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A Call to Arms: A Social Movements Perspective on Issue Surfacing on Social Media

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present a preliminary model of the emergence of an "issue", initiated by the thought of an individual, communicated via the internet, modified and embraced by new participants, and surfaced into the social consciousness of a large number of people ready to mobilize resources to enact change within their environment. In other words, the theory attempts to understand how a single message, floating in the Sargasso Sea of information, evolves into a movement that demands a particular type of response from private citizens, corporate entities, or governments. The focus of this model is therefore on how an "issue" comes to be surfaced. Key elements of the emergent model include program, identity, and standing claims articulated within messages and the valence, richness and reach of responses to the messages. We briefly consider subsequent consequences of "issue" surfacing for resource mobilization.

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present a preliminary model of the emergence of an “issue”, initiated by the thought of an individual, communicated via the internet, modified and embraced by new participants, and surfaced into the social consciousness of a large number of people ready to mobilize resources to enact change within their environment. In other words, the theory attempts to understand how a single message, floating in the Sargasso Sea of information, evolves into a movement that demands a particular type of response from private citizens, corporate entities, or governments. The focus of this model is therefore on how an “issue” comes to be surfaced. Key elements of the emergent model include program, identity, and standing claims articulated within messages and the valence, richness and reach of responses to the messages. We briefly consider subsequent consequences of “issue” surfacing for resource mobilization.

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Introduction

Communication via social media serves a range of relational and instrumental purposes. The purpose of this manuscript is to shed light on instrumental communication via social media within commercial and political contexts. Extant research on impacts of information and communication technologies on instrumental behavior in collectives has investigated on groups of known actors within a hierarchical structure (Fjermestad and Hiltz, 2000; Dennis, Wixom et al., 2001; Baltes, Dickson et al., 2002). On social media though, problem identification and solving is typically undertaken by loosely-connected actors outside the purview of traditional organizational hierarchies or similar structuring principles. Further, extant group decision-making research has mainly considered problem solving rather than problem identification (Quaadgras and Golden-Biddle, 2010). On social media though, problem-identification or “issue” surfacing necessarily precedes problem-solving and collectives are constituted by and constitute the “issue”.

The perspective adopted here is that individuals experiencing a dissatisfaction or grievance, what C. Wright Mills (1959) terms “private troubles”, engage with like-minded others on social media to translate though “private troubles” into what Mills terms “public

issues” and subsequently to mobilize resources toward resolving those “issues”. “Issues have to do with matters that transcend ... the individual” (Mills, 1959: 8). They are matters that threaten a collectively-held value. “Issues” are not automatically recognized, even in the presence of widespread personal troubles though, surfacing instead through negotiation within collectives:

“Often there is debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus if only because it is the very nature of the issue; unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary men” (Mills, 1959: 8-9).

The focal question driving this research is: How do private perceptions of a wrong foment to the level of an “issue”? To understand how private troubles ascend to the status of public issues and then mobilize resources toward resolving them, we look to social movement literature. Social movements have been defined as “collective enterprises to establish a new order of life” (Giddens, 1984: 204). Typically applied to the study of contentious politics, we appropriate the social movement lens to investigate instrumental communicative action ranging from the relatively mild consumer activism that occurs on brand communities to the more serious political activism that occurs through blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. The ensuing manuscript represents the start of a grounded theory effort to understand such instrumental action on social media. Data being collected from brand communities and political action blogs, tweets, and pages is being viewed through a social movement lens. Specifically, we seek to understand how individuals’ problems (1) acquire the status of issues of importance to the collective and (2) garner resources from powerful others. The arena of this investigation is primarily

Starbuck's MyStarbucksIdea brand community. Insights are augmented by less formalized observations of political processes such as the protest of the Iranian elections, the recent Coffee Party movement, and the 2008 U.S. Presidential election.

In the following sections, we begin by re-visiting relevant literature on problem identification, its highlighting limitations in informing understanding of instrumental communication on social media lacking a shared institutional or organizational context. We then describe key ideas of the social movement perspective pertinent to identifying qualities of communications that lead to surfacing "issues" (problem identification) on social media. We offer a preliminary view of data we are collecting and synthesizing and derive an initial model of "issue" surfacing. We conclude with future directions for this project and identifying ways in which insights here may inform future research.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

To the extent that prior literature has focused on problem identification, they have tended to employ the vocabulary of problem "recognition," communicating the a priori existence of an objective problem. For example, Weick's work on sensemaking has focused on actors' ability to notice child abuse (Weick, 1995) or the dangers posed by one's work environment (Weick, 1993). Gallupe and DeSanctis (1988) investigated the extent to which group decision support systems facilitated groups' identification of a problem, when the symptoms of the problem were known. Problem finders in this arena of research have had the benefit of organizational histories, organizational plans, and referent others – internal and external to the organization – against whom one's own situation could be benchmarked (Pounds, 1969).

In a study of problem formulation by managers, Lyles and Mitroff (1980) observed four approaches varying from a single believed-to-be “optimal” formulation, a single expertise-based problem formulation, integrative problem formulation, and dialectical formulation. They observed that only a minority of organizations (26%) pursued the latter two, more synthetic approaches. Thus, problem identification efforts in conventional organizations appear biased toward input from a few select individuals within the organization. A cursory examination of “issues” on social media suggest a very different dynamic there – something is deemed to be a problem or an “issue” because of the breadth of individuals who experience it as a problem or “issue”.

While Kiesler and Sproull (1982) explicitly applied a constructivist lens to problem finding, their analysis was still premised on change in a reference environment and “correct” interpretation of associated cues. However, identification of “problems” outside the organizational arena need not be accompanied by changes in the environment. For example, there was no landmark event or environmental change that gave rise to the civil rights or gay marriage movements. Changes in aspects of the landscape may have been more conducive to *noticing* such “problems”, but the “problems” themselves had existed for quite a while. Thus, the nature of instrumental communicative action on social media, which occurs outside the context of shared histories and structures common to organizations, calls for a new lens for studying problem identification.

A SOCIAL MOVEMENTS LENS ON PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Social movements have been defined as “collective enterprises to establish a new order of life” (Giddens, 1984: 204). Instrumental communication via social media can be

conceptualized as social movements in that “social movements do not characteristically operate within fixed locales, and positioning within them does not have the clarity of definition associated with ‘roles’” (Giddens, 1984: 204). Social movements are a special case of collective action. It is purposive, specifically oriented toward evoking or blocking some form of change. It is undertaken by an alliance of people lacking an a priori structuring that characterizes political parties or interest groups. Examples of movements are quests for gay rights, consumer rights, trade unionism, and feminism.

The social movement literature is a social constructionist perspective that eschews an a priori or objective “validity” or “value”. In point of fact, this is the challenge of social media – how do we determine whose reality is “valid” and what resources have “value”? These are post hoc social constructions, attained via discussion and negotiation. The social movements lens is therefore a viable one through which to view the instrumental discourse that occurs on social media.

A key insight from the social movement literature is attributes of proponents’ messages that garner the peer attention necessary to mobilize a movement. Tilly (2004) proposed that the effectiveness with which proponents articulate three types of claims drives the attention that the messages attract. First, proponents articulate *program claims*. These “involve stated support for or opposition to actual or proposed actions” (Tilly, 2006: 292). Second, proponents articulate *identity claims*, i.e., membership in a category of people. Third, proponents articulate *standing claims*. These entail establishing relationships between the claimant and others that enjoy legitimacy or power.

For some authors, a central focus of social movements is change through affirmation by

others, an “authentic” form of sociability based on mutual respect and understanding (Polletta, 2000). Public attention for an issue is an end unto itself and whether such attentions “are harbingers of ... changes ... is a moot question” (Giddens, 1991: 228). For others, movements are about resource mobilization (e.g., Edwards and McCarthy 2004). Regardless, a key element of a movement is peers’ authentication of individuals’ concerns, which then flags it as a public “issue.” This is an essential antecedent to a movement’s ability to mobilize resources from powerful others (Tilly, 1998).

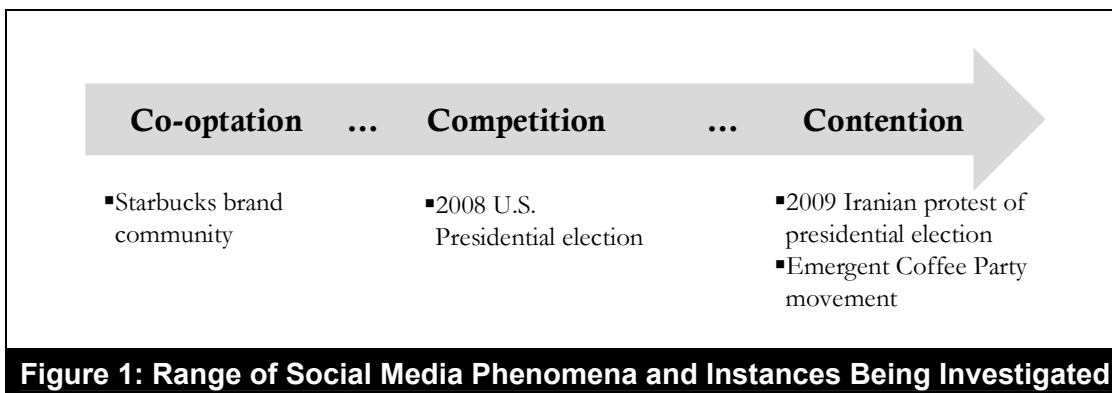
RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS

This research adopts an inductive approach to understanding how “issues” are surfaced in unstructured or loosely structured environments, i.e., environments devoid of a shared organizational or institutional context. We derive theoretical insights from investigating problem identification or “issue” surfacing across a range of instrumental communication on the internet. The immediate focus of this research is to better understand the nature of each of claims articulated in individual messages, the responses they evoke, and the momentum the responses convey to the escalation of an “issue.”

Research Sites

Research sites described in Figure 1 depict the range of phenomena to which the social movement lens is being appropriated. MyStarbucksIdea is a brand community on which Starbucks co-opts customers into the mission of the firm, i.e., identifying new product and service offerings and devising new strategies for the firm. The site also enables Starbucks to consolidate and keep tabs on customers’ expressions of dissatisfaction. In

contrast, the 2008 presidential campaign represents a competition, whereas protests surrounding the Iranian presidential election, and the emergent Coffee Party movement represent true movements, marked by contention. Tilly (1998: 467) distinguishes campaigns from movements thus: “A social movement is a kind of campaign... Whereas an electoral campaign pays off chiefly in the votes that finally result from it, a social movement pays off in the effective transmission of the message.” This range of phenomena should offer rich and varied insights into how “issues” are surfaced.



