

Spring 2016

# The Strength of Weak Social Ties: Social Activism and Facebook

Nichole Akai Giraldi  
*Old Dominion University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.odu.edu/  
sociology\\_criminaljustice\\_etds](http://digitalcommons.odu.edu/sociology_criminaljustice_etds)

 Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Social Media Commons](#),  
and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Giraldi, Nichole Akai, "The Strength of Weak Social Ties: Social Activism and Facebook" (2016). *Sociology & Criminal Justice Theses & Dissertations*. Paper 3.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology & Criminal Justice at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology & Criminal Justice Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@odu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@odu.edu).

THE STRENGTH OF WEAK SOCIAL TIES: SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND FACEBOOK

by

Nichole Akai Giraldi  
B.A. May 2009, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
May 2016

Approved by:

Garland White (Director)

Dianne Carmody (Member)

Roderick Graham (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### THE STRENGTH OF WEAK SOCIALTIES: SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND FACEBOOK

Nichole Akai Giraldi  
Old Dominion University, 2016  
Director: Dr. Garland White

The use of Social Networking Sites, Facebook in particular, has become a major avenue of communication; Facebook has become a platform where people can discuss any topic of their choice to include social issues within society. While some argue Facebook is only a disseminator of information, others argue that in addition to being a disseminator of information it is also a motivator of social activism. Facebook profiles consist of one's social ties, both strong and weak, which have the potential to expose users to different information daily. Using Mark Granovetter's strength of weak social ties theory as a framework, the purpose of this study is to determine if Facebook users are influenced by their weak social ties to participate in social activism. The data utilized in this study is secondary data collected by the Pew Research Center. The findings include a relationship between social ties and social activism and a relationship between particular acts of social activism and social ties. This research concluded that Granovetter's theory is not applicable to Facebook users in that it is not one's weak social ties that influence them to participate in social activism, but rather their strong social ties.

Copyright, 2016, by Nichole Akai Girdi, All Rights Reserved.

This thesis is dedicated to my family  
And  
Everyone fighting for a cause.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my committee members for their efforts in guiding me through this entire process. When I first started this process, I went to Dr. Carmody for assistance in narrowing down my thoughts. Not only did she assist me in doing this but since then, she has taken the time to go over any questions I have had and provide me with additional information needed to complete this thesis. She guided me towards Dr. White for additional assistance for which I am grateful for. Dr. White has sacrificed his time and energy to assist me complete this thesis. He has been patient and open-minded throughout this entire process. Dr. White was always available to answer my questions in person and through email. His assistance with the statistical analyses portion of this thesis was vital. Dr. Graham took on the task of being one of my committee members although he hadn't done this before. He assisted me in finding the data that is utilized in this study and provided me with further reading materials to review and utilize in this thesis. All three of my chair members were always available to assist me with any questions or concerns I had. My committee provided invaluable assistance throughout this process that without, I'm not sure I would have finished this thesis in the timeframe I had set out. I am thankful for all three of my committee member's assistance in getting me through this challenging process. I would also like to acknowledge my family for always encouraging and supporting me. I'm grateful for your patience and understanding during the time this thesis was my main focus.

Thank you to all whom have guided, assisted, and supported me in this process. Without you all, this thesis would not have been completed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	6
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
DISSEMINATION TOOL OR MOBILIZER? .....	8
NOT MOBILIZERS .....	12
INTERNET AND THE DIVIDE .....	15
MOBILIZERS OF ACTION .....	19
COLLECTIVE AGENCY AMONG YOUTH .....	23
POSTS, TWEETS, AND PROTESTS .....	26
CRITIQUE OF THE LITERATURE .....	29
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	30
III. METHODOLOGY .....	34
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	34
RESEARCH HYPOTHESES .....	34
VARIABLES USED IN THE STUDY .....	35
PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTATION .....	39
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS .....	40
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS .....	40
BIVARIATE ANALYSIS .....	41
LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS .....	41
P-VALUE .....	41
DEFINITIONS .....	42
LIMITATIONS .....	42
SUMMARY .....	43
IV. RESULTS .....	44
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS .....	44
CROSS TABULATIONS .....	48
LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS .....	54
ADDITIONAL ANALYSES .....	56
V. CONCLUSIONS .....	60

REFERENCES .....65

VITA.....68



## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Dependent Variables .....	35
2. Independent Variables .....	37
3. Control Variables .....	38
4. Descriptive Statistics .....	45
5. Social Ties and Frequency for 3 Levels .....	47
6. Social Ties and Frequency for 2 Levels .....	47
7. Survey questions combined to create the Dependent Variable for H2.....	49
8. SNS3A_2responses * Social_Activism (Binned) Cross-tabulation.....	50
9. Crosstab for SNS3A_2responses * Social_Activism (Binned) * Age.....	52
10. Crosstab for SNS3A_2responses * Social_Activism (Binned) * ideo3.....	53
11. Social Activism Behaviors that have an association with Social Ties .....	57

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Tests and Measures for Age 4 Variable, Categorical level 18-30 .....	52
2. Tests and Measures for Ideo3 Variable, Categorical Level Moderate Views .....	54
3. Linear Regression analysis for SNS3A_2responses and Age.....	55

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As a society, we have made many technological advances that have gotten us where we are at this current time. One of those advances was the creation of the internet which has expanded across the globe. In today's world, everything can be done on the internet: shopping, education, work, research, buying cars, and most importantly, instant communication. The internet allows people to communicate with each other instantaneously, no matter where the individuals are in comparison to each other: in different buildings, in different cities, states, and even countries. This has been done through the use of e-mail, instant messenger programs, blogs, websites, and most recently Social Networking Sites, which can all be encompassed under the category of social media. A social networking site is an online platform that allows users to create a public profile and interact with other users on the website (Techopedia). Social networking sites consist of profiles people create for themselves containing their name, interests, pictures, and friends. There is also an area where the individual is able to post comments or statuses to communicate with others in their social networks. Social networking sites enable people to communicate with their existing friends and expand their social networks to include new friends and acquaintances.

The social networking site of interest here is Facebook. Facebook had 1.59 billion monthly active users worldwide as of December 2015, making it the most popular social networking site worldwide (Statista 2015). This site allows the individual to include additional information about themselves to their profiles such as: the school they have attended, where they work, places they have visited, and their family members. The area that Facebook provides their users to make posts or comments is called the timeline. Anything can be posted to the timeline:

pictures, comments, links, and articles. The timeline is where most of the communication between friends occurs. Once a post is made on the timeline it is available to their friends immediately, and sometimes people who are not connected as a friend can observe these posts as well. This rapid communication is one of the characteristics that have made Facebook and other social networking sites so popular.

Social Networking Sites are not only being used as a way to communicate with friends about personal matters, they are now also being used as a way to inform people of social issues within communities and across the nation. Social Networking Sites, particularly Facebook, are now places where the news and social issues are shared. Facebook has become one of the most popular sites to use because of its ability to share links and articles on the timeline and the posts are not limited to a certain number of characters. This has become an effective way to disseminate information due to, not only the speed at which information is distributed but, the number of people it can reach at one time. Recently, social networking sites have been heavily utilized in the distribution of news and commentary.

Recently, considerable attention was paid to police brutality and discrimination on Facebook. In the past few years there have been multiple occurrences where African American males have lost their lives during their encounters with Caucasian male officers/security officers. 17 year old Trayvon Martin, 43 year old Eric Garner, 18 year old Michael Brown, and 12 year old Tamir Rice are among some of the African American males who have tragically lost their lives since 2012 during their encounters with Caucasian officers. Their stories have been circulated on Facebook as a means of informing society of what happened to them. In response to these tragic events, a social movement started which later turned into an organization called Black Lives Matter. This organization started out as a movement on social media using the

hashtag of #Blacklivesmatter. A hashtag is used on social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, as a way of marking a comment or post to be included in a conversation of a particular topic (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). This hashtag started after Trayvon Martin was killed in 2012. The hashtag #Blacklivesmatter was utilized to mark comments/posts made in relation to this incident and was continuously used for other incidents involving unequal treatment of African Americans such as the killings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice and others. This hashtag allowed people to find the most relevant posts, comments, and news on the topic or post their own feelings and opinions on the subject to be included in the conversation. The hashtag movement then turned into the organization of Black Lives Matter as a response to the non-indictment of the shooter for his actions against the 17 year old boy; “it is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society” (BlackLivesMatter). This organization took part in social action such as marches, protests, and speeches to stand up against the injustices being committed (BlackLivesMatter).

Animal abuse is another social issue that is circulated on social networking sites. Occurrences of animal abuse have been posted on different profiles to advise others of the abuse going on within the community and around the world. The posts range in regards to the information distributed. In general, the posts will contain details of the abuse that took place, the suspect or assailant’s information if it is known, and the person's feelings or comments on the situation. The purpose of posting this information on social networking sites is to bring these situations to the attention of society in hopes that something will be done to eradicate these actions and punish the perpetrator. One example of this is the case of Hope, a pitbull that was set on fire on March 20, 2014 in Arcadia, Florida. Hope was found on fire by children who lived in her owner’s neighborhood. After rescue teams put out the fire on her body, Hope was rescued by

the Hardee Animal Rescue Team (HART) in Florida. This rescue organization utilized their Facebook page immediately to post Hope's pictures and story for their social network to see and read. HART asked for donations to help fund the care for the year old pitbull. Hundreds of people showed their support to the organization by posting comments on the page, sharing Hope's story on their personal profiles and sending donations. The story brought awareness to the cruel behavior that was committed and helped the organization gain more support in their fight against animal cruelty. The man who committed this act was charged and arrested but, never stood trial due to his lack of mental capacity (Katherine 2014). Through the use of Facebook, people were made aware of animal abuse issues within their community and the organization was able to help Hope with the support of their followers and community.

Another example of news and commentary on Facebook was seen in regards to the terrorist acts committed in Paris, France on November 13, 2015. When the attacks occurred there were multiple news coverages of the attacks to advise the world of what occurred. Facebook users posted links to articles or news stories on their pages; people shared their sympathy, condolences, and opinions in posts about the attacks. One way that users showed their support for the people of Paris, France was to change their profile picture to reflect a translucent picture of the French flag over their personal profile picture. This was a way to let those affected know that they had support from people in the United States of America and all over the world. Although, this was not necessarily a physical act of support and a miniscule task to complete, it can still be viewed as a group coming together to show support for others who were in need at the time. After the attacks, people also utilized Facebook to let their friends and family know they were safe. It illustrated the power behind the instant dissemination of information across the world and the ability to form a collective group of millions of people immediately.

