebook offers its users an array of applications, some of which can and have been used for political purposes. The next chapter will present the three methodologies used for this thesis. More specifically, it will identify why each research strategy was selected, and the strengths and weaknesses that accompany each.

Chapter 4: Methodology

As previously stated, to date few researchers have sought to study the nature, operation, or impact of cyber groups in Canada. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the cyber group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” that emerged on December 30, 2009, following Stephen Harper’s request to prorogue Parliament for the second time (see: Chapter 1). The group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” began as a forum dedicated to asking Members of Parliament to return to work. Eventually, it developed into an online group that boasted “more than 200,000 members, 1,487 discussion groups, 16,000 links to related news items, and local chapters” (Marlatt, 2010). These facts render “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” an excellent case study for online activism.

In an effort to address the relationship between cyber groups and political participation, I posted an online survey to the group’s wall, conducted a content analysis of the group’s discussion board, and engaged in an interview with the groups administrator. This chapter will discuss each of these research strategies in turn. More specifically, this chapter will explain what prompted the above mentioned methodological choices. As well, it will highlight the pertinent information that was involved in the data collection. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations that I encountered in analyzing the data.

4.1 Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Expectations

This thesis addressed the following three research questions: 1) What motivated individuals to join the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament”? 2) Did the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” mobilize new

participants or did it reinforce existing biases in participation? 3) Did the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” mobilize or reinforce the political participation of citizens in the real world? These research questions emerged from the theoretical framework and the gaps in the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2.

To recap, the literature review and the theoretical framework (see: Chapter 2) suggested that to date studies have been mixed about whether or not the Internet has the capacity to alter how previously inactive demographics (such as “the young, the less educated, the economically disadvantaged, those from visible minorities, and women” (Winne, 2009: 48) participate in politics. Indeed, whereas some studies have found that the Internet reduces barriers for traditionally unengaged citizens to inform themselves and to participate in politics (see: Johnson and Kaye, 2003f; Grossman, 1995b), other scholars have found that the Internet reinforces existing biases in political participation (see: DiGennaro and Dutton, 2006g). While studies have been found to support both the mobilization and the reinforcement theses, an increasing number of studies have favoured the reinforcement thesis. Thus, with regards to the second research question, it is my expectation that the group may enhance the participation of various demographics, but that the results will be minimal. More specifically, given the research (see: Chapter 2), I predict that the traditional biases in all of the demographics will remain the same, with the exception of the younger generation, whom I expect will be more likely than the older generation to participate actively in politics as a result of joining the group.

In addition to the above, chapter 2 suggested that the decentralized nature of the Internet could drive political participation both in the virtual and in the real worlds (see: Puig-Abril and Rojas, 2009b; Weber and Bergman, 2001c; Quintler and Vissers, 2008d;

Feezel, Conroy, and Guerrero, 2009c). The introduction of social networks has made this more likely, as they provide opportunities for lower communication and networking costs, thereby increasing the means for engagement. Therefore, with regards to the third research question, I expect the group to enhance the engagement of those already politically astute and to drive the participation of those uninterested or apathetic in politics.

4.2 Research Strategies

The goal of any research “is to design a study that has strong internal and external validity, reliability, and a comprehensive multidimensional view” (Thermond, 2001: 253). One way to ensure the latter is to use methodological triangulation. To do this, a researcher must evaluate and analyze the same object from multiple angles (Vergeer and Hermans, 2008). This allows the weaknesses of a single method to be offset by the strengths of another method.

The research questions for this thesis were tested through multiple methodologies. This provided this study with a range of benefits. First, the use of multiple viewpoints provided a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the units under study (Jick, 1979). This approach revealed unique findings about the group that may have remained undiscovered with only one methodology. As well, the triangulation of the data ensured that the focus of the phenomenon remained, while the mode of the data collection changed. This contributed to an increased confidence in the research data. Finally, the use of multiple viewpoints created new and innovative ways of understanding the problem. This provided me with more depth and breadth in evaluating and drawing conclusions on the group’s participation.

As mentioned above, the research strategies used in the investigation of the group included a survey, a content analysis, and a semi-structured interview. My survey used a combination of standard and new indices related to political participation. To complement this data, a semi-structured interview was conducted with Christopher White. This interview offered a rich insight into the administration of the group. Finally, the content analysis proved to be the most fruitful method in uncovering the users' motivations for generating and participating in the group. Together, the behavioural and the objective data that was retrieved from these methodologies complemented one another, thereby producing consistent and convergent results. Having explained my overall approach, the rest of this chapter will describe each of the chosen methods in detail. Details on the data preparation of the various methodologies and their analyses will uncover what impact the group had on the members' rates of political participation.

4.3 Online Survey

4.3.1 Survey Design and Data Source

The online survey was preferred over other methodologies for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important of these reasons was that the group's members were geographically dispersed throughout Canada (and in some cases throughout the world). Thus, employing other methodologies would have been neither time nor cost efficient. The online survey also allowed me to ask various questions to the group's members, thereby offering considerable flexibility in the analysis. For all of these reasons, an online survey was deemed an advantageous methodology for data collection.

My survey contained a total of 41 questions (see: Appendix B). In order to draw comparisons with the Canadian population, many of these questions were drawn from the

2008 Canadian Elections Study. Additionally, these 41 questions were organized into 5 topics, including general questions regarding the user's political knowledge, the user's Facebook usage, the user's level of political participation (prior to joining the group), the user's membership and participation in the group, and the user's demographic information. My survey worked its way from the broad to the specific questions, to give the respondents a general feel of my survey before delving into the important questions. As these topics are quite diverse, a detailed explanation is provided below.

The first theme (questions 1 to 14) asked the participants to indicate how politically knowledgeable they considered themselves to be. These questions were primarily drawn from the 2008 Canadian Election Study. The intention behind these questions was to gauge how politically savvy the members were.

The second theme (questions 15 to 18) investigated how long the participants had used Facebook for and whether they were frequent Facebook users. Of the four questions within this theme, the last two were the most important, as they tested whether the participants had previously used Facebook as a means for political expression.

The next section (question 19) asked whether the respondents had, might, would never, or were unsure about participating in a host of political activities. As with the first section, these questions were drawn from the 2008 Canadian Elections Study, whenever possible. Again, the purpose of these questions was to uncover whether the members of the group were politically motivated or apathetic individuals. As well, a comparison of question 19 to question 27 and question 28 provided an insight about whether the group had increased the user's level of political participation. The fourth section (question 20 to 24) asked users to identify their motivation for joining and participating in the group. The

answers to these questions helped to answer research questions 1 and 3. The last section of my survey (questions 30 to 41) asked members to answer various demographic questions. These questions helped me to answer research question 2 by uncovering whether the group mobilized or reinforced the participation of various demographics.

4.3.2 In the Field

The members of the group were introduced to my survey through a wall posting that appeared daily on the group's page (see: Appendix A for the message that was posted to the group's wall and for the times at which the message was posted). The wall posting invited those members aged 16 and older to participate in the survey. By selecting on my survey link, the respondents were directed to surveymonkey.com. As previously mentioned, my survey consisted of 41 closed questions, and test trials indicated that it took roughly 30 minutes to complete. The field period for my survey was between February 12, 2010 and March 7, 2010, and produced a sample of 273 respondents. This three-week timeframe ensured that participants responded to my survey under the same period. This is important because the prorogation of Parliament in Canada was a contentious and changing issue, thus any interruptions in time could have resulted in a misleading or misrepresentative outcome.

While in the field, I encountered several obstacles that are worth mentioning. First, because my survey was hosted by surveymonkey.com and not the University of Lethbridge, many users feared its authenticity. These members voiced their concerns by sending me private messages and by commenting on the survey's wall post. Christopher White quickly diffused the situation with a wall post that verified that he and I had spoken prior to the survey's commencement, and that I was a graduate student at the

University of Lethbridge. A related problem that I encountered while in the field was on February 18, 2010 when a user of the group flagged the survey. Doing so prompted Facebook's authorities to remove and prevent any further postings of the survey. In an effort to address this problem quickly, I provided Facebook (via the contact information that the site provides) with the consent form and contact information for the Office of Research Services at the University of Lethbridge. Within 24 hours, Facebook had reposted my survey and restored my access to the group's page.

4.3.3 Limitations

My survey was marked by several limitations that I must point out. The first and most obvious is that the responses to the online survey were based on self-report, which has been shown to lead to a lack of representation and thus to biased estimates (Bethlehem, 2008). In order to best understand if mobilization or reinforcement occurred or to test if real world participation was provoked by the group, "it would have been necessary to conduct a random, representative sample, for which the resources did not exist" (Wilkes, 2008: 73). Despite this shortcoming, my survey responses provided the basis for testing the research questions and developing baseline interpretations that other scholars can build on in future studies. Also, because my survey was posted through the group's wall, it likely attracted those who were the most engaged members of the group to respond. Because of this, my survey results are probably skewed in the favor of those who were most motivated to participate in the group. If my survey is skewed towards the most motivated members, one cannot determine whether the group stimulated the participation of those who were peripherally attached to the group.

Another limitation of my survey was that it was based on a voluntary sample. Indeed, no sampling frame was used to conduct the survey; rather, the individuals chose to participate based upon their own interest and their own free will. This is problematic because there is no way to determine how the members who participated differed from those who did not. A final limitation of my survey was based upon its timing. Because my survey was released to the group on February 12, 2010, it did not capture the height of the group's excitement or success that occurred in its outset on January, 2010. While these limitations are unfortunate, they were necessary and unavoidable, given the circumstances within which the research was conducted. Despite this, they should be considered when interpreting the results.

4.4 Content Analysis

4.4.1 Content Analysis Design and Data Source

The content analysis was employed in conjunction with my survey for a number of reasons. First, the content analysis was able to systematically relate how joining the group (the cause) led to political participation (the effect), something my survey would have been unable capture. As well, the content analysis allowed me to follow the group's members' thoughts and language use, as I was able to track the emotions that were often tied to the discussion board postings. Similarly, the content analysis was helpful in uncovering trends that emerged on the group. These trends included how frequently various topics were discussed, the tenor of the discussion, whether the debate was reasonable, and so forth. Finally, the content analysis was useful for providing information about the activities of those who chose not to respond to the survey, and also

to those who were active on the discussion board before my survey went out into the field.

4.4.2 In The Field

The discussion board was selected as the unit for analysis, as it was “seen as a proxy for discussion that might [have] occurred in face-to-face interaction in a traditional offline group” (Feezell, Conroy, Guerrero, 2009d: 13). I analyzed every message that was posted to the group’s discussion board. In total, there were 2,358 messages. The comments were posted over a two month period from December 31, 2009 to March 7, 2010. A random or a stratified sample was not employed, as it would systematically distort an understanding of the group. This is because the important posts hovered around important events (for example the Canada-wide rallies) that occurred over weeks or in some cases over months. I did not post any messages (outside of the posts that called for participation to the survey)¹³ to the group’s discussion board in an effort to minimize the possibility of a researcher-effect. As well, I tried to reduce altering the behaviour of the group’s members.

The content analysis was guided by Grounded Theory; “a primarily inductive investigation process in which the researcher aims for formulating a small-scale, focused theory that is derived from the continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Razari and Iverson, 2006a: 461). The Grounded Theory approach is comprised of open coding, developing a coding frame, and axial coding. Open coding is where the researcher examines and compares all of the data, and then organizes it on the basis of themes, patterns, or issues (Sparker, Lau, Sahay, 2000). In this stage of the analysis, the

¹³ These posts were excluded from the analysis.

researcher reads each line, sentence, and paragraph in search of the answer to the repeated questions: “what is this about?” and “what is being referenced here?” (Silverman, 1991). At this stage of the analysis, I took notes as I read the postings, noting the topic of the posting so that I could locate the noteworthy messages later. Instead of a line-by-line analysis, my analysis was post-by-post. This ensured that the significance of one post would not be lost when removed from the context of the other posts. As well, the posts were coded according to the overall message that they contained. For example, a posting that asked for help with organizing a rally in a particular city was coded ‘rally organization.’ Similarly, a post that contained information about a particular issue and linked to an external website was coded ‘information sharing.’ The overall message of some of the postings was to communicate a particular understanding of the Facebook group; these postings were coded ‘meanings of “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament”’ and sub-coded to contain their specific meaning. In addition to the above, I sought to locate the posts that had a potential connection to civic engagement. Because the goal of this section was to capture how civic engagement was motivated and understood by the group’s members, the quotes extracted were only those that reflected the latter. Once the patterns common themes and differences were identified, common posts were grouped together to produce categorizations. In total, the coding process produced the 11 distinct categorizations referred to in Table 1, which were used as the coding frame for the subsequent phase of axial coding.

Table 1
Coding Paradigm

Categories	Sub-Categories
Does the post advertise contact with the Prime Minister, Governor General, a Member of Parliament, the Party Leaders, the Queen, the media	Letter Writing Campaign
Does the content of the post oppose the group?	Opposition to CAPP
Does the post advertise other offline events (other than the rallies and letter writing)?	Events
Does the post include a personal story or an opinion?	Personal story or opinion
Is the post a question?	Question
Does the post link to an external source of information that pertains to the group?	Information Sharing
Does the post aim to provide a meaning of the group?	Meanings of CAPP
Does the post stimulate debate?	Debate
Does the post link to media coverage about the group?	Media Coverage
Does the post pertain to the January 23rd across Canada rallies?	January 23rd Rallies
Does the post indicate the groups impact or success?	Impact or success

The last part of the Grounded Theory approach involved axial coding, where similar data sequences were assessed to foster connections between emerging concepts (Frosch, Kreuger, Hornik, et al., 2007). This was achieved by revisiting the ‘coding paradigm’ (see: Table 1) that I developed in the open coding process, and counting the number of times that each theme occurred. If necessary, within this process the categories were revised to best represent the data that was found on the group’s discussion board (Wood

and Lawton, 2007). This process was important to ensure that each theme that emerged on the group's discussion board could be measured, analyzed, and discussed (Hayden, 2010).

4.4.3 Limitations

The content analysis was also marked by several limitations. First, as with all content analysis, mine was purely descriptive. That is, the content analysis section was only able to describe what was found on the group's discussion board, but it could not reveal the underlying motives for the observed pattern. However, the other methodologies that I employed in this thesis including my survey and the interview probably offset this limitation, as they allowed me to delve more into the trends that I found when analyzing the group. A second limitation was the limited availability of material. It is likely that the topics posted to the group's discussion board, were those that generated the most interest and excitement. For example, the Canada-wide rallies may have garnered more attention on the group's discussion board than did the less dramatic occurrences. A final disadvantage of the content analysis was that it only captured the activity of those individuals who had posted comments to the group's discussion board. This thesis does not seek to suggest that those posts extracted and evaluated were representative of the entire group.

4.5 Semi-Structured Interview

4.5.1 Interview Design

The final methodology for this thesis included a semi-structured interview with Christopher White, the group's administrator. I deliberately selected Mr. White to

interview as he was integral in spawning the offline political participation that emerged as a result of the group.

I recruited Mr. White for participation in the interview by sending him a personal Facebook message (see: Appendix C for the Facebook messages that were sent to the interviewee).¹⁴ I met with him at the University of Alberta on April 9, 2010 (see: Appendix D for the interview consent form). The interview was semi-structured in format, meaning that I went beyond my list of prescribed questions, when the participant seemed willing to permit the changes. The interview took approximately forty-five minutes to conduct, and it was tape-recorded. The goal of the interview was to learn more about how the group spawned political participation both online and offline among its users (see: Appendix E for a copy of the interview guide).

4.5.2 Limitations

As with the other methodologies, there were limitations in utilizing the interview. For example, Mr. White could only speculate on what impact the group had on political participation, but he could not offer any insights as to who in particular (or what demographic) was most influenced by the group or on the extent to which the group impacted its users to participate politically. The goal of the interview was not to generalize Mr. White's suggestions to the larger population, but rather to add depth to the information generated by the content analysis and survey.

4.6 Conclusion

¹⁴ Mr. White suggested that I also interview Shilo Davis, as she was integral in spawning the rallies. However, despite numerous attempts, I was unable to reach her.

This chapter reviewed and justified the methodological considerations for this thesis. To recap, the methodologies associated with this thesis included a survey, a content analysis, and an interview. The diversity of methods used in this study, offered the opportunity to gain insights from their individual strengths, and to compensate for their particular faults and limitations. The next chapter will uncover the results from the survey.

Chapter 5: Survey Results

Whereas the previous chapter outlined the methodological approach of this thesis, this chapter presents the findings from my survey research. My survey was designed to show the multiple ways in which political participation occurred both online and offline, how often political participation occurred both on the group and off, whether the group prompted mobilization, reinforcement or both, and finally what motivated members to join the group. The survey's findings were mixed in terms of mobilization and reinforcement. Moreover, the results showed that the group was semi-successful in promoting virtual and real world political participation.

The survey's findings are presented in three sections to allow for a clearer presentation of the data. The first section examines the demographic profile of respondents, revealing trends in the participants' years of birth, education levels, household incomes, party identifications, sex, and ethnicities. Where necessary, these results are presented in conjunction with findings from the 2006 Canadian Census, 2008 Canadian Elections Study, Statistics Canada, and findings from a study of "Canadians against Proroguing Parliament" conducted by the Rideau Institute (2010a).¹⁵ The second section reveals whether the group's members utilized the group as a vehicle for offline participation. The last section draws on my survey to indicate what motivated users to join the group.

5.1 Profile of the Respondents

¹⁵ The Rideau Institute surveyed members of the group "Canadians against Proroguing Parliament" between January 10 and January 16, 2010. Their survey consisted of 8 questions, and yielded a total of 341 responses.

