Political Public Relations in Advocacy:

Building Online Influence and Social Capital

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Abstract

This article explores how political public relations activities support advocacy efforts and allow organizations to communicate and partner with other organizations and individuals to affect change. Our study examined the organizational relationships that engaged in political advocacy to defeat the 2012 Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA). We argue that networked social capital provides a theoretical framework for broadening the study of relationships from a dyadic approach to one that encompasses the multitude of relationships necessary to bring about change. Structural hole theory was used to identify influential organizations based on their network position. Two methods including a hyperlink network analysis of organizational websites involved in the Internet Blackout and a semantic network analysis of the SOPA legislation media coverage revealed three findings: 1) diverse ties enhance political advocacy, 2) political public relations can enhance network positions of organizations, and 3) evidence shows that social media can be used strategically to capitalize on political activism.

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In a democratic society, individual activists can affect change. One person can take a stand, point to injustice or identify a problem. Yet, by joining organizations, individuals can magnify their personal efforts to create political change. Organizations can also become activists. Their efforts are also amplified when they join other organizations in an advocacy network to affect change. Organizations are a nexus for communicating about societal change because they can mobilize many different resources including individuals, stakeholders, employees or customers (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Additionally, they can utilize different organizational assets such as websites, social media channels, and traditional media to communicate their message to political leaders (Sweetser, 2011).

Political activism is a natural part of a democracy because it brings people and ideas together in "the wrangle of the marketplace" (Burke, 1969, p. 23). Public relations plays a vital role in fostering activism and maximizing the efforts of individuals and organizations in policy formation and change. This paper explores political public relations in two ways. First, we build a theoretical framework of networked social capital to explain the dynamics in political public relations. Such a framework moves the field's scholarship on relationships from a dyadic approach to one that considers a network of relationships necessary when enacting political change. Second, we study a coalition of political actors as they formed an online network to defeat the 2012 Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) legislation. The analysis finds that organizations positioned at structural holes in the network played a significant role when they formed relationships with a multitude of other actors.

The defeat SOPA campaign demonstrates the bridging role organizations can enact in their online relationships to influence the political process. This study provides insights for both political public relations practitioners and public relations scholars to understand the power and structure of online political networks. To do so, we were guided by the question of how an organization's structural position in the SOPA network influenced their role. We examined the hyperlink network of websites that protested SOPA and the semantic network of media coverage about the lobbying efforts of organizations for and against SOPA. The first section of the article provides a brief background of SOPA and applies the theoretical framework of networked social capital to political public relations practice and scholarship. The second section outlines the methodology used to study the hyperlink network of organizations involved in the campaign against SOPA and the semantic network analysis of the media coverage of organizations involved in both sides of the legislation. The final section reports the results of both network analyses and places the findings into a framework for understanding political public relations as a creator of social capital. Implications for both practitioners and scholars are discussed in this last section.

The SOPA/IPA Case Study: Online Political Public Relations

In 2011, House Bill 3261 was introduced to protect the copyright of materials distributed on the Internet. The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) bill sought to expand the ability of law enforcement to fight online trafficking in copyrighted intellectual property. US companies lose billions each year in revenue from online piracy, especially from overseas "pirate" websites. The Bill would allow the U.S. Department of Justice, as well as copyright holders, to seek court orders against pirate websites and the websites that link to them.

Supporters of the proposed legislation included some of the largest content providers such as NewsCorp, Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), Viacom, etc. The political narrative—"piracy is bad"—that accompanied this Bill focused on protecting American businesses and jobs. Opponents of the Bill told a different narrative. Internet companies such as Google, Yahoo, and First Amendment advocates framed SOPA as anti free speech. On January 18, 2012, technology organizations such as Wikipedia, Reddit, and BoingBoing, among several others, participated in a "blackout" protest and took down access to their websites as an act of opposition to the proposed SOPA legislation. Other organizations participated in the protest (e.g. Google) but did not completely take down their websites. Instead, they used their sites on that day to connect individuals to politicians.

A unique feature of the defeat SOPA campaign was facilitating citizen interaction with their elected representatives. Visitors to the defeat SOPA websites were directed to a message describing the SOPA legislation and then linked to their Congressional representatives. Millions of Americans followed these links, sent emails opposing SOPA, which ultimately brought down the government servers hosting Congressional websites (Sherry, 2012). The anti SOPA campaign demonstrates the core of what is conceptualized in this study concerning the bridging role organizations can play online to influence the political process. A justification for using this case (Yin, 2008) is that the network provides the opportunity to study how organizations engage in political public relations and in doing so, shows how they create social capital that becomes political capital. We begin with a review of literature on political public relations.