One of the most current topics found across social networking sites is politics since the presidential election is at the end of this current year, 2016. There are numerous posts, articles, and comments about the presidential candidates and the election. Facebook profiles are used to express a person's political views, ideas, concerns and opinions. Facebook users have also posted videos that are either for or against a political candidate. This is a way of trying to convince others of one's own beliefs or opinions in hopes that they will vote for the person they want to win the election.

Social media allows people to become aware of the issues occurring in the world. It creates platforms for people to express themselves freely. It has the potential for both sides of an argument, issue, or debate to reach millions. These platforms create an environment where a collective agency has the potential to grow as a result of sharing of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and actions. These actions include forms of social activism which can be described as any action taken by an individual as a means of achieving social or political goals in support of or against a particular practice. Social activism is not limited to physical actions; it includes actions taken online as well. There is exposure to social activism through social media; people witness the actions of others through the posts made on these sites. This can be a positive or negative thing depending on the actions being committed. People are sometimes influenced by the words or actions of others, which can lead to positive or negative actions depending on who they are influenced by. People may be influenced by their strong ties, characterized as close friends, or their weak ties, characterized as those we may know in passing. Herein lays the concern; Are Facebook users influenced by their strong ties or their weak ties to participate in social activism?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research provides data on Facebook's impact on social activism among those who live in The United States utilizing Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak social ties theory as a framework. Prior research has been completed utilizing young participants ranging from 14-18 years of age or has focused on people within a particular area such as a neighborhood or city. Prior research has not been completed on the United States as a nation. Looking at people across the nation provides an overall picture of how the nation is affected by Facebook. People across the United States are exposed to different events and experiences, are taught differently from each other, and hold different beliefs. This research can provide an overall perspective of how a country is impacted by Facebook, if at all.

This research will also provide data on whether Facebook users are influenced to participate in social activism based off of who exposes them to the information. As a nation we are still learning about each other, the world and how it all works together so, researching Facebook's effects on the decisions we all make can be informative and potentially provide a new way of educating individuals. Social and political activist organizations can benefit from this research as it provides data that will indicate whether these organizations should continue, start, or stop their social media efforts in relation to promoting their cause. This research may also impact the way Facebook is utilized when trying to reach college students, the elderly, and everyone else in regards to social activism efforts overall.

This chapter has provided an overview of social media, Facebook and its relationship to social activism. Also provided in this chapter were the reasons for and significance of this research. The following chapter will provide an overview of prior empirical studies that have



been completed on social media's impact on social activism. The chapter will also include an overview of Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Weak Ties theory.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the two major arguments examining social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and their perceived impacts on activism. A critique of the literature is then provided. An explanation of Granovetter's (1973) theory is given. This theory compares weak and strong ties and how they encourage the spread of information. Finally, the connection between weak social ties, social networking sites and social activism is discussed.

#### DISSEMINATION TOOL OR MOBILIZER?

Obar (2014) completed a study to determine how the advocacy organizations in Canada were using social media. He also wanted to know what the perceptions were of the organization's employees regarding the benefits social media provided them. Out of the 500 advocacy groups found in Canada by Obar, 63 groups agreed to receive the online survey and completed it; these 63 advocacy groups comprised the sample. A total of 157 representatives, which consisted of 56 social media/communications directors and 101 employees, completed the two surveys he distributed (Obar 2014). The 56 social/media directors took a longer version that consisted of questions about the organizations' characteristics and social media use and individual perceptions about social media benefits. They were then asked to rank 6 technologies based on their ability to help the group they worked for (Obar 2014). All 157 participants took a shorter version that solely asked questions about their perceptions of social media. Both surveys included open ended questions, allowing the individuals to respond using their own words (Obar 2014).

The results of this study indicated the groups perceived there were both affordances and drawbacks in using social media to promote activism. Obar found 54 of the 56 groups were using social media to interact with the general public (2014). Facebook and Twitter were the social media platforms used the most with 54 of 56 using Facebook and 50 out of 56 using Twitter. Respondents reported using them either every day or a few times a week. The groups indicated Facebook and Twitter had allowed them to be more interactive with the community.

Advocacy group representatives perceived social media as “tools for advancing forms of activism” but, also found issues with using social media that kept them from using it more often (Obar 2014:221). The study found advocacy groups perceived social media affords the ability to: strengthen outreach efforts, enable engaging feedback loops, and increase speed of communication. The three main benefits listed above were broken down further to describe how they are provided. The affordance of strengthening their outreach efforts is done by allowing them to reach more people than they normally would have been able to reach before; thus making more people accessible to them. Social media also allowed the advocacy groups to engage with youth. Respondents noted that younger individuals use social media more and from their perspective normally don’t attend physical events. Group representatives also stated social media is easy to use and “makes it easier to communicate with followers and to give them ways to take action in their daily lives” (Obar 2014:222). The biggest factor in strengthening outreach efforts is that it overcomes the limitations of organization size and budget. They felt that no matter the size of the organization, social media allows them to grow through gaining more supporters than they would through normal means (Obar 2014).

Feedback loops are possible through social media because they allow facilitating conversations to occur. In Obar's study, the advocacy groups were able to communicate with

the community through the conversations on social media sites. They are able to see the issues the community is concerned with and engage in conversations about these issues. Social media provides an arena for dialogue to occur between the organization and their supporters. (Obar 2014). The speed of communication was the third affordance perceived as social media allows information to be shared in “real time” (Obar, 2014). This allows the groups to respond in real time and gain motivation for their cause during critical moments. (Obar 2014).

On the other hand, Obar (2014) found there were drawbacks to social media that prevented the advocacy groups from using it more. They felt that social media required a considerable commitment of staff time and resources, it did not necessarily advance the goals of advocacy, and it needed to be better understood to be used more effectively (Obar 2014). In order to stay relevant on social media, the group had to constantly be on social media to make their presence known. They felt this would take up too much time and manpower they could be using for other projects that have been proven to work (Obar 2014). In regards to social media advancing the goals of advocacy, they indicated that social media “provides recognition, nothing more. A like button does not help us in any way” (Obar 2014:224). Respondents felt that social media creates “slacktivists - the people who click, but don’t come out; they support a cause online, but that’s millimeters deep and does not truly bother the powers that be” (Obar 2014:225) Social media therefore may provide them with a false account of how many supporters they actually have for their cause.

The third drawback for groups is in their lack of understanding how social media works. They do not know how to utilize the platform enough to make it work to their benefit. Some respondents stated they are still, “trying to find a balance of what is too much and what is too little” (Obar 2014:225). Obar’s (2014) study provides examples of ways in which social media is

perceived to encourage activism and also examples of how organizations perceive social media to hinder or discourage activism. It illustrates a divide among activists when it comes to social media and social activism; some are for it and some are not.

The usage of social media for social activism has created a divide amongst researchers and analysts alike. Two points of view exist on this topic. One side suggests social media, such as Facebook and Twitter are “simply new tools for speedily diffusing information” (Onuch 2015:227). Under this approach, social media are used only as disseminating tools; they allow information to spread rapidly through created networks on social networking sites. These platforms take away limitations of distance and allow others to become aware of what is going on in different areas whether that be locally, nationally, or globally. However, while the information is shared across posts and tweets which enable people to see what is going on, it does not motivate or mobilize people to engage or participate in the activity they see through their social networking sites or in activity for or against a cause.

The opposing viewpoint states social networking sites are “new virtual spaces where strong and weak ties overlap, expanding the efficiency and effectiveness of network dynamics, and thus, actually aiding in the mobilization of protestors” (Onuch 2015:227). This view proposes that by using social networking sites to distribute and share information, it allows a collective to form leading to civic action taking place. Social networking sites provide an area where people share events, feelings, and opinions on issues currently taking place, allowing groups to form based on mutual feelings and ideas. A major advantage of social networking sites is the speed in which information is shared; essentially instantaneous. Studies will be discussed that support both views.

*Not Mobilizers*

Onuch (2015) completed a study on the protests that took place in Ukraine in 2013, which were titled “EuroMaidan Protest”. The protesters “focused on socioeconomic and political development and the desire for the Europeanization of Ukraine” (Onuch 2015:217). Onuch wanted to know, among other questions, “whether social media was the dominant mobilizing variable in the EuroMaidan protests” (Onuch 2015:218). The sample for this study consisted of 1,304 protestors and data was collected from the participants while they were actively protesting. Participants were asked a series of questions, and some were interviewed on site. The sample of protestors was 59% male, 41% female, 92% Ukrainian, and 4% Russian (Onuch 2015:222). The data was collected in the first few months of the protests ranging from November 26, 2013 through January 10, 2014. This is the time period before the protests became illegal in Ukraine.

Onuch (2015) found in the beginning of the protest, activists and journalists sent out Facebook and Twitter messages in an attempt to gather support for the protest. These messages resulted in low turnout ranging from 1,000-2,000 people protesting in the Maidan of Ukraine. “It was not until after University student organizations, civic organizations, and the opposing political parties called for people to join in the protest that the numbers escalated to between 80,000 - 200,000 protestors” (Onuch 2015:224). Her study found Facebook was not the only source of information protestors used; 52% of the protestors reported mainstream media was their most influential source in providing them with the time and location of the protests. Facebook was in second place with 37% of protestors using this source (Onuch 2015:228). Onuch (2015) also discusses the difference between a novice protestor and those with previous protest experience; novice protestors being those who have not participated in a protest before. This study found novices relied on social media for information more than those with previous

protest experience. This suggests that social media is not a major motivator for the more "experienced" protesters, since there were relatively few protestors in the beginning of the protests.

“The main findings are that, while social media and internet news sites play an important role in diffusing information and for this reason are highly influential in motivating people and framing their protest claims, they are not in themselves mobilizing (Onuch 2015:233). Onuch indicates that social media works more so for those individuals with existing strong ties. She suggested if people are not connected or don't have strong ties, they are less likely to use social media; in that case it would definitely not be a mobilizer (Onuch 2015). This study supported the argument that Facebook and Twitter are not mobilizers of movements but instead, just tools utilized by already strong networks to disseminate information.

Another study completed in Egypt found similar results. Brym, Godbout, Hoffbauer, Menard, and Chang (2014) completed a study to “assess the factors that distinguish high and low-risk activists in the Egyptian uprising of 2011” (2014:271). They used a sample of 1,005 participants gathered through the Gallup World Poll. The sample was representative of the Egyptian population. The participants were split into two groups representing demonstrators and sympathetic onlookers. The researchers tested four hypotheses. The first three dealt with the types of demographics and characteristics the demonstrators would possess versus the sympathetic onlookers: The demonstrators were more likely to be more aggrieved than sympathetic onlookers, more likely to be unmarried, highly educated, urbanized men versus sympathetic onlookers, and more likely to have ties to civic associations in the larger society versus sympathetic onlookers (Brym et al. 2014). Their fourth hypothesis stated sympathetic onlookers would be more influenced by new media communications than demonstrators (Brym

et al. 2014). The sympathetic onlookers were thought to be more receptive to the new media communications than the demonstrators.