Understanding the profile of the respondents that comprised the group is important, as it will assist us in determining if the group's use of Facebook supports the mobilization or the reinforcement theses. According to the reinforcement thesis, the Internet has traditionally favored males of a higher socioeconomic status, and those who are highly educated (Gibson, Lusoli, Ward, 2005c). If the demographic findings support the prior research, then the Internet, and by association Facebook, will have done little to increase the political participation amongst the group's members, and will have simply catered to those individuals who were previously involved in politics. The demographic findings will provide an examination of what characteristics the members of "Canadian's Against Proroguing Parliament" possess. The following section will unfold in two-ways: First, it will provide the results of my survey (backed by findings from the Rideau Institute's survey). Second, it will compare my survey data to the results from the Canadian Election Study, Statistics Canada, and the Canadian Census. Doing so will reveal whether the group's members differed from their Canadian counterparts.

5.1.1 Year of Birth

The year of birth variable was based on the respondent's own statements of their years of birth. Their responses were categorized across the following generational breaks: The first group was comprised of those born before 1950. The second cluster was comprised of those who were born between 1951 and 1965. The third cohort was comprised of those born between 1966 and 1980. Finally, the last group was those born

between 1981 and 1995.¹⁶ These thresholds were chosen as they roughly correspond to various life-cycle changes. For example, the group comprised of those born before the 1950s represent seniors, and those born between 1951 and 1965 represent the middle-aged. As well those born between 1966 and 1980 are considered adults, while those born between 1981 and 1995 are classified as youth. The survey's results showed that while those born between 1951 and 1965 had the highest proportion of users (88 or 38.6%), those born before 1950 had the least (30 or 13.2%) (see: Table 2).

Table 2

Year of Birth of Respondents

Year of Birth	Subjects Year of Birth (n and %)
1950 and Before (60 years or older)	30 (13.2%)
1951-1965 (45-59 years old)	88 (38.6%)
1966-1980 (30-44 years old)	38 (16.7%)
1981-1995 (16-29 years old)	72 (31.6%)
TOTAL (N)	228 (100.0%)

These results are consistent with data from the Rideau Institute (2010b), which found that 49.7% of the group's members were aged 45 and older.¹⁷ Given the fact that the literature has suggested that the youth (aged 16 to 29) are the majority of Facebook users,¹⁸ it is surprising that they trailed behind those aged 45 to 59 in membership. However, this may have been because the group maintained a political focus.

¹⁶ These categorizations have varied according to author. For example, LuDuc and Pammett (2003) used a more extensive categorization than Zukin et al (2006) consisting of the following 8 cohorts: 1980-1982, 1976-1979, 1971-1975, 1963-1970, 1953-1962, 1943-1952, 1933-1942, and before 1933.

¹⁷ This compares to my survey finding that 51.8% of the user's were aged 45 and older.

¹⁸ Data from InsideFacebook.com revealed that a whopping 62% of Facebook users are between the ages of 13 and 34 years.

As well, a comparison with the Statistics Canada Population Estimates and Projections (2010) reveals that the ages of the group’s members were comparable to the Canadian population (see: Table 3).

Table 3
Year of Birth of Respondents and Canadian Population

	Canadians against Proroguing Parliament	Statistics Canada Population Estimates and Projections (2010)
1950 and Before (60 years and older)	31 (13.6%)	6,788.4 (23.8%)
1951-1970 (40-59 years old)	97 (42.5%)	10,121.5 (35.5%)
1971-1980 (30-39 years old)	29 (12.7%)	4,596.1 (16.1%)
1981-1996 (15 to 29 years old) ¹⁹	71 (31.1%)	6,986.2 (24.5%)
Total (N)	228 (100.0%)	28492.2 (100.0%)²⁰

In terms of the group’s membership, 42.5% were between 40 and 59 years old, as compared to 35.5% of the 2010 Statistics Canada population estimates and projections (Statistics Canada, 2010). However, the data also showed that those aged 16 to 29 years old represented 31.1% of the group’s membership. This finding mirrors previous research

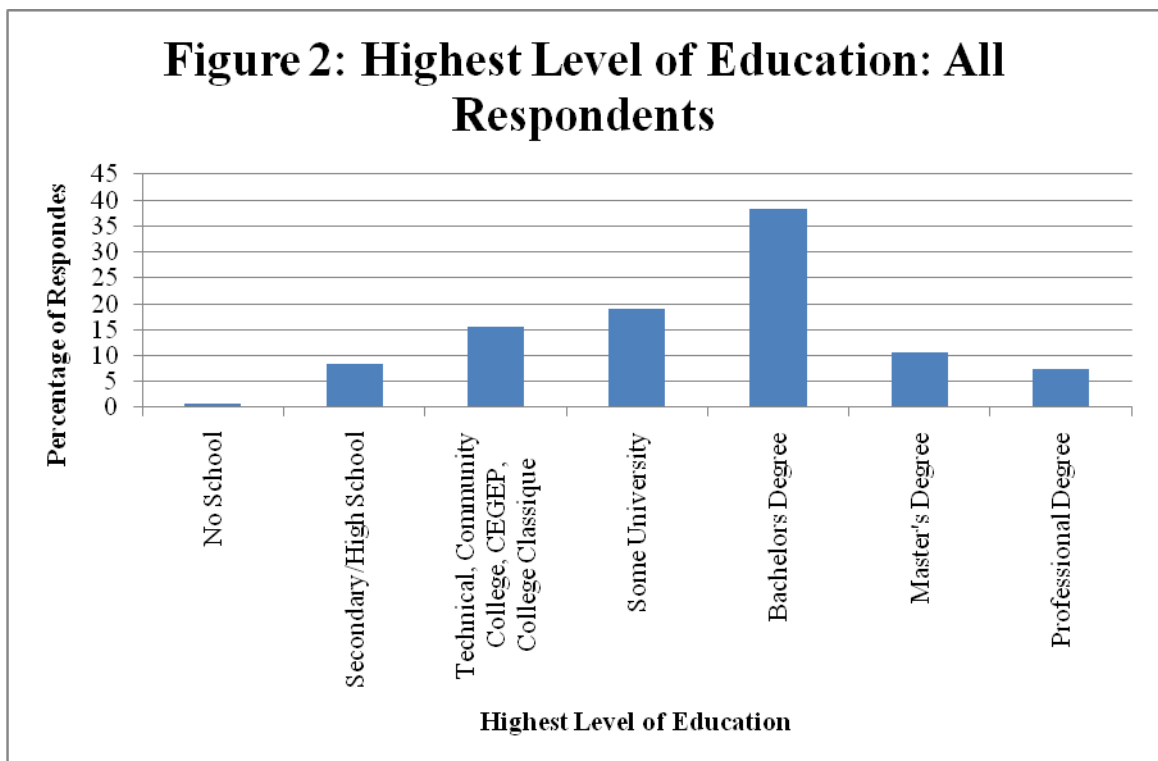
¹⁹ While the Statistics Canada Estimates (2010) include 15 years olds in their analysis, the “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” data does not.

²⁰ These Statistics Canada Population Estimates and Projects (2010) includes people who are less than 16 years, while the group’s survey does not.

that has found that younger individuals are more likely to be mobilized by the Internet (see: Shah, Kwak, and Holbert, 2001a).

5.1.2 Education

My survey also asked respondents to identify the highest level of education that they had completed. Findings from my survey revealed that the highest proportion of the group's users (38.4%) had received a Bachelor's degree, and that 17.9% had received a Master's degree, a professional degree, or a doctorate (see: Figure 2).



The Rideau Institute's (2010c) survey of the educational attainment of the group's members mirrored the survey's findings indicating that 56.1% of the respondents claimed to have completed a Bachelor's degree or higher.²¹ These findings were much higher than

²¹ My survey found that 56.3% of the group's members had completed a Bachelors degree or higher.

data of educational attainment provided by Statistics Canada (2009) which found that 6,553,420 (25.5%) of the population possessed only a high school diploma. This figure was closely followed by 6,098,325 (23.8%) of the population who had not completed high school. Indeed, only 2,981,465 (11.6%) of the population had a Bachelor's Degree, and a mere 1,360,515 (5.3%) possessed a Master's Degree (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Overall, the levels of education amongst the group's subscribers were much higher than they were for the general population. There are two reasons for why this trend may have occurred. First, education is an important determinant of Internet use. A study by Statistics Canada revealed that "in 2005, 8 out of 10 (or 80.0%) Canadians with some postsecondary education used the Internet, as compared with about one-half (49.0%) of adults with less education" (McKeown and Underhill, 2008). Second, results from my survey indicated that those who were better educated, were more likely to join the group. The research has generally shown that those with higher educational levels are more likely to have a heightened political interest (see: Lijphart, 1997). Previous research has demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of education are also more likely to possess higher levels of political efficacy (see: DiGennaro and Dutton, 2006). Since the majority of the group's members had higher levels of education, the group may have attracted those individuals who were more likely to participate in politics. This combination of education, heightened political efficacy and membership in the group all demonstrate support in favour of the reinforcement thesis.

5.1.3 Visible Minorities

The frequencies from my survey also indicated that 21.8% of the group's membership claimed to be a visible minority.²² This number is slightly higher than Statistics Canada (2010) data, which found that 16.2% of the population identified themselves as a visible minority. This difference may be because the group was skewed in favour of Liberal supporters (in that it was against prorogation) who are generally represented well amongst visible minorities (Blais, 2005).

5.1.4 Sex

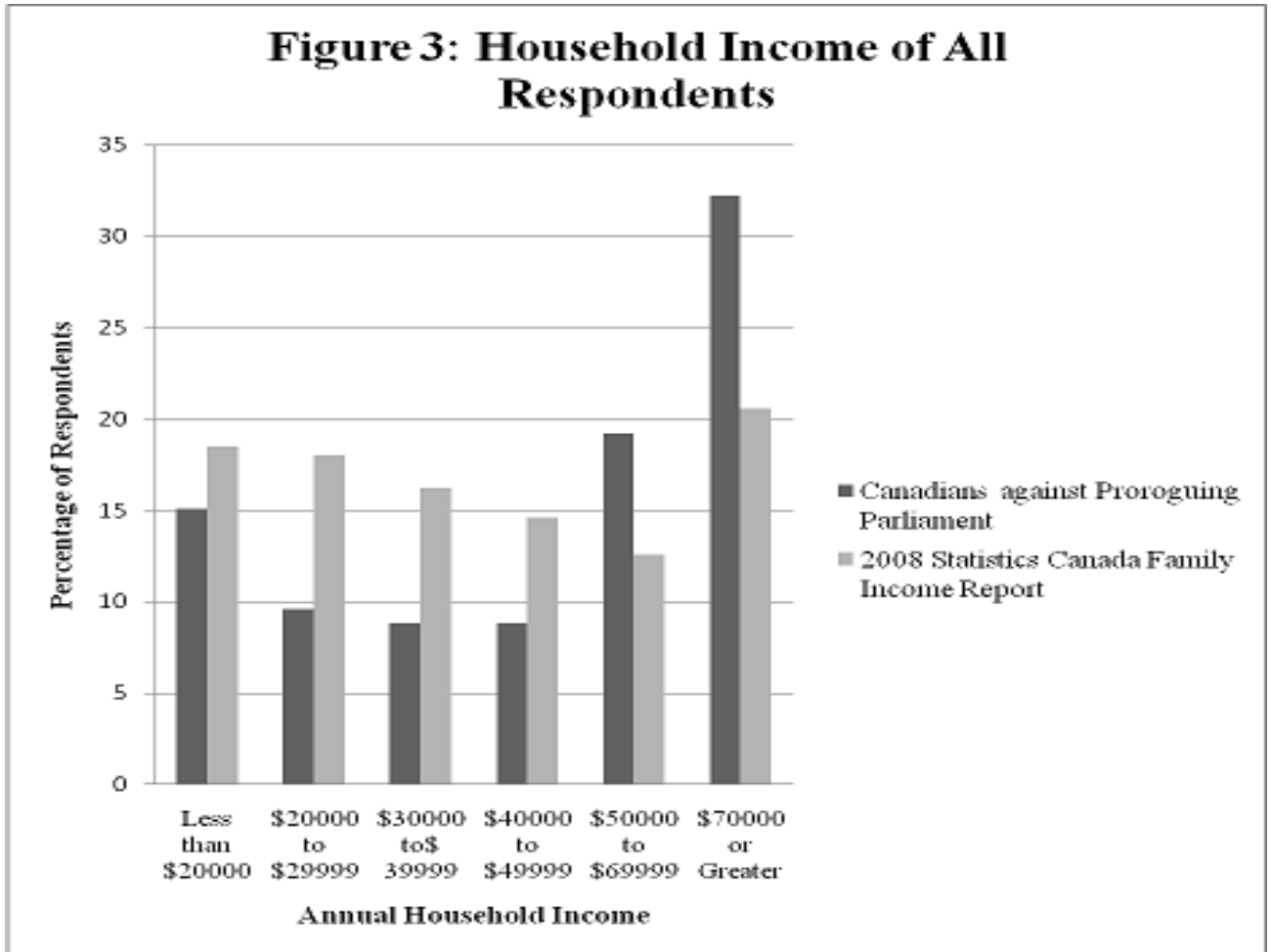
While some of the findings of the demographic segments referred to above were fairly pronounced, the differences between the male and the female respondents to my survey were not quite as large. Indeed, the frequencies from my survey revealed that the males only outnumbered the females by 2.8%. Interestingly, the 2006 Portrait of the Canadian Population revealed by the 2006 Canadian Census indicated that females outnumbered males 51.0% to 49.0% (Canadian Census, 2007).

5.1.5 Household Income

Findings from my survey revealed that the greatest proportion (32.2%) of the group's users indicated that their household income was greater than \$70,000, followed by 19.2% of the respondents who indicated that their household income was between \$50,000 and \$69,999. This compares to data from the 2008 family income report by Statistics Canada (2010), where 20.6% of the respondents claimed to have an income

²² The definition of visible minorities used herein refers to that of the Employment Equity Act, which defines visible minorities as 'persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.'

over \$70,000, followed by 18.5% of the respondents who had an income of less than \$20,000.



These differences demonstrate that the group’s members were slightly more affluent than their Canadian counterparts were. While certain researchers have suggested that the Internet is more likely to mobilize younger individuals despite socioeconomic standings (Shaw, Kwak, and Holbert, 2001), these findings seem to support previous research that has concluded that the Internet is more likely to cater to and attract older individuals with a higher annual incomes (Solop, 2001). Finally, this finding confirms previous studies,

which have found support for the reinforcement thesis, suggesting that those with higher incomes are more likely to participate politically.

5.1.6 Party Identification

An examination of the user's party identification patterns revealed that 43.8% of the members felt the closest to the Liberals, followed by 17.5% who felt closest to the New Democrats, 8.8% who felt closest to the Greens, 6.7% who felt closest to the Conservatives, and 1.0% who felt closest to the Bloc Quebecois. Comparatively, findings from the 2008 Canadian Election Study (Gidengil, Everitt, and Nevitte, 2008) revealed that 23.5% of the participants identified with the Liberals, followed by 22.7% who identified with the Conservatives, 9.6% who identified with the New Democrats, 8.4% who identified with the Bloc Quebecois, and 2.6% who identified with the Greens.

As these numbers demonstrate, the difference in party identification between the respondents of the two surveys is quite pronounced. This difference is almost certainly because of the nature of the group. Indeed, because the group emerged out of a disdain for the Conservative administration and their decision to prorogue, it is likely that they did not attract individuals who felt positively about the Conservative party.

5.1.7 Facebook Activity

In addition to asking the members to report on their demographic characteristics, my survey also asked the users to reveal how many times and for what purposes they had used Facebook. This adds an important dimension to the analysis, as it indicates whether the group's members were serial or repeat online activists (Rideau Institute, 2010). The

results from my survey indicated that the group’s participants were avid Facebook users. Indeed, 87.4% of the group’s members noted that they had logged onto Facebook at least once a day (see: Table 4).

Table 4
Frequency of Facebook Use

Frequency of Facebook Use	Respondents Facebook Use (n and %)
Several times per day	155 (61.3%)
Once a day	66 (26.1%)
A few times a week	21(8.3%)
Once a week	6 (2.4%)
Less than once a week	5 (2.0%)
TOTAL (N)	253 (100.0%)

Frequencies from the Rideau Institute’s (2010d) study confirmed this finding, as their data indicated that the group’s users were frequent Facebook users, with 54.3% claiming to be “daily users of Facebook,” and the remainder of the group’s members claiming to use Facebook either “a few times a week” or “once in awhile.”

The questionnaire also asked the group’s members to consider how often they had posted or viewed politically relevant material on Facebook. A small proportion of the group’s membership had either posted material on Facebook that was political in nature, or had viewed material on Facebook that was political in nature (see: Table 5).

Table 5

	Proportion of Facebook Posts that were Political in Nature	Proportion of Posts Viewed on Facebook that were Political in Nature
Low (0-30%)	122 (48.2%)	98 (38.9%)
Medium (40-60%)	50 (19.7%)	68 (27.0%)
High (70-100%)	81 (32.1%)	86 (34.1%)
TOTAL (N)	253 (100.0%)	252 (100.0%)

This suggests that the group’s members were at least partially inclined towards online political activism, and partially confirms what some have suggested (Rideau Institute, 2010). This is important for a few reasons. While over 60% of the respondents indicated that they used Facebook for some political purpose, a significant segment of users did not. As chapter 3 noted, when Facebook users post material to their accounts it automatically appears on their friend’s mini-feeds. This is important, because this material may have informed those users that may have otherwise overlooked this information. Because these posts “are much shorter, and contain less content, than, for instance, news articles, or blogs” (Tumasjan, Sprenger, and Welp, 2010: 2) they may have a better chance of piquing the interests of politically uninterested or apathetic users. These features of Facebook may have intrigued or garnered the attention of a number of users who would have otherwise overlooked the group.

5.1.8 Political Participation and Knowledge

The questionnaire also asked members to recall whether they had participated in selected political acts. These survey questions allowed us to assess the extent to which the group’s members were previously politically active. The frequencies from my survey

revealed that 92.0% of the group’s users claimed to have watched television to gain political knowledge or information, 84.9% of the group’s users claimed to have listened to the radio to gain political knowledge or information, 83.9% of the group’s users claimed to have visited a candidate’s or political party’s website to gain political knowledge or information; 77.2% of the group’s users claimed to have sent a letter, an e-mail, or a fax to an elected politician; 68.8% of the group’s users had used political party literature to gain political knowledge; and 58.4% of the group’s users had attended a political event that was held by a candidate or political party (see: Table 6).