Public Relations as a Political Resource

Public relations has a role to play in political issues. Strategic messaging, channel

choice, lobbying, issues management, building coalitions, and media relations are just a few of the ways that public relations contributes to political activities (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011). Today, political public relations relies on online interactive functions such as social media, videos, and online petitions to carry out campaigns (Sweetser, 2011). Both individuals and organizations can draw upon public relations' resources when acting in the political sphere.

In the political public relations context, Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) asserted that organizations act as political actors "if they have political agendas and are trying to influence the political processes" (p. 10). Therefore, organizations involved in lobbying or forming coalitions are political actors. The organizations in the defeat SOPA network became political actors when they joined the protest. From a network perspective, organizations are capable of bridging different groups within a network to achieve political objectives. The process of "bridging" connects actors to other actors that are not already connected. This connection changes the flow of information in a network and some organizations gain influence within the network. Websites and social media tools hold the potential to bridge individuals and organizations.

The coalition of organizations that stopped the SOPA legislation used their websites as a bridge that linked individuals directly, or through other websites, to their legislators. The coalition used their network resources to achieve political objectives. Indeed, merely providing functional features on websites to bridge groups is insufficient and requires a critical concept to be considered—social capital. By investing and creating social capital through relationships in the network, organizations can draw from such social capital investments to engage in strategic political public relations to mobilize network resources. Social capital becomes political capital.

Social Capital and Public Relations: Political Resources Affecting Change

Smith (2005) noted that activism is a "process by which groups of people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions the activists find problematic" (p. 5). Pressure comes when activists mobilize resources as they participate in the wrangle of the marketplace of ideas. McCarthy and Zald (1977) argued that groups were only as successful in their advocacy as they are in their efforts to mobilize resources.

Scholars have clearly established that resources matter (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Oliver and Marwell (1992) argued that the organization's decision to mobilize money rather than mobilize volunteer's time from a public actually results in different organizational behaviors and goals. Likewise, using certain communication channels in activism may also affect advocacy outcomes. Public relations research has focused extensively on activists' use of websites (Coombs, 1998; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Youmans & York, 2012). The Internet and social media allow organizations to build public support and mobilize resources via citizens. Such mobilization builds social capital. Furthermore, Park, Thelwall, and Kluver (2005) found that websites function as "bridges" that connect a number of different types of actors to other actors—a point discussed further in the below section on structural holes.

Scholars have conceptualized the antecedents and outcomes of social capital at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Kianto & Waajakoski, 2010; Lin, 1999; Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011). Coleman (1988) described social capital as "productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible…Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" (p. 98). Coleman (1988) recognized the

variety of actors (individual and organizational), the significance of the social structures, as well as the autonomy individuals can have in their actions to capitalize on their social relations.

Hazleton and Kennan (2000) conceptualized a specific form of social capital for public relations: "the ability that organizations have of creating, maintaining and using relationships to achieve desirable organizational goals" (p. 322). At the core of conceptualizing social capital is the nature of public relations' focus on organizations and their relationships with individuals (publics). Yet, these conceptualizations of social capital consider the social relations within the context of a dense network—a group of actors that are connected to most of the other actors. Network theory, as described by Lin (1999, 2001, 2008), considers social capital in a broader perspective that recognizes actors are connected to others across networks.

Network Theory of Social Capital

Network theory can help us understand political activism and the significance of social capital online. We believe network social capital is an underused theoretical framework that can help scholars and practitioners provide an additional explanation of the relationship between publics, organizations, and political objectives. Such a framework moves beyond the dyadic approach of study an organization and a public as is considered in the organization–public relationship literature (OPR) (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ferguson, 1984). Network theory adds another layer to OPRs and reflects Broom, Casey and Ritchey's (1997) conception of interorganizational relationships as a fertile area of public relations research.

According to Lin (1999) social capital forms through the collective connections and resources of network actors. The perspective taken by Lin broadens the focus from

small groups to the expansiveness of a network or system. Such a view of the network recognizes that connections between actors are not bound to specific groups. Lin (2008) stated: "networked-based theory of social capital recognizes important patterns of social relations" (p. 59). Yet, social relations patterns are inherently unequal among actors in the network just as public resources are often unequal to organizational resources. The inequality can be seen in two forms: the amount of connections and the positions of the network actors. In a network, organizations have differing numbers of *contacts* based on their interests, abilities, and needs. The other inequality is the *positioning* of actors in the network. By recognizing the patterns of social relations of actors in a network, more credence can be given to those actors in a network that are positioned with connections that spread throughout a network and across multiple networks (Lin, 1999). For political public relations, knowing positions and connections helps us identify influential actors.