Methods

This research is focusing on the individual messages posted/being posted at these four sites, described briefly in Table 1. Current insights are based on a preliminary analysis of postings and responses to posts at each of the four sites. The intent is to sample postings to each site more systematically and to code postings within the sample that initiate a discussion thread – or fail to do so. Insights reported below are based largely on analyses of the set of 20 threads currently flagged as “Ideas in Action” at MyStarbucksIdea and 20 others that have not yet been vetted by Starbucks but were

matched to the initial 20 on submission date and idea category. Characteristics of these 40 threads are summarized in Appendix A. Insights were augmented by the first author's observations, gleaned from informal monitoring of the three political action sites over an 18 month period. As this research progresses, all four sites will be subjected to a more extensive, formalized investigation.

Table 1: Sources of Data	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>MyStarbucksIdea.com</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Site is wholly owned by Starbucks.com ▪ 1st Qtr 2008 – launched website ▪ Encourages customers to make comments about Starbucks or recommend new product and services. ▪ Ideas suggested by customers. Starbucks places promising suggestions <i>Under Review</i>. ▪ Ideas subsequently elevated by Starbucks' "Idea Partners" (employees) to a <i>Coming Soon, Reviewed, or Launched</i> status ▪ Data captured by visiting the site 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Coffee Party Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Started by Annabel Park who was frustrated with media coverage of the Tea Party, their political position and the developing media story that the tea party represented most Americans ▪ 1/26/10 – Founded as a Facebook group ▪ Within 6 weeks had over 155,000 members ▪ 3/12/10 – Participants met in over 350 local events ▪ 9/24/10 – Group holds first national convention ▪ Data captured by visiting the Facebook page
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Iran Revolution on Twitter</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6/12/09 – Iran holds 10th presidential election ▪ 6/13/09 – Ahmadinejad declared winner ▪ 6/14/09 – Protest supporting opposition candidate Mousavi begin and become increasingly violent. ▪ 6/16/09 – All journalist banned from reporting protest ▪ Twitter becomes dominant form of communication within Iran as the government shuts down other media ▪ Foreign media rely on Twitter for information ▪ Twitter feeds captured using www.coveritlive.com 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>2008 U.S. Presidential Election</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 7 Republicans and 8 Democrats participated in their respective primaries ▪ John McCain (R) and Barack Obama (D) became the nominees ▪ Often considered the first Presidential election that used Web 2.0 ▪ Data captured by visiting the Facebook page

SURFACING AN “ISSUE”

The Initial Message

As noted earlier, the social movement literature proposes that the elevation of a message to the level of an “issue” and the momentum the issue gathers is a function of the claims articulated by the proponent. The literature identified three types of claims, specifically, program, identity, and standing claims (Tilly, 2004). We now investigate the extent to which these claims were represented in the instrumental communicative actions studied and the nature of the specific claims articulated.

Program Claims

Examination of the content of messages initiating the MyStarbucksIdea “Ideas in Action” (Appendix A, Table A1) revealed that these messages, without exception, articulate a program claim, i.e., a specific course of action that the proponent favors or disfavors. Further investigation of a matched sample of ideas that were not validated by Starbucks’ employees (Table A2) revealed that articulation of a program claim was indeed universal.

Our second observation about program claims is that they vary in their complexity, even within a brand community. The request for a decaf iced coffee in Figure 2, for example, was relatively simple. In contrast, *Suz01* in Figure 3 requests the ability to purchase a coffee for a remote co-worker. (This service was later termed by another member of the burgeoning social movement an “e-drink”.) Honoring this request – not to be confused with a simple gift-card as will be apparent from subsequent communications – required several problems be solved – e.g., payment, delivery, security. Respondents identified




these problems and offered solutions to them. This responsiveness belies Olson's (1965) belief that the free-rider problem would permeate social movements: specifically, if a social movement delivered a collective good without an individual's contribution, why would the individual be motivated to contribute? Here, we observe that not only do individuals respond to calls to action that benefit them, but also contribute insights that might be beneficial to the "power other" from whom they are attempting to mobilize resources. Of particular note is the caution voiced by *oxox999* that an email coupon might be duplicated, engendering a loss for Starbucks and the thought the contributor put into crafting a remedy for such a situation.





Figure 2: "Decaf Iced Coffee" for "Pregnant Women"

Identity Claims


An identity is "an actor's experience of a category," where a category is "a set of actors distinguished by a single criterion" (Tilly, 1998: 456). This refers to labeling the collective of whom the contributing member is an instantiation. Examples of such categories are graduate students, women in science, or African Americans.

Vote **I'll buy you a drink" - remotely**  Share   

 Posted on 3/20/2008 11:45 PM
by **Suz01**

 **42,760** points

I work at home as a remote employee. There have been many times that I have wanted to treat a co-worker to a Starbucks for helping me out on a project, or just to brighten their day. Wouldn't it be neat if you could purchase a drink for someone via the Starbucks web site? The recipient gets an email stating, for example, "Suzanne bought you a drink!" The recipient prints the email (with a barcode) and takes it to their nearest Starbucks to redeem.

 Comments [273]

mic1011 Good idea, but this is basically a gift card. Those do exist.
3/20/2008 11:52 PM

Suz01 It's not a gift card, since you can't email a gift card to a friend. It is more convenient than a gift card, in that you don't have to go into the store to purchase it, and then mail it to someone (and pay postage for the transaction). It's a much quicker, easier way to treat a friend who lives long distance.
3/22/2008 4:33 PM

bgweorg I like this idea! How about a widget for web sites and blogs that links to your starbucks card? Like a PayPal donate button can add \$ to your account without showing your account #, the sbux widget could add \$5 to your sbux card balance.
4/6/2008 9:35 AM

oscubed Even better - make it a facebook gadget. "Buy me a coffee" or "Buy your friend a coffee"....
5/7/2008 6:41 PM

That would be way cool :) I'd even write it if you hired me to :)

oxox999 What an awesome idea.
5/10/2008 4:13 PM

I wonder though if xeroxed, it could be redeemed more than once?! They would have to put a code in that cancels the offer after it was redeemed. They would have to have a message come up that this coupon had already been redeemed and when it happened. OMG the CS problems that could be generated from this....

Figure 3: A Complex Program Claim for "Remote Workers"

Note: Double lines between comments indicate intervening comments from the thread are suppressed in this exhibit.

An identity statement communicates to the target audience that they are not dealing with a single individual but a collective representing a large number of individuals. It emphasizes attributes of that collective that imply their ability to exercise collective sanctions. In Figure 2, *hyorkstillwate* identifies with the category of pregnant women in her request for decaf iced coffee. In Figure 3, *Suz01* represents the category of remote employees.

“Identity claims consist of assertions that ‘we’ – the claimants – constitute a unified force to be reckoned with” (Tilly, 2006: 292). If accepted, identity claims establish connections with other members of the category. Note that respondent *one_luv_hawaii* in Figure 4 reiterates *hyorkstillwate*’s initial identity claim from Figure 2 (“...I became pregnant”). Note also that the respondent validates *hyorkstillwate*’s expression of personal trouble associated with caffeine consumption while pregnant. As such validation of the identity category–personal trouble association increases, we see the message elevated from the status of personal trouble to public “issue” (readers allocated the message 2,060 points).

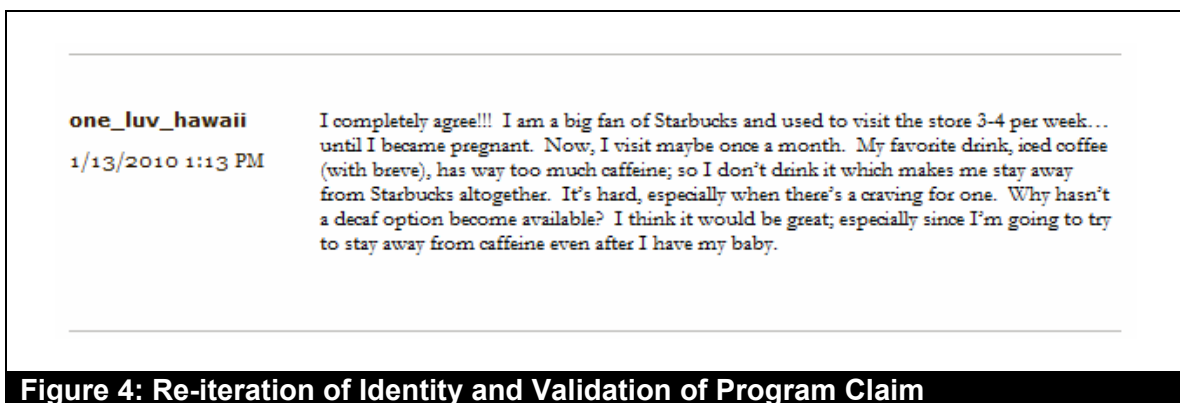


Figure 4: Re-iteration of Identity and Validation of Program Claim

“The public representation of [an actor’s identity] often takes the form of a shared story,

a narrative” (Tilly, 1998: 456). This storytelling is particularly visible in *one_luv_hawaii*'s description of her plight, because of her “craving” for caffeine, which will not be assuaged even after her pregnancy because she will be staying away from caffeine.

Standing Claims

These “assert ties and similarities to other political actors” (Tilly, 2006: 292) that validate claimants’ program. This refers to efforts to co-opt others, for example, suffragists’ and abolitionists’ initially joint battle for the right to vote. Invoking similar claimants signals increases in the number of subscribers’ to the “issue”. Standing claims entail invoking or referencing sympathetic powerful others. Such claims represent a patronage-dependent repertoire, which entails claimants “appealing to immediately available power holders to convey grievances or settle disputes” (Tilly, 1986: 391). Invoking powerful others increases perceived validity of the cause and confidence that claims will be heard. Action mediated by such expert knowledge reduces actors’ risk (Giddens, 1991). For example, in Figure 5, *gobo* challenges *hyorkstillwate*'s claim that pregnant women should not consume caffeine and *buxbar* responds by invoking doctors and the medical establishment, who represent “systems of accumulate expertise” and “sources of authority” (Giddens, 1991: 3).