Table 6

Political Activities Performed by Respondents

Political Activity	Respondents Participation in Political Activities (n and %)
Sent a letter, e-mail, or fax to an elected politician (N=250)	193 (77.2%)
Attended a political event held by a political party/candidate (N=245)	143 (58.4%)
Watched the television to gain political knowledge/information (N=249)	229 (92.0)
Listened to the radio to gain political knowledge/information (N=245)	208 (84.9%)
Visited candidate/party websites to gain political knowledge (N=249)	209 (83.9%)
Used political party/candidate literature to gain political knowledge (N=247)	170 (68.8%)
Signed a petition (N=247)	226 (91.5%)
Attended a protest (N=244)	179 (73.4%)

These results mirror Weber, Loumakis and Bergman’s (2003b) study, which found that users of the Internet for political purposes tended to be highly engaged in civic life prior to their participation. Indeed, more than half of the respondents in their survey revealed

that they had signed a petition, and one third claimed to have attended a town hall or a school meeting.

As with the previous questions, the frequencies below are followed by comparisons from the 2008 Canadian Election Study. It should be noted that because the 2008 Canadian Election Study did not span political activities to the extent that the group's survey did, only a few acts are compared. Thus, whereas 91.5% of the group's users claimed to have signed a petition, 73.4% of the group's users claimed to have attended a protest, and 41.3% of the group's users claimed to have held membership in a party; only 79.1% of the participants from the 2008 Canadian Election Study claimed to have signed a petition, 24.5% of the participants from the 2008 Canadian Election Study claimed to have attended a boycott, and 15.6% of the participants from the 2008 Canadian Election Study claimed to have held membership in a party (Gidengil, Everitt and Nevitte, 2008). These comparisons show that the group's members were more politically inclined to participation in traditional activities than their Canadian counterparts. It should be noted that because the 2008 Canadian Election Study already tends to over-represent the politically active, these figures are probably even more pronounced.

In addition to revealing whether the members had engaged in a host of political activities, my survey also asked questions to gauge the extent of the user's political knowledge. The frequencies from my survey revealed that the majority (63.2%) of the group's participants claimed to discuss politics "everyday" or "a couple of times a week" (see: Table 7).

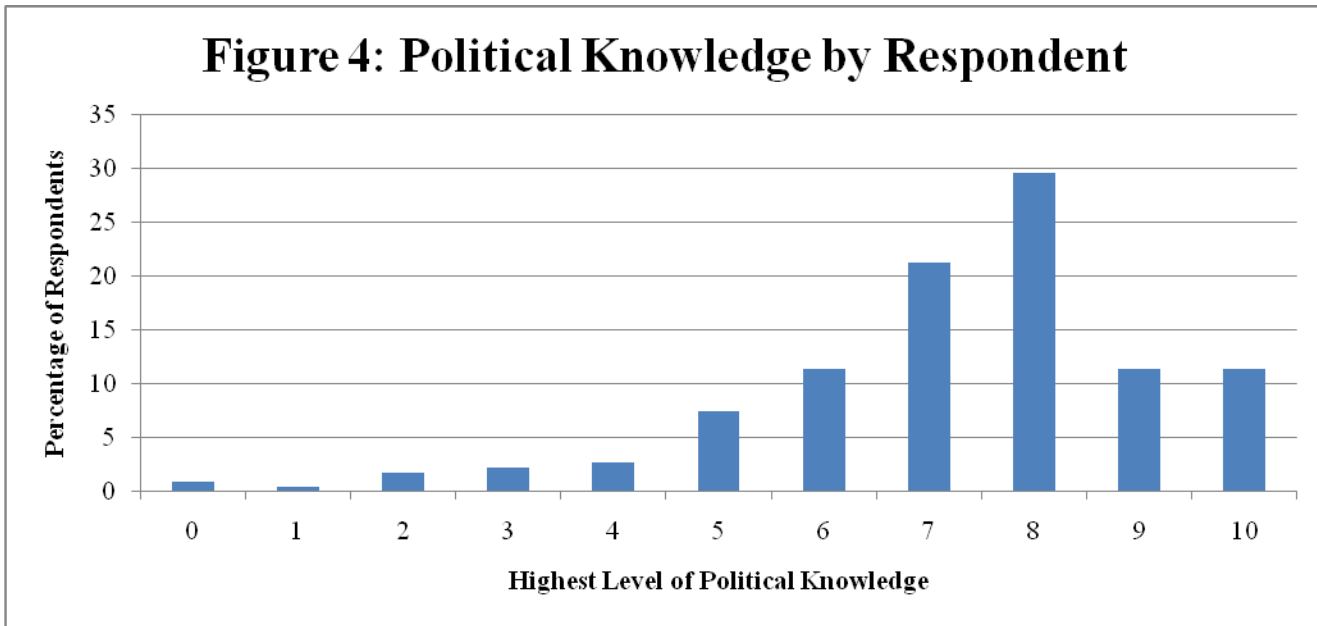
Table 7

Political Discussion with Family, Friends, Colleagues, or Acquaintances (N=255)

Frequency of Political Discussion	Political Discussion by Respondents (n and %)
Everyday	82 (32.2%)
A couple of times a week	79 (31.0%)
Weekly	32 (12.5%)
Monthly	18 (7.1%)
Never	3 (1.2%)
As issues of interest arise	41 (16.1%)

This compares with 54.9% of the participants from the 2008 Canadian Election Study who indicated that they discussed politics “several times” throughout the campaign (Gidengil, Everitt, and Nevitte, 2008). Thus, it is fair to say that the group’s members may have been slightly more politically astute than their Canadian counterparts. In addition to the latter, my survey also asked the group’s members to rate their political knowledge on a scale of 0 to 10 (with 10 being the highest).²³ The frequencies revealed that the mean response for political knowledge was 7.29 out of 10 (see: Figure 4).

²³ I acknowledge that this question has limits on the subjective knowledge test. However, because the questionnaire was administered through surveymonkey.com, respondents could have looked up short answer questions (ex. Name the Prime Minister of Canada) online. Thus, a subjective measurement of the respondent’s knowledge was considered to be the best evaluation of this question.



In order to understand what segments of the group’s members are participating in political activities and whether these activities are translating into real world political participation, it is necessary to first understand the demographic composition of the group. The comparisons with the Canadian Census, Statistics Canada and the 2008 Canadian Election Study provided above reveal that users of the group are distinctive from the Canadian population. This “suggests a tendency for cybergroups, as is true for other forms of political groups, to draw membership from salient segments of the larger population” (Lyons, 2002: 89).

In general terms, the demographics of the group provided support for the reinforcement thesis. Indeed, the members proved to be quite divergent from the Canadian population with regards to education, and slightly divergent in other categories such as ethnic minority and income. Thus, it may be suggested that the group may have partially disproportionately represented the Canadian population. The data also found that the group was skewed towards wealthier individuals. The largest proportion of the

group's users had a household income of above \$70,000. As well, 38.4% of the group's users had a Bachelor's degree, and a full 17.9% had completed a Master's degree, a professional degree, or a doctorate. It is important that education and income were found to be higher amongst the group's members, as a variety of studies have confirmed that these two variables are those most likely to be associated with online political activity (Gibson, Lusoli and Ward, 2005; Solop, 2001).

The group was also found to be more politically active than the Canadian population. A higher proportion of the group's members tended to participate in political activities. As well, 63.2% of the group's members claimed to discuss politics "everyday" or a "couple of times a week," and the mean political knowledge for the group was a 7.29 out of 10. These trends can be partly explained by the general demographics of the group users. Indeed, higher education and household income rates have been correlated with heightened civic engagement and political interest. As Smith et al. (2009) point out, "nearly all traditional forms of civic activity are stratified by socio-economic status. That is, as income and educational levels increase, so do community involvement, political activism, and other types of civic engagement." Be that as it may, this finding again reflects support for the reinforcement thesis.

While the data above presents a start for understanding the profile of the membership, further analyses will uncover what impact the group had on the users' political and civic engagement practices. What will follow is an exploration of the survey's findings through frequencies and cross tabulations, which will contribute to an understanding of the main research questions.

5.2 Determining the Demographic Predictors of Online and Offline Political Participation

Understanding the demographic profile of the group's members who engaged in political activities is important, as it provides evidence as to whether the group could be regarded as a mobilizing or a reinforcing mechanism (see: Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of this). To recap, the proponents of the mobilization thesis have argued that the Internet will provide new avenues for public deliberation, which will enable a more participatory democracy (see: Rheingold, 1993b). With respect to demographics, the mobilization literature claims that the Internet will reduce the barriers to political participation for those who have traditionally been marginalized from the political process (see: Park and Perry, 2007c; Bimber, 2003e; Norris, 2001g). The research states that, in particular, the Internet will enrich the engagement of females, ethnic minorities, the youth, and those with lower education and household incomes in politics.

Meanwhile, the pessimists claim that the Internet is less likely to engage the traditionally unrepresented groups in politics (see: Davis, 2005a; Norris, 2001h, Brants, Huizenga, and van Meerten, 1996a). Rather, they claim, that the

“familiar socioeconomic biases which exist in nearly all conventional forms of political participation seem unlikely to disappear on the net, even if access gradually widens to the electronically disadvantaged” (Norris, 1999:3).

For example, in their study, Brants, Huizenga, and van Meerten (1996b) found that the profile of Internet users in Amsterdam supported the existing socioeconomic structure of elite dominance. Although Brants, Huizenga, and van Meerten (1996c) were writing at a time in which Internet communication required money for equipment and monthly fees, Davis (2005b) came to similar conclusions several years later about the Internet; he

argued that it continued to be dominated by those that are from higher education and socioeconomic statuses.

The discussion below will uncover whether the participants engaged in various political activities. Their responses are grouped by various demographic indicators in order to assess whether the group provided a mobilizing or a reinforcing force. As my survey found support for both the mobilization and the reinforcement theses, I will present the latter first, and then turn to the former.

In order to examine who was engaging in online or offline forms of political participation, and to assess whether online participation translated into real world political participation, several frequencies and crosstabs will be examined. As well, the results of a chi-square test will be presented for the relationships that were found to be significant. The online and offline variables were examined separately as the activities that an individual can participate in, in the real world vary substantially from those activities that an individual can engage in virtually.²⁴ For example, while inviting people to the group is an activity that users could only engage in online, attending a meeting about prorogation is something that that users could only partake in offline.

²⁴ “A large segment of the prior research has conceived of political participation as an offline phenomenon, failing to consider the new ways that people can engage in politics in the virtual world” (Zuniga et al., 2007: 20).

Table 8

Online and Offline Activities

Online Activities	Offline Activities
Invited others to join the group	Organized a rally or a demonstration about prorogation
Wrote about prorogation on Facebook profiles	Attended a rally or a demonstration about prorogation
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	Joined a political party since joining the group
Wrote on Twitter about prorogation	Donated money to a political party since joining the group
	Organized a meeting about prorogation
	Attended a meeting about prorogation
	Wrote a letter to the newspaper since joining the group
	Called into a radio or a television call-in show to talk about prorogation

Having noted the online and the offline variables (see: Table 8), the next section will strive to identify which demographics were the most likely to participate online and offline forms of engagement. The next section begins with a discussion of the demographic predictors and online participation.

5.3 Demographic Indicators and Online Participation

5.3.1 Evidence of Reinforcement

In terms of the respondent's age, the crosstabs showed that those 60 years or older were the most likely cohort to engage in half of the online political activities that were measured (see: Table 9).

Table 9

Year of Birth of Respondents (By Online Activity)

	1950 or Before (60 years or older) (N=30)	1951-1965 (45-59 years old) (N=88)	1966-1980 (30-44 years old) (N=38)	1981-1995 (16-29 years old) (N=72)
Invited others to join the group	22 (73.3%)	55 (62.5%)	24 (63.2%)	44 (61.1%)
Wrote about prorogation on Facebook profile's	20 (66.7%)	38 (43.1%)	22 (57.9%)	35 (49.0%)
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	3 (10.0%)	14 (15.9%)	7 (18.4%)	12 (16.7%)
Wrote on Twitter about prorogation*	4 (13.3%)	7 (8.0%)	9 (23.7%)	4 (5.5%)

*p<0.05

While it is worthwhile to point out that those aged 60 and older were not substantially or significantly more likely to engage in these acts as compared to the other cohorts, they did still lead them in the proportion of participation online. This finding is interesting, given the vast literature that has shown that young people are more likely to use the Internet. This shows then, that, “once citizens use the Internet, age is positively related to participation, so that older Internet users are more likely to be active online” (Anduiza et al., 2010: 16).

In addition to the respondent’s age, my survey revealed that the participant’s household income reinforced the involvement of those most likely to engage in politics online. The findings revealed that those members who had an annual household income of between \$40,000 and \$70,000 and over performed the activities at a greater proportion than those with a household income of lower than \$40,000. These activities included writing about prorogation on Facebook, posting a link to Facebook about prorogation, writing a Blog about prorogation, and writing on Twitter about prorogation (see: Table 10)

Table 10

Respondents Income (By Online Activity)

	\$70,000 and over (N=77)	\$69,999 to \$50,000 (N=46)	\$40,000 to \$49,999 (N=21)	\$39,999 to \$30,000 (N=21)	\$29,999 to \$20,000 (N=23)	Less than \$20,000 (N=36)
Invited others to join the group	53 (68.8%)	31 (67.4%)	14 (66.6%)	10 (47.6%)	12 (52.1%)	23 (63.9%)
Wrote about prorogation on Facebook profile's	40 (51.9%)	25 (54.3%)	12 (57.1%)	9 (42.8%)	7 (30.4%)	20 (55.6%)
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	9 (11.7%)	11 (23.9%)	5 (23.8%)	4 (19.0%)	2 (8.7%)	5 (13.9%)
Wrote on Twitter about prorogation	6 (7.8%)	9 (19.6%)	3 (14.2%)	1 (4.7%)	3 (13.0%)	1 (2.8%)

It should be noted that household income was not found to be significantly related to any of the online political participation variables.

The differences associated with visible minorities and sex (see: Table 11 and 12), were so small, that it is difficult to draw any findings of significance from the data.

Table 11

Respondents Ethnicity (By Online Activity)

	Visible Minority (N=53)	Not a Visible Minority (N=190)
Invited others to join the group	34 (64.1%)	121 (63.7%)
Wrote about prorogation on Facebook profile's	28 (52.8%)	95 (50.0%)
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	7 (13.2%)	31 (16.3%)
Wrote on Twitter about prorogation	5 (9.4%)	20 (10.5%)

Table 12**Respondents Sex (By Online Activity)**

	Male (N=125)	Female (N=118)
Invited others to join the group	77 (61.6%)	78 (66.1%)
Wrote about prorogation on Facebook profile's	66 (52.8%)	58 (49.1%)
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	21 (16.8%)	18 (15.2%)
Wrote on Twitter about prorogation	13 (10.4%)	12 (10.1%)

Finally, with regards to education, my survey found that the proportion of those with Master's degrees were the most likely to have invited someone to join the group (84.6%) and to have posted something on Twitter that pertained to prorogation (19.2%).

Table 13**Respondents Education (By Online Activity)**

	No School, Elementary School, Secondary or High School (N=22)	Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique (N=38)	Some University (N=47)	Bachelor's Degree (N=94)	Master's Degree (N=26)	Professional Degree (N=18)
Invited others to join the group	16 (73.0%)	22 (57.9%)	30 (63.8%)	55 (55.0%)	22 (84.6%)	12 (66.7%)
Wrote about prorogation on Facebook profile's	15 (68.2%)	16 (42.1%)	24 (51.1%)	45 (47.9%)	15 (57.7%)	10 (55.6%)
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	7 (31.8%)	4 (10.5%)	8 (17.0%)	12 (12.8%)	4 (15.4%)	4 (22.2%)
Wrote on Twitter about prorogation	1 (4.5%)	3 (7.9%)	5 (10.6%)	10 (10.6%)	5 (19.2%)	1 (5.6%)

5.3.2 Evidence of Mobilization

In terms of gender, the female respondents were slightly more likely (than their male counterparts) to invite others to join the group, with a difference of 4.5 percentage points (see: Table 12). Similarly, those who were members of a visible minority were more likely to invite others to join the group (64.1%) (see: Table 10). As previously discussed, while the findings associated with the ethnicity and sex variables are worthwhile to point out, due to the small percentages, they should not be given too much credence.

My survey found little for the mobilization thesis with respect to education and participation in online activities. The results showed that the proportion of those with no school, elementary school, or secondary or a high school to have written about prorogation on Facebook was 68.2% (see: Table 13). In addition, to writing about prorogation on Facebook, those with only a secondary or a high school education had the highest proportion of respondents to have written a Blog about prorogation (31.8%) (see: Table 13).

Taken together, the results from the demographic indicators and the online activities provide evidence in favour of both the mobilization and the reinforcement theses. The findings associated with income provide the most evidence in support of the reinforcement thesis, as those with an annual household income of over \$40,000 were found to have performed all of the listed activities at a greater proportion than those with an annual income below \$40,000. As well, those with a Master's degree had the highest proportion of respondents who invited others to join the group (84.6%) and who wrote on Twitter about prorogation (19.2%). There are numerous reasons for why this may be,

including that those with higher household incomes tend to be much more likely “to use the Internet and have high speed Internet access at home” (Smith et al., 2009). Certainly, previous research has noted that “the relationships are all in the intuitive direction: greater **education** and **income** are associated with greater likelihood of access, having full-time employment increases the likelihood and increasing age decreases it” (Gibson et al., 2002: 3). However, a more positive story emerged with regard to education. Those who had completed no school, elementary school, secondary school, and high school were the most likely cohort to invite others to join the group (73.0%), write about prorogation on Facebook (66.7%) and to write a Blog about prorogation (28.6%). This suggests that Facebook may offer a new space for political engagement among those who might have otherwise been inactive, particularly the young and the less educated.