This study found evidence to support the first three hypotheses, thus the study found demonstrators were more likely to be more aggrieved with the government, unmarried, single, highly educated men who lived in urbanized areas with a history of ties to a civic organization (Brym et al 2014). The fourth hypothesis was not supported. The study found instead of sympathetic onlookers favoring new media communications such as Facebook and Twitter, it was the demonstrators. Although, demonstrators favored new media communications over sympathetic onlookers, overall, the most used source of information for both groups was found to be television (Brym et al. 2014:282). Indicating once again, that social media was not a mobilizer in this region.

Brym et al. (2014) found the most important factors that determined whether a person would be a demonstrator or sympathetic onlooker was their tie to a civic organization followed by gender, urbanity, and marital status - factors they labeled as structural availability. Using Facebook and Twitter as a news source was the least important when it came to influencing a sympathetic onlooker to participate in a protest. This study found social media was not a mobilizing factor in the Egyptian uprisings of 2011. Results indicated social media was used by the participants in the survey but, it was not utilized in such a manner that made people participate in a protest. Social media was utilized as a way of getting information about the protest by demonstrators while the sympathetic onlookers used other sources more often to get their news. This suggests those affected by social media were those who were already tied with civic organizations. (Brym et al. 2014) This study focused on the impact social media had on the sympathetic onlookers versus how it impacted the demonstrators; the study lacked in



determining the mobilizing factor for demonstrators which defeats the purpose of the study. The researchers should have focused on determining whether the demonstrators were more affected by their civic organizations versus social media or if it was a combination of the two.

Both of the studies conducted by Onuch (2015) and Brym et al (2014) found evidence supporting the argument that social media, such as Facebook, are not mobilizers of social activism, but are disseminators of information. The platforms can spread news to everyone who is connected, but that is the extent of it. Social media did not cause people to go to the streets and protest, according to these studies. Other studies presenting additional support of this argument follow.

#### *Internet and the Divide*

Kumar and Thapa (2015) examined the impact social media had on civil society movements in the city of Dehradun, India (2015:1303). The researchers wanted to know if social networks were used as a source of information, motivation, and forum where people could discuss civil society movements (Kamar and Thapa 2015). The city of Dehradun, the capital of Uttarakhand State in India, was chosen to conduct this study due to its higher levels of education, and its history of fighting for social causes and civic rights (Kamar and Thapa 2015: 1304). The sample in this study consisted of 200 university students between the ages of 17-27. The researchers used this age group as they felt, as other researchers have, this age group uses the internet more and is better skilled with social media (Kamar and Thapa 2015). They also indicated this age group was the age of most of the actors in civic society movements in India (Kamar and Thapa 2015). This was a qualitative study where students were asked a series of questions about social media usage, which source they used to obtain information, if social media could be used for mass campaigns, their opinion on how credible the information on social

media is and questions on information dissemination on the participant's part (Kamar and Thapa 2015).

Their findings supported one of the three hypotheses they proposed. The analysis of their data found social media did not motivate people to join in civil society movements. Also, the people of Dehradun, India did not use social media as a source of information or updates on the civil society movements. People instead used "old media" such as television or the newspaper to get information about civil society movements in India (Kamar and Thapa 2015). However, what the study did find is that students used social media to give enough "dialogic cues" for digital activism (Kamar and Thapa 2015:1308). Meaning, social media was a forum where people were able to discuss the events that were taking place. This data indicated people were more apt to use social media to talk about events, but not use it as a source of credible information that pushed them into participating in a movement. The students were more likely to believe information about the movements and become inspired to participate in the movements by the information obtained through television (Kamar and Thapa 2015). In this area, most households had televisions, but access to the internet was less widespread.

Kamar and Thapa (2015) discuss a divide that is created between people who have internet access and people who do not have access to the internet. All of the citizens of India do not have access to the internet and therefore aren't exposed to the information available on it. Kamar and Thapa state "Though social media is being considered as a force multiplier for civil society movements the world over, the situation in India does not suggest so, as has been shown in the findings of this study (2015:1313). The findings indicated the internet penetration rates of the population are higher in India than for other countries but, they still account for a small percentage of the population, therefore not making enough of an impact on the population. So at

this time, their study indicates there is too much of a divide between those who have the internet and those who do not have the internet for social media to influence enough people to mobilize for civil society movements.

Harlow and Guo (2014) conducted a study on activists working with the immigrant population in Austin, Texas. They gathered 10 activists, who work for advocacy campaigns for immigrants, through a snowball method and conducted focus groups. The participants consisted of six women and 4 men between the ages of 23 and 41. The participants were comprised of 7 Caucasians, 2 Hispanics, and 1 Persian who all spoke English and were fluent in Spanish. They split the participants into two focus groups that lasted about an hour long. In the focus groups they asked a total of four questions: How do you define activism?, What are the new technologies and tools you have used in your activist work?, Give an example of what worked well, what didn't work so well, and why?, and How, if at all, would you say activism has changed because of digital tools? (Harlow and Guo 2014:467-468).

The researchers found themes among the responses yielded by the activists: "the different dimensions of use for communication tools in immigration activism, the advantages and disadvantages of digital communication tools, the digital divide and perceived versus real activism" (Harlow and Guo 2014:468). Social media was seen as a way to reach out to the general public by the activists, to provide information and promote awareness about the cause. It was not seen as a good way to interact with the immigrants or refugees for whom the activists advocate. The participants indicated the "immigrants or refugees lack access to the internet and digital technologies" (Harlow and Guo 2014:469). They felt a better way to reach them is by word of mouth or by handing out fliers in the communities.

The activists thought while social media are effective tools to spread information, they are not able to create the sense of community that is needed within activism (Harlow and Guo 2014). Instead, they create a spectacle for society (Harlow and Guo 2014). The activists thought social media takes the focus away from the actual cause by making it about how many people are following, tweeting, posting, or liking the cause instead of what the actual cause is about. The major issues with social media illustrated in the participant's responses are those of the digital divide and real versus perceived activism.

The digital divide is the divide between those individuals who have technological internet access and expertise and those who do not (Harlow and Guo 2014). In this study, the activists worked with immigrants and refugees and therefore knew that many of them did not have access to the internet and/or lacked the knowledge necessary to use the internet. (Harlow and Guo 2014). The activists resorted to talking to people to spread information when it came to this group of people. Social media is not viewed as an advancing tool for activists who work with populations who do not have access to it or lack the technological knowledge to use it; it is an impracticable tool to utilize when trying to reach the populations they are advocating for and is instead seen as a tool to communicate with other advocates and activists to organize.

In relation to the real versus perceived activism, the activists stated that social media creates perceived activism "where people think because they hit a like button or join a group they are an activist" (Harlow and Guo 2014: 472). The respondents indicated they felt that in order for someone to be an activist they had to do more than just click a button and be engaged with the subject matter. The activists want people to participate in actions outside of social media such as attending an event or a march. They also thought social media gives an unrealistic account of how many supporters a cause actually has since people hit the "like" button for the cause on

social media. This can lead to disappointment when there is a low turnout for an event where an organization thought they were going to have a large turnout due to the number supporters online (Harlow and Guo 2014). These findings support the concept of “slacktivists” which are considered to be those individuals who participate online but do not participate offline in social activism.

This literature indicates that not only is there a divide between people who have access to the internet and those who do not, but social media in itself also may create a facade of supporters for the organizations. More people will support the cause online through liking, sharing, posting, or tweeting than will show up for an event protest. Harlow and Guo (2014: 475) state that “digital tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, are more for communicating among activists, rather than spurring collective action or participation”. So far, studies that suggest social media is just a disseminating tool have been discussed. In the next sections, studies will be presented in support of the other side of the argument, which states social media is a mobilizer of activism.

### *Mobilizers of Action*

In a study completed by Velasquez and LaRose (2015), social media was found to be linked to social activism. They wanted to test if social media political efficacy was linked to social activism. This study was conducted using 222 respondents from three different groups at Michigan State University: Democratic, Republican, and Environmental groups. The Democratic and Republican groups were the official representatives of the parties on campus (Velasquez and LaRose 2015:460). It was not stated whether the groups were mutually exclusive. Each of the groups was offered a donation of \$75.00 and each participant received \$2.00 to participate in the study. The surveys were distributed during the group meetings.

The results of this study indicate social media political efficacy is positively linked to social media activism. The more a person received positive feedback about the political post they made on their Facebook page, the more this person was apt to believe in social media political efficacy (Velasquez and LaRose 2015). Meaning, the more people received positive feedback about their political post online the more they thought political efficacy could be achieved through social media. Also, the more positive feedback they received, the more positively they thought about internal political efficacy (Velasquez and LaRose 2015).

More importantly, these researchers found that social media political efficacy is positively associated with social media activism (Velasquez and LaRose 2015). So, when people believe in social media political efficacy they are more likely to participate in social media activism. Their belief in social media bringing people together for a cause motivates them to participate in social media activism because they believe a change will come about. The relationship between social media political efficacy and social activism was found to be stronger than that between internal political efficacy and social media activism (Velasquez and LaRose 2015). The researchers advise, “the information provided by the system and by the interactions with other individuals might increase perceptions of efficacy as long as the information communicates to members of the groups that their online behaviors have been effective in achieving their objective” (Velasquez and LaRose 2015: 469). Overall, as long as those using social media receive positive feedback in relation to their posts, they will perceive that they have positive social media political efficacy and will be more likely to participate in social activism. When people get positive responses they are more likely to use social media for social activism.

A study conducted by Chen, Ping, and Chen (2015), was completed to determine what factors “motivate individuals to utilize social media for social movement and what kinds of

social media activities citizens abroad can use to contribute to political participation” (2015:443). The participants in this study were Taiwanese citizens who were not in Taiwan at the time of The Sunflower movement in the spring of 2014. In using these individuals it allowed the researchers to determine what motivated those who were not there to actively participate in some action to support the movement. A sample of 176 participants was gathered through snowball sampling since there was not a list available of Taiwanese citizens who were out of the country at the time of the survey (Chen et al. 2015). A survey was utilized to collect data.

Here, people used social media for social movements if the issue was personally important to them, they had a sense of civic identity that attached them to the home country, and they possessed negative emotions towards the government (Chen et al. 2015:450). The factors presented here illustrated the motivators are all related to strong attachments to an issue and to their country of origin. It suggests that if a person is not in the country and they do not feel attached to the country, then they will not use social media to take part in social movements. The social media participation the researchers describe here are: reading news related to the movement, expressing their opinions, sharing information, joining social and political causes on social media related to the movement and encouraging others to join social movement-related groups (Chen et al. 2015). This study supports social media as a mobilizer in that it provided different types of activism people are able to participate in even if they are not present. This study does not limit activism to something that has to be done in person or something that has to be continuously acted out. It suggests that activism can be something as small as sharing information on the issue or topic. Another study also found factors that motivated individuals to join in protests.