Burt's (1992) theorizing of social capital also provides insight into the value of organizations with multiple connections across a network. Burt's (2001) structural hole perspective of social capital recognizes individual actors can bridge network holes that exist between separated groups. A structural hole is the gap between groups and the bridge actor connects the groups. Connecting the structural hole by bridging unconnected groups provides the bridging actor "an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people, control the project that bring together people" (2001, p. 35). According to Burt (1992), an influential actor is positioned at a structural hole in the network and bridges groups across the system. The important factor in this perspective is the actor's position within the network makes them more influential in political advocacy.

For the case of the SOPA protest, organizations used their websites to introduce visitors to other websites. These other websites included news and information sites that provided more information about the legislation and protest. Social networking sites allowed visitors to share information about the protest, and other websites directed citizens to Congressional websites. The websites involved in the protest formed a hyperlink network connecting websites across different types of groups and organizations.

The scholarly attention on hyperlink networks relative to this study has focused on NGOs (Pilny & Shumate, 2012; Shumate, 2012; Shumate & Dewitt, 2008; Yang, 2012) and political communication (Kim, Barnett, & Park, 2010; Meraz, 2013). As previously stated, Lin (1999) suggested through the diversity of *contacts* and *positions,* actors create a pattern of connections, or a network structure. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the structure of the network in terms of organizations' contacts and positions to understand political influence. We posed the following research question to identify the *contacts* websites had with others and type of network structure created:

RQ1: What are the overall network structural features of the websites that participated in the SOPA protest?

Identifying Influential Actors Through Structural Holes Theory

Structural holes theory also gives credence to an actor's *position* and suggests the locus in the network can determine the flow of information (Burt, 1992, 2001). For example, website A links to website B that then links to website C; website B fills the structural hole and can broker the information shared to A and C (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Illustration of Structural Hole Concept
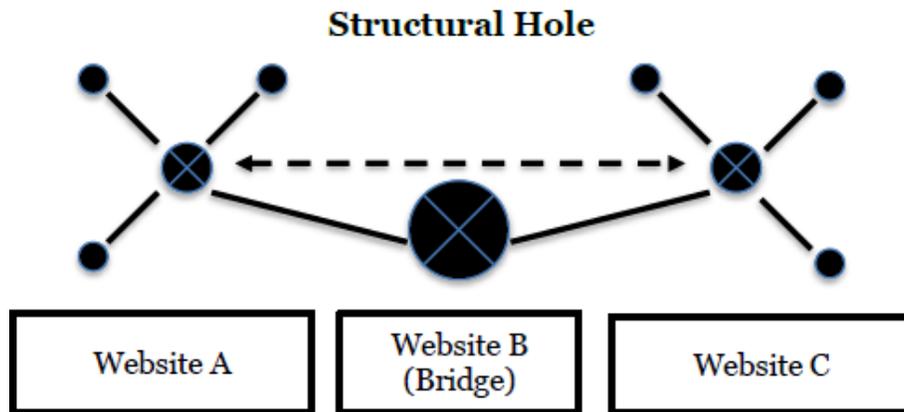
In network terms, website B is highly efficient and has a large effective size. Put another way, website B will have few redundant ties (efficient) but will have several ties that span the network (effective size). This means that organizations use their network position to maximize their influence in the political process.

In a hyperlink network, the website brokering a connection between two unconnected organizations plays a critical role in the network as they are able to direct individuals to specific other organizations (Shumate & Lipp, 2008). Yang (2012) found that structural holes characteristics varied between different types of NGOs. More politically focused, Meraz's (2013) network analysis of political blogs confirmed that politically moderate blogs play a bridging role between liberal (left-leaning) and conservative (right-leaning) blogs. Meraz further suggested that people reading "moderate blogs can benefit from their bridging function, receiving access to more heterogeneous information exchange" (p. 204). Therefore, to better understand how the defeat SOPA network connected different types of organizations, the second research question was posed:

RQ2: What are the structural holes characteristics of the network of websites that participated in the SOPA protest?

Online vs. Offline Influence

Studying the hyperlink network of the anti SOPA organizations is one lens for examining the multiple relationships involved in the legislative battle. A second way is to look at the media perceptions of the offline influence of organizations in the defeat SOPA movement. This portion of the research provided a means to triangulate findings because it examined if the online network leaders were also perceived to be the leaders by the media:

RQ3: Which defeat SOPA actors were featured in the media coverage of the issue?

Semantic network analysis can identify the co-occurrence of organizations mentioned within a news article, or more detailed, within paragraphs. Examining the co-occurrence of organizations mentioned within the news articles allows us to see the relationships of organizations as perceived by the media. Since media could influence the public's perception of salient social issues, the analysis of media coverage helps to partially illustrate the effect of the hyperlink networks. Public relations researchers have used the method to study media framing of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill (Schultz, Kleinnijenhuis, Oegema, Utz, & van Atteveldt, 2012) and the media coverage of nations' public diplomatic positions (Yang, Klyueva, & Taylor, 2012). Media coverage identified the organizations advocating for and against SOPA. Such analysis of the media coverage offers a unique opportunity to study the media's perception of the relationships between the organizations.