5.4 Demographic Indicators and Offline Participation

5.4.1 Evidence of Reinforcement

As with the previous section, I assessed the level of offline participation against the various demographic indicators. Those aged 30 to 44 had the highest proportion of respondents for the majority of the acts, followed by those 60 and older, and finally those between 45 and 59 years old. Thus, those between the ages of 16 to 29 years did not have the highest proportion of respondents for any of the offline acts (see: Table 14).

Table 14

Year of Birth of Respondents (By Offline Activity)

	1950 or Before (60 or Older) (N=30)	1955-1965 (45-59 years old) (N=88)	1966-1980 (30-44 years old) (N=38)	1981-1995 (16-29 years old) (N=72)
Organized a rally or a demonstration about prorogation	2 (6.7%)	7 (8.0%)	3 (8.0%)	4 (5.6%)
Attended a rally or demonstration about prorogation	18 (60.0%)	49 (56.0%)	23 (61.0%)	36 (50.0%)
Joined a political party since joining the group	1 (3.3%)	7 (8.0%)	1 (2.6%)	3 (4.2%)
Donated money to a political party since joining the group	6 (20.0%)	14 (15.9%)	8 (21.0%)	14 (19.4%)
Organized a meeting about prorogation	7 (23.3%)	19 (21.6%)	9 (23.7%)	10 (13.9%)
Attended a meeting about prorogation	7 (23.3%)	18 (20.5%)	6 (15.8%)	13 (18.0%)
Wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation*	12 (40.0%)	16 (18.2%)	11 (30.0%)	10 (13.9%)
Called into a radio or a television call-in show about prorogation	5 (16.7%)	8 (9.0%)	3 (7.9%)	5 (6.9%)

*p<0.05

The results showed that the eldest cohort had the highest proportion of respondents who wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation (40.0%) or called into a radio or a television call-in show about prorogation (16.7%). This finding can be partly explained by the influence of life cycle effects. Taylor (2000) found that older individuals are more likely to participate in conventional political activities such as writing a letter to elected officials. This suggests that while the traditional forms of political communication remain the most robust form of engagement for the older generation, new forms of engagement seem to be outstripping traditional forms of communication for the younger generation.

In addition to the participant’s age, my survey revealed that the respondent’s household income reinforced the involvement of those most likely to engage in politics. The findings suggested that those with a household income of between \$40,000 to \$75,000 had the highest proportion of respondents for seven of the activities (see: Table 15).

Table 15
Respondents Income (By Offline Activity)

	\$70,000 and over (N=77)	\$69,999 to \$50,000 (N=46)	\$40,000 to \$49,999 (N=21)	\$39,999 to \$30,000 (N=21)	\$29,999 to \$20,000 (N=23)	Less than \$20,000 (N=36)
Organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation	7 (9.0%)	4 (8.7%)	2 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.0%)	2 (5.6%)
Attended a rally or demonstration about prorogation	46 (60.0%)	28 (61.0%)	13 (62.0%)	8 (38.0%)	11 (48.0%)	17 (47.2%)
Joined a political party since joining the group	5 (6.5%)	2 (4.3%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Donated money to a political party since joining the group	13 (16.9%)	9 (19.6%)	6 (28.5%)	5 (23.8%)	4 (17.3%)	3 (8.3%)
Organized a meeting about prorogation*	25 (32.5%)	7 (15.2%)	4 (19.0%)	4 (19.0%)	3 (13.0%)	3 (8.3%)
Attended a meeting about prorogation	20 (26.0%)	7 (15.2%)	7 (33.3%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (13.0%)	4 (11.1%)
Wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation**	22 (28.6%)	9 (19.6%)	8 (38.1%)	5 (23.8%)	3 (13.0%)	3 (8.3%)
Called into a radio or a television call-in show about prorogation	10 (13.0%)	3 (6.5%)	4 (19.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (13.0%)	2 (5.5%)

*p<0.05, **p<0.1

This finding is expected, given the research that “nearly all traditional forms of civic activity are stratified by socio-economic status” (Smith et al., 2009). Put simply, as

household income (and education) levels increase so too does political participation. Indeed, being active in politics does involve costs. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) free time is a necessary condition to participate in time-consuming activities and money is necessary to partake in those activities that require contributions. Both of these conditions are something that those from lower socio-economic statuses would not have a lot of. Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of the political acts measured were performed by those from a higher household income bracket.

As well, the analysis indicates that those individuals who identified as a non-visible minority performed all of the offline political acts, including organizing a rally or a demonstration about prorogation, attending a rally or demonstration about prorogation, writing a letter to the newspaper about prorogation, calling into a radio or TV call-in show to talk about prorogation, organizing a meeting about prorogation, attending a meeting about prorogation, gaining membership in a political party since joining the group, and donating money to a political party since joining the group at a higher proportion than the visible minority members (see: Table 16).

Table 16

Respondents Ethnicity (By Offline Activity)

	Visible Minority (N=53)	Not a Visible Minority (N=190)
Organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation	3 (5.6%)	14 (7.4%)
Attended a rally or demonstration about prorogation	25 (47.1%)	109 (57.4%)
Joined a political party since joining the group	1 (1.8%)	12 (6.3%)
Donated money to a political party since joining the group	8 (15.0%)	38 (20.0%)
Organized a meeting about prorogation	8 (15.0%)	40 (21.0%)
Attended a meeting about prorogation	7 (13.2%)	38 (20.0%)
Wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation	8 (15.0%)	44 (23.2%)
Called into a radio or a television call-in show about prorogation	4 (7.5%)	17 (8.9%)

However, the magnitude of the difference between minorities and non-minorities for the majority of these activities was not that pronounced. Indeed, the only two activities that pointed towards reinforcement were attending a rally or a demonstration about prorogation and writing a letter to the newspaper about prorogation. In terms of the former, 57.4% of non-minorities performed this act, compared to 47.1% of non-minorities, a difference of 10.3 percentage points. As well, 23.2% of non-minorities were wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation, compared with 15.0% of non-minorities, a difference of 8.2 percentage points. Despite these differences, none of the activities associated with ethnicity were statistically significant.

In terms of sex, my survey found that males were more likely than females to have organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation (8.0%), attended a rally or demonstration about prorogation (57.6%), written a letter to the newspaper about

prorogation (21.6%), attended a meeting about prorogation (21.6%), and to have donated money to a political party since joining the group (20.0%) (see: Table 17).

Table 17
Respondents Sex (By Offline Activity)

	Male (N=125)	Female (N=118)
Organized a rally or a demonstration about prorogation	10 (8.0%)	8 (6.9%)
Attended a rally or demonstration about prorogation	72 (57.6%)	63 (53.3%)
Joined a political party since joining the group	4 (3.2%)	9 (7.6%)
Donated money to a political party since joining the group	25 (20.0%)	21 (17.7%)
Organized a meeting about prorogation	22 (17.6%)	27 (22.8%)
Attended a meeting about prorogation	27 (21.6%)	19 (16.1%)
Wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation	27 (21.6%)	24 (20.3%)
Called into a radio or a television call-in show about prorogation	11 (8.8%)	11 (9.3%)

Again, the percentage differences associated with sex and the aforementioned offline acts was quite low for the relationships to be considered significant. As such, the data should be assessed with this in mind.

Finally, my survey found that the proportion of those with a bachelor’s degree were the most likely cohort to organize a meeting about prorogation (53.5%), while those with a Master’s degree were the most likely to organize a rally or a demonstration about prorogation (19.2%), attend a rally or a demonstration about prorogation (76.9%), and attend a meeting about prorogation (38.4%). As well, those with a professional degree were the most likely cohort to call into a radio or television call-in show to talk about prorogation (16.7%).

Table 18

Respondents Education (By Offline Activity)

	No school, Elementary School, Secondary or High School (N=22)	Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique (N=38)	Some University (N=47)	Bachelor's Degree (N=94)	Master's Degree (N=26)	Professional Degree (N=18)
Organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation	2 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (8.5%)	5 (5.3%)	5 (19.2%)	2 (11.1%)
Attended a rally or demonstration about prorogation	13 (59.1%)	19 (50.0%)	29 (61.7%)	45 (47.8%)	20 (76.9%)	10 (55.5%)
Joined a political party since joining the group	2 (9.1%)	3 (7.8%)	2 (4.2%)	5 (5.3%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Donated money to a political party since joining the group	7 (31.8%)	7 (18.4%)	6 (12.7%)	20 (21.2%)	3 (11.5%)	3 (16.6%)
Organized a meeting about prorogation	3 (14.0%)	5 (13.1%)	6 (12.7%)	24 (53.5%)	6 (23.0%)	5 (27.7%)
Attended a meeting about prorogation	4 (18.2%)	2 (5.2%)	10 (21.2%)	16 (17.0%)	10 (38.4%)	4 (22.2%)
Wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation	9 (41.0%)	7 (18.4%)	11 (23.4%)	19 (20.2%)	4 (15.3%)	2 (16.6%)
Called into a radio or a television call-in show about prorogation	3 (13.6%)	1 (2.6%)	3 (6.3%)	10 (10.6%)	4 (15.3%)	3 (16.7%)

The proportions of those with a Master's degree who attended a rally or a demonstration about prorogation and who attended a meeting about prorogation are quite considerable and are therefore worth pointing out. In terms of the latter, 76.9% of those with a Master's degree attended a rally or a demonstration, followed by 57.1% of those with a secondary or a high school degree, a difference of a whopping 19.8 percentage points. Even more astounding, those with a Master's degree were almost 50.0% more likely to attend a meeting about prorogation, than their counterparts. As with the online forms of participation, this finding supports previous research that has linked increased education to greater civic involvement.

5.4.2 Evidence of Mobilization

While the evidence of my survey pointed to a digital divide amongst the group's users, reinforcement was not present for all of the variables measured. With regards to sex, 22.8% of females organized a meeting, and 7.6% of females joined a political party, suggesting a mobilizing effect (see: Table 17).

With regards to education, three of the offline activities pointed to mobilization including writing a letter to the newspaper about prorogation (41.0%), gaining membership in a political party after joining the group (9.1%) and donating money to a political party after joining the group (31.8%). The most significant differences in tasks were with regards to writing a letter to the newspaper about prorogation. This finding is interesting, given that the highest category of respondents were those with a Bachelor's Degree who represented 38.4% of the respondents, compared with those with no school, elementary school, or secondary and high school education who represented 15.5% of the

respondents. Because those with a Bachelor's Degree had just under two and a half times more respondents, than those with no school, elementary school or secondary and high school, we would have expected them to dominate in the participation in this activity.

Taken as a whole and compared to the online acts, the offline political activities were more likely to be done by those who were older, better educated, and from higher household incomes. For example, those aged 30 and older with a household income of above \$40,000 were the most likely cohorts to perform almost all of the offline political activities. As well, those with a Bachelor's degree had the highest proportion of respondents to organize a meeting about prorogation (53.3%). Moreover, those with a Master's degree had the highest proportion of respondents who organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation (19.2%), attend a rally or demonstration about prorogation (76.9%) and attend a meeting about prorogation (38.4%). Finally, those with a professional degree had the highest proportion of respondents who called into a radio or a television call-in show to talk about prorogation (16.7%). As previously mentioned this is not surprising given the higher propensity among the more affluent and highly educated towards traditional forms of participation. This does, however, indicate that the reinforcement of traditional inequalities in participation took place on the group.

5.5 Determining Whether Members Participation on the Group Translated into Real World Participation

In order to test whether virtual participation translated into real world participation, I asked the members whether they had engaged in a host of activities—both online and off. Where possible, these responses were then compared to the rest of the

population to infer the impact that group membership had in prompting civic engagement. The discussion below will detail the participation rates of the members in the selected activities. I start with an analysis of the online activities followed by those activities that were performed in the real world.

5.5.1 Online Activities

The frequencies revealed that the group’s members did not participate online in large numbers (see: Table 19).

Table 19

Participation by all Respondents in Online Activities (N=273)

Online Activity	Respondents Participation in Online Activity (n and %)
Wrote about prorogation to Facebook	140 (51.3%)
Wrote a Blog about prorogation	44 (16.1%)
Invited others to join the group	175 (64.1%)
Wrote about prorogation to Twitter	27 (9.9%)

Indeed, just above 50% of individuals wrote on Facebook about prorogation and invited others to join the group. This is surprising given the fact that these activities do not require very much of the user. Given the latter, it is less shocking that a mere 16.1% of the members wrote a Blog about prorogation and that only 9.9% wrote on Twitter about prorogation. There are several reasons for why Twitter usage may have been so low. First, the majority (20%) of Twitter users tend to be born between of 1974 and 1984, with the median birth year of 1978 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009). Findings from my survey revealed that only a minority of the survey’s respondents (see: Table 2) were found to have been born within that timeframe, and that the median year of birth of the respondents was 1964. Additionally, a study by Infoscape Research Lab (2010a)

concluded that the Twitter updates about prorogation were predominantly posted by those who identified as non-partisan (64%), Liberal (18%), Tory (11%), and the New Democrat (7%). Findings from my survey revealed that the majority of the respondents identified as Liberals. Thus, it is not surprising that Twitter usage was low, as the majority of the survey's respondents, Liberals and those between 40 and 59 years old, have not been classified as those likely to post to Twitter.

The frequencies above provide an insight into the individual activities that the group's members engaged in. However, it may be that those group members who participated in one act also participated in others. This statement rests on Milbrath's (1965) and others' assumptions that citizen participation in political activities is cumulative. To test this rationale, an additive measure of online participation was constructed consisting of four items (wrote about prorogation to Facebook, wrote a Blog about prorogation, invited others to join the group, and wrote about prorogation to Twitter). Responses for this analysis were coded either as "have participated" (1) or "have not participated" (0). Thus, individual respondents could score anywhere between 0 (no participation whatsoever) and 4 (participated in all four acts) (see: Table 20).

Table 20

Additive Measure of Online Activities

Number of Activities	Measure of Respondents Participation (n and %)
0	11 (4.1%)
1	38 (14.0%)
2	85 (31.4%)
3	58 (21.4%)
4	79 (29.2%)
TOTAL (N)	273 (100.0%)

As table 20 indicates, the highest proportion of individuals (31.4%) indicated that they had participated in two of the four online acts. This demonstrates that being exposed to political stimuli did not necessarily enhance the online level of participation of users. Simply put, the group's members were not necessarily more motivated to participate in all of the activities, just because they had participated in one.

5.5.2 Offline Activities

Of the nine offline activities measured, four had components which could be compared with the 2008 Canadian Election's Study. These acts included: contacting Member of Parliament, attending a rally or a demonstration, holding membership in a political party, and donating to a political party. With the exception of holding membership in a political party, the group's members were found to outperform the general population in all of the measured political acts. There are many reasons for why this may have been: first, as previously discussed, the members of the group were found to be far more politically astute than the general Canadian population was. Second, the various functions of the group (through Facebook) including participating on the discussion board or writing to the wall may have aided in developing the civic skills necessary to participate in civic life (Quintelier and Vissers, 2008).

In terms of contacting a Member of Parliament about prorogation, the frequencies revealed that 50.6% of the group's membership carried out this political act (see: Table 21).

Table 21

Participation by all Respondents in Offline Activities

Offline Activity	Respondents Participation in Offline Activity (n and %)
Organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation (N=271)	20 (7.4%)
Organized a meeting about prorogation (N=271)	58 (21.4%)
Contacted a Member of Parliament about prorogation (N=271)	137 (50.6%)
Wrote a letter to the newspaper about prorogation (N=271)	66 (24.3%)
Called into a radio or television call-in show to talk about prorogation (N=271)	25 (9.2%)
Attended a rally or a demonstration about prorogation (N=271)	149 (55.0%)
Attended a meeting about prorogation (N=271)	55 (20.3%)
Held membership in a political party since joining the group (N=271)	15 (5.5%)
Donated money to a political party since joining the group (N=273)	50 (18.3%)

This compares with the 2008 Canadian Election Study that found that 35.4% of those surveyed had contacted a politician or a government official within the past 5 years (Gidengil, Everitt, and Nevitte, 2008).

Similarly, the findings revealed that 55.0% of the group's membership had attended a rally or a demonstration about prorogation (see: Table 20), compared with 24.5% of the public (Gidengil, Everitt, and Nevitte, 2008). Some scholars (see: Brunsting and Postmes, 2002) have found that online groups tend to anticipate that others will join them in collective action. Thus, members of the group may have anticipated that others would attend the rallies about prorogation, thereby prompting them to also attend.

The findings also demonstrated that 5.5% of the group's members joined a political party (see: Table 19), as opposed to 15.6% of the 2008 Canadian Election

Study's respondents (Gidengil, Everitte, and Nevitte, 2008). While the proportion of the Canadian Elections Study respondents was higher, than the proportion of the participants of the group who joined a political party, it is possible that membership in the group led some users to join political parties.

As with the online activities, an additive scale was constructed to determine the overall participation rate of the offline activities (see: Table 22).

Table 22
Additive Measure of Offline Activities

Number of Activities	Measure of Respondents Participation (n and %)
0	0 (0.0%)
1	2 (0.7%)
2	7 (2.6%)
3	7 (2.6%)
4	17 (6.3%)
5	22 (8.1%)
6	44 (16.3%)
7	56 (20.7%)
8	46 (17.0%)
9	69 (25.6%)
TOTAL (N)	273 (100.0%)

The largest proportion of the respondents (25.6%) claimed to have participated in all of the offline activities. This means that those members, who participated in one act, were likely to participate in other acts of participation. As well, the participation in low intensity acts may have led the group's members to participate in higher intensity activities. For example, drawing on Milbrath (1965), Lyons (2002) notes that political

activities online fall into one of three categories: spectator, transitional, or gladiator²⁵. He suggests that if one partakes in spectator acts, they have a better likelihood of increasing their overall level of civic engagement. This line of rationale suggests that members, involvement on Facebook may lead to a greater degree, and a higher intensity of participation.