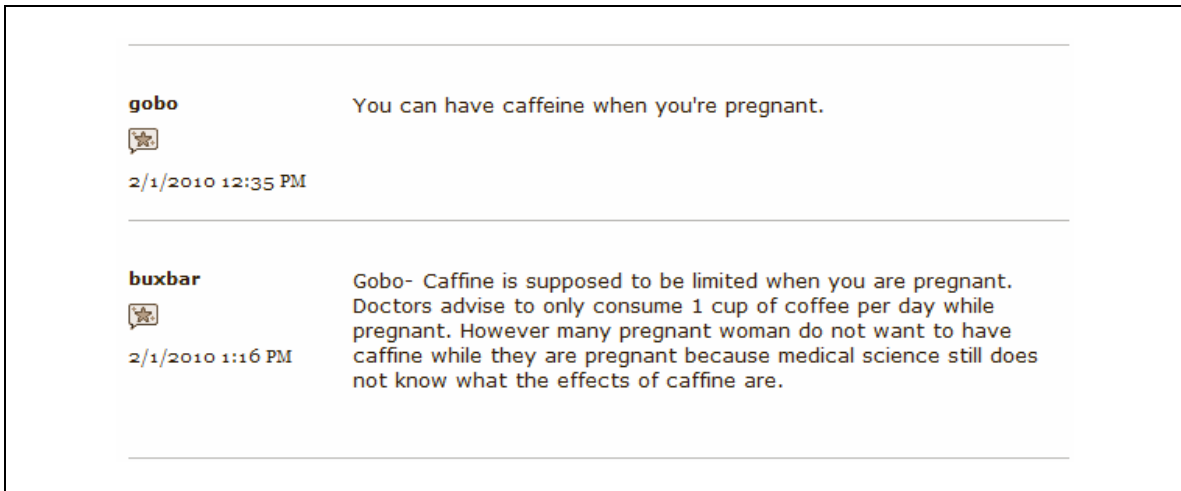


Figure 5: Defense of an Identity-based Program Claim by Invoking an “Expert”

Standing claims may also invoke claimants who have won a related battle. Thus, in Figure 6, we see the emergent Coffee Party movement assert their ties to Martin Luther King and signal the similarity of their cause to the civil rights movement. Such standing claims seek legitimacy based on the similarity of program claims to prior program claims that have been legitimized by a broad section of society.



Figure 6: Co-opting the Previously-Legitimized Civil Rights Movement

Standing claims about involvement of family, friends, and others with whom claimants have embedded ties have been found to be particularly effective in sustaining, even expanding activism (Shemtov, 2003). This is particularly true in the case of risky causes, where networks of trust “pool risks and provide aid to unfortunate members” who suffer sanctions from the powerful constituents from whom the movement seeks concessions (Tilly, 2000: 11). For example, in the face of the serious threats to life and liberty, we see protesters of the Iranian election call attention to the solidarity displayed by “families” coming out to the protests in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Tweeting About Embedded Ties in Risky Iran Elections Protest Movement

Response Attributes

“Issues” surface as initial claims diffuse through a social milieu, are challenged, modified, and/or accepted. These responses are themselves claims that elaborate or qualify earlier claims, evoking further response or lack thereof. Responses also differ in the format in which they are presented. We note three response attributes in the communications observed – valence, richness, and reach.

Response Valence

Valence is the respondent’s expression of attractiveness or likeability of claims articulated. For example, on MyStarbucksIdea, individuals can click an icon for “thumbs-

up” or “thumbs-down” to signal their reaction to the “issue” (see Figures 2 and 3). Votes are aggregated below these icons into the total points associated with the “issue”. Similarly, Facebook has a “like” button. Other sites such as IdeaTorrent, SourceForge’s location for developers’ enhancement requests, enable other developers to signal positive, negative, or *neutral* reactions to enhancement requests. Alternatively, respondents may signal their reactions via text messages or comments. Acceptance of initial claims represents a positive response; challenges indicate a negative response. Thus, while *mic1011*’s response to *Suz01* in Figure 3 appears to have a positive tone, it actually voices a challenge to *Suz01*’s program claim, asserting the counter-claim that the e-drink suggestion was basically a gift card, which was already available from Starbucks. *Suz01* responds by clarifying and elaborating on her initial program claim.

Response Richness

Response richness is the degree to which readers of that response can unambiguously ascertain the intent of the respondent (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Votes, for example, are a more ambiguous signal than comments. A respondent might have a negative response to program, identity, or relationship claims articulated or some combination thereof. While comments enable the articulation of specific challenges, votes do not. Initial claimants and supporters can subsequently respond to these challenges, whereas positive or negative votes do not offer talking points that advance the conversation. For example, the “Furry Friends” post that suggested Starbucks provide “communal bowls for water in the summer ... or maybe the occasional free treat dog biscuit” (summarized in Table A2 of Appendix A), garnered -90 points. The post attracted a total of three comments – one positive, one negative, and one neutral (from a Starbucks’ Idea

Partner). First, it is not clear whether the -90 points means nine negative votes (each vote is worth 10 points) or some combination of positive and negative votes that aggregate to a net of -90 points. Thus, it is impossible to ascertain the level of support for an “issue” from votes alone. For example, if 50 people supported the idea and 59 resisted it (yielding the -90 points), knowledge that 50 other people were similarly concerned about being able to share their Starbucks experience with their pets could have mobilized other sympathizers to overcome the resisters.

Further, because of the effort entailed, positive responses that are richly articulated signal a heightened level of respondent commitment to the initial claim. Even negative responses, when richly articulated, signal respondents’ commitment to *oppose* the initial claim, paradoxically validating the status of the initial claim as an “issue” (Latour, 1988).

Response Reach

Web 2.0 allows respondents to an initial claim to broadcast the initial claim, along with their response to others. For example, a Twitter message can be re-tweeted, email can be disseminated via a distribution list or Listservs, or bloggers can hypertext to other sites to support those sites’ messages. This ability to broadcast recruits supporters – or resisters – to the claim. In Figure 8, for example, the appeal to re-tweet (“PLEASE RT RT”) the call to capture identities and actions of the “Basijis,” Iranian militia groups believed to be responsible for enacting violence on protesters, represents a credible threat to the militia members, as such documentation could make them a target for retribution or serve as evidence in potential war crimes trials. Militia actions were, in fact, captured and documented – publicly posted – on various blogs (e.g.,

<http://margbarbasiji.blogspot.com/>). Further, these extensions of movement reach through the modality on which the movement originates (Twitter, blogs, community posts) and across modalities (e.g., Twitter to blogs), diffuses information about the cause more widely, recruiting additional supporters (as well as resisters) and garnering momentum for the movement.



A SYNTHESIZED MODEL OF INSTRUMENTAL COMMUNICATION

The primary objective of this study was to understand the process of “issue” surfacing. Earlier analyses identified attributes of the initial message and responses. We now consider how those attributes contribute to the escalation of a private “trouble” into a public “issue.” The emergent model, which speaks briefly also the relationship between “issue” surfacing and resource mobilization, is summarized in Figure 9.

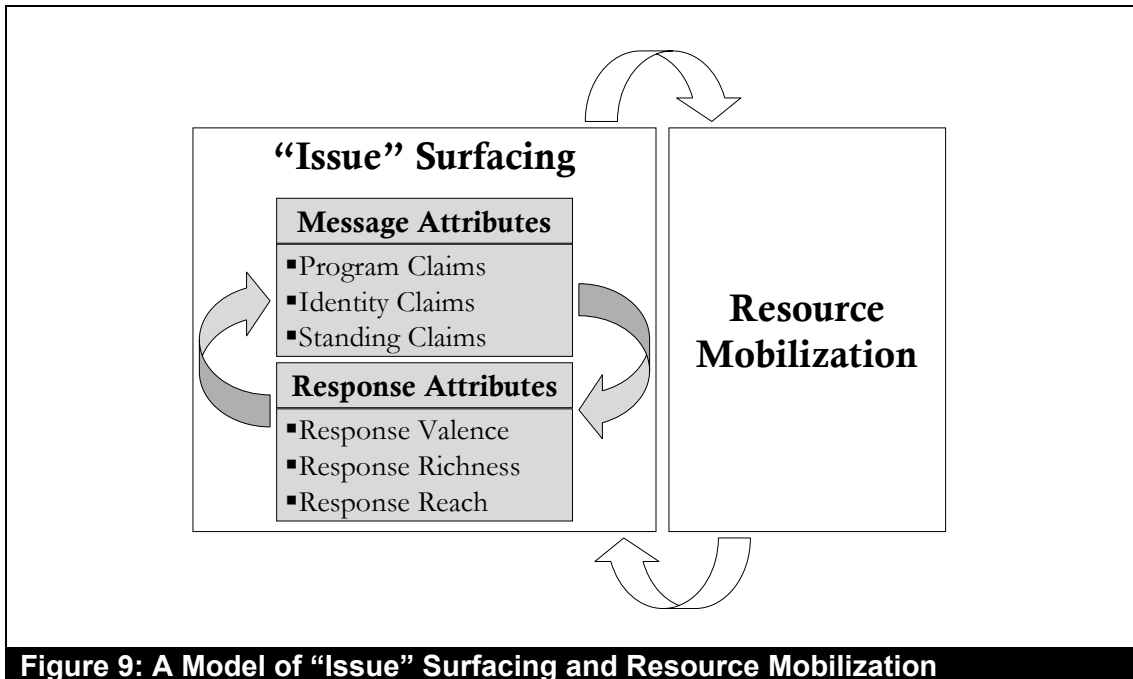


Figure 9: A Model of “Issue” Surfacing and Resource Mobilization

Consequences of Message Attributes in “Issue” Surfacing

The Role of Program Claims

Earlier, we observed that program claims varied in their level of complexity. We also noted that more complex program claims appeared to evoke a greater number of responses as individuals attempted to tease apart the separate aspects of the claim – to identify different impediments to implementation, constituents impacted by those impediments, and propose solutions. Why would this occur? Olson’s (1965) belief in individuals’ proclivity to free-ride in the production of collective goods notwithstanding, others have suggested that sharing is a human imperative (e.g., Dixon 2000).

What is it about complex program claims then that appear to promote conversation? It is

possible that different people with different skill sets perceive and relate to the disparate problems underlying complex program claims. For example, *oscubed* (fourth respondent in Figure 3), who suggests making the e-drink a “Facebook gadget,” clearly has some programming competence. “Judgments of self-efficacy also determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences” (Bandura, 1982: 123). Individuals were found to be most creative when working on complex, challenging tasks (Oldham and Cummings 1996). Thus, program claims with underlying problems that are complex and challenging, and appeal to a wide range of individuals’ distinctive competencies, invite those individuals to articulate and enact their self-efficacy, thereby co-opting them into the movement. Notably, responses to complex claims will be rich because simply casting a vote does not permit the kind of self-efficacy articulations and enactments individuals will be motivated to contribute.

Proposition 1: Complex program claims will evoke a greater number of rich responses.

The Role of Identity Claims

In research on conventional problem solving, awareness of individuals’ identity is believed to be anathema to effective problem solving. Extant literature on technology support for group problem solving has focused on the ability of technology to mask individuals’ identities, to enable a “participant’s identity to ‘get lost in the crowd’” (Dennis and Wixom, 2001/2002: 240). Such technology-based anonymity is believed to minimize personal influence, facilitating collectives’ adoption of the “group” identity (Whitworth and Felton, 1999). It has been found to curtail unequal participation by team

members and facilitate more complete information transfer (McLeod, 1992). Individuals in dispersed teams in which the identity of contributors was not revealed experienced less of a shift in their preferences – a key indicator of “groupthink” – following a discussion than did those working in a face-to-face condition (Sia et al., 2002). Yet, anonymity has also been found to be de-individualizing (Jessup et al., 1990), increasing group conflict, social loafing, and inability to attain consensus (Valacich et al., 1992). Lack of awareness of the identity of discussion participants was found to inhibit consensus-building in the presence of disparate member opinions (Kahai et al., 1998).