In summary, the hyperlink network that emerged to stop SOPA legislation provides an excellent example to study online political public relations. Furthermore, the media coverage of the organizations lobbying for and against this bill also presents

an opportunity to consider how the media coverage reflected the leading organizations advocating for and against the law. The hyperlink and semantic networks that emerged help us to understand what kinds of organizations worked together virtually and how certain organizations, by virtue of their network position, contacts and media coverage, mobilized both individuals and organizations to pressure the US Congress to withdraw SOPA. The next section details the methodology used in the triangulation of the data.

Method

To answer the research questions, we conducted a hyperlink analysis of the websites involved in the SOPA protest and semantic network analysis of organization mentioned in news articles about SOPA.

Hyperlink Network Analysis

Derived from social network analysis, hyperlink network analysis (HNA) examines hyperlinks, a basic structural element of the Internet that "play the role of an actor who could influence other websites' trust, prestige, authority, or credibility" (Park, 2003, p.53). HNA enables researchers to trace how websites form coalitions or cliques (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1997). Studies have found that hyperlinks reflect relationships among individuals or organizations, and that the hyperlinks of an organization's website are illustrative of its choice of alliances (Park, 2003; Shumate & Lipp, 2008). The method allows us to see the relationships among the members of the defeat SOPA movement.

In order to obtain the hyperlink data, a web crawler, SocSciBot 4 was employed. SocSciBot 4 can mine hyperlinks among websites and identify relationships in a network. The study commanded the crawler to mine two levels under the top-level

domain with a maximum of 10,000 queries per day. Next, the data were transformed

into a directional network data matrix.

Sample

To conduct a hyperlink analysis, we first identified a list of websites that

participated in the SOPA protest. "Fight for the Future", a nonprofit organization that

promotes and organizes campaigns for Internet freedom, published a list of

organizations' websites that confirmed their participation in the blackout (N = 184). One

researcher confirmed the list for only active websites and removed all inactive websites

from the list in Fall 2012. The final roster totaled 164 organizations' websites.

The defeat SOPA movement included a diverse mix of organizations. Nine

organizational types were identified within the sample. Table 1 reports the percentage of

each organizational type from the list of 164 websites. *Strike organizer* websites were

formed to share information about the SOPA protest, link other protesting websites

together, and direct site visitors to contact their Congressional representative by

submitting a form email or providing other congressional contact information to the

visitor. *News sites* were the traditional and online media outlets that were covering the

SOPA protest. *Social networking sites* included many of the popular social media sites

that allow users to interact with other users by sharing information. *Blogs* were

categorized separately because this type of new media does not share the networking

characteristics of social networking sites. The fifth category, *traditional activist*

organizations, encompassed websites of organizations that were normally engaged in

organizing and raising awareness about issues boarder than the SOPA protest. *Tech*

organizations were the websites representing technology or Internet-based companies.

The seventh category, *information sites,* represented organizations that shared access to

general information with no partisan or journalistic objective. *Entertainment sites* were mostly online comic or cartoon-like websites. The final categorization, *other,* represented the websites that were without a definable organizational type. The websites were coded to identify organizational type by two of the researchers. One researcher coded all the websites and the second member coded 20% of the sample to establish intercoder reliability of organizational type. The coders reached a Holsti's reliability score of .93.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Organizational Type.

Organizational Type	Example	Frequency	Percentage
Striker Organizer	sopastrike.com, action.eff.org	8	4.88%
News Site	wired.com rawstory.com	10	6.10%
Social Network Site	facebook.com tumblr.com	15	9.15%
Blog	blog.reddit.com libertyconfidential.com	32	19.51%
Traditional Activist Organization	aclu.org hrw.org	13	7.93%
Tech Organizations	en.wikipedia.org google.com	32	19.51%
Information Site	universalsubtitles.org theskaterack.com	12	7.32%
Entertainment Site	theoatmeal.com thechive.com	38	23.17%
Other	handi-maid.com	4	2.44%

Measures

Once the data were in the network matrix form, they were analyzed with UCINET (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). To answer the research questions, two general types of network measures were used: descriptive measures of network structure and structural hole measures. These network measures are reviewed further below.

Descriptive measures of network structure. The first research question required an assessment of the hyperlink network structure. *In-degree centrality* measures the number of links a website receives from other websites. *Out-degree centrality* measures the number of links a website sends to other websites. The *E-I index* assesses the embeddedness of groups by "comparing the number of ties within groups and between groups" (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005, chapter 8, para. 37).

