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INFO 200 BLOG #2: Information Community

Posted on [September 14, 2018](#) by [Jason Weekley](#)



Social Movements as Information Communities

On Saturday, September 8, 2018, thousands of people gathered in San Francisco and other cities across the United States to urge government leaders to switch to renewable energy sources and end the use of fossil fuels.

Organizers called it the largest climate march ever on the west coast (Milman 2018). Organizers would have had to gather, create, and disseminate information using various tools and methods to organize a collective movement of this size. For my research project, I have chosen to examine the information needs and behaviors of people who lead, organize, and participate in social movements like the one that recently

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took place in San Francisco. As part of my research, I will show how social movements function as information communities and explore the information seeking behaviors of participants within those communities.

By examining the key characteristics of information communities as articulated by Fisher and Durrance (2003), we can see how social movements function as information communities.

- Social movements are built around the creation, sharing, and distribution of information. Without the circulation of information, social movements would not be able to use mass mobilization tactics to bring attention to their movement.
- Social movements are often built around different focal points but unite in a common cause. Large scale movements often consist of smaller communities and organizations that focus on specific issues but work together to accomplish their goals
- Although social movements can be centered around a specific location, they are not limited to geographic boundaries. For example, movements that begin in a local community often gain national or international support.
- Although social movements have existed as an information community long before the creation of the internet, technology tools have enabled them to organize and disseminate information on a much larger scale. Social movements often use social media tools like Facebook and Twitter to rapidly organize demonstrations and share pertinent information to its members. In addition, social organizations create websites where community

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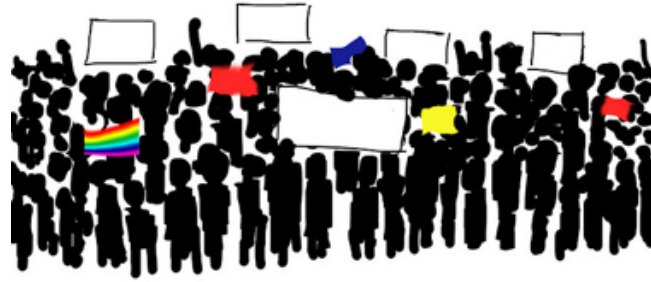
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members can access news articles, read blog posts, or participate in discussion forums.



When looking at social movements as information communities, I think the work of Christen and Levinson would be useful in examining the information seeking behaviors of participants within movements. According to Christen and Levinson, what constitutes a community can be explored from four angles: affinity, instrumental, primordial, and proximate (Fisher & Bishop, 2015). The information seeking behavior of individuals is most likely different depending on the context of the individual within the community. For example, if you are part of a social movement because you believe in the purpose and goals of the movement, then it is most likely that you already have a more in-depth understanding of the movement. On the other hand, if you are driven by family ties or just happen to come across a demonstration that is taking place in your neighborhood, then you might be less engaged in the community.

For example, Zeynep Tufekci in *Twitter & Teargas* (2017) comments that the use of social media has allowed movements to grow rapidly. As a result, large movements are often made up of people who are new to the causes and do not have the same informational background as someone who has devoted years to the movement.

Therefore, anticipating the information needs of someone in this community is not a one size fits all. Nevertheless, I think several information seeking behavior models and theories will be useful in researching social movements. In my next blog post I explore this aspect of social movements.

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