When studied in isolation, the rates of participation for the online and offline activities were quite low, with just a few exceeding the 50% mark. However, when compared with the population, it becomes apparent that the group did participate in the activities to a higher degree than their Canadian counterparts did. This provides evidence in favour of the mobilization thesis, as it is possible that by participating on the group, the members were able to garner the skills necessary for further interaction or engagement, particularly in the offline world. This claim is further advanced when one notes that the highest proportion (31.4%) of the respondents who participated in one online activity, were more likely to engage in two online activities, and 25.6% of the respondents who participated in one offline activity, were far more likely to participate in all of the offline activities.

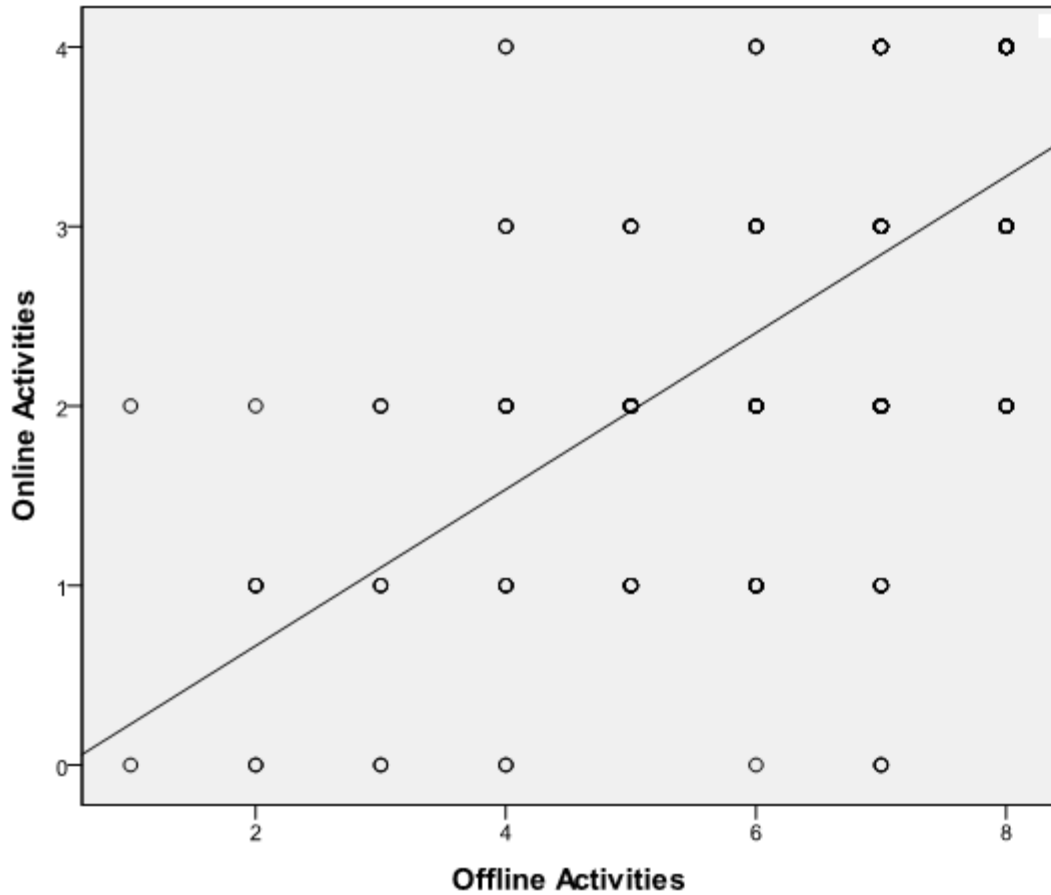
5.5.3 Online and Offline Activities

As previously mentioned, the additive indexes were comprised of all of the variables that made up online and offline political participation. To recap, the online political participation measure consisted of four items: writing about prorogation on

²⁵ Lyons (2002) defines gladiator activities as higher cost activities such as “contributing time in a community campaign emerging from issues of cyber group focus, transitional activities as mid-cost activities such as contacting a public official as a result of cyber group involvement and spectator activities as lower cost activities such as exposing oneself to civic stimuli by reading cyber group postings” (Lyons, 2002: 108).

Facebook, writing a Blog about prorogation, inviting others to join the group, and writing about prorogation to Twitter. Similarly, the offline political participation measure consisted of nine items: organizing a rally or demonstration about prorogation, organizing a meeting about prorogation, contacting a Member of Parliament about prorogation, writing a letter to the newspaper about prorogation, calling into a radio or a television call-in show to talk about prorogation, attending a rally or demonstration about prorogation, attending a meeting about prorogation, holding membership in a political party since joining the group, and donating money to a political party since joining the group. Based on these additive indexes, a scatter plot was constructed (see: Figure 5) to see if the respondent's that performed the online activities were the same as the respondent's that performed the offline activities.

Figure 5: Scatterplot of Online and Offline Activities



$r=.953$ ($p.<.01$)

As figure 5 demonstrates the Pearson's r co-efficient which illustrates the correlation between the two variables was .953 indicating that there is a positive to medium strong relationship between online and offline political participation. This, in conjunction with earlier findings, demonstrates that the same members that were active in offline formats were also active in online formats. This provides additional support that the group reinforced the participation of those members that were already politically active. More importantly, however, this finding indicates that online activism is not replacing offline

activism (Zuniga et al., 2010). Thus, it is likely that those members seeking to participate in online forms of activism are using the web as another venue to express their political engagement. Taken together, this finding reveals that the same people are doing the same things online as they are offline.

5.6 Determining what Motivated Members to Join the Group

In an effort to uncover the third and final research question, frequencies were conducted on two direct survey questions in order to determine how the participants learned about and why they joined the Facebook group. The frequencies of the former question indicated that 30.8% of the respondents had heard about the group through the media (for example, through the television, the radio, the newspaper, or another online source), while 26.2% of the participants found the group through their Facebook mini-feed, and 23.5% of those surveyed received a group invite from a friend (see: Table 23).

Table 23

How Respondents Learned About the Group

How Respondents Learned about the Group	Responses by Category (n and %)
In conversation with a friend	22 (10.0%)
Through the media	68 (30.8%)
Received a Facebook group invite	52 (23.5%)
Showed up on my Facebook mini-feed	58 (26.2%)
Was a founder of the group	4 (1.8%)
Other	17 (7.7%)
TOTAL (N)	221 (100.0%)

It is interesting to note that just under half (49.7%) of the group's recruitment came internally from within Facebook (through Facebook group invites or through Facebook mini-feeds). Taken one step further, a simple-cross tab of these five variables was

conducted to determine if the traditional biases in media reception occurred. More specifically, this cross-tab was implemented to determine if the older demographics found out about the group by conversing with a friend or by watching the news, and if the younger demographics found out about the group through Facebook. (see: Table 24).

Table 24

Age and How Respondents Learned about the Group

	1950 or Before (60 and Older) (N=21)	1951-1965 (45-59 years old) (N=58)	1966-1980 (30-44 years old) (N=49)	1981-1995 (16-29 years old) (N=54)
In conversation with a friend	1 (4.8%)	4 (6.9%)	4 (8.1%)	12 (22.2%)
Through the media	17 (80.9%)	30 (52.0%)	10 (20.4%)	1 (1.9%)
Received a Facebook group invite	6 (29.0%)	17 (29.3%)	9 (18.4%)	17 (31.5%)
Showed up on my Facebook mini-feed	6 (28.6%)	24 (41.4%)	7 (14.3%)	17 (31.5%)

Table 24 indicates that those between the ages of 45 and 60 had the highest proportion of respondents that found out about the group through the media. Likewise, those between the ages of 16 and 29 had the highest proportion of respondents that found out about the group through a Facebook invite (31.5%). This is likely because individuals of different ages are more likely to consume different kinds of media. For example, Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001) found that those born before 1946 preferred a newspaper, whereas those born between 1946 and 1964 preferred the television, and those that were born since 1965 went online for news and other information.

As well, the frequencies of the members' motivations for joining the group suggested that 60.7% of the respondents joined the group to express their disagreement with the government (see: Table 25).

Table 25

Respondents Motivations for Joining the Group

Respondents Motivations for Joining the Group	Responses by Category (n and %)
Learn more about prorogation	19 (8.5%)
Express my disagreement with the government	136 (60.7%)
To connect with others who share a similar point of view	38 (17.0%)
To argue in favour of prorogation	2 (0.9%)
To organize activities/events	3 (1.3%)
General political interest	18 (8.0%)
Other	8 (3.6%)
TOTAL (N)	224 (100.0%)

This provides support for the reinforcement thesis suggesting that those individuals, who are previously engaged offline, are likely to find new ways to express their engagement online. The fact that majority of the members (60.7%) joined the group to express disagreement with the government's actions may be suggested as indicating a pre-existing interest in the subject matter and, hence, would support the concept that the members who joined were previously politically engaged.

The findings from the Rideau Institute (2010f) provided further evidence as to why a member may have been inclined to join the Facebook group "Canadians against Proroguing Parliament." Evidence from the Rideau Institutes (2010g) survey indicated that 53.0% of the participants joined the group because they believed proroguing Parliament was undemocratic. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of participants indicated that thought joining the Facebook group would make a difference.

The frequencies and cross-tab associated with the above questions lend themselves to the mobilization thesis. Those between the ages of 45 and 60 years old had the highest proportion of members who learned about the group from the traditional media sources such as the television or the newspaper, whereas, those between the ages of 16 and 29 had the highest proportion of users to have learned about the group through a Facebook invite. This finding demonstrates that Facebook has the power to captivate the youth to join politically orientated groups.

5.7 Conclusion

My survey results provided answers to the three research questions put forth in this thesis (see: Chapter 4). My survey results confirmed that the majority (60.7%) of the group's members joined the group to express their disagreement with the government. As well, 30.8% of the group's members found out about the group through the media.

With regards to the second research question, my survey results largely pointed to support for the reinforcement thesis, mirroring the traditional participation biases, although there were a few instances in which those participants with lower education were mobilized. Overall, these results demonstrated that a "digital divide" did exist, with those members from traditionally represented groups leading participation in the online and offline activities. With regards to the online activities, those with a household income of above \$40,000 and those aged 30 and older performed all of the activities. The findings were even more pronounced for the offline activities, where those between the ages of 16 and 29 did not have the highest proportion of participation for any of the selected acts. As well, those with a household income of above \$40,000 had the highest proportion of respondents for all of the selected acts, and those with a Bachelor's degree

or higher had the highest proportion of respondents for 5 of the 8 offline activities. This suggests that the demographic participation on the group was dominated by “elites” who likely had the greatest access to Facebook, and were the most motivated, active and informed (Norris, 2001).

As well, my survey results were mixed in terms of the third research question. Specifically, my survey results showed that online participation and offline participation rates were quite low. For example, only two of the four online activities and four of the nine offline activities had engagement rates of above 50.0%. When compared with the 2008 Canadian Election Study, the group’s members were 15.2% more likely to contact a Member of Parliament and 30.5% more likely to attend a rally or demonstration. However, the 2008 Canadian Election Study respondents were 10.1% more likely to hold membership in a political party than the group’s members were. Finally, the survey’s results showed that the highest proportion of individuals who participated in one activity were more likely to participate in two or more activities online and off. This shows that minimal participation in activities led to an increase in the overall participation rates of members. The next chapter of this thesis will provide the results from the discussions that occurred on the Facebook group. This will help to answer whether Facebook engaged member’s political participation virtually or in the real world.

Chapter 6: Content Analysis

While the previous chapter outlined my survey results, this chapter presents the findings of the content analysis research. As with chapter 5, the interview with Christopher White will be used alongside the content analysis. The content analysis evaluated the group's discussion board postings in an attempt to determine the frequency of discussion about prorogation and to gauge whether individuals used the forum as vehicle for real world political activity. The content analysis discussed below follows in two ways: First, readers will be given an insight into the group members' impressions of the various political events that emerged on the group. This analysis will reveal whether political discussion on the group translated into political activity. This will be followed by a second reading of the group's discussion board that will provide readers with a breakdown of the number and percentages of posts associated with the related research questions and their hypotheses.

6.1 From Design to Results

From December 31, 2009 to March 7, 2010²⁶, every post on the group's discussion board was coded for a number of features that are discussed below. During this timeframe 2,358 posts (on 79 different discussion board topics) were generated. This translated into approximately 36.3 posts per day. An analysis of the discussion board revealed that members posted the most content during the weekdays, as opposed to on the weekends. The group's members were the most active during the month of January

²⁶ These dates were chosen in order to analyze my survey and content analysis under the same reference point.

2010²⁷, with their participation rates dropping in both February and March 2010. Furthermore, the results from the content analysis illustrated that from January 3, 2010 to January 9, 2010, the group's members generated the most content on the discussion board, with January 7, 2010 being the busiest day for the group's users. This is likely because Parliament had just been prorogued, thereby making the issue of prorogation a hot topic for the week that followed.

6.2 Results

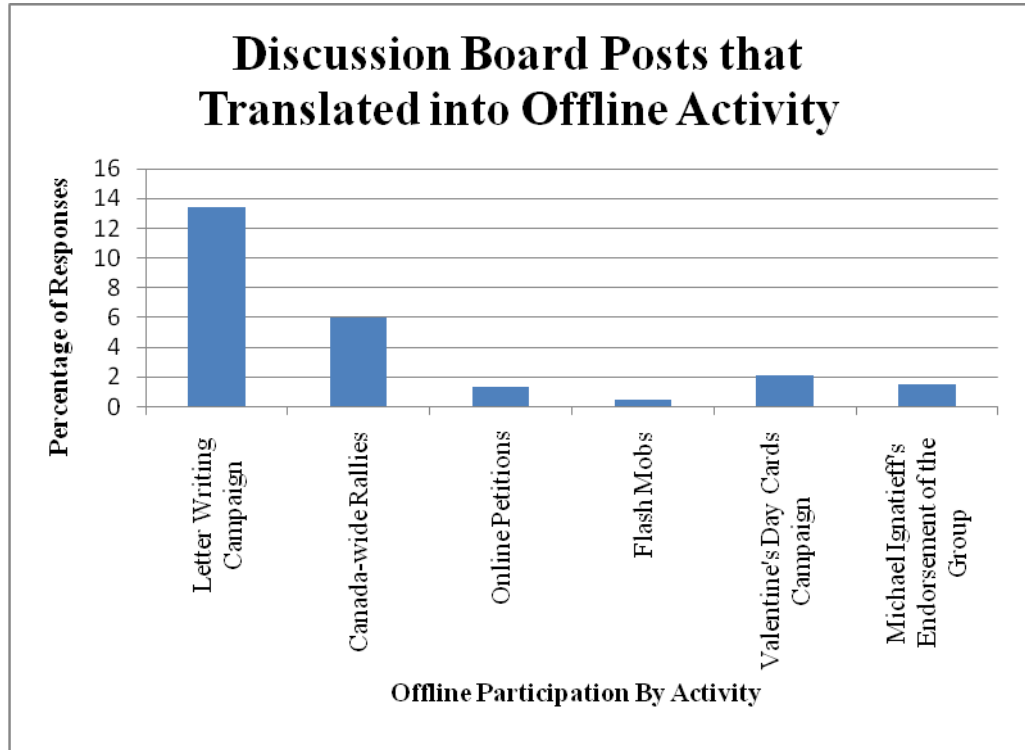
I performed a qualitative analysis and systematic coding of the discussion board to determine which (if any) of the posts indicated offline political participation. It quickly became evident that some of the postings did generate civic engagement in the real world. This finding is not surprising given the fact that other researchers (ex. Feezell, Conroy, and Guerrero, 2009e) have found Facebook groups to be associated with political participation. The following section will provide a qualitative reading of six categories that emerged from the 2,358 coded discussion board postings (see: Chapter 4). These posts included: the letter writing campaign, the January 23 rallies, and other less orchestrated offline events (including online petitions, flash mobs, Valentine's Day for Democracy cards and an endorsement by Michael Ignatieff).

In total, 24.8% of the posts on the group's discussion board discussed offline activities. Although small, this number shows that the group had a remarkable connection between the online and offline realms. Indeed, while Diani (2000) and others have argued

²⁷ The group was probably the most active in January because the issue of prorogation and the group were new.

that the Internet is a distinct or isolated space, this group proves that the virtual world can be centered on ‘real world’ actions.

With regards to the six analyzed activities, the largest proportion of the posts (13.4%) had to do with the letter writing campaign (see: Figure 6).



This is not surprising for two reasons. First, this was the first activity to be carried out by the group. Because Parliament had just been prorogued it is likely that the backlash against Prime Minister Harper and the hype that surrounded the emergence of the group resulted in a higher proportion of participation than the activities that followed. Second, because this activity only entailed that users write (and send) letters to various political entities it required less initiative than many of the other acts, including, for example, the Canada-wide rallies. The letter writing campaign is discussed in detail below.

6.2.1 Letter Writing Campaign

The first form of active participation that emerged on the group's discussion board was the letter writing campaign. On December 30, 2009, Christopher White asked the group's members to keep the pressure on Stephen Harper and the issue of prorogation by writing letters to their respective Members of Parliament (Paulsen, 2010e). As well, Christopher White asked that the members post both the letters that they had written and the responses that they had received to the group's discussion board (Paulsen, 2010f). Posting the letters and their replies to the group's discussion board were important tools, insofar as they allowed users to share their ideas with other group members and to draw on what other Members of Parliament had acknowledged, thereby broadening the scope of what others could address within their letters. This probably made it easier for other members to write the cards, and made their letters more effective.