Davison conducted a study to determine the ways in which risk and social media are related (2015). She focused on the Arab Spring Revolutions in her study. Davison wanted to “determine if people living in Arab Spring countries believed there is an association between their use of social media during Arab Spring protests” (Davison 2015:16). The study was conducted using a sample of 12 participants who lived in Arab countries. The researcher used a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questions Davison (2015) asked revolved around social media use, civic action participation, risks taken, and the status of the respondent’s country.

The responses given determined that social media was used in four different ways during the Arab Spring Revolutions which formed the four categories of: organize, document, information, and action. The first category of organization and the last category of action were found to be associated; those who were providing details about the protests were attending the protests as well (Davison 2015). The second and third categories, document and information, were found to be associated in that the people who were documenting the events and posting them intended for their work to provide information to others (Davison 2015). An important finding in this research was that young, educated, unmarried, employed males and females from the Arab countries were motivated by social media to take personal and social risks by participating in protests (Davison 2015:20). In this case, social media was found to motivate individuals to participate in high-risk activity. People used social media as a means of obtaining information about the event because they felt they could rely on it. Social media also framed the social movements to get the attention of the people and push them to take action; “the framing process was to take photographs and videos and to post them so that they appeared on Facebook feeds. The images documented the reality of events on the ground and fueled the sense of



injustice that people were feeling” (Davison 2015:22). Respondents noted that they were able to see what was going on at any given time, which made them participate in actions they may not have before (Davison 2015).

This provides examples of how social media motivates individuals but, there are some factors that Davison (2015) did not take into account. She did not measure the frequency of social media use, which could have had an effect on whether one participated in the protest or not. The sample size utilized was very small and the participants came from different countries thus not making it a representation of any one of the populations within those different countries. This also made it difficult to generalize the findings to any one country involved in the Arab Spring Revolutions.

#### *Collective Agency Among Youth*

Garcia-Galera, Hoyo-Hurtado, and Fernandez-Munoz (2014) completed research on youth in Spain. The purpose of the research was to “determine if social media was responsible for active social commitment offline or if they just intensify an existing or previous tendency towards social participation” (2014:37-38). This study focused on a younger age group than other studies; the sample was 16 – 18 years old. Through the help of a major social networking site called Tuenti, the researchers gathered a sample of 1,330 youth. Tuenti distributed a questionnaire on its platform and provided a prize draw incentive to attract participants (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014). Tuenti is a social networking site used in Spain that is similar to Facebook and has around 10 million users. Though Tuenti distributed the survey, social media questions were not limited to Tuenti, they involved other forms of social media.

Garcia-Galera et.al. (2014) found supporting evidence that demonstrates social media is used for social activism. This study found that 38% of the participants had participated in both

online and offline activism while, 44% state they participated in online events only (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014). Additionally, 24% always or almost always use social networks to encourage others to participate in certain events, demonstrations, and meetings. (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014). Another 26% agreed that social networks had led them to develop/participate in an action of social protest (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014). Through this research the youth indicated that social media motivates them to participate in some sort of social activism whether it be in person or online. The study emphasized the different types of activism the youth participated in, advising that activism can be done both online and offline. When youth participated actively, it was to situations that were geographically proximate or socially proximate (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014). Geographic proximity referred to the geographic location of the situation or the distance from the participant. Social proximity referenced how much the participant could relate to the situation, for example, a young participant would have more social proximity to bullying than to labor issues.

This research indicates that, “social networks are a social medium for not only communicating but also for social participation and global activism” (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014:41). The youth in this survey illustrated that they use social media to participate in social activism. Social media provides opportunities to the youth to become socially active online or offline (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014). In regards to the research question posed, it was found social media provides the opportunities for social activism and the platform for collective action therefore it can be assumed that social media influences social activism.

Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman conducted research on young adults in Chile; their study focused on the use of social media by young adults aged 18-29 in Chile (2012). The researchers wanted to see what role social media played in youth protest behavior for political

change (Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman 2012). They looked at different factors that mediated the relationship between Facebook and youth protest, one being postmaterialist values and ideologies. The sample consisted of 1000 surveys from the three largest urban areas in Chile: Santiago, Valparaiso-Vina del Mar, and Concepcion-Talcahuano. The researchers gathered data by going to 5 randomly selected households on each randomly selected block. This data was then analyzed through Poisson regression models (Valenzuela et al. 2012).

The researchers in this study were adamant about the idea that social media promotes social activism. They state:

Social network sites have several affordances for promoting participation, particularly protest behavior among youth. They facilitate access to a large number of contacts, thereby enabling social movements to reach critical mass. By allowing multiple channels for interpersonal feedback, peer acceptance, and reinforcement of group norms. These sites also promote the construction of personal and group identities that are key antecedents of protest behavior (Valenzuela et al. 2012: 302).

The researchers argue that social media allows individuals to gather as a collective and mobilize into action. Like the previous study, conducted by Garcia-Galera et.al. (2014), these researchers considered action taken online as participation in activism. Naturally, their hypotheses were indicative of this argument. They developed three different hypotheses that proposed a relationship between social media and social activism. These hypotheses were supported by their findings.

The data they collected revealed a positive relationship between the use of Facebook and protest behavior among Chilean youth; the more frequent use of Facebook led to more protest activity (Valenzuela et al. 2012). The researchers also identified mediating factors in this relationship between Facebook use and social activism, which supported their second hypothesis. The data illustrated frequent use of Facebook for news and socializing was positively associated with protest levels, meaning those who used Facebook for news and socializing were more likely

to participate in protest (Valenzuela et al. 2012). Interestingly, opinion expression was not found to be a significant mediating factor between Facebook use and protest activity (Valenzuela et al. 2012). Their third hypothesis, which proposed “the relationship between Facebook use and protest behavior will be stronger for individuals with a leftist ideology and with postmaterialist values” (Valenzuela et al. 2012:303-304), was not supported. Their data demonstrated that the youths' political or cultural values did not have any bearing on the relationship between Facebook use and protest behavior (Valenzuela et al. 2012). Overall, this study found evidence that social media promotes social activism. It showed that the amount of time one spends on Facebook and what one does on social media matters when it comes to promoting social activism (Valenzuela et al. 2012).

#### *Posts, Tweets, and Protests*

Studies have focused on obtaining data from activists and the protestors themselves. Further studies research social media's effect on social activism by looking at the actual posts and tweets on Facebook and Twitter. Bastos, Mercea, and Charpenter (2015) conducted a study to determine if the activity on Facebook and Twitter had any bearing on the development of street protests (Bastos et al 2015). They tested whether the protests and Facebook and Twitter activity occurred bidirectionally.

The researchers tracked data using 100 hashtags and 100 Facebook pages in relation to three different protests: the Indignados in Spain, the Occupy movement in the United States, and the Vinegar protests in Brazil (Bastos et al 2015). They gathered data from press reports to obtain the number of people at the demonstrations or camp-outs, the number of people who were injured, and the number arrested by police. They used Granger-causality testing on posts, tweets, number of protestors, number that camped-out, arrested, and injured to determine if the activity

online predicted onsite activity (Bastos et al 2015). The results of this research found online activity to predict onsite protest activity (Bastos et al 2015). An analysis of the data demonstrates that more online activity leads to more onsite protest activity (Bastos et al 2015). These findings are an indication of social media being a mobilizer to those who are connected. The posting of information about protests allows people to find out where these events are occurring and take part in them.

Although, the researchers indicate social media activity can predict onsite protests, the type of posts were not described. The study did not differentiate the type of posts utilized to mobilize protestors to the street. Also, the study only found this causal effect in two out of the three protests, the Indignados and the Occupy. The Vinegar protest did not show any causal activity. The results indicate the possibilities of using social media for social activism (Bastos et al 2015).

A four stage model was created by Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014) to explain how protests evolve through the use of social media. The four stages consist of: 1.) Triggering event 2.) Media Response 3.) Viral Organization 4.) Physical Response. This four stage model was then utilized to complete an analysis on three different events that occurred in Mexico. The events the authors used happened in different timeframes so as to allow them to show how activism has evolved in regards to technology (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014).

The first stage of their model is a triggering event. This is considered to be “an extraordinary event that promotes a social reaction” (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014:369), which is explained as an action that occurs and provides a political opportunity for the people to organize against the action or actions being taken. The triggering factor then creates a response from the media which is amplified through social media (second stage) since social

media enables information to be spread to a larger amount of people at a faster rate. The researchers state, “the virtual space of political interaction enables citizens to share, collaborate, and cooperate using social media technologies with no information costs and a common technology ground” (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014:369). With this the researchers recognize the benefits that social media contributes to the promotion of social activism. The third stage is viral organization. This occurs after people have connected through social media and discussed their thoughts and opinions; they are essentially creating a mass reaction (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014). The fourth step is that of action by protest. The collection that occurred on line then mobilizes to the streets (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014).

The Twitter movement of #InternetNecesario was utilized in this study to demonstrate how the model can be applied. This movement started with the proposition of a law that would place a tax on internet use in Mexico. A member of the Mexican Chapter of the Internet Society tweeted a message against the proposed tax and used the hashtag #InternetNecesario (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014). The proposition of the tax was the triggering event that caught the attention of the public. The tweeted message gained popularity and created a movement on social media and traditional media wherein, comes stage two. The issue went viral causing thousands of tweets to be made; approximately 11,156 tweets were being made daily in reference to this issue (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014). The fourth stage is the physical reaction, which was displayed by the protest held in Mexican cities against the proposed tax. Due to the mass movement against this proposed tax, it was denied (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014). This case supported the four stage cycle that was presented by the researchers and the argument illustrates how social media leads to social activism.

## CRITIQUE OF THE LITERATURE

The research reviewed above examines the impact social media has on social activism. Unfortunately, the literature above did not provide a clear definition of social activism. Instead, the researchers implied through their findings what they were considering as social activism. A distinct difference was found between those arguing that social media is a mobilizer and those arguing it is just a disseminator. The research in support of social media as a mobilizer implied through their findings that social activism was any action taken for a cause to include those taken online consisting of signing a petition, sending an email, or joining a group (Bastos et al 2015, Hsuan-Ting et al. 2015, Garcia-Galera et al. 2014, Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014, Valenzuela et al. 2012, and Velasquez and LaRose 2015). The research in support of social media as just a disseminator implied social activism to be actions requiring a person to be physically present. They are actions such as protests, marches, and events (Brym et al. 2014, Harlow and Guo 2014, Rajesh and Thapa 2014, and Onuch 2015). This can have an overall effect on the outcomes of the research, as without a definitive definition, the research can be obscure. In this literature, it was at least implied and one could extract what was being researched by the measures being utilized. Future research should include a definition of social activism.