Structural hole measures. The second network measure to address RQ2, structural holes (Burt, 1992), was measured with four variables. *Effective size* measures the links across multiple regions of a network (Borgatti, Jones, & Everett, 1998). *Efficiency* indicates that an organization has few redundant ties across a network (Burt, 1992). This occurs with websites when website A links to website B that is not already linked to website A's other contacts. *Constraint* accounts for the stress placed on a focal organization that is connected to actors who are already connected (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). Burt's (1992) notion of constraint recognizes that organizations are constrained from having an "advantage" to brokering information if the actor's connections (or alters) are already connected. Constraint with websites occurs when website A links to websites B and C who are already connected; therefore, website A cannot broker B and C. H*ierarchy* considers the concentration of the constraint on an actor as such that it seeks to determine if the constraint is from a single alter or from multiple alters (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). A high hierarchy occurs when the constraint is sourced from a single alter. Low hierarchy occurs when the constraint is from multiple alters. In the case of this network, actors connected to a number of "regions" in the network, who have efficient ties other actors, and experience little

constraint from their actors, can play a significant role in mobilizing individuals through multiple websites. These organizations are central to mobilizing the online movement.

Semantic Network Analysis Procedures

RQ3 sought to compare the hyperlink network with a semantic network of how media covered the defeat SOPA protest. Media coverage is often an outcome of public relations efforts. The study examined the media most likely to be consumed by members of Congress. The team identified six influential newspapers read by members of Congress based on Erdos and Mordan's (2011) study of opinion leaders: *Washington Post, Politico, Roll Call, New York Times, USA Today,* and *Washington Times*. A LexisNexis search using the terms "Stop Online Piracy Act" and "SOPA" generated 407 newspaper articles published between October 8, 2011 and March 8, 2012. To qualify for inclusion in the semantic network analysis, articles had to mention the search terms twice. This ensured the articles focused on the legislation and were not merely mentioning the legislation as part of another topic. A total of 153 articles met the criteria for inclusion.

Two coders analyzed the 153 articles looking for the names of the defeat SOPA organizations. The coders identified all pairs of names co-occurring in a story. For instance, a paragraph might list the names of five or six organizations in the defeat SOPA movement (Google, Facebook, Electronic Freedom Frontier and Yahoo). The coders would treat the list as a mini network of collaborators in the minds of the media. Additionally, to understand how the media constructed the pro SOPA organizations, the coders also counted pro SOPA groups. The names used in the stories provide insight into which organizations the media perceived to be leading the pro SOPA lobby. To

ensure reliability of identifying the names, the coders independently coded 15% of the articles and achieved a Holsti's intercoder reliability of .92.

The unit of the analysis was a "paragraph" that mentioned the involved organizations on both sides of the legislation. The coders created co-occurrences network matrices that were analyzed using UCINET (Borgatti et al., 2002), which provided network visualizations and calculations of centrality. In summary, the two parts of the study identified the influential network actors through their hyperlink relationships and then examined organizational linkages in the media coverage of influential newspapers.

The Defeat SOPA Network Results

RQ1 directs attention to the overall structural features of the network of organizational websites that participated in the SOPA protest. The overall density of the network, which is the total number of links relative to the total possible, was .033, meaning 3.3% of all possible links existed (869 ties existed). This indicates that organizations built highly selective relationships and the network lacks a high level of interconnections. Specifically, 62.78% of existing web links are outlinks (organizations created a link to other organizations that they believed were influential) and 47.36% links are inlinks, (some organizations actively received others' attention in this system). The result shows that the average indegree centrality is 5.30 (SD=10.92) and the outdegree centrality is 5.29 (SD=12.58).

The E-I index examined if the nine types of organizations interact with other types of organizations by measuring the ratios between different groups (external) and within a group (internal). The calculation normalizes to a value with a range of -1.0 (only internal relationships) to +1.0 (only external relationships) (Krackhardt & Stern, 1988).

For this network, the E-I index value is 0.715 (expected value is 0.697), suggesting external linkages between organization types clearly dominated the network. Specifically, this measure indicates websites in the network sent outbound links to organization types other than their own type of organization. Among the nine different types of organizations, *strike organizers* (E-I index=0.816) had the highest E-I index values, suggesting these organizations are actively building connections with more diverse types of organizations in the network. In contrast, *technology organizations* (E-I index=0.532) had the lowest tendency to build connections with other types of organizations in the network.