Following Christopher White's suggestion to post the letters and their responses to the group's discussion board, the members took it upon themselves to provide other members with the contact information for all of the Members of Parliament, the Governor General, and the Prime Minister. Housing all of the addresses in one place made it easier for individuals to find and to subsequently contact the various political elites, thereby lowering the cost of participation. In addition to posting the contact information for the various political elites, group members acted as watchdogs by verifying and correcting the contact information. By ensuring that these watchdogs were in place, the group's members were able to focus their attention on mass-producing letters, as opposed to worrying about misinformation. Taken together, this strategy likely enhanced the accuracy of the letters.

In addition to providing the contact information for the political elites, the group's members also posted tips on how to write effective letters. These guidelines contained points that the members could touch on in the letters, in addition to providing suggestions for why to mail (as opposed to e-mail) the letters (Looney, Facebook post, 2010a). These guidelines provided a baseline for those individuals who were unsure of how to format their letters to the political elites.

While these suggestions were helpful in providing the members with letter writing techniques, the users eventually began to post sample letters that could be copied, pasted, and sent directly to the political elites. For example, in a discussion board topic, a group member, Mireille Boisvert posted the following template for other members to use:

“I'm joining thousands of Canadians who oppose your arrogant decision to shut down Parliament. You thought we wouldn't notice, or we wouldn't care – but you were wrong. Part of your job as Prime Minister (Member of Parliament) is answering tough questions – about torture cover ups, climate change and unemployment. But now you're running away from your responsibility to be accountable – because you have something to hide. Other countries kept their Parliaments in session before and during the Olympics. Other governments have prepared throne speeches and budgets while Parliament was still running. You have no good excuse for shutting down Parliament for so long. Do your job and stop running from Parliament. Get back to work” (Boisvert, Facebook post, 2010a).

Posts like these were important in facilitating engagement, as they lowered the cost (in terms of time) of participation even more, thereby making it easier for individuals to send their letters to the political elites. In addition, an analysis of the discussion board suggested that more members were likely to have reported that they had sent a letter to a Member of Parliament after the templates were posted to the group's discussion board.²⁸

²⁸ While posting sample letters to the group's discussion board, and an increase in the letters sent to political elites certainly imply correlation, one cannot assume causation.

For example, on January 5, 2010 only a single member reported that they had sent a letter to a Member of Parliament. However, after the first sample letter was posted on January 10, 2010 (Facebook, 2010f), 52 individuals indicated that they had sent a letter to a Member of Parliament.

Table 26

Letter Writing Campaign Sub-Categorizations

Letter Writing Campaign Sub-Categorizations	Responses by Sub-Category (n and %)
Members of Parliament/Opposition Party Leaders	203 (65.0%)
Governor General	22 (7.0%)
Prime Minister	37 (11.7%)
Mainstream Media	33 (10.4%)
International Community ²⁹	22 (7.0%)
Total (N)	317 (100.0%)

As table 26 indicates, of the 317 discussion board postings that were related to the letter writing campaign, the bulk of the letters that were posted to the discussion board were sent to or received from Members of Parliament or opposition party leaders (65.0%), with a minor percentage of the letters sent to or received from the Prime Minister (11.7%), the mainstream media (10.4%), the international community (7.0%), and the Governor General (7.0%).

The letters to the Members of Parliament and to oppositional party leaders were descriptive containing information about the Conservative Party’s administration and about prorogation, as well as argumentative as they denounced the Conservative government’s decision to prorogue Parliament. Some of these letters also asked the

²⁹ The international community included political leaders, ambassadors, the media etc.

political elites to stand up against Stephen Harper and the Conservative government by taking matters into their own hands. For example, one letter asked the Member of Parliament, Joyce Murray, to voice her disapproval with Stephen Harper by staging a walk-in. (Handman, Facebook post, 2010a).

While the content of the letters was generally similar, the users' letters to other political entities (including the international community or the Governor General for example) generally focused on providing solutions or on asking for the international community's help in fixing what many members dubbed as a broken system. For example, in their joint letter to the Governor General, Rosemary Kelly and Tony Nardi asked for the Governor General's help in holding Prime Minister Stephen Harper accountable. They wrote:

“Please reconsider and reverse your decision to grant the Prime Minister his request to prorogue Parliament. As head of state, you are doing damage to the state, damage to the democratic political and administrative process, and damage to democracy” (Kelly and Nardi, Facebook post, 2010a).

However, of the 317 letters and responses that were posted to the group's discussion board, none generated as much hype as the 14 letters that were written to Tony Clement, Canada's industry minister. The reason that the correspondence with Mr. Clement was so active was because on January 3, 2010 while at an auto show in Detroit, Mr. Clement said of prorogation:

“I know it's a big issue with the Ottawa media elite and some of the elites in our country, but I got to tell you, if the reaction in my constituency was any indication, I've maybe had three dozen e-mails. It may not be what the chattering classes want, but we're not here to govern on behalf of the chattering classes” (Taber, Facebook post, 2010a).

This statement provoked members of the group to organize and to launch a letter writing campaign that urged people to start writing to and e-mailing Mr. Clement. This campaign seems to have been successful, as following this request, 14 members indicated on the

group's discussion board, that they had sent a letter or an e-mail to Mr. Clement (Facebook, 2010g). The messages to Mr. Clement were mainly focused on reminding him that he was governing on behalf of all of Canadians, and not just those that had voted for the Conservative Party (Facebook, 2010h). More importantly, however, these letters scorned Mr. Clement for not encouraging the political awareness and engagement of Canadian citizen's vis-à-vis the group (Facebook, 2010i). Anita G³⁰, a member of the group, drew upon these points in a portion of her letter to Mr. Clement by stating:

...“and, it saddens me that someone who has clearly chosen to dedicate himself to government service would make disparaging comments about a group of Canadians, particularly a group that includes so many young adults, who are voicing their wish to be informed and engaged in the political process. Shouldn't this be something to be celebrated, not disparaged?” (Anita G, Facebook post, 2010a).

Interestingly, while the members had indicated that they had sent letters or e-mails to Mr. Clement they did not post any replies that they had received from him. As such, it is impossible to determine what effect (if any) the letters had on Mr. Clement and the comment that he had made.

Taken as whole, the letter writing campaign was focused on affirming and supporting individual action. This was achieved through open communication and providing members with helpful resources and support in a way that encouraged them to participate in the letter writing campaign. The letter writing campaign informed and communicated with members by providing various political elites contact information, by offering tips on how to write effective letters, and by posting samples of letters that others users had written. Although these acts represent one-way forms of communication and

³⁰ Anita G did not provide her full name on Facebook, which is why I've referred to her here as Anita G.

dissemination of information, they likely encouraged other members to take part in the campaign, which likely inspired the feeling of a collective struggle.

6.2.2 Canada-wide, January 23, 2010 Rallies

A second form of offline political participation, and the most visible form of organization engaged in by the members, was the Canada-wide rallies that took place on January 23, 2010. What was interesting about the rallies was that unlike the letter writing campaign, which had no organized leadership, the rallies were spearheaded by Shilo Davis, a member of the group. In the interview, Christopher White stated that shortly after the group's creation, Shilo Davis approached him with the idea of organizing rallies. Of course, Mr. White accepted (White, 2010b).

The results revealed that of the 2,358 discussion board postings, 142 (or 6.0%) discussed in some way the January 23, 2010 rallies. Of these 142 postings, 94 (or 66.0%) were aimed at organizing or planning the rallies (see: Table 27).

Table 27

Rally Campaign Sub-Categorizations

Rally Campaign Sub-Categories	Total Responses by Category (n and %)
Preparation and Planning	94 (66.0%)
Promotion	32 (23.0%)
After the rallies	10 (7.0%)
Rallies in the media	9 (6.3%)
Total (N)	142 (100.0%)

Indeed, in order to ensure that the rallies were successful, Christopher White, Shilo Davis, and interested members of the group knew that they would require a fair amount of preparation and planning prior to their commencement. This preparation and planning consisted of organizing where (within Canada) and when the rallies would be held, what

activities would be available for individuals to engage in, and what to do in the event that the rallies did not go as planned.

The majority of the posts within this section contained relatively straightforward topics that provided information to the individuals about where and when the rallies were being held. These posts were important, as they provided the individuals with the appropriate information to ensure that the gatherings were coordinated, large, and unified. The preparation and the planning stages were imperative to promote real world participation, as interested individuals could quickly locate the relevant information for their province or cities demonstrations. This probably contributed to an increased turnout, as had individuals been unable to find this information, they would have likely been unable to attend the demonstrations.

In addition to planning where and when the rallies would be held, a fraction of the posts (31 of 94 or 33.0%) within the preparation and planning category were focused on proposing various activities that individuals could engage in while at the rallies. Some of the more simple ideas that were put forth by the members included asking individuals to wear a black armband at the rallies, and until Harper released the Afghan documents, to complex ideas that asked individuals to perform street theatre while at the marches (Facebook, 2010j).

Another aspect of the planning and organization posts focused on tips or rules for individuals to follow while at the demonstrations (12 of 94 or 13.0%). For example, the post, “nonviolent action checklists – tips for organizers and demonstrators” asked members to visit the National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance website (www.iraqpledge.org) and to acquaint themselves with the action preparation tips to

ensure that the rallies were peaceful and effective (Morris, Facebook post, 2010a). These posts were important, as they ensured that the rallies maintained a consistent tone, despite the fact that they were being held in different provinces and cities within Canada.

Finally, a fraction of the posts (5 of 94 or 5.3%) within the rally preparation and planning category focused on what to do if the rallies were cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. For example, the post “contingency plans” asked members what they would do if Harper announced he was going to recall Parliament on January 25, 2010 (Belfrey, Facebook post, 2010a). The responses to this post seemed to suggest that even if Parliament resumed, members were still in favour of rallying, not against prorogation, but against the lack of accountability and democracy instead.

Once the members had coordinated where and when the rallies would be held, and what activities individuals could engage in while at the rallies, the next step was to promote the demonstrations. Of the 142 rally-related threads, 32 or (23.0%) were focused on promoting the rallies. Rally promotion was aimed at attracting individuals both within and outside of the group. With regards to the former, posts such as “armchair activism isn’t enough” and “actions speak louder” (Facebook, 2010k) were important in building online momentum prior to the rallies. More importantly, however, these posts asked members to move from virtual to real world participation, stating that actions were louder than words.

The posts that were meant to target individuals outside of the group were also important, insofar as they were aimed at reaching those users who may have been previously uninterested or unaware of the group’s existence. The posts within this category were unique, as they asked members to display signs, slogans, buttons or

bumper stickers to reach beyond the confines of the Facebook group (Facebook, 2010l). As well, some of the posts within this category asked members to send text messages to their apathetic friends in an effort to activate them to participate within the rallies (Facebook, 2010m).

Perhaps the most telling aspect of offline activism was the posts that cited the number of individuals who were in attendance at the rallies. Prior to the demonstrations, a group member asked the local chapters' administrators³¹ to record the number of attendees present at the rallies in their respective cities or provinces. Thus, following the rallies, the administrators who had taken note of the rallies turnout posted their findings to a website (<http://sontag.ca/Support-the-CAPP-rally-groups.html>) and to the group's discussion board. Table 28 details the high, the low and mean crowd estimates.

Table 28

High, Low, and Mean Crowd Estimates for the Canadian Rallies

Rally Location	High Estimate	Low Estimate	Mean Estimate
<u>Newfoundland</u>			
St. John's	200	300	250
<u>Nova Scotia</u>			
Antigonish	120	150	135
Halifax	300	1000	650
Inverness	50	50	50
Port Mouton	2	2	2
Sydney	100	100	100
Truro	100	100	100
Wolfville	15	15	15
<u>New Brunswick</u>			
Fredericton	45	100	72.5

³¹ Each city in Canada had a local chapter group that was used as a subset of the larger group. These groups were used to plan, organize, and mobilize the users from the various cities and provinces.

Moncton	25	25	25
<u>Prince Edward Island</u>			
Charlottetown	150	150	150
<u>Quebec</u>			
Montreal Quebec	300	1000	650
Quebec City	150	150	150
<u>Ontario</u>			
Barrie	200	500	350
Belleville	200	300	250
Bolton	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cobourg	150	160	155
Hamilton	300	600	450
Huntsville	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guelph	300	600	450
Kingston	500	600	550
London	150	800	475
Mississauga	25	25	25
Newmarket	200	250	225
North Bay	100	100	100
Oakville	200	200	200
Orangeville	100	150	125
Orillia	300	300	300
Oshawa	125	150	137.5
Ottawa	2500	5000	3750
Owen Sound	200	200	200
Parry Sound	n/a	n/a	n/a
Peterborough	250	300	275
Sault-Sainte-Marie	n/a	n/a	n/a
Quinte	200	200	200
Stratford	125	200	162.5
Sudbury	250	300	275
Thunderbay	100	250	175
Toronto	7000	20000	13500
Waterloo	350	700	475
Windsor	250	250	250
<u>Manitoba</u>			
Winnipeg	400	600	500
<u>Saskatchewan</u>			
Regina	150	350	250
Saskatoon	450	500	475

Prince Albert	60	60	60
<u>Alberta</u>			
Calgary	200	500	350
Lethbridge	50	200	125
Grande Prairie	12	20	12
<u>British Columbia</u>			
Courtney	138	150	144
Duncan	35	100	67.5
Prince George			
Kamloops	75	100	87.5
Kelowna	100	100	100
Nanaimo	60	60	60
Penticton	25	25	25
Prince Rupert	60	60	60
Maple Ridge	n/a	n/a	n/a
Smithers	n/a	n/a	n/a
Terrace	30	35	35
Vancouver	1000	5000	3000
Vernon	20	20	20
Victoria	500	2000	1250
<u>Northwest Territories</u>			
Yellowknife	30	30	30
<u>Yukon</u>			
Whitehorse	150	150	150
Total (N)	19177	45337	32205.5

As table 28 indicates, the mean crowd estimates for the January 23, 2010 rallies was a total of 32205.5.

Myers (2000) noted that information communication technologies (ICTs) have often been credited for their ability to accelerate and geographically extend the diffusion of information and protest (Myers, 2004). The rallies certainly achieved this, as in addition to orchestrating the demonstrations within Canada, the group also had a hand in organizing rallies in various international communities. Again, the numbers presented in

table 29 are based upon estimates from a website (<http://sontag.ca/Support-the-CAPP-rally-groups.html>) and the group’s discussion board.

Table 29

High, Low, and Mean Crowd Estimates for the International Rallies

International Rally Location	High Estimate	Low Estimate	Mean Estimate
Beijing, China	1	1	1
Oman, Arabia	2	2	2
The Hague, Netherlands	3	3	3
London, England	20	20	20
New York, New York	20	20	20
Costa Rica, Central America	30	30	30
Dallas, Texas, USA	2	2	2
San Francisco, California, USA	11	15	13
Total (N)	89	93	91

As table 29 demonstrates, mean estimates suggest that approximately 91 individuals participated in the various international rallies.

While at a first glance the January 23, 2010 rallies’ turnout rate is not substantial, considering the leap in commitment from clicking to join a group, to attending a rally in the real world, 16.1% is a considerable number. Despite the fact that only 16.1% of the group’s total membership was mobilized on January 23, 2010, this still translated into 32296.5 individuals (across the globe). As well, evidence from the rallies shows that the group was successful in providing a meeting space for members to inform themselves and partake in democratic discourse. Ultimately, this resulted in collective action for members around the globe.

Given the evidence provided above, it appears as though the group served as an arena within which the members could communicate and collaborate, which provided the users with the elements that they needed to organize the rallies. Through preparation,

planning, and promotion, the group was able to build anticipation and momentum for the rallies. The ability for the members to coordinate their actions meant that users from around the Canada and the world could “arrange their actions so that they functioned as part of a larger collective movement” (Garrett, 2006: 14). In addition to the letter writing campaign and the Canada-wide rallies, a number of additional online activities translated into real world activism, although these acts were of a smaller scale than the previously mentioned activities.

6.2.3 Petitions

Of the 2,358 discussion board postings that were coded, 136 (5.7%) suggested offline activities that were smaller in scale than the letter writing campaign or the Canada-wide rallies. The first of the smaller scale activities that was generated online and spilled into offline political participation was the petitions. Of the 2,358 discussion board postings 32 (1.4%) were associated with various petitions (see: Table 30).

Table 30

Other Offline Activities

Offline Activity	Total Responses by Category (n and %)
Online Petitions	32 (1.4%)
Flash Mobs	13(0.5%)
Valentines' Day for Democracy Cards	51(2.2%)
Michael Ignatieff's Endorsement	37(1.6%)
Total (N)	2,358

Of these 32 posts, the users were either generating their own petitions (8 of 32 or 25%) or forwarding petitions that already existed (24 of 32 or 75%). For example, “easy petition to sign” (Facebook, 2010n) contained a brief introduction stating that the petition was against prorogation and would be forwarded to the media The post also contained an

electronic link to the online petition, and asked members to forward the link to other individuals. Threads following these posts generally consisted of individuals stating that they had “signed the petition and [that others] should too” (Facebook, 2010o).

As stated above, in addition to posting their own petitions, members of the group also posted petitions that others had created to the group’s discussion board. Examples of the latter included “petition link,” “petition (for Afghan Detainee) link,” and “sign this petition and spread the word” (Facebook, 2010p). While the majority of these posts were similar in format to what has been discussed above, a select few focused on political issues that were related to, but not exactly about prorogation. For example, a member posted a petition that advocated for the release of Afghan Detainees (Facebook, 2010q). It is obvious from the discussion above that the petitions were a successful online tactic for a number of reasons. Obviously, when signing an offline petition, an individual is often confronted with a number of constraints (including time, access, and ease for example). However, the online format of the petition offered by the group eliminated these constraints, thereby allowing members the convenience of filling out the petition at a time and place that worked best for them.