In the social movement literature, revelation of individuals’ identity is paramount. Identity claims are believed to be particularly important in environments lacking an institutional context because such environments are largely devoid of personal cues (Tilly, 2006). The connotation of revealed identity is not that the persona of the individual be revealed, though this information is certainly available via richer social media such as Facebook. Rather, the focus is on revealing one’s membership in specific categories.

Category-based connections are beneficial as individuals tend to allocate discretionary resources preferentially to others within the same category (Tajfel, et al., 1971). A shared identity also evokes favorable attributions by others. For example, Hindu clerks attributed generosity of shopkeepers they were told were Hindus to internal dispositions and cheating to external forces; when told the focal shopkeeper was Muslim though, the Hindu clerks attributed the shopkeeper’s generosity to external forces and cheating to internal dispositions (Taylor and Jaggi, 1974). Further, a stated identity reduces members’ uncertainties about behaviors expected of them (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) and non-members’ uncertainty about what they may expect from members (Hogg and

Terry, 2000; Hsu and Hannan, 2005). This enhances others' sense of the claimant's predictability. Further, given limited cognitive resources, social entities tend to allocate those available to monitoring *similar* others (Labianca et al., 2001). Consequently, social movements have been found to diffuse through similar others. For example, Soule (1997) found use of shantytowns as a device to induce corporate divestment in apartheid South Africa diffused through educational institutions of similar size and prestige. Thus, on MyStarbucksIdea, we see pregnant women responding to the pregnant woman, remote workers and others interacting remotely with people they care about responding to the remote worker.

Proposition 2: Identity claims of one's membership in a social category will evoke positive responses from members of that category.

Then, identity claims are inherently strategic: "The identities people deploy in political claim-making consist of contingent relationships with other people rather than inbuilt personal traits; they therefore alter as political networks, opportunities, and strategies shift" (Tilly, 1998). Multiple identities enable organizations to address the expectations of multiple stakeholders and adapt to different environments (Pratt and Foreman 2000; Brickson, 2005). Multiple identities permit multivocality and robust action, enabling claimants justify action from multiple perspectives (Padgett and Ansell, 1993).

Competing identity can engender interpersonal conflict as was noted in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's strike in the mid 1990s (Glynn, 2000).

Pluralistic identity claims will therefore work under one of two circumstances. The first circumstance, as occurred with the subject of Padgett's and Ansell's (1993) investigation

– the Medici government, is a segregated audience. When target audiences do not talk with one another, the disparate identity claims that underlie robust action are tenable. For example, Figure 10 captures two different Facebook pages – Veterans for Obama and Women for Obama. Supporters of Obama’s election campaign sought to appeal to these are two distinct groups. The separate Facebook pages enable supporters recruit members of these disparate target audiences with different messages – program, identity, and standing claims. Thus, the program claim in the first page is support of veterans’ families while the program claim in the second is education for children.



Figure 10: Two Disparate Facebook Pages Targeting Different Audiences

Proposition 3: Identity claims of membership in multiple social categories will evoke positive responses from members of those categories when members of those categories are segregated from one another.

The second circumstance is when pluralistic identities are synergized, i.e., “are tightly related or aligned with one another” (Pratt and Foreman, 2000: 23). Such synergy or alignment is manifest in a common thread or theme underlying the disparate identity claims that make them all simultaneously defensible. For example, the Facebook post of the Coffee Party in Figure 11 expressly appeals to pluralism and communicates synthesis of pluralistic identities via the motto stamped on the penny.



Figure 11: Coffee Party’s Synthesis of Pluralistic Claims Symbolized in Penny

Proposition 4: Identity claims of membership in multiple social categories will evoke positive responses from members of those categories when the statement speaks to how those categories relate to one another.

Standing Claims

Earlier, we identified three types of standing claims – claims that tacitly relate the claimant to domain “experts” such as medical professionals, claims that tacitly relate the claimant to claimants of successful movements, and claims that explicitly draw attention

to embedded ties among participants. Individuals attempting to initiate a social movement do so from a position of powerlessness. Co-opting powerful others to their cause is an important strategy in getting the cause off the ground (Tilly, 1986). As noted earlier, widely-recognized experts represent a source of power in modern society. For example, the admonition about the potentially harmful effects of tobacco smoke by the then Surgeon General, Luther Terry, was a powerful stimulus to the anti-tobacco movement in the mid 1960s.

Proposition 5: Standing claims that reference experts will evoke positive responses.

In addition to co-opting individuals and collectives who symbolize previously successful causes, standing claims may reference portions of the program claim that are meeting with success. Thus, Polletta (2000: 369) notes of the civil rights movement: “Legal proceedings inside the courtroom supplemented the rights-talk that took place outside it by publicly recognizing people’s willingness to ‘stand up’ to white oppression... Legal victories were interpreted as prods to further action.”

Proposition 6: Standing claims that reference claimants of successful movements will evoke positive responses.

Polletta (2000) also found that complementing direct demands of powerful constituents, e.g., federal and local officials, with efforts to gain recognition from “congregation, kin, and community” was most effective in evoking change. As noted earlier, drawing attention to supporters’ embedded ties signals the pooling of risk (Tilly, 2000), which is particularly beneficial in inducing support to high-risk causes. Drawing attention to supporters’ embedded ties in the context of risky causes also highlights supporters’

commitment to the movement as such participation increases the scope of negative impact participants may sustain. For example, participation by both parents in the Iran protests could well have rendered their children orphans, whereas participation by a single parent would have left the children with a source of support.

Proposition 7: Standing claims that draw attention to the embedded ties among supporters will be particularly useful in high-risk contexts.

Response Attributes

Response Valence

Earlier, we observed that reactions to a message may be positive, negative, or neutral. Unless exclusively positive responses elaborate on the program, identity, or standing claims of an earlier message, they will end a “movement” as the initial claimant and other prospective supporters feel that support is universal. Note such an ending is not necessarily a signal that the movement has failed, just that the conversation has exhausted itself – that the “issue” has ceased to be an “issue”.

Proposition 8: When responses are exclusively positive, unless they also elaborate on identity, standing, or program claims from earlier messages, the “issue” will die out.

Exclusively negative responses or the absence of any response, on the other hand, signals opposition to or lack of interest in the claim. This will deter the claimant from pursuing claims further. Under each of these circumstances, the initial claimant is likely to abandon the “issue”.

Proposition 9: When responses are exclusively negative or no responses appear, the “issue” will die out.

In contrast, when support for the initial claim is coupled with some negative responses, the initial claimant and supporters will be motivated to re-articulate and clarify their claims, giving the “issue” momentum. The initial program claim articulated in the thread presented in Appendix B, reflecting *Naromo*’s frustration with Starbucks’ change in policy regarding how the free coffee reward would be implemented, is closer to true protest than most appearing on MyStarbucksIdea. What is particularly notable though is the stridently dissenting voices of *SBUXCMM* (responses #14-23), *bowlingb* (#29), *nyc4me* (#31), *Kristyna* (#53), *mirandolynn* (#55), and *betterbefore* (#58) as dissent targeting other Starbucks’ customers was not particularly common. Nonetheless, the dissent does appear to serve the function of stimulating discussion that might otherwise have died out. Some dissenters, e.g., *bowlingb*, explicitly challenge supporters to articulate specific program claims. This culminates in the very detailed posting by *qbnjava* (#34). Finally, *betterbefore*’s post elicits a supportive response from a Starbucks’ Idea Partner – *sbx_sto* (#59) that closes down the discussion.

Whereas literature on computer-mediated communication has flagged flaming, i.e., speaking “incessantly and/or rabidly on some relatively uninteresting subject or with a patently ridiculous attitude” (Steele, 1983:65), as a negative correlate of electronic communication, this research suggests that negative remarks, even when stridently articulated and “with a patently ridiculous attitude” might be beneficial. The relative success of this conversation marked by flaming may be attributable, in large part, to the steering provided by respondents such as Melody (co-incidentally flagged by Starbucks

as a “top commenter” and as someone who has contributed an idea that was implemented) after each negative interjection. Without such skillful steering, the movement may well have collapsed.

Proposition 10: Challenges to a claim in the presence of acceptances of the claim will engender counter-claims re-articulating and clarifying the program, identity, and standing claims underlying the “issue”.

Response Richness

As noted earlier, rich responses offer more cues to which prospective supporters or resisters can react. Such responses therefore stimulate re-articulation and elaboration of claims, keeping the “issue” alive. Rich responses may also supply critical information, as appears in Figure 12. Such information provides ground support for the movement, thereby keeping it alive.

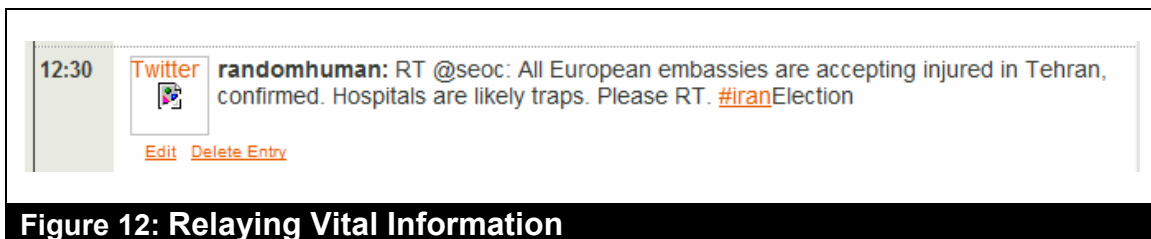


Figure 12: Relaying Vital Information

Proposition 11: Richer response articulations will lead to re-articulations and elaborations of the program, identity, standing claims underlying the “issue”.

Response Reach

Responses with greater reach will increase the possibility of getting the message out to new people. Further, different demographics tend to dominate different modalities. For example, the largest growth demographic on Twitter in 2009 was people 24 and younger (Wilson, 2010). For the same period, the largest growth demographic on Facebook was 35-54 year olds (Corbett, 2009). Consequently, responses with a wider reach may also result in different demographics being targeted. As these different demographics may have somewhat different perspectives, the claims underlying an “issue” may be further elaborated and modified.

Proposition 12: Responses with a more extensive reach will lead to re-articulations and elaborations of the program, identity, and standing claims underlying the “issue”.

Resource Mobilization

“Social movement pays off in the effective transmission of the message that its program’s supporters are (1) worthy, (2) unified, (3) numerous, and (4) committed ... a visibly low value on any one of them discredits the whole movement” (Tilly, 1998: 467). Worthiness is represented in supporters’ “sober demeanor, neat clothing, presence of clergy, dignitaries, and mothers with children” (Tilly, 2006: 4). Essentially, worthiness derives from conveying adherence to mainstream values to the extent possible. Unity is signaled by symbols such as badges and uniforms, chants and songs (Tilly, 2006). Numbers speaks to the ability to demonstrate a large quantity of supporters. Commitment is signaled by the effort entailed in participation in the movement.