Addressing RQ1, these findings suggest a handful of organizations took a leadership role in organizing the political action. The pattern of hyperlinked relationships is highly concentrated and polarized. Table 2 lists the top five organizations with highest indegree centrality and outdegree centrality. Sopastrike.com had the most outdegree centrality (107.00) and Facebook.com had the most indegree centrality (82.00). Sopastrike.com was a *strike organizer* that played a central role in connecting other protesters and directing visitors to their elected political representatives. Facebook.com, on the other hand, is a social media platform that all types of political activists used to share information about the protest. In addition, there was a strong tendency in this network to actively build connections *with diverse organizations*. Many organizations are linking with others that are very different in mission, type, and profit motive. Overall, this network brings together a diverse group of organizations and they developed their inter-group connections through this political activism.

Table 2. Organizations with Highest Outdegree and Indegree Centralities.

	Top Five High Outdegree Centrality	Outdegree Centrality	Top Five High Indegree Centrality	Indegree Centrality
	Sopastrike.com	107.00	Facebook.com	82.00
	Freelancedesignz.com	88.00	Wikipedia.org	67.00
	Wordpress.com	82.00	Google.com	58.00
	Freeinternetpress.com	23.00	Americancensorship.org	39.00
	Blog.reddit.com	18.00	Wordpress.org	36.00
Mean[a]		5.29		5.30
SD [a]		12.58		10.92

a. Mean and standard deviation for the entire network of 164 organizational websites

RQ2 provides a description of the structural holes characteristics of the network of websites that participated in the SOPA protest. We assessed the presence or absence of structural holes in the overall network of ties among participating organizations. Structural holes are a necessary feature of any advocacy network. The structural holes measure allows us to assess the extent to which organizations do or do not access structural holes in the total network structure.

Effsize is the number of contacts a focal organization has, minus the average number of ties that each of those contacts has to each other. This measure controls the effect of redundancy and illustrates actors' non-redundant connections. As demonstrated by Table 3, Sopastrike.com has the largest effsize (106.85) and therefore exposes to the largest among of non-redundant connections in this network (See Figure 2 for illustration). In other words, not only is Sopastrike.com well connected, it also connects with actors who are isolated from each other, allowing this website to enjoy a higher level of strategic importance in the advocacy network.

Table 3. Structural Hole Measures for Representative Organizations.

Organization	Org Type	Effsize	Efficiency	Constraint	Hierarchy
Sopastrike.com	Strike Organizer	106.85	0.92	0.09	0.51
Wired.com	News Site	20.71	0.69	0.14	0.12
Facebook	SNS	76.83	0.94	0.07	0.36
BoingBoing	Blogs	22.02	0.76	0.16	0.18
Creative Commons	Traditional Activist Group	26.91	0.75	0.13	0.18
Wordpress.org	Tech Organization	35.54	0.83	0.13	0.29
Theoatmeal.com	Entertainment	4.80	0.53	0.40	0.11

After taking into consideration the ego-networks, Facebook emerged as the organization with the largest efficiency within this group. In other words, with a relatively small number of connections, Facebook enjoys more non-redundant ties.

In contrast, constraint measures the extent to which an organization has built relationships with others who are already connected. Boingboing.com seems to face a high constraint level in this network. Hierarchy expands on the concept of constraint, and assumes that if the total constraint on an organization is concentrated in a specific actor, the organization has a higher level of hierarchy value. In this group, Sopastrike.com actually has a high hierarchy level. Overall, the hierarchy level in this network is 0.65, suggesting that most organizations in this network rely on a handful of actors for non-redundant connections (e.g., sopastrike.com). In other words, this network could fall prey to external interruptions (imagine if one of the sites went down). When interactions rely on a handful of actors, the removal of these actors can be disastrous for a network. This weakness may be due to the fact that as a social movement network, the SOPA network has formed over a short period of time, and

actors had almost no history of working together.

The HNA results revealed two points of interest to political public relations. First, Sopastrike.com played a significant role in the network and in the final outcome of the advocacy efforts. Second, Facebook played a central role in the movement for mobilizing citizen interactions with their elected representatives suggesting that social media can indeed provide a platform for social action. Together, these findings illustrate the process through which networked actors build collective connections and mobilize resources. The process may contribute to the generation of networked social capital, which creates momentum for the social movement. The media also played a role in reporting the organizations involved in lobbying for and against SOPA. The following section reports the results of the semantic network analysis that examined media coverage.

Media Coverage of the SOPA Legislation

The third research question sought to triangulate the findings from the HNA by asking which organizations were the most central in the media coverage. When any organization is mentioned in news coverage, it is being privileged and singled out as relevant. The HNA showed that hundreds of organizations participated in the SOPA debate and some organizations emerged as more important than others. Media coverage can also tell us which ones were perceived by the media to be the most important in the advocacy efforts.