A few of the studies reviewed limited their research to a younger age group (Garcia-Galera et al. 2014, Rajesh and Thapa 2014, and Valenzuela et al. 2012). While this is understandable and acceptable due to the fact that the younger generation is more apt to use social media and have the skills to use it, it would be noteworthy to expand the sample to include older age groups. This could assist in determining whether social media indeed is a mobilizer or a disseminator.

While some of the studies provided evidence supporting social media has mobilization capabilities, they did not go into detail about what the posts or comments contained that actually motivated individuals to participate in social activism. The studies accounted for factors such as grievances and political affiliations, but they did not provide details as to what in the posts, tweets or comments moved individuals. Were people moved when they saw violence? Were they motivated by posts directed towards a person's rights being violated or overlooked? Was it a combination of issues? Although, this could present itself to be difficult to accomplish, it may be worth attempting to differentiate between the posts that motivate and those that do not.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Granovetter developed a theory in 1973 called *The Strength of Weak Ties* which focuses on social networks. The main argument of this theory maintains it is through a person's weak social ties that they are exposed to information they normally would not have been exposed to through their network of strong ties. The weak ties allow people to connect to more people sharing and exposing different information about society, jobs, and other topics (Granovetter 1983). The idea is that a person forms a network of close friends (strong ties) and also a network of associates (weak ties). Both of these ties provide benefits, or social capital which is considered "the resources one has access to through one's relationship with others" (Graham 2014:58). A strong tie allows for what Graham (2014) calls bonding capital; social capital that is long lasting, has intimate connections and is normally with family and friends. These are the people we associate with most. Those within someone's strong ties network are essentially similar to them and therefore the information exposed within this network is similar to information already obtained by the individual. Granovetter argues that, "individuals with few weak ties will be



deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends” (1983:202). This would indicate the individuals with few weak ties are insulated from new ideas, fashions, jobs and issues going on in society, if their strong ties were not bringing in that information already (Granovetter 1983).

Granovetter’s theory states that one’s weak ties are what connect them to the world. A person’s weak ties allow connections to people of other networks through, what Granovetter calls, bridges (1973). A bridge is “a line in a network which provides the only path between two points” (Granovetter 1973). Also of note, a bridge will always be a weak tie but, a weak tie will not always be a bridge (Granovetter 1973). Graham (2014) asserts that weak ties produce bridging capital. Bridging capital is social capital that is less permanent, associated with task-oriented connections, with co-workers, or people that are seen occasionally such as students within one’s class (Graham 2014). Our weak ties are those individuals who we may see often but do not share deep connections with. Weak ties offer a bridge not only to other people but also to information that is not available through a strong tie. In essence, person A has a network of strong ties. Person B has a network of strong ties and, at the same time, is in person A’s weak ties network because they work at the same company but in different departments. The connection between A and B is a bridge due to them working in the same location yet having a distant relationship. Their connection can also connect person A to person B’s network and vice versa to create additional ties to the extent that there are no other ties between person A and person B, at which point would be considered a local bridge (Granovetter 1973). A local bridge is, “a connection between two sectors to the extent that it is the only alternative for many people” (Granovetter 1973:1365). The more local bridges there are, the more pathways exist between people, creating more connections.

Those without weak tie networks are also thought, “to be difficult to organize or integrate into political movements of any kind, since membership in movements or goal-oriented organizations typically results from being recruited by friends” (Granovetter 1983:202). Meaning, one can have a strong ties network but, if those individuals are not exposing each other to certain types of information, it will be difficult to get them to join an organization because they are only involved with themselves and don’t have a weak tie to bring them into contact with the organization or movement. This thought ties this theory to the use of social media for social activism.

With social media, people create strong and weak ties within their social media networks. If a person only associates with people within their strong networks, and those within their strong networks do not provide any information on issues or events that are occurring within their community, they are not being exposed to the opportunities to participate in social activism. They are not being exposed to information disseminated about social issues and are inhibiting their exposure to new information. From Granovetter’s stand, weak ties are what connect people in the world and allow them to obtain useful information (1983). Granovetter also recognizes the use of strong ties but, asserts without weak ties a person is essentially sheltered from others around them and confined to the ideas within their strong networks.

This chapter discussed prior literature on social media and its influence on social activism. There were two major themes found throughout the literature. One theme is that social media influences social activism and the other being that social media does not influence social activism- it is just a disseminator of information. Research was provided that supports both themes. A critique of the literature was followed by a description of Granovetter’s (1973)

Strength of Weak Social Ties theory, which will be utilized in this research. The following chapter provides a discussion of the methodology utilized to conduct this research.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct this research. The chapter begins with a description of the research design of the study to include the sample obtained, hypotheses, and variables used. Following is a discussion on the procedures and instrumentation utilized to collect the data used for this study. Also discussed is the statistical analyses applied to the data collected.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a cross sectional study conducted to determine if social ties influence Facebook users' participation in social activism. The data utilized for this study was provided by the Pew Research Center. The sample was comprised of Americans across the United States. The overall sample size was 2,253 adults over the age of 18 with 1,873 adults being internet users (Pew Research Center 2012). The study took place in 2012 and collected data based off of the respondents' thoughts, actions, and behaviors from the previous year, 2011. The study done by Pew Research Center was completed in an attempt to gather information about Americans' use of the internet. The study gathered data from the American population in regards to how and what they use the internet for. Random digit dial sampling was the approach taken to obtain a proper representation of Americans.

#### *Research Hypotheses*

This study sought to answer two research questions which were then translated into hypotheses. The first research question posed was, are people exposed to more social events or issues by their weak social ties or by their strong social ties? According to Granovetter's (1973)

theory of weak social ties, people are exposed to more issues due to their weak social ties. When they are aware of these issues surrounding them they are more inclined to become involved in them. The first hypothesis derived from this is:

H1: Through Facebook, people are exposed to social issues by their weak ties more than their strong ties.

The second research question to be answered in this study was, does the exposure to social issues through the use of Facebook influence a person to participate in social activism? It was hypothesized as:

H2: Exposure to social issues through weak social ties on Facebook will influence people to participate in social activism more often.

#### *Variables Used in the Study*

The dependent variables used for this study are social activism participation and exposure to social issues. The dependent variables were operationalized as follows:

Table 1. Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	Description	Coding
Exposure to social issues	In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you decided to LEARN MORE about a political or social issue because of something you read on a social networking site or Twitter? [IF YES: Did you find out about that issue from someone you know personally, from someone you don't know personally like a public figure or organization, or both?]	1 = Yes, someone know personally 2 = Yes, Public figure or organization 3 = Yes, both 4 = Yes, can't remember source or refused to tell source 5 = No

Table 1. Continued

Dependent Variable	Description	Coding
Social Activism	<p>SNS2: Do you ever use social networking sites or Twitter to-</p> <p>A. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read?</p> <p>B. Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues?</p> <p>C. Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you?</p> <p>D. Encourage other people to vote?</p> <p>E. Repost content related to political or social issues that were originally posted by someone else?</p> <p>F. 'Like' or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted?</p> <p>Q16: In the past 12 month, have you –</p> <p>A. Attended a political rally or speech?</p> <p>B. Attended an organized protest of any kind?</p> <p>C. Attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs?</p> <p>D. Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate?</p> <p>E. Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party?</p> <p>F. Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community?</p> <p>Q22: In the past 12 months, have you -</p> <p>D. Signed a petition ONLINE?</p> <p>H: Commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue?</p> <p>I: Posted PICTURES or VIDEO online related to a political or social issue?</p>	0-15 Scale = 0 indicating no social activism took place and 15 indicating the highest level of social activism
Social Activism (Binned)	Participation in internet and physical activism	0-1 = Least Active 2-4 = Moderately Active 5-15 = Most Active

The independent variables used in this study are strong and weak ties. This independent variable was utilized for both H1 and H2.

Table 2. Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Description	Coding
Type of Social Tie: Strong or Weak tie	In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you decided to LEARN MORE about a political or social issue because of something you read on a social networking site or Twitter? [IF YES: Did you find out about that issue from someone you know personally, from someone you don't know personally like a public figure or organization, or both?]	1 = Strong Tie 2 = Weak Tie

Control variables were used in this study to control for other factors that may influence a person to participate in social activism. These variables consisted of educational level, political views, age, marital status, parent of children under age 18, income, employment status and race. The variables were operationalized as follows:

Table 3. Control Variables

Control Variable	Description	Coding
Education Levels	What is the last grade or class you completed in school?	1 = None, or grades 1-8 2 = High school incomplete 3 = High school graduate (grade 12 or GED certificate) 4 = Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school 5 = Some College, no 4-year degree (includes associate degree) 6 = College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree) 7 = Post-graduate training/professional school after college (toward a Masters/Ph.D., Law or Medical school)
Political Views	What do you consider your political views to be	1 = Very Conservative 2 = Conservative 3 = Moderate 4 = Liberal 5 = Very Liberal
Age	What is your Age?	Fill in the blank
Marital Status	Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?	1 = Married 2 = Living with a partner 3 = Divorced 4 = Separated 5 = Widowed 6 = Never been married
Parent	Are you the parent or guardian of any children under age 18 now living in your household?	1 = Yes 2 = No



Table 3. Continued

Control Variable	Description	Coding
Income	Last year, that is in 2011, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?	1 = Less than \$10,000 2 = \$10,000 to under \$20,000 3 = \$20,000 to under \$30,000 4 = \$30,000 to under \$40,000 5 = \$40,000 to under \$50,000 6 = \$50,000 to under \$60,000 7 = \$60,000 to under \$75,000 8 = \$75,000 to under \$100,000 9 = \$100,000 to under \$150,000 10 = \$150,000 to under \$250,000 11 = \$250,000 to under \$500,000 12 = \$500,000 or more
Employment	Are you now employed full-time, part-time, retired, or are you not employed for pay?	1 = Employed full time 2 = Employed part-time 3 = Retired 4 = Not employed for pay 5 = Disabled 6 = Student 7 = Homemaker 8 = Other
Race	What is your race? Are you White, Black, Asian, or some other race?	1 = White 2 = Black or African-American 3 = Asian or Pacific Islander 4 = Mixed Race 5 = Native American/American Indian 6 = Other

## PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTATION

The secondary data utilized in this research was obtained from the Pew Research Center website and is called August 2012 Civic Engagement. The survey created by the Pew Research Center consisted of 65 questions overall with a total of 8 questions being sublevel questions; in example 1a, 1b, and so on. This survey used dichotomous, nominal, fill in the blank, and contingency formatted questions. Reliability will be discussed in the next chapter describing the

analysis of the findings. The survey was distributed through interviews conducted over the phone by the Princeton Survey Research Associates International from July 16 through August 7, 2012 (Pew Research Center 2012). The sample of landline and cellular phone numbers was provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI).

“Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers (Pew Research Center 2012).” This data was placed into SPSS for analysis. This researcher utilized the applicable variables from this dataset in an attempt to test the hypotheses proposed.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

There were two statistical analyses applied to the data collected in this study to determine the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. This section lists the statistical analyses utilized along with the reasoning for their use.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

The data collected in this study was comprised of nominal, ordinal, and continuous data, therefore, the measures of central tendency used were mean, median, and mode. Nominal and ordinal data does not provide data to which a mean can be derived so this was not used with this type of data. Continuous data, on the other hand, does allow for a mean to be calculated. Cross tabulations work well with categorical data. Most of the data utilized in this study was categorical which made the use of cross tabulations appropriate.

### *Bivariate Analysis*

The bivariate analysis applied in this study was the cross tabulation analysis. This analysis allows for the comparison of one independent variable and one dependent variable; it compares one relationship at a time. In this study, the bivariate analysis was run when cross tabulations were completed to test for associations between different variables. For example, a cross tabulation and the chi-square analysis was used to compare the relationship between the type of social tie and the amount of social activism participated in. This analysis was used as the data gathered for the independent and dependent variable was nominal.

### *Linear Regression Analysis*

Linear regression analysis was also completed here. This model tests for a relationship between two or more variables to determine if they can predict or explain another variable. In order for this type of analysis to be completed, one of the variables needs to be a continuous variable (ratio or interval). Two linear regression analyses were completed. One was done to test the relationship between the type of social tie (categorical variable) and the amount of social activism (continuous variable) participated in. The other analysis tested the relationship between social tie (categorical variable) and age (continuous variable).

### *P-Value*

The P-value or significance level is the level used to determine whether the null hypothesis will be rejected or accepted. If the significance level is reached or surpassed, the null hypothesis will be accepted. If the significance level is not reached then, the null hypothesis will be rejected. This study used a significance level of .05

## DEFINITIONS

This research focuses on the two types of social ties: strong and weak. Strong ties can be close relationships between people that see each other often, share feelings or connections, consider each other family, or can be actual relatives. A weak tie can be a relationship in which people see each other infrequently, don't share personal information with, and can be terminated at any point. For the purposes of this research a strong tie was categorized by the respondent as "someone you know personally", while weak ties will be categorized as "a public figure or organization" by the respondents.

## LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this study. One limitation is the limited amount of respondents who provided a response to the question about who they learned social issues from. The number of respondents to this question was 232 making this a small sample size compared to the American population who use Facebook. This makes it difficult to generalize these findings to the entire population. Also, the average age of this sample size is older than the average age of Facebook users meaning these results may be difficult to generalize the population. Although the data from the Pew Research Center was found useful and applicable to this study, there were things that could have been addressed more appropriately had primary data been collected. For example, social ties and exposure were addressed in one question whereas primary data would have addressed these variables individually to gather a better measure of the two. Additionally, a scale of social activism was not encompassed in this data leaving the researcher to have to manipulate the data to create one.

## SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the research design of the study consisting of the sample, hypotheses, and variables used for this research. The statistical analyses applied to the data collected were also reviewed with the chapter concluding with a discussion on the limitations to the study. The next chapter will discuss the findings of this study to include the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of the computed analyses. It will first review the descriptive statistics of the sample. Next, the results of the cross tabulations and linear regression will be discussed in regards to the hypotheses tested. Lastly, further analyses were completed to test relationships between additional variables which will be discussed.

#### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

A total of 2,253 respondents comprised the sample utilized in this research. Table 4 presents descriptive statistics of the sample. Males accounted for 46.8% and females accounted for 53.2% of the sample. The majority of the sample was made up of White Americans (78%) while the remaining 22% consisted of people of different races such as Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American/American Indian, mixed races, and other. Half of the sample was employed (49%) and the other half (51%) combined individuals who were retired, not employed, students, homemakers or other; in Table 4 this group is categorized as not employed. The average age was 53.

Additionally, about half of the sample participants (1,102) were married at the time this survey was taken. The education level with the highest frequency for the sample was high school or below (39%). The second highest education level was college or post graduate studies at 32.4%. The income level coincides with the education level as the highest frequency income level was \$39,999 or less. Also of note, 76% of the sample did not have children under the age of 18 living in their homes.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	<b>(2253)</b>	
Male	1055	46.8%
Female	1198	53.2%
<b>Race</b>	<b>(2215)</b>	
White	1749	77.6%
African-American	290	12.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	52	2.3%
Mixed Race	43	1.9%
Native American/American Indian	29	1.3%
Other	52	2.3%
<b>Employment</b>	<b>(2246)</b>	
Employed	1099	48.9%
Not Employed	1147	51.1%
<b>Age</b>	<b>(2253)</b>	
Mean = 52.62		
Range = 18-99		
S.D. = 19.52		

One survey question was found to address the relationship to be tested in hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1 is stated as: Through Facebook, people are exposed to social issues by their weak ties more than their strong ties. The survey question that addresses this hypothesis and provides the data for this hypothesis is:

“SNS3A: In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you decided to LEARN MORE about a political or social issue because of something you read on a social networking site or Twitter? [IF YES: Did you find out about that issue from someone you know personally, from someone you don’t know personally like a public figure or organization, or both?]

1. Yes, someone know personally
2. Yes, public figure or organization
3. Yes, both
4. Yes, can’t remember source or refused to tell source
5. No”

(Pew Research Center, 2012)

In this study, this question encompasses both the independent variable and the dependent variable. The independent variable, exposure through weak social ties, is addressed in response 2, which states, “Yes, public figure or organization.” This was seen and recoded as a weak tie. Weak ties are “connections with people whom you may not be particularly close to but you recognize and are friendly with” (Graham 2014:59). A public figure or organization can fill that same position as they are either people or created by people. Public figures and organizations are known by many and create multiple weak connections in their daily activities in order to create and maintain their presence in society. On the other hand, “Yes, someone you know personally” was recoded into strong ties. Someone you know personally implies a stronger relationship with a person when comparing it to a public figure or organization.

The dependent variable, exposure to social issues, is addressed in the question itself: “has there been a time when you decided to LEARN MORE about a political or social issue....” This is representative of the dependent variable in that a person takes the time to learn about something only after being exposed to that topic or issue through some avenue. Both learning and exposure go hand in hand as you cannot learn about something you have not been exposed to.

In order to obtain the data to determine if this hypothesis will be accepted or rejected, the responses were recoded as follows: ‘Yes, someone know personally’ was recoded into Strong Ties, ‘Yes, public figure or organization’ was recoded into Weak Ties, and Both was left as Both. The remaining responses were coded as missing data as they were not relevant. Two descriptive frequencies were generated: one with 3 levels and another with 2 levels. The initial frequency table included all 3 levels as seen below in Table 5.



Table 5. Social Ties and Frequency for 3 Levels

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strong Ties	144	6.4%	29.6%	29.6%
Weak Ties	88	3.9%	18.1%	47.6%
Both	255	11.3%	52.4%	100%
Total	487	21.6%	100%	

The frequency indicates the amount of respondents who advised they learned about a social issue from their strong tie, their weak tie, or both. This table illustrates the respondents were exposed to social issues from the combination of their weak and strong ties more so than the other two categories individually. This is ideal and possibly closely related to what occurs daily. However, for these research purposes, only the categories of Strong Ties and Weak Ties will be utilized to identify any differences that exist between strong and weak ties in relation to Facebook and social activism; Table 6 provides this data.

Table 6. Social Ties and Frequency for 2 Levels

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strong Ties	144	6%	62%	62%
Weak Ties	88	4%	38%	100%
Total	232	10%	100%	

There were a total of 232 respondents fitting into these two categories which will comprise the sample size utilized for this research. Looking at Table 6, it illustrates that people were exposed to social issues through their strong ties more so than their weak ties. Therefore H1: Through Facebook, people are exposed to social issues by their weak ties more than their

strong ties, is not supported by this data and will be rejected. Strong ties have the higher influence when it comes to exposing people to new topics. This is not to say that weak ties do not expose people to social issues as well though; there were still individuals who were exposed by their weak ties and took the time to learn about the topic more.

## CROSS TABULATIONS

The second hypothesis to be tested in this research focuses on exposure through weak social ties and social activism. It is stated as: Exposure to social issues through weak social ties on Facebook will influence people to participate in social activism more often. This hypothesis was created in an attempt to test if Mark Granovetter's strength of weak social ties theory can be utilized as a framework to understand how or what influences people to participate in social activism in relation to social networking sites, particularly, Facebook.

The independent variable for H2, exposure through weak social ties, was operationalized by using the results from the question listed earlier, SNS3A, which had established the difference between strong and weak ties based on their impact on exposure to social issues. This variable was named SNS3A\_2responses. On the other hand, the dependent variable, social activism, had to be created. This was done by combining multiple responses from survey questions that involved some form of social activism. The activities within the questions were either internet activities or physical activities. The response format for each of these questions was dichotomous resulting in either a yes or no response. The following table consists of the questions utilized to create this dependent variable.

Table 7. Survey questions combined to create the Dependent Variable for H2

Survey Questions:	Sublevels
SNS2: Do you ever use social networking sites or Twitter to -	A. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read?
	B. Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues?
	C. Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you?
	D. Encourage other people to vote?
	E. Repost content related to political or social issues that were originally posted by someone else?
	F. 'Like' or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted?
Q16: In the past 12 month, have you -	A. Attended a political rally or speech?
	B. Attended an organized protest of any kind?
	C. Attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs?
	D. Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate?
	E. Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party?
	F. Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community?
Q22: In the past 12 months, have you -	D. Signed a petition ONLINE?
	H: Commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue?
	I: Posted PICTURES or VIDEO online related to a political or social issue?

The reliability for these variables was tested which produced a Cronbach's Alpha level of .846 indicating these variables are very reliable. These dichotomous variables were then transformed into the interval variable of Social Activism. This was an additive scale that ranged from 0 to 15

with 0 indicating no social activism took place and 15 indicating the highest level of social activism took place. An additional variable was created from social activism once it was binned. Meaning, it was transformed into a 3 level categorical variable; the levels were least active, moderately active and most active.

To test H2 the variables of SNS3A\_2responses and Social Activism (Binned) were used. These two variables were tested for association utilizing the bivariate analysis of chi-square in a cross tabulations matrix. Table 8 consists of this matrix.