On social media, worthiness may be judged by the extent to which program claims violate conventional mores; unity by the absence of dissension among supporters regarding claims articulated. Numbers and commitment relates directly to the extensiveness of support and the richness with which that support is communicated. Resource mobilization via social media has yet to be systematically examined. Nonetheless, we observe preliminary evidence of supporters' signals of unity, numbers, and commitment. For example, in Figure 13, we observe respondents to *Suz01*'s initial post in Figure 3 calling Starbuck's attention to the extensiveness of support for the request, manifest in the duration of the conversation and the number of comments.

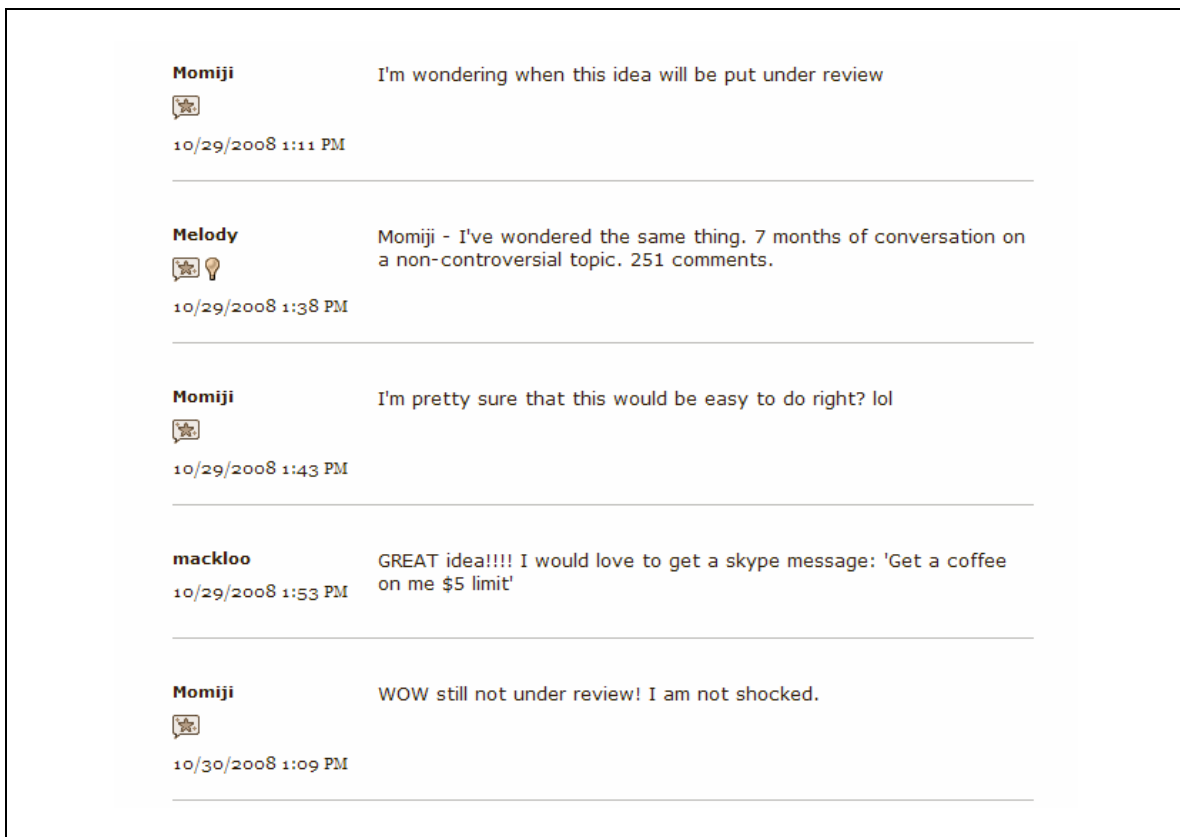


Figure 13: Calling Starbucks' Attention to Numbers and Commitment

In the tweets in Figure 14, we see an exhortation to protesters to stick together because there is strength in numbers. In Figure 15, we see the ultimate signal of commitment in the tweet expressing sympathy to Neda's family.



Figure 14: Tweet to Demonstrate Solidarity during Iranian Protests

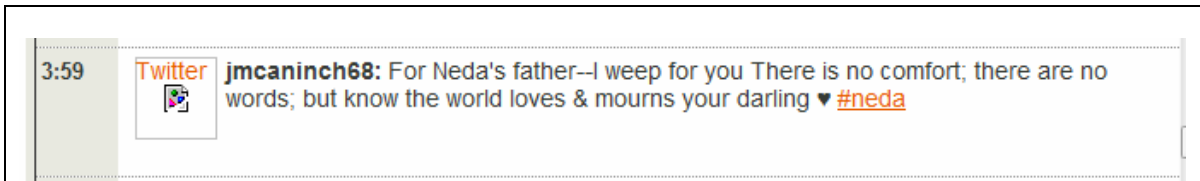


Figure 15: Broadcasting Commitment in an Expression of Sympathy

Future Research Directions

This paper is an initial attempt to understand how individuals' "private troubles" diffuse within the electronic milieu and transform into a "public issue". More specifically, the focus of this paper is ontological – what is "issue" surfacing? This initial question must be answered before we can investigate other factors such as what is the impact of technology, which features are necessary to encourage or discourage resource mobilization, how do individuals self organize in electronic realms? This research path is not without precedent: for example, group decision making was studied before the

impact of computer support was considered.

Future research will entail an elaboration of the technology and its impact. For example, social ties are created differently in social networking sites. Facebook.com requires a two party acknowledgement to be friends – one person must initiate the request and the other must agree. Twitter does not have this limitation; a Twitter user can follow and be followed by anyone. Establishment of a social tie depends on either party but not both. Future research may help us to understand how such technology features restrict or enhance "issue" surfacing and subsequent resource mobilization.

The manner in which resource mobilization occurs is currently under-developed in the model. In point of fact, the social movement literature highlights the role of several factors besides the claims that underlie an "issue" and the response it has garnered in resource mobilization. Andrews and Biggs (2006) highlighted the role of local newspapers, Shemtov (2003) the role of friendship networks and political ties, and Edwards and McCarthy (2004) of patronage relationships.

As part of this ongoing program of research, we will seek a better understanding of the temporal aspects of "issue" surfacing and resource mobilization. While it seems evident that the velocity of the two feedback loops represented in Figure 9 would sustain or kill a movement, we currently lack the data to understand exactly how communication velocity plays is implicated in "issue" surfacing and resource mobilization. Further theoretical development is required to understand what factors accelerate or decelerate the cycles, e.g., technology type, contributor status, and volatility of the external environment.

Contributions

The theory that results from these efforts should provide insights that facilitate investigation of other arenas of unstructured instrumental communication. For example, in development of open source software, how does an originator of a software idea mobilize a development team? How do open source developers garner enhancements to their development environment? How do musical bands or theatrical troupes develop a fan base? How do grassroots activists coalesce into an organized cause?

Practically, this research will have utility in a number of applied areas. An understanding of how to structure program claims can benefit initiators of open source projects, enabling them to recruit team members more effectively. Brand communities such as MyStarbucksIdea, Dell's IdeaStorm, and Audi's AudiWorld can gain insight into mobilizing customer input toward cost free product research and design. Protest groups may glean insights on how best to harness the internet to support their activism.

While this project has derived considerable insight from the social movement literature, it also has the ability to contribute to the literature. Non-intuitive insights surfaced thus far include the possibility for *complex* program claims and *resistance*, rather than unqualified acquiescence to claims, to mobilize movements. Additionally, this research highlighted conditions under which pluralistic identity claims may be successful, the types of standing claims that may be articulated, and the role of media richness and reach – both of which may be manipulated by skilled movement organizers – in sustaining and promoting a movement.

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Appendix A: Preliminary Collection of MyStarbucksIdea.com Site Data

To ascertain the extent to which the three claims are evident in initial ideas or postings to the Starbucks' community, we are examining the content of claims. A small sample of claims – those that have been vetted and validated by Starbucks – appears below in Table A1.

Table A1: Initial Postings of Starbucks' "Ideas in Action" and Community Responses to Postings

Idea	Date Submitted	Identity Claim	Standing Claim	Program Claim	Points	Comments	Starbucks' Action
Sell Jamaican Blue Mountain Coffee In The Stores	9/9/2008	-	-	Starbucks should offer Jamaican Blue Mountain Coffee in the stores	50	0	Launched
Fresh Fruit	3/25/2008			Fresh fruit would be a great!	2,360	10	Launched
Separate Brewed Coffee Line/Card Swiping	4/28/2008	Customers who only want a brewed coffee		There should be a separate line	28,480	35	Under review
Flavored coffee	4/8/2010	Diehard Starbucks's Customer	Biggby (successful referent)	Offer flavored Coffee	-210	31	Launched
Stars per DRINK, not per transaction!	5/14/2010	Gold Card Level Members		Starbucks should offer stars (part of their reward system), per each drink and not transaction	13,490	32	Under Review
Carry in a coupon for a free drink???? Are you kidding me?	11/13/2009	Reward Card members		Redeem Stars without electronically, not by redeeming paper coupon mailed to customer	15,050	60	Under Review
"Bank" Free Drink when Buying a LB of Coffee	3/31/2010			A cup of coffee given when a customer buys a pound of fresh coffee. Starbucks should offer a paper or electronic coupon in lieu	4,450	11	Under Review
Better blenders=less ice chunks	7/14/2010			Less ice chunks requested in frozen drinks	-10	5	Implemented

Idea	Date Submitted	Identity Claim	Standing Claim	Program Claim	Points	Comments	Starbucks' Action
Brink Back the After 2 Program	11/21/2009			Bring back coffee specials in the afternoon	5,870	23	Implemented
Use Fake Breakfast Sandwich Displays	1/16/2009	Individuals concerned with world hunger		Use plastic displays of sandwiches instead of continually throwing out freshly made display-sandwiches	2,180	14	Under Review
Low fat & high-protein items for breakfast	12/15/2009			Offer more nutritional food	2,140	20	Implemented
Brink Back Salted Caramel Hot Chocolate for 09	11/16/2009			Re-offer seasonal drink	4,030	16	In the works
Starbucks Blackberry App	12/8/2009	Blackberry owners	Android and windows smartphone owners	Offer mobile applications	2,620	12	Implemented
Make the starbucks treat receipt work through your starbucks card	7/13/2010	Starbucks card users		Allow 'treat' receipts to be credited to your card instead of on paper.	3,610	24	Under Review
Make Golds more Special!	7/2/2010	Gold card members	Airline gold card program	Improve quality of service for gold card members	3,090	31	Under Review
Decaf Iced coffee	2/1/2010	Pregnant women	Medical doctors	Offer Decaf iced coffee	2,060	9	In the works
I'll buy you a drink remotely	3/20/2008	Work at home employees		Offer ability to buy a drink to a co worker at a different location by sending coupon through email	42,760	273	In the works
Dome lid for venti clear insulated tumbler	5/16/2010			Dome lids for frappes	440	9	In the works
Noisy Ice Blender	3/10/2008	Customers		Use quieter blenders	1,270	19	Implemented

Idea	Date Submitted	Identity Claim	Standing Claim	Program Claim	Points	Comments	Starbucks' Action
Drives Customers Crazy		sitting and chatting in the store					
Brink Back Oatmeal & Chocolate chip cookies	5/26/2009			Bring back older version of cookies	450	6	Implemented

To ensure that Starbucks' vetting process applied to their "Ideas in Action" did not impose a systematic bias on our understanding of the issue surfacing process, a second sample – matched to the "Ideas in Action" sample based on submission date and idea category (identified by the individual initially posting the idea) – was drawn. These claims are summarized in Table A2.