The Network

The results from the semantic network analysis of print coverage indicate Google, Congress, Wikipedia, Facebook, and Reddit were the five most central organizations. This is because they are most likely to co-occur with other organizations in different

paragraphs. These organizations played leading roles in the media's narrative about the stop SOPA protest. The centrality degrees are reported in Table 4. Many of these technology organizations—which were opposed to the legislation—were mentioned together and with other organizations. However, this was not the case at different times during the media coverage of SOPA.

Table 4. Top Five Central Organizations in Media Coverage Network.

Organization	Degree of Centrality
Google (tech)	319.00
Congress (government)	219.00
Wikipedia (tech)	169.00
Facebook (social networking)	137.00
Reddit (blog)	109.00

Evolution of Media Coverage Over Time

To better understand how evolving media coverage constructed the networks of organizations around SOPA, the researchers aggregated the data into three periods: *pre SOPA* (October 8 to December 30, 2011), *SOPA* (December 31, 2011 to February 3, 2012), and *post SOPA* (February 4 to March 8, 2012). A longitudinal analysis shows how the media coverage evolved as organizations began to voice their positions toward the legislation.

The calculation of central normative degrees of the pre SOPA period suggests Google (5.165), Congress (3.964), Yahoo (2.462), Chamber of Commerce (2.222), and Facebook (2.162) were the most central actors. The Chamber of Commerce is the only organization on this list that supported SOPA.

As the SOPA lobbying campaigns peaked in January 2012, Wikipedia (4.737) and Reddit (2.819) replaced Yahoo and the Chamber of Commerce on the list of most central

organizations. Wikipedia was frequently mentioned with their co-founder Jimmy Wales as the spokesperson for the anti SOPA campaign. Reddit was active in facilitating information about the anti SOPA protest and emerged as a central actor. The same set of actors (Google, Congress, Wikipedia, Reddit, & Facebook) maintained their roles in the semantic network in the post SOPA analysis. The next section discusses how the findings further our understanding of political public relations and networked social capital.

Discussion of Implications for Theory and Practice

Speaking to the future of political public relations, Kiousis and Strömbäck (2011) acknowledged, "the growing influence of social media and technology in political public relations" (p. 319). Networks of individuals and organizations can cooperate to bring about societal change. Today, websites, social media channels, and traditional media are used to communicate political messages (Sweetser, 2011). Through these channels, leaders will emerge, relationships will link both similar (homophilous) and diverse (heterogeneous) groups, and new ways of organizing will be made visible. The diverse relationships of the online world can create a networked form of social capital that can influence the political world. We see three major implications for political public relations practitioners and theorists in our findings.

Diverse Networks Enhance Political Advocacy

McCaughey and Ayer (2003) posited that technology brings together people who share similar beliefs (homophily) to act. By taking a social network perspective to examining the influence of technology in political public relations, we challenge such notions and assert that diversity is crucial for the mobilization of social capital online. Lin (1999) noted that the diversity of connections and network positions mediates

actors' abilities to mobilize resources. We have found evidence for Lin's claims in the SOPA network where the connections to different organization types gave actors access to different resources. The variety of organizations involved in the protest, nine different types, may have helped the network achieve its goal.

This finding has implications for political public relations practitioners and theorists. Diverse networks are valuable for bringing new resources to a political advocacy effort. Creating coalitions that span many different organizational types and functions can create enhanced reach and bring in people, actions, and ideas that strengthen a position on a political issue. Practitioners should consider casting a wide net as they build coalitions. They should also consider including organizations with online expertise in their coalitions. Understanding the technical features necessary to connect individuals to political actors is critical in the digital age of political public relations.

Political Public Relations Maximizes the Benefits of Structural Holes

This study identified social capital as an outcome of diverse network structures. Unlike some scholars (Putnam, 1995) who conceptualize social capital as exclusive to cohesive networks, we argue that diverse networks that are filled with structural holes are even more crucial for social movements than redundant ties among groups. This is because although ties developed in social movement networks are not necessarily stable and resilient to external pressures, they introduce unfamiliar actors into the unexplored territories of social relationships. Granovetter (1985) long ago noticed the possible detrimental effect of network cohesion, and argued that although strong ties enable actors to have reliable support, strong ties also constrain actors' opportunities for new information. In the context of computer-mediated social movements, the diverse weak

ties may bring in the benefit of diverse social resources and information flow that contribute to the generation of another type of social capital.

This study showed that certain websites were filling the structural holes in the network. Sopastrike.com was positioned at a structural hole in the network and connected organizations that would not otherwise be connected. McCarthy and Zald (1977) explained that activists are successful when they mobilize resources. We found new activist organizations, such as Sopastrike.com, were successful in mobilizing resources and positioning the organization's website as a central actor in the hyperlink network. The finding accompanies Meraz (2013) and Yang (2012) who have found evidence for the theory of structural holes in the online context. The filling of structural holes also has practical significance provided that the connections between websites determines the flow of information and paths individuals follow during political causes.