6.2.4 Flash Mobs

In addition to the petitions, the group’s members also coordinated flash mobs. Flash mobs occur when “large groups of people assemble with short notice in a public place” (CreativeGuerrillaMarketing.com, 2011). Indeed, the flash mobs that were orchestrated via the discussion board were planned as soon as the users became aware that Stephen Harper or other Conservative Members of Parliament would be in their provinces or cities. Because the flash rallies were planned quite quickly (in many cases the same day

in which they were proposed), they were rarely as well coordinated as the Canada-wide rallies. Of the 2,358 activities that were coded as “other events,” 13 (or 0.5%) were attributed to the flash mobs (see: Table 30). Table 31 details the dates and targets of these 13 flash mobs.

Table 31

Dates and Targets of the Flash Mobs

Flash Mob Target	Flash Mob Location	Flash Mob Date
Stephen Harper Flash Mob	Sudbury, Ontario	1/13/2010
Tony Clement Flash Mob	Toronto, Ontario	1/26/2010
Tony Clement Flash Mob	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan	1/27/2010
Andrew Saxton Flash Mob	Vancouver, BC	1/27/2010
Stephen Harper Flash Mob	St. John, New Brunswick	1/29/2010
Jim Prentice Flash Mob	Calgary, Alberta	2/1/2010
Rob Moore Flash Mob	Ottawa, Ontario	2/1/2010
Jason Kenney Flash Mob	Ottawa, Ontario	2/1/2010
Rob Moore Flash Mob	Toronto, Ontario	2/4/2010
Stephen Harper Flash Mob	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan	2/5/2010
Rob Nicholson Flash Mob	Niagra Falls, Ontario	2/6/2010
Jason Kenney Flash Mob	Toronto, Ontario	2/13/2010

Of the 13 flash mobs that were undertaken by the group, the two that demanded the most attention were those directed at Tony Clement. As with the letter writing campaign, these flash mobs emerged out of Tony Clement’s remarks towards the group that were previously discussed. Indeed, on the morning of Mr. Clement’s arrival, group members took it upon themselves to notify other users via the discussion board that Mr. Clement was in their city. These posts encouraged other users to meet at the said locations ready to protest (Facebook, 2010r). Although it is hard to determine how many users partook in these and other demonstrations, both the group’s page and their website indicate that more than a dozen individuals were mobilized.

It is likely that Facebook through its one-to-many communication channel, made it feasible for the networks of members who were mobilized to participate in the flash mobs. Indeed, this form of mobilization best highlights the intersection between online and real world activism that the Internet affords, as the flash mobs were organized on Facebook exploiting the power of digital media to communicate quickly and virally (Molnar, 2005). The literature has suggested that, through the Internet, actors can rally quite quickly and can “engage in swarm-like challenges, taking simultaneous action, on multiple fronts, in multiple ways” (Garrett, 2006: 11).

6.2.5 Valentines’ Day for Democracy Cards Campaign

In addition to the letter writing campaign, other campaigns emerged on the group that also translated into real world political action. The most significant of these was the Valentines’ Day for democracy cards campaign. This campaign was similar to the letter writing campaign discussed above, but rather than sending letters, the members were asked to make or to buy Valentines’ Day cards, to enclose a message, and to mail them to a centralized mailing station (Facebook, 2010s). The members were told that Cindy Crackintoes, a member of the group, would collect and deliver the cards to Stephen Harper on Valentines’ Day (Crackintoes, Facebook post, 2010a).

In an effort to coordinate the Valentines’ Day for democracy cards campaign, members tried to implement what had worked for them in the letter writing campaign. Indeed, at the outset of the Valentines’ Day cards campaign various individuals shared information about their Valentines’ Day cards design, colour, and message on the group’s discussion board (Facebook, 2010q). However, within a few days, the members had taken it upon themselves to post sample cards that could be printed and used by other members

(Facebook, 2010r). As with the letter writing campaign, it is probable that these sample cards contributed to the increased participation of members within this initiative.

On February 12, 2010, Cindy Crackintoes, one of the organizers of this initiative, posted the following message to the group's discussion board:

“As for the final count, we delivered about 530 but there were about 80 envelopes in the box today and I suspect I'll see the same on Monday followed by a trickling off over next week. I'm anal enough to keep counting and post a final number here” (Crackintoes, Facebook post, 2010b).

As the media did not track the Valentines' Day cards campaign, the analysis from the discussion board and my personal correspondence with Cindy Crackintoes revealed that approximately 812 letters were received (see: Table 29). While this result indicates that only .38% of all of the members of the group wrote a letter to Tony Clement, this percentage should be evaluated with a number of caveats in mind: first, the Valentines' Day democracy cards campaign was only coordinated over a two-week span of time and second, given the latter, this means that approximately 81 letters were received per day. Thus, although small, the results of this campaign were nonetheless significant.

6.2.6 Michael Ignatieff's Endorsement

The final activity that is worthwhile to note here was not conceived by the group, but rather was the initiative of the Liberal Party's leader Michael Ignatieff. On January 20, 2010, Christopher White posted a discussion board topic titled “important! Please read - Michael Ignatieff's response to CAPP” (White, Facebook post, 2010a). In his post, Mr. White stated that Mr. Ignatieff had created a letter to the group on his personal Facebook profile. In his posting, Mr. White provided the letter, and asked group members to offer their responses and thoughts of it.

Among other things, Mr. Ignatieff's letter indicated that he wanted the group's members to know:

“how heartened [he was] by the mere existence of the group – the largest spontaneous online political movement we've seen yet in this new digital age of politics in Canada. [He was] heartened because the vitality of our democracy depends on the participation of its citizens, regardless of their political stripes” (White, Facebook post, 2010b).

Mr. Ignatieff ended his letter to the group by stating that on Thursday, January 21, 2010 from 3 - 4pm EST, he would be holding an online town hall that would take place through his Facebook page (White, Facebook post, 2010). In his letter, Mr. Ignatieff encouraged members of the group to join him, by participating in the online town hall and asking any questions that they might have (White, Facebook post, 2010c).

In total, 37 discussion board topics were generated, following Mr. White's post of Mr. Ignatieff's letter. Most of the discussion board topics were generally supportive of Mr. Ignatieff's letter, and seemed to agree with Helga Geerhart, a member of the group, who stated:

“I like it. I think he means what he says, but then I find Ignatieff to be as genuine as he possible can be - given the circumstances, and the impossibility of being completely honest in this political climate. It's supportive, it says what I think - that it's encouraging to know that there are so many Canadians who feel passionately about democracy. This FB page has provided a focusing point” (Geerhart, Facebook post, 2010a).

While the group's members did not (and could not in any way) plan for Mr. Ignatieff's endorsement of or address to the group, the fact that he did was important for many reasons: First, this letter was an example of a leader of a major Canadian political party addressing the grassroots group directly. Indeed, the sincerity of Michael Ignatieff's letter to the group probably helped to add to the positive effects of the group by for

example increasing its legitimacy. Second, this letter showed that political elites, albeit ones with something to gain from this, were paying attention.

6.2.7 Online Activities that did not Manifest into Offline Participation

While the above mentioned activities were successful in fostering online to offline political participation, many ideas were suggested that did not result in any action. Indeed, of the 186 discussion board topics that contained some reference to a political activity, 136 (or 73.1%) resulted in political action. Thus, 50 (or 26.9%) posts never did. Some examples of the ideas that never manifested into political participation included the “Olympic torch protest,” nationwide boycott of newspapers,” and “withhold taxes” (Facebook, 2010t).

While it is impossible to definitively say what made one activity more likely to facilitate participation than another, discussion threads that followed some of the suggestions that did not manifest into participation provide some insight. For example, in reaction to the “Olympic torch protest” post, many members voiced concern with rallying at an international event. Indeed, one member, Kabir Moe stated, “if we rally at the Olympics, I’m out of here” (Moe, Facebook post, 2010a). This posting indicates that group members were hesitant to implement ideas that they deemed as being too extreme.

6.3 Conclusion

The results from the content analysis provided support for the third hypothesis. In particular, the content analysis results reinforced the finding that the group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” provided a means for individuals to express their political orientations offline. What began as a way for Facebook users to voice their dissatisfaction with Stephen Harper and the Conservative government’s decision to prorogue Parliament

turned into real world political participation. This suggests that Facebook (and the Internet more broadly) has the “potential to alter the flow of political information, to reduce the costs of conventional forms of participation, and to create new low-cost forms of participation, ultimately creating and upsurge in participation” (Garrett, 2006:5).

While a minor percentage of the 2,358 discussion board’s postings were about the letter writing campaign (13.4%), the January 23, 2010 rallies (6.0%), or other offline events (7.9%) the discussions that did occur were successful in prompting mobilization for numerous reasons. For example, the letters writing campaign and Valentine’s Day for Democracy Cards show how members of the group used Facebook as a means to verify information, which may have led to more accuracy and lowered the costs of participation for users. This not only reinforces the benefit that online political engagement can have on offline political participation, but it suggests that by providing individuals with an easily accessible and an easily useable medium, political participation can increase. Similarly, the rallies show that the group was successful in heightening the issue across a broad region. Indeed, the simplicity and ease of Facebook allowed members to organized succinct actions across the globe without incurring large costs. More importantly, the ability to coordinate the rallies globally means that members from around the world could arrange their actions so that they functioned as part of larger collective unit (Garrett, 2006:14). Finally, Facebook made it easier for loosely coupled networks of members to mobilize rapidly when Stephen Harper or other Conservative Members of Parliament were visiting the users’ provinces or cities. Thus, the key success to the offline mobilization of the group was the ease with which individuals could use it to activate effectively, efficiently, and quickly. In the following chapter, I will discuss and provide

the implications of the results from my survey (see: chapter 5) and the content analyses chapters, and will offer a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 7: Discussions, Implications, and Conclusions

This study was motivated by the speculation that Web 2.0 could offer a remedy to civic disengagement. Indeed, many scholars have credited the Internet for having the potential to enhance political participation (see: Chapter 2). These studies, however, were conducted at the outset of the Internet. Since then, the Internet has grown to include Blogs, wikis, and social networking websites.

This goal of this thesis was to better understand the group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” that emerged on Facebook. This thesis evaluated various aspects of the Facebook group including who (or which segment of the population) was engaged on this group, what motivated these individuals to join the group, and whether the group stimulated offline political participation. A survey, a content analysis, and an interview were employed to answer the above questions and to examine active political participation both online and off. This chapter will begin by summarizing the key findings of the research questions. It will then proceed by examining the limitations of the research, and will end by offering suggestions for future research.

7.1 Major Results:

This thesis was designed to evaluate the profile of members who participated in the group “Canadian’s Against Proroguing Parliament,” and to determine whether online political activism translated into real world civic engagement. To examine these goals, the following three research questions were constructed and analyzed through the data:

- What motivated individuals to join the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament?”

- Does the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” mobilize new participants, or does it reinforce existing biases in participation?
- Does the Facebook group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament” mobilize or reinforce the participation of citizens in the real world?

7.1.1 Participants Motives for Joining the Group

Scholars have noted that motivation is the sine qua non of participation (see: Han, 2009; Krueger, 2002). Thus, before uncovering how the group’s members participated, it was important to understand why they participated. In response to a survey question that directly asked this, the majority of the respondents stated that they joined the group to express their disagreement with the government. It is obvious that the users of the group felt that it offered them a meaningful opportunity to become engaged in an issue that affected them. As well, because the costs of engagement associated with joining the group (via Facebook) were low, it is likely that more individuals were able to involve themselves in something that required very little of themselves.

7.1.2 Mobilize New Participants or Reinforce Existing Biases

With regards to the second research question, my survey found that those individuals who were previously politically interested offline were more likely to become engaged in similar ways on the group. The frequencies from my survey indicated that the group’s members’ levels of political interest, knowledge, discussion and participation were all fairly high in comparison with the average Canadian as surveyed by the Canadian Election Study. This finding reveals that the Facebook group tended to attract those individuals who were already politically interested or savvy. Thus, there is little

evidence to suggest that the Facebook group drew in unengaged or apathetic individuals. This finding provides evidence in favour of the reinforcement thesis, which suggests that online users have a heightened political interest, as compared to the general population (Johnson and Kaye, 2004).

Analysis of my survey also found that the group both mobilized and reinforced the online and offline political participation of its members. In terms of online participation, the only gains for the mobilization thesis were with regards to education. My survey found that those with a no school, elementary school, secondary school, or high school had the highest proportion of users who invited others to join the group (73.0%), wrote on Facebook about prorogation (68.2%), and wrote a Blog about prorogation (31.8%). The cumulative effect of this “is that the less educated are closing the gap slightly, but, the results suggest that improved access to the Internet will continue to increase the political participation for all citizens” (Winneg, 2010a: 3).

In terms of offline political participation, the results primarily showed that the traditional biases in political participation presented themselves on the group. Indeed, those who were older better educated, and from higher income brackets had the highest proportion of participation for almost all of the listed acts. For example, those respondents who were 30 years and older, with a household income of above \$30,000 were found to have performed all of the offline activities. As well, those with a Bachelor’s degree were the most likely to organize a meeting about prorogation (53.3%), while those with a Master’s degree were the most likely to organize a rally about prorogation (19.2%), attend a rally or a demonstration about prorogation (76.9%), and attend a meeting about prorogation (38.4%). Finally, those with a professional degree,

were the most likely to call into a radio or a television call-in show to talk about prorogation (38.4%).

While the group both mobilized and reinforced the participation of its members, the results do not indicate consistency across all of the measured political participation activities (Winneg, 2010b). The findings illustrate that the group was more likely to motivate certain demographics, to engage in activities online and off. Because Facebook activism is still growing, there is evidence to suggest that its effect on participation is still evolving.

7.1.3 Online to Offline Participation

The crux of this thesis was designed to evaluate whether the group promoted political participation in the real world. Thus, both my survey and the content analysis sought to evaluate what active participation consisted of on the group. With regards to the survey, the frequencies conducted revealed that the individuals who engaged in online activities on the group were more likely to engage in offline forms of political participation. This finding supports Pasek et al's., (2006b) study that concluded that those individuals, who used the Internet to gain political information or to express their opinions about public affairs through e-mails, were more likely to engage in civic and political participation. Indeed, findings from my survey suggested that those users who posted messages to the group's discussion board were more likely to contact a Member of Parliament about prorogation or to attend a rally or a demonstration about prorogation.

In addition to the survey, the content analysis was constructed to evaluate the percentage of the discussion board's postings that manifested into real world political participation. Six online activities (the letter writing campaign, the January 23th rallies,

the flash mobs, the Valentine's Day cards, the petitions, and the group's endorsement by Michael Ignatieff) were found to translate into offline participation. With respect to each of these forms of political participation, the content analysis revealed how the group's members organized and planned the various political activities.

While I was unable to definitively conclude how many individuals signed the petitions or attended the various flash mobs, I was able to assess how many users wrote or received letters, how many users attended the January 23, 2010 rallies, and how many users sent Stephen Harper Valentine's Day cards. With regards to the letter writing campaign, the content analysis revealed that of the 2,358 discussion board threads, 317 (or 13.4%) made references to letters (either sent or received). Findings from the content analysis (that were backed up with media reporters) also revealed that approximately 32205.5 (or 16.1%) group members partook in the January 23, 2010 rallies. Results from the content analysis (and communication with Cindy Crackintoes) showed that of the 2,358 members, 812 (or .38%) sent Stephen Harper Valentine's Day cards. The successes of these events demonstrate the importance of online groups for political participation. While some may argue, that the amount of participation mobilized by the group was small, I believe that this thesis demonstrates that the efforts achieved by the group should not be overlooked. Indeed, the group brought increased attention to the issue of prorogation, numerous media attention was drawn, political elites were aware of the group's existence (Tony Clement discredited and Michael Ignatieff endorsed the group) and so forth.

7.2 Connecting the Core Concepts

The results from my survey and the content analysis demonstrated several important ideas about how Web 2.0 can enhance civic engagement. Indeed, the opportunities for political participation that were traditionally offered offline are now available in similar formats online. Findings from my survey and from the content analysis revealed that those who were likely to participate in one form were likely to also participate in the other.

The literature review and theoretical framework (see: Chapter 2) introduced the mobilization and reinforcement theses and explored their relationship to political participation. These theses have argued that the Internet can either provide a space in which previously engaged individuals are given another forum in which to participate in politics (mobilization thesis), or the Internet can offer an arena for motivating previously unmotivated individuals into political engagement (reinforcement thesis). Because Facebook draws its membership from various demographics, it is likely that the medium reaches a spectrum of individuals. This study indicated that Facebook both mobilizes and reinforces political participation, which truly fulfills the promise of hope for any technology (Winneg, 2009).

The second concept that was explored in this project was whether online engagement stimulated offline participation. Offline interaction was found to be an important aspect of the group for participants. Indeed, results from the content analysis seemed to illustrate that members were aware that for their group to make a meaningful impact, they had to move beyond Facebook, and into the realm of real world participation. Thus, the group planned and organized events (see: Chapter 6) online that were carried out offline.

7.3 Implications of the Study

The findings associated with this research were significant, insofar as they illustrated a group members' profile and detailed the relationship between online and offline political participation. As such, a number of implications can be drawn from this study that can be applied to other contexts. First, the findings from this study suggest that Facebook can be used as a political tool. Indeed, Facebook provides a unique set of applications that can (and were used in the case of "Canadians against Proroguing Parliament") be used for organizing and mobilizing masses of people. If Internet-based groups continue to proliferate on Facebook, activating masses of individual's offline may become easier.

7.4 Future Research

This study only presents a starting point for research into political participation. This section details some ideas for future research, using data collected by this study, and data that could be generated by future studies. The following sections will progress in two ways: First, I will discuss how the literature and theoretical frameworks that surrounded this thesis (see: Chapter 2) can be expanded upon to further develop an understanding of the role of social networks in political participation. Second, I will offer where scholars researching the mobilization and reinforcement hypotheses need to concentrate to better understand who social networks cater, too. In the last section, I will focus on what methodological changes can be made to better understand political participation.