Table A2: Initial Postings from Random Sample of Submissions and Community Responses to Postings

Idea	Date Submitted	Identity Claim	Standing Claim	Program Claim	Points	Comments	Idea Category
Bring back the To Go tumbler	8/17/2008	People wanting the tumbler	Other people blogging about the tumbler and willing to pay \$50 on Ebay	Offer To Go Tumblers	170	1	Merchandise & Misc.
Toasters	3/25/2008			Offer to toast bagels	2,320	4	Food
Free Drink Coupon for Extended waits	4/9/2008	Customers who experience along waits		Supervisors should have free drink coupons at their disposal to give to customers	2,280	17	Ordering, Payment, & Pickup
More Variety in Sugar-Free Flavors	4/20/2010	Diabetics	Others who use sugar free products	Offer more sugar free flavors.	800	15	Coffee and Espresso Drinks
Baristas need to know more about Starbucks Card!	5/12/2010	Reward Card members		Baristas need to understand the program	1,250	44	Starbucks card
You need a true reward for pure COFFEE drinkers	12/29/2009	Regular coffee drinkers		Offer program for people who drink only drip coffee	220	10	Starbucks card
International	3/16/2010	International		Offer an international card	340	0	Starbucks

Idea	Date Submitted	Identity Claim	Standing Claim	Program Claim	Points	Comments	Idea Category
Starbucks Card		Travelers		versus one card per country			card
Coconut Mocha Frap	7/27/2010			Offer to sell coconut mocha frap outside B&N	280	12	Frappuccino beverages
Furry Friends	11/17/2009	Dog owners		Offer communal water bowls and doggie treats for pets	-90	3	Other Experience Ideas
100% bio-degradable plastic straws, lids, etc.	1/31/2009	Environmental		Starbucks should move away from plastic straws, lids, etc.	630	9	Social Responsibility
Unsold pastries donated to local homeless shelter	11/18/2009			Donate unused/unsold food to shelters	660	11	Food
Decaf Tea Lattes with bold tea flavor	12/8/2009	Woman who avoid caffeine	Pregnant women	Offer Decaf Tea Lattes	60	1	Tea & Other Drinks
Make it easier to reward Excellent service	12/24/2009			Offer employee reward system based on customers' input	200	6	Other Experience
1 free shot for gold	7/16/2010			Also add a free shot as a reward	2,670	33	Starbucks Card
Free Drink after 10 purchases	6/17/2010			Offer free drink after 10 purchases	1,140	7	Starbucks Card
DARK CHOCOLATE	1/16/2010			Offer Dark chocolate in espresso drinks	5,350	45	Coffee and Espresso Drink
"build your drink" nutrition calculator	3/27/2008	Weight watchers		Website or interactive calculator to determine nutrition of customized drinks	460	4	Other Product Ideas
Almond Milk	6/9/2010	Environmental		Offer Almond Milk to help ease demand on soy milk. Demand of soy beans may be a cause of deforestation	220	4	Other Product Ideas
Cozy Stores	4/6/2008			Make stores cozy like	640	10	Atmosphere

Idea	Date Submitted	Identity Claim	Standing Claim	Program Claim	Points	Comments	Idea Category
				'before'			& Location
Offer Power Protein Plate at ALL Starbucks Locations Nationwide	4/20/2009	Health Conscious customers	Parents	Offer Power Protein Plate at all locations	140	1	Food

Appendix B: Complete Conversation on Starbucks' Policy Change on Rewards Card Payoff

The exhibit below reproduces in its entirety a conversation regarding Starbucks' change in the manner in which their Rewards Card holders received their free drink.

Carry in a coupon for a free drink??? Are you kidding me?		
Posted on 11/13/2009 6:16 AM by Naromo		15,050 points
<p>As one of the new "benefits" of the coming change in card rewards (I have the black card..10% discount) my discount will not only be cut to the equivalent of 1 free drink after 15 visits (from the current 10% off on EVERYTHING) but the free drink will only be redeemed by bringing in a coupon that has been "automatically mailed to you upon reaching 15 stars".</p> <p>If you are able to check your "star" balance by presenting your card at the register, why can't you get your free drink at the register via card swipe WITHOUT HAVING TO HAUL IN A COUPON?</p> <p>Starbucks has now transferred the responsibility for claiming a free drink TO US (through bringing in a coupon) FROM THEMSELVES by automatically redeeming it at the register with a card swipe. If you are a frequent visitor, good luck on keeping track of whether you've received and/or used your coupons.</p> <p>Not green, not customer friendly, definitely not cool.</p>		
1.	betterbefore 11/13/2009 6:32 AM	to 'Naromo': this has been pointed out from the beginning. crazy. Many of us have said this same thing and agree with you but apparently it's not so simple for Starbucks. at all.
2.	Naromo 11/13/2009 6:50 AM	Thanks. It IS crazy that they're back in the coupon mailing business. Maybe they're going for the nostalgia thing. Sure, you can pay with an iPhone, but to claim a reward they'll have to mail you a coupon that you must bring in. I'm sure that the postal workers union was behind this, on a number of different levels. ;-)
3.	LadyKathryn 11/13/2009 3:54 PM	I agree that this new rewards program is screwy. Definitely. But really...remembering to carry in a small slip of paper is not a great hardship. It comes in the mail, and you stick it in your purse/wallet. Then it's there when you want it. Sure, a coupon-less version would be nice. But this program has much bigger problems than that, I think.
4.	betterbefore 11/13/2009 5:19 PM	to LadyK: I agree, they do have much bigger problems than this. (with the new program) It's not so much the idea of having to carry in a paper coupon, it's the very inefficient idea of Starbx mailing us all postcards, etc. It's that part that's so crazy, to me. (along with the entire rest of the point-star program...:)
5.	LadyKathryn 11/13/2009 5:30 PM	@betterbefore - I agree that it's an inefficient way to do things. It is a bit crazy. Like most of the rest of this program. =) To me, it just sounded like the OP was complaining more about the inconvenience of having to carry around coupons, rather than the inefficiency of Starbucks having to make and mail them out. Maybe I misunderstood him/her. My apologies if so. =)
6.	sbx_jcar*** 11/18/2009 11:42 AM	Naromo – I can assure you that this is something we're looking into. As always, we will keep you posted on our progress via the Ideas in Action blog. Thanks!

7.	rinalda 11/20/2009 8:36 AM	I liked the 10% off and find this whole star thing annoying. I don't want to have to carrying around a coupon. And for what drink -- a tall drip?
8.	VaSbux 11/21/2009 6:22 AM	<p>I've posted this before in other threads, but it seems to be a constant theme. The POS system at SBUX is awful, has been for years, and corporate isn't putting anything into fixing it.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rewards should be automatic, as stated above. When your free drink is due, you get it, not bring in a piece of paper from 1980. 2. When the original 'free syrup, etc.' program was rolled out, it didn't work for months, and customers had to beg for discounts due. 3. People with gold cards kept being asked 'is there money on this' for weeks after the system could and should have told them 'yes, it's a Starbucks card, it has money, use it!'. <p>And, now we have many, many people with gold cards that will convert to 'new' gold level cards at various dates through almost the end of 2010 (mine is in November 2010, since I was lucky enough to get a card that late in 2009). I'm waiting for my card to stop working as an 'old' gold card before it's supposed to. :)</p> <p>The POS (point of sale, if you don't know) system really needs to be updated and out in all stores before new features are advertised.</p> <p>Or, they need to get people that have some creativity. Who ever thought of mailing free drinks on paper (and wasting postage, paper, etc.) in 2009 should be reassigned. Seriously.</p>
9.	betterbefore 11/21/2009 6:46 AM	to VaSbux: well said!
10.	rogeve22 11/23/2009 7:19 AM	We travel and don't always get our mail.... so there should be a way on the Gold Card..... Work on this please.....
11.	bmtbaseball31 11/23/2009 9:44 AM	also with the way Starbucks is doing its part on going green and doing its part on using recycled material for cups and sleeve, wouldnt this whole mailing of the coupons kind of be a hypocritical act?
12.	VaSbux 11/23/2009 4:19 PM	<p>Also, it has been mentioned elsewhere that, as with many rebate programs, that with the 'mail you the postcard' program, the idea could be to have some be lost, some be ignored, some be not used, etc. I don't know if SBUX actually thought of that, but we all know how well 'mail in the rebate' programs work.</p> <p>If SBUX really wanted to give loyal users an *automatic* reward, the POS system would give it to us automatically. So, I don't know if we are the beneficiaries of poor programming or planning to have us work for our reward. :)</p>
13.	lorax1 11/23/2009 5:53 PM	<p>Anytime an organization messes with its frequent and loyal users it risks alienating them. Changing the gold card is simply a bad idea fomented by some new MBAs undoubtedly.</p> <p>If you really wanted to make us happy, reward us via email or automatically load a bonus on our cards.</p>

14.	SBUXCMM 11/24/2009 10:40 AM	blah, blah, blah...is there anything on the planet Starbucks customers DON'T complain about? I mean....you complain when you get coupons, you complain when you don't get them! How can we possibly make anyone happy when everything gets complained about?
15.	Melody 11/24/2009 11:24 AM	@SBUXCMM-Are you here to bring ideas to the table, enhance the customer experience, and have great discussion OR to complain about customers? If the answer is the latter over the former, perhaps your Starbucks-ideals need some work. Many of the concerns about carrying in a paper coupon have great merit.
16.	SBUXCMM 11/25/2009 8:15 AM	So, Melody...what you are saying is that NO, there isn't anything on the planet Starbucks customers won't complain about. Got it.
17.	Melody 11/25/2009 8:20 AM	@SbuxCMM - So what you're telling me is that you won't have a dialogue and really listen, and you'd rather call customers "complainers". It's easier to assume that you're perfect and Starbucks is perfect than to think about how it could be better and where there might be meritorious discussion.
18.	SBUXCMM 11/25/2009 8:26 AM	When it comes to the customer experience, I truly do want customers to have a great time. I want them to get a great drink and to spend a pleasant couple of minutes with baristas who do have a personal connection with them. That CANNOT happen when people want Starbucks to be everything except an actual Starbucks. We cannot be all things to all people, and even trying is insane. Way too many customers simply want things we are not able to provide...and when we attempt, such as with this coupon, we get crucified. Can you not see how frustrating that would be? I, as a customer(in general..not just a Starbucks customer), am more than happy to accept whatever product is being offered on a menu...if not, I'm not a customer of that establishment. I vote with my wallet. I don't try to change the nature of the business, as it isn't mine to change!
19.	Melody 11/25/2009 8:30 AM	Your hostile attitude is not very Starbucks-like. Why are you so angry?
20.	SBUXCMM 11/25/2009 8:33 AM	I must also say that the tone of so many of the posters here firmly puts them in the "complainer" column, as opposed to the "meritorious discussion" column. If their comments were less whiny, snide and selfish and more thoughtful, helpful, and carefully worded, there may not be such an automatic reaction of disdain. I'd love for some of the posters(and some customers) to try and see why Starbucks would make the decisions they have made, instead of yelling about how stupid it is and how inconvenient that decision is now going to make their life.
21.	SBUXCMM 11/25/2009 8:35 AM	Actually, I thought my second post to be very calm and reconciliatory. Not hostile, at all. Firm, but not angry...
22.	Melody 11/25/2009 8:43 AM	I think we may have been posting at the same time - I hear you say that you don't try to change the nature of the business, but honestly, if Starbucks weren't interested in changing, they would not have created this site. (Now we could have long discussions about whether this site has been effective for anything, but that's another story entirely).