Table 8. SNS3A\_2responses \* Social\_Activism (Binned) Cross-tabulation

			Social Activism (Binned)			
			Least Active	Moderately Active	Most Active	Total
SNS3A_2responses	Strong Ties	Count	20	51	71	142
		% within SNS3A_2responses	14.1%	35.9%	50.0%	100.0%
	Weak Ties	Count	22	36	28	86
		% within SNS3A_2responses	25.6%	41.9%	32.6%	100.0%
Total	Count		42	87	99	228
	% within SNS3A_2responses		18.4%	38.2%	43.4%	100.0%

The observed chi-square significance level for this cross tabulation was .017. This is below the set p-value of .05 indicating there is a statistically significant association between social ties and social activism. The gamma value for this relationship was -.319 indicating there is a strong negative relationship between the variables. Being exposed to social issues through strong ties is linked to an increased level of participation in social activism. Conversely, if the exposure comes

from weak social ties, the level of social activism participated in decreases. This relationship is most evident in the "least active" and "most active" groups. The type of relationship may not affect those within the moderately active category as much being that the difference between the two was only 6%. Although there is an association between the two variables, the direction in which this occurs is reverse from what H2 assumes thus H2 would be rejected. Exposure from strong social ties is more likely to influence people to participate in social activism than weak ties. This finding is not consistent with the Strength of Weak Ties theory (Granovetter, 1973).

Additional cross-tabulations were completed to determine if additional variables affected the relationship between social ties and social activism. The following variables were tested against this relationship: education, political views, age, marriage status, children living in the home under 18, income and race. As a whole, none of these variables were statistically significant when tested against the relationship between social ties and social activism. However, there were two partial associations that arose: age and political views.

A cross-tabulation was completed between age, social ties and social activism. The age variable was initially an interval variable but, was recoded into a new four level categorical variable. The age categories were ages 18-30, ages 31-50, ages 51-70, and ages 71 and above. As a whole, age was not statistically significant when tested against the relationship between social ties and social activism but one age category was, ages 18-30. This age group was statistically significant at the .02 level, indicating a partial association. This is a strong negative relationship indicated by the -.479 gamma value.

This means for those between the ages of 18 and 30 there is an association between social ties and social activism. This is a negative relationship implying those exposed to issues through their strong ties are more likely to participate in social activism and those exposed to issues by

their weak social ties are less likely to participate in social activism. This can be seen in Table 9 and Figure 1 below.

Table 9. Crosstab for SNS3A\_2responses \* Social\_Activism (Binned) \* Age

				Social_Activism (Binned)			
Age				Least Active	Moderately Active	Most Active	Total
18-30	SNS3A_2 responses	Strong Ties	Count	8	18	30	56
			% within SNS3A_2responses	14.3%	32.1%	53.6%	100.0%
		Weak Ties	Count	10	15	8	33
			% within SNS3A_2responses	30.3%	45.5%	24.2%	100.0%
Total			Count	18	33	38	89
			% within SNS3A_2responses	20.2%	37.1%	42.7%	100.0%

Figure 1. Tests and Measures for Age 4 Variable, Categorical level 18-30

Chi-Square Tests		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
	Pearson Chi-Square	7.810b	2	0.02	
	Likelihood Ratio	8.05	2	0.018	
	Linear-by-Linear Association	7.295	1	0.007	
	N of Valid Cases	89			
Symmetric Measures		Value		Value	Approx. Sig.
	Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	Zero-Order	-0.479	0.003
	N of Valid Cases			89	

The second variable where a partial association was found when tested against the social ties and social activism relationship was political views. This variable was a categorical variable split into three levels: Conservative, Moderate, and Liberal. The moderate views level was found to be statistically significant at the .017 level. This indicates that political views have an impact on the relationship when the individual holds moderate political views. The gamma value for this relationship was  $-.537$  indicating a strong negative relationship between moderate views, social ties, and social activism. The negative association between social ties and social activism remains significant for those with moderate political views. Table 10 illustrates the cross tabulation computed for this relationship and Figure 2 shows the tests and measures done for this relationship.

Table 10. Crosstab for SNS3A\_2responses \* Social\_Activism (Binned) \* ideo3

				Social_Activism (Binned)			
Ideo3				Least Active	Moderately Active	Most Active	Total
Moderate	SNS3A_2responses	Strong Ties	Count	4	18	26	48
			% within SNS3A_2responses	8.3%	37.5%	54.2%	100.0%
		Weak Ties	Count	7	16	7	30
			% within SNS3A_2responses	23.3%	53.3%	23.3%	100.0%
	Total		Count	11	34	33	78
			% within SNS3A_2responses	14.1%	43.6%	42.3%	100.0%

Figure 2. Tests and Measures for Ideo3 Variable, Categorical Level Moderate Views

<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>		<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>	
	Pearson Chi-Square	8.156c	2	0.017	
	Likelihood Ratio	8.397	2	0.015	
	Linear-by-Linear Association	7.901	1	0.005	
	N of Valid Cases	78			
<b>Symmetric Measures</b>				<b>Value</b>	<b>Approx. Sig.</b>
	Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	Zero-Order	-0.537	0.002
	N of Valid Cases			78	

## LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS

A linear regression analysis was completed to test the relationship between social ties and social activism. SNS3A\_2responses was the predictor variable and the created interval variable of social activism was the dependent variable. The social activism interval variable was created by adding all of the dichotomous variables in Table 7 together. This created the scale variable ranging from 0-15 where 0 indicated no social activism took place and 15 indicated the highest level of social activism took place within this research. The significance level for this relationship is .016 making this relationship statistically significant. The slope of this relationship is negative. This analysis found 2.1% of the social activism rate can be explained or predicted by social ties, in other words, you can predict the level of social activism by knowing the type of social tie the exposure to social issues came from. So this model postulates that when given a strong tie the level of social activism will be high whereas a weak tie will have a low rate of social activism.

Another linear regression analysis was completed to test the relationship between the scale variable of age and social activism. The relationship between these two variables is



statistically significant at the .014 level and also has a negative slope indicating a negative relationship. The independent variable in this relationship was age and the dependent variable was social activism. Age can explain the rate of social activism by .4%. When age increases the rate of social activism will decrease and vice versa. This indicates that the younger a person is the more social activism they will take place in, conversely, the older a person is the less social activism they will take part in. The figure 3 below encompasses the regression analysis completed for this relationship.

Figure 3. Linear Regression analysis for SNS3A\_2responses and Age

Model Summary				
Model 1	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.071a	0.005	0.004	3.549

a. Predictors: (Constant), AGE. What is your age?

ANOVAa						
Model 1		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	76.205	1	76.205	6.051	.014b
	Residual	14860.64	1180	12.594		
	Total	14936.85	1181			

a. Dependent Variable: Social\_Activism

b. Predictors: (Constant), AGE. What is your age?

Coefficientsa					
Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.384	0.276		15.894	0.000
AGE. What is your age?	-0.014	0.006	-0.071	-2.46	0.014

a. Dependent Variable: Social\_Activism

## ADDITIONAL ANALYSES

Additional analyses were conducted using further variables provided in the Pew Research Center dataset to identify alternate associations. Variable Q17F was tested against the categorical variable Social Activism in a cross tabulation. Q17F asked the question:

“Do you ever-Get asked on a social networking site to get involved in a political activity?  
[IF YES: Would you say that happens, daily, every few days, about once a week, or less often?]

1. Yes, Daily
2. Yes, every few days
3. Yes, once a week
4. Yes, less often
5. No”

The chi-square significance level was .000 indicating there is an association between the two variables. The gamma value was .647 indicating a strong positive relationship being present. When there is an increase in the amount of times a person is asked online to get involved in an activity there is an increase in the amount of social activism they participate in. In other words the more a person is asked to get involved in an activity the more they will participate in social activism. What this means for people and organizations is if they want to garner more support against a social issue or their cause, they would be wise to continue to ask people to participate in acts of social activism such as signing a petition or spreading awareness about an issue.

In reference to social activism behavior listed in this dataset, there were 2 different types: internet social activism and physical social activism. These different behaviors were independently measured against the independent variable, social ties (SNS3A\_2responses), to determine which/if any acts have an association with it. Four of the internet and two of the physical social activism behaviors were found to have a statistically significant relationship with social ties. Table 11 provides a list of these six acts.

Table 11. Social Activism Behaviors that have an association with Social Ties

Social Activism Behavior	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)	Gamma
SNS2B: Do you use Social Networking Sites/Twitter to post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues?	0.005	-0.372
Q22H: In the past 12 months have you - Commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue?	0.011	-0.349
Q16F: In the past 12 months have you worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community?	0.020	-0.311
SNS2D: Do you use Social Networking Sites/Twitter to encourage other people to vote?	0.025	-0.304
Q16C: In the past 12 months have you attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs?	0.027	-0.325
SNS2C: Do you use Social Networking Sites/Twitter to encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you?	0.043	-0.273

This table illustrates that all, with the exception of SNS2C, have a strong negative relationship with the type of social tie in which exposure to social issues is provided. SNS2C has a weak relationship with social ties nonetheless, it is still associated. When looking at the relationship, this means that those who are exposed to social issues through their strong ties are more likely to participate in the activities above, while those who are exposed to issues by their weak ties are less likely to participate in these activities.

The remaining activities were not found to be statistically significant but, did yield interesting information. The survey question asking respondents if they have participated in an

organized protest of any kind within the past 12 months (variable Q16B) was found to have the same percentages of 'yes' and 'no' for both weak and strong ties. So, the relationship between the informant and the informed does not have an effect on whether a person will participate in an organized protest.

Whereas one would assume there is an association between the type of social ties you get information from and behaviors such as 'reposting content related to political or social issues that were originally posted by someone else' (SNS2E) and 'liking or promoting material related to political or social issues that others have posted' (SNS2F), there is not. Another behavior thought to have an association with the social ties was 'signing a petition online'. The cross tabulation suggests there is no association between this behavior and the social tie from which you hear about the online petition from. Soliciting people to sign a petition may have more of an effect if you expose them to it more often such as the findings suggested earlier. The social ties variable was more associated with internet social activism than with physical social activism. This could be for multiple reasons such as it being easier, people trust their strong ties more than their weak ties, it's faster to do something on the internet as it takes less effort, or people may think this is the way to get things done in today's society, further analysis is needed to determine the actual reason for the association between these two variables.

This chapter has discussed the descriptive statistics for the overall sample for the Pew Research Center Dataset and data that rejects hypothesis 1. The cross tabulations completed to test hypothesis 2 were reviewed and discussed which also reject hypothesis 2. Linear regression analyses were also completed to test the relationships. Finally, additional analyses were discussed concerning relationships between alternate variables given in the dataset. The next

chapter will provide a conclusion of this research and discuss the applicability of Granovetter's strength of weak social ties theory.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the analyses completed for this research. This chapter will discuss the applicability of the findings and what they suggest. Also, the applicability of the strength of weak social ties theory will be discussed. Finally, further research to be conducted will be discussed.