7.5 Literature and Theoretical Underpinnings

7.5.1 Political Participation

While this thesis has provided a starting point for researchers and political organizations/elites, future scholarship may help to clarify the link between online and offline civic engagement. These studies should expand their research to include a diversity of local, national, and international cyber groups that utilize different media and are based around a variety of themes. In many ways, the circumstances that contributed to the group “Canadians against Proroguing Parliament’s” successes, both online and off, were unique. Indeed, there were a myriad of reasons that led to the group’s achievement. First, the group was led by a dedicated, committed and capable leader, Mr. White.³² Mr. White made himself available to the group’s members and continually engaged them by posting new discussion board topics or by changing the group’s profile picture to ignite debate (White, 2010e). As well, Mr. White asked for the member’s input when he was speaking to the media or political elites on the group’s behalf (White, 2010f), thereby involving them in anything that pertained to the group. More important, the group maintained a narrow focus and a simple goal, to defend Canadian democracy, that all of its members could work towards. This group also had an offline goal that was tangible: “to engage with Members of Parliament”. This offline component seems to be one of importance, as the real world successes of “A Million Voices against the FARC” (see: Chapter 3) can also be attributed to its goal of organizing a rally in the street. In his guide to digital activism, Shultz (2008) comes to a similar conclusion suggesting that online communities are much more likely to succeed when the users have a clear purpose and a common goal to pursue. As well, the group provided its users with a ladder of

³² Social movement literature has found that a social movements leader is integral to its success (see: Kshirasagara, 1994; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, 2004; Morris, 2002).

engagement through which they could go from being tangentially to quite involved both on and off the group. For example, once the members had joined the group (which was quite a basic form of participation) they were introduced to a more intense form of engagement through the letter writing campaign. It is likely that the gradual acts of participation helped to set the stage for the more extreme forms of participation. The rationale behind this is that the more the group's members were integrated into the group's online community, the more likely that they were to participate in the offline activities. Obviously, the more people who were engaged, the more successful the group was. Finally, the group was successful because the media took notice. "From Great Britain-based *The Economist*, to online news sources such as Reuters, to home grown national news sites such as MacLean's, *The Globe and Mail*, *Rabble*, *The National Post*, and the CBC what this break in parliament meant to Canadians was covered extensively" (Prosser, 2010). While it is true that Stephen Harper did not go back to work on account of the group, the combination of negative media coverage almost certainly led to a the Conservative Party's drop in the polls,³³ something that he surely took notice of. Thus, it is fair to say that "Canadians against Proroguing Parliament" success was unique because it consisted of a "cyber-team of self-motivated people with a collective vision, enabled by the web to collaborate in achieving a common goal" (Gloor, 2006: 11).

As well, as indicated by Chapter 2, the state of the literature regarding virtual political participation is quite limited. Thus, future studies should concentrate on learning more about online organization, including the origin, classification, behaviour, and

³³ Among several polls showing the Tories have suffered since prorogation, Ekos pegged Conservative support at 30.9 per cent earlier this month, virtually tied with the Liberals at 29.3 per cent—erasing the 15-point lead the Tories enjoyed as recently as October (Geddes, 2010).

impact of cyber-groups. Finally, further research needs to be conducted to determine if online political engagement does in fact increase the offline political engagement of individual's. While the online realm does provide a new outlet for individuals to engage in politics, if their participation does not translate into the real world, the impact of the Internet is quite limited.

7.5.2 Mobilization and Reinforcement Theses

In addition to expanding the field of political participation, future studies should also concentrate on determining who online civic engagement attracts. Indeed, this research should address whether the virtual world has the capacity to motivate previously uninvolved actors into civic engagement, in addition to reinforcing the participation of those who the political system already favours. Lastly, it is likely that Facebook (and other online methods that exist today) will become outdated, thereby becoming replaced by other online mechanisms. Indeed, as the virtual world changes, it will become increasingly important for researchers to design strategies that capture these new methods.

7.6 Methodological Underpinnings

As mentioned in the methodological chapter (see: Chapter 4), the survey, content analysis, and interview all suffered from drawbacks. With more time and resources, a future study should employ longitudinal research (a dataset from more than two years) that measures how users of social networks use the Internet for political purposes.

I believe that future studies should also endeavor to employ survey data. While my survey relied on self-report as a means to measure political participation, I believe that future studies should strive to go beyond this limitation. Doing so “would disentangle

the causal direction and establish whether participation in online groups indeed incites political engagement” (Wojcieszak, 2009: 579). These future studies could implement experimental studies to achieve this. In these studies, researchers could receive permission from the group’s members to track their behaviours while connected to the group.

Given that my findings showed that the discussion board postings were important for indicating political participation, I believe that future studies should include a content analysis section. Indeed Katz (2001a) wrote that diffusion, unlike persuasion, takes time making its way through the normal channels and networks of a community (Katz, 2001b). The Internet, however, has changed that calculus by significantly reducing the time a message makes its way through a community or social network. All in all, with new social networks on the rise³⁴, future studies should seek to uncover the ways in which they can be used to increase political participation.

³⁴ These social networks include: MySpace, YouTube, and most recently Twitter.

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Appendix A: Wall Posting Asking the Group's Members to Take my survey and the Date's and Time's that they Survey was Posted to the Group's Wall

I am conducting a study of the Facebook group Canadians against Proroguing Parliament for a graduate thesis. If you are 16 and over I would like to invite you to complete a survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CZT22CX>. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Time:</u>
02/12/2010	2:09 PM
02/13/2010	8:42 AM
02/14/2010	5:00 PM
02/15/2010	10:40 AM
02/16/2010	1:10 PM
02/17/2010	9:34 PM
02/18/2010	11:27 PM
02/19/2010	12:59 PM
02/20/2010	5:45 PM
02/21/2010	6:13 AM
02/22/2010	7:08 AM
02/23/2010	11:12 AM
02/24/2010	3:31 PM
02/25/2010	9:42 PM
02/26/2010	8:01 AM
02/27/2010	2:42 PM
02/28/2010	1:08 AM
03/01/2010	10:12 PM
03/02/2010	6:42 AM
03/03/2010	7:01 AM
03/04/2010	9:45 AM
03/05/2010	7:16 PM
03/06/2010	3:30 PM
03/07/2010	2:42 AM

Appendix B: Survey

Welcome to the University of Lethbridge Facebook and Politics Survey!

It includes a brief, confidential questionnaire that examines the relationship between Facebook groups and politics. For the most accurate results, be sure to complete the entire questionnaire.

Thanks for participating!

BACKGROUND: My survey was prepared by Dr. Harold Jansen and Noorin Chatur at the University of Lethbridge (Alberta, Canada). They are collecting data that will help researchers and policymakers gain a better understanding of the way citizens use the internet for learning about and participating in politics. Information from submitted questionnaires will go into a database, statistical analyses will be conducted, and the information will be published in a thesis.

YOUR PRIVACY IS GUARANTEED: This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is completely confidential, and no identified information will be collected. Only Dr. Harold Jansen and Noorin Chatur will have access to the raw data collected. In the final copy of the thesis, data from the questionnaire will be reported using general statistics. Only answers from completed questionnaires will be sent to our database. Your responses will be collected together with the responses of others, so you will not be identified. While your participation is an extremely important part of this research project, your participation is also completely voluntary, and you may exit my survey at any time.

ANY QUESTIONS? If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey and/or your participation in it, please e-mail Dr. Harold Jansen at harold.jansen@uleth.ca or Noorin Chatur at noorin.chatur@uleth.ca. If you would rather not share them directly with Dr. Harold Jansen or Noorin Chatur, you can e-mail the University of Lethbridge Research Services at research.services@uleth.ca. To request an executive copy of the research please e-mail Noorin Chatur at noorin.chatur@uleth.ca.

Please report any technical problems with this survey to *enter contact information here*

This informed consent statement has been approved by the University of Lethbridge. You are encouraged to print a copy of this statement for your records.

Getting to Know You

1. How would you rate your overall knowledge about politics? (*0=not at all knowledgeable; 10=very knowledgeable*)
2. On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not satisfied at all with the way democracy works in Canada?
 - Very satisfied
 - Fairly satisfied
 - Not very satisfied
 - Not satisfied at all
 - Do not know
3. How important do you believe it is to vote?
 - Very important
 - Somewhat important
 - Not very important
 - Not at all important
 - Do not know
6. From where do you get most of your political information? (*Please select the most applicable response*)
 - Television
 - Radio
 - Newspaper
 - Websites
 - Blogs
 - Social Networking Sites
 - Family or Friends
 - Other
7. Approximately how many days a week would you say that you read a traditional newspaper?

8. Approximately how many days a week would you say that you watch the news on television?
9. Did you vote in the last Federal election on Oct 14, 2008? (*if no, please skip to question 10; if yes, please skip to question 11*)
- Yes
 - No
 - Was not eligible to vote
 - Cannot remember
10. If no, why did you not vote? (*Please select the most applicable response , then please skip to question 13*)
- Just not interested
 - Did not like the parties or the candidates
 - My vote would not have mattered
 - Did not care about the issues
 - Busy at school or work
 - Out of town
 - Did not know where or when
 - Physical limitations
 - Illness
11. If yes, which party did you vote for? (*Please select the most applicable response*)
- Liberal
 - Conservatives
 - NDP
 - Bloc Quebecois
 - Green Party
 - Other
 - Cannot Remember
12. Did you use the Internet to gather information about the above election?
- Yes
 - No
13. In the past, have you discussed politics with other people (*if no, please skip to question 16*):
- Often
 - Occasionally
 - Never

14. How often do you discuss politics with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances?
- Everyday
 - A couple of times a week
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Never
 - As issues of interest arise

General Facebook Usage

15. When approximately did you join Facebook?
16. How often do you log into Facebook?
- Several times per day
 - Once per day
 - A few times per week
 - Once per week
 - Less than once per week
17. Approximately, what proportion of your posts on Facebook are political?
18. Approximately, what proportion of what you view on Facebook is political?

General Political Activity

19. *For the following questions, please indicate by marking an X whether you have done, might do, would never do, or not sure if you would do the listed activity (Please select all that apply).*

Question	Have Done	Might Do	Would Never Do	Not Sure
Sent a letter, e-mail, or fax to an elected politician				
Volunteered for a political party or candidate				
Donated money to a candidate and/or political party				
Attended a political event held by a political party or				

candidate				
Watched television to gain political knowledge/information				
Listened to the radio to gain political knowledge/information				
Visited candidate or party websites to gain political knowledge				
Used political party or candidate literature to gain political knowledge				
Campaigned on behalf of a political candidate or party				
Held membership in a political party				
Became a member of a group that influences government policy				
Signed a petition				
Started a petition				
Attended a protest				
Organized a protest				
Worked for a candidate and/or campaign				
Volunteered for a candidate and/or campaign				

Facebook, Group Membership, and Politics

All of the following questions will relate to the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament”

20. When approximately did you join the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament”?
- December 2009
 - January 1-January 10 2010
 - January 11-January 20 2010
 - January 21-January 31 2010
 - February 1-February 10 2010
 - February 11-February 20 2010
 - February 21-February 28 2010
21. How did you find out about the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament”?
- In conversation with a friend
 - I heard about the group through the media (Ex: Television, Radio, Newspaper, Other Online Sources)
 - I received a Facebook group invitation from a friend
 - The group showed up on my Facebook mini-feed
 - Other (Please specify)
22. Why did you join the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament”? *(Please select the most applicable response)*
- To learn more about prorogation
 - To express my disagreement with the government
 - To connect with others who share a similar point of view
 - To argue in favor of prorogation
 - To organize activities and events
 - General political interest
23. Since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament” have you viewed the group page? *(If yes, please skip to question 27; if no please skip to question 28)*
- Yes
 - No
24. If yes, how often do you view the group page “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament”
- More than once per day
 - Everyday
 - A few times a week
 - Once a week
 - Once
25. Are you a member of a local chapter of the “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament”? *(If yes, please skip to question 29; if no please skip to question 30)*
- Yes

__ No

26. If yes, which of the following local chapter(s) are you a member of?

27. Which of the following activities have you done on the group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament” only (not other groups)?

Question	Yes	No
Posted a comment on the group’s wall		
Replied to or commented to any post on the group’s wall		
Started a topic on the group’s discussion board		
Replied to or commented to anything on the group’s discussion board		
Posted an event invite to the group’s page		
Attended an event that was posted on the group’s page		
Posted a note on the group’s page		
Replied to or commented on a note on the group’s page		

28. For the following statements, please indicate by marking an X if you have done any of the activities since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament.” Please mark all that apply.

Invited others to join the Facebook group “Canadians Against Prorogation”	
Contacted a Member of Parliament (MP) about prorogation	
Attended a rally or a demonstration about prorogation	
Organized a rally or demonstration about prorogation	
Written a letter to the newspaper about prorogation	
Called into a radio/television show call in show to talk about prorogation	
Organized a meeting about prorogation	
Attended a meeting about prorogation	
Wrote about prorogation on my Facebook profile	
Wrote a blog post (outside of Facebook) about prorogation	
Joined a political party since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Prorogation”	
Donated money to a political party since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Prorogation”	

29. For the following statements, please indicate by marking an X in the appropriate column whether the listed phrase has increased greatly, increased somewhat, stayed the same, decreased, or greatly decreased since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament.”

Question	Increased Greatly	Increased Somewhat	Stayed The Same	Decreased	Decreased Greatly
Since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament,” has your interest in politics					
Since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament,” has your knowledge about politics					
Since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament” has your involvement of politics					
Since joining the Facebook group “Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament,” has the involvement of others in politics					

General Demographic Information

30. Are you a Canadian citizen?

Yes

No

31. Where do you live?

British Columbia

Alberta

Saskatchewan

Manitoba

- Ontario
- Quebec
- New Brunswick
- Nova Scotia
- Prince Edward Island
- Newfoundland & Labrador
- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut
- Outside of Canada (Specify:)

32. Please indicate your sex

- Male
- Female

33. Please mark only the highest level of education that you have achieved (*Please select the most applicable response*)

- No schooling
- Some elementary school
- Completed elementary school
- Some secondary and/or high school
- Completed secondary and/or high school
- Some technical, community college, CEGEP, College Classique
- Completed technical, community college, CEGEP, College Classique
- Some university
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree or doctorate
- Do not know

34. Are you currently a student? (*Please select the most applicable response*)

- Yes, full time
- Yes, part time
- No

35. Are you currently employed (*Please select the most applicable response*)?

- Yes, full time
- Yes, part time
- No

36. Are you a visible minority?

- Yes
- No

37. Please indicate which of the following broad categories your total household income before taxes was for the previous year?

- Less than \$20,000
- Between \$20,000 and \$30,000 (\$29,999.999)
- Between \$30,000 and \$40,000
- Between \$40,000 and \$50,000
- Between \$50,000 and \$60,000
- Between \$60,000 and \$70,000
- Between \$70,000 and \$80,000
- Between \$80,000 and \$90,000
- Between \$90,000 and \$100,000
- Between \$100,000 and 110,000
- Between \$110,000 and \$120,000
- More than \$120,000
- Do not know

38. Counting yourself how many people live in your household?

39. And how many of them are under 18?

40. In federal/provincial politics, do you usually consider yourself as a? (Please select the most applicable response)

- Liberal (Grits)
- Conservative (Tory, PC, Conservative Party of Canada)
- NDP (New Democratic Party, New Democrats, NDPers)
- Bloc Quebecois (BQ, PQ, Bloc, Parti Quebecois)
- Green Party (Greens)
- Other
- None of the above

41. In what year were you born?

Appendix C: Interview Recruitment E-mail

Dear Mr. White:

I am a graduate student in political science at the University of Lethbridge. My supervisor (Dr. Harold Jansen) and I are conducting research into the use of Facebook for political activism and were hoping we could interview you for our study.

The interview, should you agree to participate, will be conducted in person in Edmonton at a date and a time that is convenient for you. I will be asking you to answer several questions relating to the above-mentioned topics. Should you agree, our interview will be audio recorded and should take approximately 30 minutes of your time. Before we begin, I will also ask you to read and sign a consent form.

Please note that your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate at any time prior to, or at any point during, the interview, without consequence. All of the notes and records of the interview will be held in a secure environment. The interview will be on the record, and any quotations or other references I make to my interview with you will give your name. You will have the opportunity to review any quotations or references prior to the submission of my thesis.

We think this is an interesting and important case of Facebook political activism in the Canadian context and sincerely hope that you will be willing to cooperate with this project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through e-mail (noorin.chatur@uleth.ca) or my supervisor (harold.jansen@uleth.ca).

Thank you for your time and I anticipate your reply,

Noorin Chatur

Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Investigator: Noorin Chatur

Phone Number: 403-360-1025

This interview is being conducted for research for a thesis. This research has been approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge.

This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read this carefully and to ask any questions that you may have. You will receive a copy of this form to keep for your own reference.

- The goal of this interview is to learn more about the Facebook group “Canadians Against Prorogation.”
- Your participation in this interview should be completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions if you wish. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw your participation half way through the interview, only those responses collected prior to your withdrawal will be used in the thesis.
- This interview will be open-ended in format, which means you will be asked questions to which you can respond in your own words, sharing as much or as little of your experience as you wish. The interview will be recorded and notes will also be taken during the interview. You may ask for the recording to be stopped at any time.
- The results of this interview -- the recordings and my notes -- will be kept in a secure place, and will be destroyed on December 31, 2010. The only people who will have access to these materials will be myself and the thesis supervisor, Harold Jansen. No other individuals will have access to these materials. Sections of the interview, however, will be presented in the final copy of the thesis.
- The interview will be on the record, and any quotations or other references I make to my interview with you will give your title and the possibility of your name. You will have the opportunity to review any such quotations or references prior to the submission of my thesis.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact me at the number above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix E: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your interest in politics?
2. What made you care enough about the issue of prorogation that you created a Facebook group for it?
3. What were your goals for this group?
4. Do you feel you have achieved them?
5. Did you expect this level of reaction to the group?
6. What will come of the Facebook group once parliament resumes on March 3, 2010?
7. Looking back, would you have done anything differently with regards to the Facebook group?