23.	SBUXCMM 11/25/2009 8:52 AM	I do think a business should listen to what customers want, otherwise they may end up out of business...such is life. Submitting an idea/change you'd like to see is a good thing. Acting insulted or getting angry because it wasn't used certainly doesn't help. And many, many customers seem to think telling baristas how angry they are will change something, when baristas are the least likely to be able to implement company wide change. I think that is the biggest reason stores are so inconsistent... baristas are just trying to make the customer in front of them happy, regardless of policy(which makes for a less legendary experience for that customer in the long run).
24.	Melody 11/25/2009 11:23 AM	Now we're really off the topic at hand, but as I experience Starbucks, I've noticed a change over the many years and years where many baristas act like they're in the business of Customer Discipline and not Customer Service. I've been very lucky that I have a number of very wonderful Starbucks near me, and my personal experiences have been overwhelmingly wonderful (which is obviously why I still am a customer) but I've seen a few bad experiences, and constantly read things on this site and on gossip blogs that has my hair standing on end. So when I hear that tone of voice (whether in person or on a website) where a barista sounds like the customer should be faulted for wanting a wonderful experience, it pushes some buttons of mine. I could give you a million examples, but this site isn't the place for that. What I do know is that Starbucks has to work to create customer loyalty. That loyalty is FAR more valuable than a free-drink now and then, and it's about the 'goodwill' of the brand. In my own retail experiences, I think that 99% of customers will leave with big smiles on their faces if they feel like they got a great service, and a lot of genuine enthusiasm from the retail professional. Basically, I believe that every customer should be treated and spoken to as if the customer standing behind him or her was Howard Schultz. That's not a perfect analogy but I use it as example because I've had that actually happen to me where Howard was the customer behind me in line, and I didn't realize it until after I sat down waiting for my beverage.
25.	qalattedrinker 11/30/2009 1:30 PM	Starbucks' official response to the outrage about downgrading treatment of their best customers is, "This thread has been a good discussion about My Starbucks Rewards and we've captured a very diverse reaction to the program. As we move towards our launch...". Starbucks spinmeister: Can you read? 99.9% of comments have been "When the gold card goes away, so will I". You consider that a "diverse" reaction? Since you are IGNORING the strongest negative reaction from your loyal customers that you have ever received, WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS SITE?
26.	Vixey529 12/1/2009 10:54 AM	I, too, find the whole "waiting to be mailed a coupon" thing a little "behind". But, I switch up what I order often, and I would like the freedom to choose to save the coupon for an special treat, like an afternoon pick-me-up Grande Mocha (which I don't do daily), instead of being forced to use it on a Venti drip I pick up for my husband in the morning (also not daily). If there was a way that the POS could recognize that you have a free drink coupon but allow you to save it for another visit (not indefinitely so that people save up a year's worth of beverages or anything, just for 30-60 days or so), that would be ideal.
27.	askmrlee 12/2/2009 2:50 PM	I believe the reason why they went postal on the free drink is that they had problems with auto loading awards on people's cards. About 4 years ago or so I received an email saying that I was awarded a loyalty \$5 credit on a SBUX card which a barista tossed because it had a zero balance. Even if I kept it I may have unregistered it because of the former 3 card limit. I called SBUX Card customer service and the nice operator right away asked me if I was calling to get this \$5 loaded onto another card. Clearly they were bombarded by this fail.

		<p>From the marketing it sounds like they went manual so that you have the flexibility to decide when you want to redeem your free drink and I applaud them for doing this. Remember that it is a programming hassle and time suck to tell the barista to "make it free". This means reprogramming the registers and teaching everyone at the thousands of stores a new key sequence to do a rewards drink. There's already a procedure in place to handle coupons/discounts.</p> <p>I would suggest that they do a print your own coupon option to redeem the free drink. While this is not totally green it at least saves SBUX postage and printing costs. I'm used to doing this for other programs.</p> <p>When Safeway had the buy 7 get the 8th drink free, the free drink was automatically and you had to remember if you earned it and then make your next order your special drink to max the \$4.99 value. Pity you forget and your free drink is a short drip.</p>
28.	gerri7756 12/8/2009 10:46 AM	I don't like the change in the gold card, nonetheless getting a coupon in the mail. The ONLY thing I drink at Starbucks is a Frappuccino, and now that it is over \$5 with tax then add a barrista tip, I'll be going from about 45 of them a month to about 20. I've already started withdrawing from them.
29.	bowlingb 12/8/2009 10:50 AM	Is there an idea/suggestion in this "idea" somewhere? How hard is it to simply present your idea and a sentence or two indicating why it would be a good one?
30.	jtrono 12/8/2009 12:12 PM	Amen - don't ask me to print and carry a coupon. Worst case, scan it from my iPhone, but I agree that it should be automatic with my registered card swipe.
31.	nyc4me 12/15/2009 7:11 PM	how heavy are coupons these days?.....
32.	Melody 12/15/2009 7:27 PM	Of course the principle has nothing to do with putting a coupon in your purse: If you were to be assured a benefit, it would be stored information on your card, and credited electronically at the register. Instead, the coupon may get lost, stolen, damaged, ... many coupons will never get redeemed. Even the neighborhood yarn store near me has figured out how to electronically keep track of a store credit/reward when purchasing \$100 worth of yarn or knitting supplies.
33.	VaSbux 12/19/2009 7:30 PM	Exactly. Please re-read my comments at the top. Either (or both) SBUX can't program the POS system properly (no resources committed to it) or they are planning on x% of all coupons being lost (frequent issue: rebates are coupons because virtually NO ONE uses them).
34.	qbnjava 12/22/2009 6:42 AM	Whomever was thinking of removing the membership Black Gold card is not thinking correctly. Whats the big deal here Starbucks. Allow us to keep our membership. A. It doesnt kill you as seeing you have many different OTHER card programs out there. B. Your assured automatically a \$25.00 payment each year. C. Giving an insentive to your customers is I dont know a reason for many to enjoy Starbucks in all it offers.

		<p>Taking away the incentive really makes me rethink if I should drive the extra mile to enjoy your coffee seeing that a Dunkin Donuts is closer to my home and job than your store and in addition which if you haven't thought of it no matter what in the end your company STILL MAKES MONEY. SO WHATS THE BIG DEAL HERE?</p> <p>Suggestion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think a Kiosk should be installed at the stores that would allow members of all types of cards should be viewable or modified and hell even reloaded from there. My Starbucks(s) are always packed and it would benefit the company as a whole especially with those that have large amount of traffic. 2. Sending coupons via mail lets be real here people lose them and if they have a card then allow them to redeem it from their card. In addition think of the Eco-friendly aspect creating literature and sending it throughout the US. 3. Those that have iPhones/Blackberry's and Android phones. Fine you too windows should be able to have a Starbucks app that would allow to instead of having a card you can then use a barcode style type system instead of using a card. I've heard that Starbucks is using something like that but HELLO how many people here actually have cell phones and would REALLY benefit from an app that allows a unique barcode that represent/replace the card itself. By using this you completely remove the use of the card(s) / coupon(s) / and paper usage as a whole and more so place that upon the consumer to produce it since electronically is now most likely the best way to go. Oh but if someone actually gets a coupon well it can be in the form of a one time use barcode that can be presented at the stores scanning system. 4. RETURN MY BLACK GOLD 10% annual membership card back to its active state!!! <p>Thank you!</p>
35.	<p>strbksmu 12/22/2009 4:13 PM</p>	<p>The mailing of coupons is a good idea for now. This is because you won't know when you've got 15 stars unless you asked the barista to swipe your card to check or you go online account. What I suggest is that Starbucks create multiple ways of informing customers when they have 15 stars. This can be by e-mail, text message, swipe card at Starbucks store, and on screen message telling the barista to tell the customer that they have 15 stars and can get a free beverage.</p>
36.	<p>Melody 12/22/2009 4:36 PM</p>	<p>I don't see much of anything good about MAILING a beverage coupon. All it means for certain is that some will get lost in the mail, stolen, or never used. I don't see how that is a customer benefit. Best case scenario: Customer receives a delayed reward.</p>
37.	<p>baxter007 12/23/2009 11:12 AM</p>	<p>I'm going to be getting a coupon mailed to me every week. it's really going to be hard to keep track of what coupons are do to me. In a day and age where I can pay with my iPhone (you really need to make this available everywhere</p>