This research aimed to determine if a Facebook users' social ties had an effect on the amount of social activism they would participate in. This was done using the strength of weak social ties theory proposed by Granovetter (1973) as a framework. This theory posits it is through our weak social ties that information is widely spread, allowing individuals to know more about what is going on around them. With this in mind, the first hypothesis proposed that people are exposed to social issues more so by their weak ties than their strong ties on Facebook. This hypothesis was rejected based off of this analysis using the data collected by the Pew Research Center. It was seen that Facebook users have been exposed to social issues by their strong social ties more than their weak social ties. This finding is similar to that of Onuch (2015) in that "social media works more for those individuals with existing strong ties" (Onuch 2015). This analysis did not attempt to identify the reason(s) as to why strong ties were more prevalent but it can be assumed that people trusted their strong ties more than their weak ties or were more concerned with what their strong social ties were involved in or discussing on their Facebook profiles. Further research can be conducted on this.

The second hypothesis proposed that exposure to social issues through weak social ties on Facebook will influence people to participate in social activism more. This hypothesis was rejected as well. The analysis found a strong negative association between the types of social ties

and social activism participation but, it was in the opposite direction proposed. Indicating when people are exposed to social issues by their strong social ties they are more likely to participate in social activism, while exposure from weak social ties is associated with low social activism rates. This relationship was tested not only through cross tabulation but also through a linear regression model which found the same conclusions; social ties are able to predict social activism rates as they have a strong negative association.

The strength of weak social ties theory is based on the idea that information is spread through the use of weak social ties. If a person does not reach out of their immediate circle, their strong ties, then they are less likely to be aware of what is going on in society. Weak ties help us broaden our knowledge base by talking to others who we do not talk to on a regular basis. Our society uses the internet and social networking sites heavily which allows for the creation of weak social ties to occur. Granovetter's theory was thought to be applicable as Facebook is about building and communicating with social networks. The social networks built on Facebook are comprised of both strong and weak ties. The thought was that the majority of one's network would consist of weak social ties. Those weak social ties would post about social issues which exposes everyone in their networks, strong and weak ties, to these issues. As a result, these posts would then influence or motivate their weak and strong ties to participate in social activism.

Although, this theory has presented a logical explanation as to how and why social ties are needed and utilized, this analysis did not find support for the application of this theory to Facebook users. If the theory was applicable here, the analyses would show associations between weak social ties and social activism for Facebook users. Instead exposure from strong social ties is what influences people to participate in social activism more often. Granovetter's (1973) theory is not a valid framework to apply to Facebook users.

There are a few reasons as to why this theory was not applicable in this research. One possibly being that people don't have enough time to participate in social activism due to packed schedules. If an issue is not deemed important to someone, which could be the case if it is something being presented by a weak tie, then they are less likely to take time to participate in social activism. Also, people may be less inclined to participate in something that their weak tie exposed them to out of fear or lack of trust. If there is an associated risk with the activity being presented it may deter people from participating, especially if it is coming from a weak social tie. Trust can play a big role in whether someone will participate in social activism as well. People are less inclined to participate in any activity with people they do not trust. It is possible that at the time this data was collected, society was not at a point where people were willing to trust or follow their weak ties into social activism.

Age and political views were partially associated with the relationship between social ties and social activism. The younger population, specifically ages 18-30, and those who have moderate political views were found more likely to participate in social activism if they were exposed to the social issues through a strong tie; older respondents and those with conservative and liberal views were not. Those seeking support for social issues, causes, or events should reach out to younger individuals to participate as this suggests a higher success rate. Additional statistically significant variables were not located, suggesting the demographics tested here do not affect the relationship between social ties and social activism.

The type of social tie did not have an effect on Facebook users when they were asked to participate in social activism online. The analyses found individuals who are asked more frequently are more likely to participate in social activism, independent from who asked them. This finding has implications for organizations who spend time reaching out to people in support



of an issue or cause. The more people they can reach out to, the more chances they have in gaining support for their cause regardless of their social ties with the people.

In this research, social activism is seen as both actions taken on the internet and actions done in person but, they were also looked at individually. There were more internet actions than physical actions associated with strong social ties and social activism. Implying people are doing more on the internet than in person and are committing these actions after being exposed by their strong ties. This in combination with the earlier finding that younger aged people are more likely to participate in social activism is in line with the opinions of the respondents from Obar's (2014) study in that youth don't normally attend physical events (Obar 2014). Due to the younger generations growing up with the internet they may see this as the main way of participating in social activism as the internet is the way they handle everything else in their lives.

The physical actions associated with strong social ties involve attending meetings, and working with other community members to solve problems. What this says is people are informed by their strong ties about issues and events and possibly, in response, attend meetings and work with others to solve these issues. Once they know more about an issue, it's plausible that they then reach out to other strong ties and continue the cycle. This is encouraging information as it shows the possibility of a collaboration of people working together to solve issues in our society which is in desperate need of restoration lately.

In a way, these findings speak to our current society. A society encompassing a young generation who is growing up on the internet and is under the impression or convinced that the internet is the way to take action against social issues and events mixed with an older generation

who hold more conservative views and don't utilize the internet as much. The utilization of strong ties to learn about social issues and events links the two generations.

These findings are not to say that people are not exposed to social issues by their weak social ties, it is to suggest that weak social ties are not what influences people to participate in social activism. Through the use of Facebook, strong social ties influence people to participate in social activism. This data was collected in 2012, four years ago when the population was a little different than what it is now. Our world is more internet driven now so further research is needed to determine if society still holds these current views and behaviors or if people are more apt to participate regardless of who told them about a social issue. Further research should focus on the type of social tie that drives people to take certain actions when distributing the survey. Future research could also attempt to determine why individuals decide not to participate in social activism.

## REFERENCES

- Bastos, Marco T., Dan Mercea, and Arthur Charpentier. 2015 "Tents, Tweets, and Events: The Interplay Between Ongoing Protests and Social Media." *Journal of Communication* 65:320-350. DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12145
- Black Lives Matter. 2015. "About Who We Are." Retrieved November 23, 2015 (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>)
- Bonilla, Yarimer and Jonathan Rosa. 2015. "#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42(1):4-17 DOI: 10.1111/amet.12112
- Brym, Robert, Melissa Godbout, Andreas Hoffbauer, Gabe Menard, and Tony Huiquan Zhang. 2014. "Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising." *The British Journal of Sociology* 65(2):266-292. DOI: 10.1111/1468-4446.12080
- Chen, Hsuan-Ting, Sun Ping, and Gan Chen. 2015. "Far from reach but near at hand: The role of social media for cross-national mobilization." *Computers in Human Behavior*. 53:443-451. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.052>
- Davison, Stephanie. 2015. "An Exploratory Study of Risk and Social Media: What Role Did Social Media Play in the Arab Spring Revolutions?" *Journal of Middle East Media* 11:2-33.
- Garcia-Galera, Dr. Maria-Carmen, Dr. Mercedes Del-Hoyo-Hurtado, and Dr. Cristobal Fernandez-Munoz. 2014. "Engaged Youth in the Internet. The Role of Social Networks in Social Active Participation." *Comunicar Journal* 43(22):34-43. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3916/C43-2014-03>

- Graham, Roderick. 2014. *The Digital Practices of African Americans: An Approach to Studying Cultural Change in the Information Society*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360-1380.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory*. 1:201-233. DOI: 10.2307/202051
- Harlow, Summer and Lei Guo. 2014. "Will the Revolution be Tweeted or Facebooked? Using Digital Communication Tools in Immigrant Activism." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19:463-478. DOI: 10.1111/jcc4.12062
- Katherine. 2014. Life With Dogs. "Update: Justice for Hope." Retrieved February 1, 2016 (<http://www.lifewithdogs.tv/2014/08/update-justice-for-hope/>)
- Kumar, Rajesh and Devam Thapa. 2014. "Social media as a catalyst for civil society movements in India: A study in Dehradun city." *New Media & Society* 17(8):1299-1316. DOI: 10.1177/1461444814523725
- Obar, Jonathan A. 2014. "Canadian Advocacy 2.0: An Analysis of Social Media Adoption and Perceived Affordances by Advocacy Groups Looking to Advance Activism in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 39(2):211-233.
- Onuch, Olga. 2015. "EuroMaidan Protests in Ukraine. Social Media Versus Social Networks." *Problem of Post-Communism* 62:217-235. DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2015.1037676
- Pew Research Center. 2012. "July 16-Aug. 7, 2012 – Civic Engagement" Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/datasets/august-2012-civic-engagement/>
- Sandoval-Almazan, Rodrigo and J.Ramon Gil-Garcia. 2014. "Towards cyberactivism 2.0? Understanding the use of social media and other information technologies for political

activism and social movements.” *Government Information Quarterly* 31:365-378. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.10.016>

Statista. 2015. “Number of Monthly active Facebook user worldwide as of 4th quarter 2015 (in Millions).” Retrieved January 30, 2016  
(<http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>)

Techopedia. “Dictionary: Social Networking Sites.” Retrieved November 23, 2015  
(<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/4956/social-networking-site-sns>)

Valenzuela, Sebastian, Arturo Arriagada, and Andres Scherman. 2012. “The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The Case of Chile.” *Journal of Communication* 62:299-314. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01635.x

Velasquez, Alcides and Robert Larose. 2015. “Social Media for Social Change: Social Media Political Efficacy and Activism in Student Activist Groups.” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53(3):456-474. DOI: 10.1080/08838151.2015.1054998

## VITA

Nichole Akai Giraldi  
 Old Dominion University  
 Department of Criminal Justice and Sociology  
 6000 Batten Arts & Letters  
 Norfolk, VA 23529  
 Ngira004@odu.edu

## EDUCATION

B.A. Criminal Justice, Old Dominion University	2009
B.A. Sociology, Old Dominion University,	2009

## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Member of the Golden Key International Honor Society	2008 – 2016
Member of Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society	2009 – 2016
Awarded Outstanding Teaching Assistant	2015

## WORK EXPERIENCE

GEICO Special Investigations Unit Information Analyst	2009 - Present
--	----------------

Complete analytical case assessments where fraudulent activity is suspected. Complete analyses on data to search for patterns and trends of fraudulent activity. Write reports to summarize my findings for investigators to utilize in their insurance fraud investigations

Teaching Assistant to Dr. Donald Smith	2015
--	------

Responded to student e-mails about class material. Graded and posted grades for the class assignments.