Political public relations practitioners should note how Sopastrike.com made their social capital functional by recognizing other organizations involved in the protest and making a connection to them. Figure 2 shows that Sopastrike.com mobilized and connected actors from across the network. A strategy to build and expend social capital with other organizations in a coalition as well as the decision to link directly with others requires strategic relationship building. Practitioners can tap the social capital of other organizations by including them in the network.

** Insert Figure 2 About Here **

The semantic data revealed that Sopastrike.com was not recognized by the media as a central actor in the movement. Over the six-month period, Sopastrike.com was mentioned less than 10 times in 153 articles about SOPA. Nonetheless, the coalition relied on the media coverage of prominent organizations such as Wikipedia and Google

to represent those opposed to SOPA. Sopastrike.com was able to focus its resources on connecting the coalition, not generating media coverage. Political public relations practitioners should recognize the value of differentiating roles that organizations play in a large campaign. Part of the value of a diverse network is the congregation of different specialties. Practitioners should strategically allocate network resources to support coordination of actions and the maximization of actors' individual contributions.

Evidence of the Role of Social Media in Political Activism

Kent (2008) warned that both public relations practitioners and scholars need to support their claims of social media power. Our analysis provides such evidence.

Social media by definition are about being social and sharing our activities with others. Facebook played a crucial role in having users share information about the protest. It is likely that the high frequency of inbound links received by the domain Facebook.com occurred because organizations linked to the site to allow citizens to share their involvement in the SOPA protest with their Facebook friends. The defeat SOPA campaign was dependent on individuals sharing information about the legislation and engaging others to contact elected officials. It is likely that when people shared their own involvement or wrote about their actions with their friends via social media, this sparked an interest for others to also become involved. Practitioners must offer participants of a campaign easy to use methods for sharing their involvement to further interest among others. Future research of online activism and political public relations could further study the importance of social media as a place for others to share with or engage about a political action.

Conclusions: From Social Capital to Political Capital

Political public relations is more than elections strategy and tactics. In some ways, the SOPA battle might be a turning point in theorizing and practicing political public relations. The pro SOPA side featured high profile figures (Former Senator Chris Dodd, the Chamber of Commerce, and large entertainment companies included in this study) and used many of the traditional political public relations tactics: lobbyists, spokespersons, and interviews with elite media outlets including the ones studied in the content analysis. The defeat SOPA side used a different strategy. It built a diverse coalition of organizations with different strengths that fostered social capital that became political capital. Traditional activists, high tech firms, blogs, search engine companies, and social media sites brought their unique strengths and constituencies to the advocacy effort. However, it is important to note that the defeat of SOPA is not only attributed to the coalition of organizational relationships. SOPA was defeated because *millions of Americans contacted their Congressional leaders to demand the withdrawal of the bill.* Social media users, not the most politically active group, shared information, formed a position on SOPA, and then emailed their Congressional representative. They are now part of a network that can be called upon in the future to activate on other issues.

Yet, these findings come with limitations. The list of websites used for this analysis is not exhaustive. Instead, the researchers elected to use a list of websites that had publicly confirmed their participation in the protest. The semantic network analysis was limited by the researchers' ability to differentiate the tone of media coverage. No valance of the co-occurrences was calculated thus limiting the network to measuring only co-occurrence and not strength/direction of attribution. Finally, we did not conduct

a HNA for the pro SOPA movement and our findings only speak to the relationships on one side of the debate.

Nevertheless, we believe this paper provides information that is useful to public relations practitioners who work in the political arena. Our advice to public relations practitioners who want to engage in advocacy is threefold: 1) build a diverse network of organizations by mixing online and offline organizations, 2) create a mechanism for the public to share information about the issues and 3) create easy ways for the public to contact to their Congressional representative.

Our findings also provide directions for public relations researchers interested in studying political public relations. The introduction of hyperlink analysis as a methodological tool for studying activist networks may prove beneficial for other studies. By studying the network relationships, we can extend public relations theory building past dyadic relationships and study systems of relations. Additionally, the semantic network analysis of the SOPA media coverage triangulated the HNA findings. The media's perception of the relationships between organizations did not mirror the relationships between organizations online. Scholars should consider the implications of why the coverage did not accurately describe the significant actors in the social movement. Finally, this paper provides additional evidence that social media play a role in activism.

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Figure 2. The Ego-Network of Sopastrike.com (9 organization types are designated with different shape & color, see notes)

Notes: Circle=org type 1, Square =org type 2, Up Triangle = org type 3, Box = org type 4, Down Triangle = org type 5, Circle-in-Box = org type 6, Diamond= org type 7, Plus=org type 8, Thing= org type 9