		soon) I have to carry around pieces of paper to redeem my free drinks. How about just swiping my new gold card. this doesn't seem that difficult. I expect more from Starbucks. I defend their product all the time but this is ridiculous!
38.	BrianH 12/28/2009 8:05 AM	I'm in favor of eliminating paper coupons (really in eliminating the onus placed on the customer to do anything but show up craving caffeine). While the poster who pointed out that modifying the point of sale system and coupon process results in a small training impact on a large scale does raise a valid point, I think it's a worthwhile investment in customer satisfaction. Maybe the SBUX IT department needs to bring in Alan Cooper for a day of user experience consulting. <tongue_in_cheek>Sounds like the inmates have been running the asylum long enough.</tongue_in_cheek>
39.	Sumipan 12/29/2009 8:54 AM	When I lived in Roseville, CA there was a Starbucks inside our local Safeway and through the Safeway card they would track how many coffees you purchased. Every 10th one was free and I LOVED it! And it was not based on purchases, it was based on the actual number of drinks. So if I bought 4 drinks in one visit I was credited 4 points towards my next freebie. This was 5 years ago. If Safeway can make it work then I am confident that Starbucks can do the same. In the end it would save them a good deal of money not having to print coupons, maintain staff members who focus on this reward and they would not have to pay postage for all these mailings. Personally I'm not too worried about it. I think Starbucks has heard us on this one and I think they will find a way to track our purchases in store.
40.	BudGreen 12/29/2009 2:58 PM	<p>Starbucks has gone out of its way to alienate its most loyal of clientele over the past few years. This ridiculous change in the gold card is just the final straw (for me, at least).</p> <p>I'm very well known at my local SB stores and have taken the time to get to know the barristas. When I ask them about how they feel about Starbucks as a company, they are all, without exception, exasperated with how they and their clients are being treated.</p> <p>They have gone from being friendly purveyors of delicious coffee drinks to corporate shells pushing whatever the newest SB idea that is coming down the pike.</p> <p>Be it Breakfast sandwiches, Thanksgiving blend, Christmas blend, Pike Place Roast (Poorest decision in SB history), VIA, Cups, Music, and on and on, they all feel like they are no longer encouraged to get to know their clients. They are 'trained' to push the latest products, upsell, upsell, upsell, and get pressured to keep the profit lines ever increasing.</p> <p>I say 'trained' because if you talk to management, they will inevitably say that Starbucks does not upsell or push products, they just make the clients aware of the new variety.</p> <p>But when you are met with the same barristas you've known for years repeatedly asking if you want to buy VIA, (Replace VIA with any new idea SB has had these past few years) it reeks of upselling.</p> <p>And now with a price increase of close to 10%, and the removing of my 10% discount for being loyal, I'm going to pay 20% more than I did a month and a half ago for the same drink? I really like the three stores close to me but not for 20% over an already inflated price for coffee.</p> <p>Very bad play Starbucks. Your corporate greed is showing. How about dialing the money grubbing back a bit and</p>

		thinking about your loyal customer base.
41.	65807 12/29/2009 3:12 PM	<p>I don't think the coupon system has anything to do with whether or not Starbucks can build the free drink into the gold card, so that you're automatically notified at the register when the card is swiped that you get a free drink. If they do that then it's safe to say 99.9% of those free drinks will be redeemed. On the other hand, they've probably calculated the cost of mailing a coupon vs. how many of those coupons will actually make it into the store for redemption and found that by going the coupon route they will actually lose less money because far fewer free drinks will actually get claimed. This has never been about whether or not Starbucks has the capabilities to put the free drink on the gold card. Of course the capabilities exist. It's about which method will maximize Starbucks profits. Period. No matter what customer perk they offer it will never, ever trump their profits. I guarantee you that's why the 10% discount is getting tossed. Not because customers said they would rather have a free card and free drinks, but because it was obviously eating into Starbucks bottom line. That's why all their hype about how they listened to our requests and as a result they've made the gold card even better, is so insulting to those of us who were charter gold card members.</p> <p>With all the complaining that's going on, Starbucks needs to remember one thing. They opened this box when they rolled out their first gold card program. Those who work for Starbucks and who are complaining that we, the customers, need to stop complaining need to keep that fact in mind. You can't extend an offer like the first gold card then change the program for the worse (while hyping it as being better) and not expect some serious push-back from gold card members.</p>
42.	freudianslip 12/29/2009 4:38 PM	plus it is not very green to be issuing paper coupons all the time - it should just be tagged in the account. better yet just go back to the discount on every drink there problem solved i hate the new rewards program with a passion
43.	ebonypaws 12/29/2009 7:35 PM	<p>"plus it is not very green to be issuing paper coupons all the time - it should just be tagged in the account. better yet just go back to the discount on every drink there problem solved i hate the new rewards program with a passion"</p> <p>Seconding the post by freudianslip - i couldn't have said it better myself :)</p> <p>coupons = more waste (environmentally unfriendly) + more i have to think about, i will forget.</p>
44.	starycat 12/29/2009 7:44 PM	<p>In an era of saving paper and saving money, mailing coupons doesn't make sense.</p> <p>In an era of plastic cards and electronics that tracks so much, using paper and not adding the funds to the duetto card is crazy.</p> <p>judyb</p>
45.	Steve521 12/29/2009 8:40 PM	A shiny new electronic punchcard. The corporate accountants have obviously taken over marketing. This is a giant leap backwards and shows a blatant disregard for brand loyalty as a key to Starbucks success. Good luck on this crazy idea and too bad you didn't see the value of my patronage by exchanging my current gold card for the electronic punchcard which will only discourage me from visiting Starbucks but will encourage me to go elsewhere.

		Consumers are not stupid and they see you have cut way back on rewards. You aren't the only coffee place in the area I frequent. You have cheapened the brand and discouraged the frequent buyer. This is what happens when you get too big. Smarten up or else you'll be right there competing with McDonalds on cost cutting and brand nothingness.
46.	nomelon 12/30/2009 6:45 AM	<p>Mailing paper coupons to a Gold Card holder for free drink(s) is *silly* at best. Coupons to pass along to friends and family are fine.</p> <p>This issue goes back quite some time ago when I suggested Gold Card and registered Starbucks Card benefits be handled by the POS system. I heard - again, quite a while ago - rumors of a new POS system coming soon. Not to be nasty, but did SBUX fire the majority of its IT staff?</p> <p>Melody's idea of informing customers about their free drink status by alternate means is good. Print it out on the bottom of the receipt, like CVS does with ExtraBuck earnings, remaining # of items needed to fulfill a deal, etc. I'd be happy to scan/post a sample CVS receipt, since there are no CVS stores in WA or OR.</p>
47.	betterbefore 12/30/2009 7:21 AM	I just recvd my b.day free drink coupon in the mail yesterday. It is just a plain, paper card.....as in 'postcard'. (I am sure I remember last yrs arriving in an envelope, and it was a card, like the card coupons they give gave?? out in the stores) It says, clearly visible to all those U.S.P.S. hands it passes thru : FREE DRINK, etc. My point is: this IS a very UNSAFE way to send out "FREE SBUX' coupons....and I am guessing this is very similar, if not the same, to the way the free 16th drink coupon will be sent. Besides the cost, etc., it's NOT SAFE. not to mention the VERY easy- to- lose appearance of this paper card.....could easily easily slip into a junk mail 'sales' papers. etc. This is really just SO crazy, I cannot believe this is the best SBux can come up with. (cost, lost, stolen, lost, cost, stolen)
48.	Melody 12/30/2009 1:45 PM	The *only* good thing about this is that you can pass on your beverage coupons to a friend. I told my boyfriend that I would give him most all of mine, (I will earn too many to use - I don't need to swim in beverages) and he gladly accepted the offer to use them. Though now I have this odd worry that his baristas at his Starbucks will start scratching their heads thinking, how weird is it that this guy has a ton of free beverage coupons but doesn't use a registered card - He only pays in cash!
49.	betterbefore 12/30/2009 5:20 PM	Melody: none of their business how he acquires them anyway. :) I want to see how this postal system works out with these flimsy pieces of paper which state right on them : FREE DRINK AT SBUX..or whatever.
50.	jillian_32311 12/31/2009 12:29 PM	I believe in the industry this is called "slippage." Although it will cost them more in the beginning (producing and mailing out all those coupons!), Starbucks is actually counting on us losing or forgetting our coupons, which will reduce the number of free drinks they have to dispense. Smart for them.
51.	purple1 1/1/2010 7:13 AM	I will add my voice to this crazy system of sending out postcards for your free drink. SB listen! Why can't we just get the free drink through the register seeing we are eligible for it.
52.	MikehSR 1/1/2010 11:12 AM	I have spent a lot more than the \$250/yr at Starbucks to justify the \$25, since I bought my Gold Card, it has probably gone up. Keep the Gold Card AND add the coupons, if you think they will help. Otherwise...

		I'm sure the 'slippage' is reason for the coupon.
53.	Kristyna 1/2/2010 5:36 AM	I hope you don't hurt yourself "HAVING TO HAUL IN A COUPON" for your free drink :)
54.	Melody 1/2/2010 6:00 PM	@Kristyna - I think you missed the point entirely. When the best case scenario is a delayed, possibly lost, mismailed, damaged, or forgotten, coupon, ... well that's not much of a best case scenario. Go back and look at page one comments on "slippage" and the discussion of immediate rewards versus delayed rewards, as well as issues with printing and mailing that amount of paper.
55.	mirandolynn 1/2/2010 8:39 PM	I didn't really think that a coupon was such a difficult thing for an adult to keep track of, let alone bring into a store to redeem...
56.	WildBunch 1/2/2010 11:41 PM	I must admit, I did not notice that piece of fine print that stated the FREE drink after purchased would be a coupon. I question this for a company that is promoting the environment, and ethical business practices to go and waste paper by having a a card swipe system generate coupons. It would make the most sense for the free drink to noted at the register. The customer should then have the "choice" to use the free drink now or later. Since reward points or Stars can be tracked on our cards why couldn't earned "Free" drinks be tracked as well? Just a question for the for the Environmentally Conscientious Starbucks...?
57.	Naromo 1/4/2010 9:22 AM	I will take no offense at the suggestion that I'm implying that it is difficult to haul in a coupon to receive a reward. My point was eloquently reinforced by the later commenter that it isn't green, it isn't efficient and it isn't necessary to "reward" someone with something requiring the printing and mailing of a coupon for a reward that is recognizable at the register. As Oscar Goldman said many years ago, "We have the technology..."
58.	betterbefore 1/4/2010 6:29 PM	here's another thread that seems like it could be 'done'. ???
59.	sbx_sto*** 1/5/2010 11:48 AM	My colleague @sbux_jcar said it best- instant rewards at the POS is something we have been looking into...for quite some time. We would love to eliminate the paper coupons- it's better for the environment and it would ensure that you are getting your rewards directly. From a practical standpoint, it sounds easy but there are a lot of stores out there and then we'd have to consider our licensed locations- whose POS is out of our control. There are a lot of moving parts but we do want to resolve this!
60.	sbx_nat*** 8/31/2010 11:53 AM	Wow guys - glad to see this thread is still going strong! That means that when we begin delivering your Free Drinks electronically you'll all throw a party and celebrate with happy thoughts!! In all seriousness - the project to deliver benefits directly to your accounts kicks off in the next few weeks. As you

		<p>all know (or maybe not), we are in the midst of a major infrastructure overhaul. Part 1 is wrapping up in a few weeks, and part 2 which will include some cool new capabilities (electronic couponing is only one of them) starts very soon. When it's complete we'll have to go through some testing cycles so that we don't turn any stores, email boxes, or servers upside down, but we hope by mid-next year to be providing a lot of our "snail mailed" benefits digitally.</p> <p>The other great thing to add to this thread is the announcement that today over 2,600 licensed stores are honoring all the benefits of My Starbucks Rewards. The whole reason we're mailing coupons is because our licensed store partners are not connected to our platform - so they can't validate, redeem and accept a digital coupon if we were to start providing them today. It's a big step in the right direction to have them honoring all benefits, next step will be to get them connected, and then the world will be a whole lot greener!!</p> <p>Thanks! sbux_nat</p>
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***Starbucks' "Idea Partners" – employees that monitor and participate in conversations

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