

Contesting Cultural Control: Youth Culture and Online Petitioning

Jennifer Earl

University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Sociology

Alan Schussman

University of Arizona, Department of Sociology

To: Sony BMG

This petition is to request that the Backstreet Boys come to Asia for a tour. They haven't been on a tour in Asia (besides China & Japan) in almost 9 years.

The Backstreet Boys have numerous fans in Asia, who have been supporting them throughout their hiatus [*sic*] & now, their new album & singles.

We are sick of reading about the boys touring Japan only. Yes, we know they toured China too, but that was only late last year. It's not as if Japan represents the whole of Asia!

Please let the Backstreet Boys tour Asia. At least a concert . . . please?

Petition number 211

A lot of kids don't get home from school in time to watch [programs on the Disney Channel]. I would like to start a Web site that would allow viewers to download episodes of the Disney Classics and of the newer Disney Channel shows at an earlier time. . . . However, I may have to get copyright permission to let viewers download tv shows from my Web site legally. You know what might increase the chances of me getting copyright permission? A lot of people signing this petition. The more signatures I have (especially if I have several hundred or several thousand signatures) the more apt the officials might be to give me copyright permission to let me let viewers download episodes from my Web site.

Petition number 79

Introduction

The above petition examples are illustrative of an online trend: using traditional social movement tactics, such as petitions, on the Internet to support, contest, or otherwise comment on cultural products and celebrities. Other petitions range from those seeking to address perceived problems in massively multiplayer online games such as World of Warcraft to petitions advocating for the open-source release of popular software to still other petitions that call on bands to share their concert recordings with fans. What this broad range of petitions has in common is a central focus on concerns that are important to youth culture and popular culture more broadly.

We would like to extend our deep thanks, and a public acknowledgment, to the operators of PetitionOnline, particularly Kevin Matthews and Mike Wheeler, who provided us with raw data for use in this chapter. We would also like to thank Lance Bennett and the other volume contributors for their lively exchanges and comments on this chapter.

However, many adults and nonenthusiasts approach these petitions with skepticism: are these petitions serious, and can they be thought of as politically oriented, or even civically oriented, in any way? In this chapter, we argue that, far from being exotic or marginal, such petitions are increasingly common online. Furthermore, we contend that this kind of petition is a predictable outgrowth of the convergence between “movement societies” and the affordances of digital technologies. As discussed in more detail below, movement society theorists assert that in many Western democracies, social movement schemas and practices (i.e., ways of understanding and acting in the world) have become so institutionalized that they are now part and parcel of everyday life.¹ Instead of ruptures in the political process, social movement tactics such as petitioning make up the fabric of everyday citizen politics in movement societies. Affordances of the Internet include markedly dropping costs of producing material online—including petitions—and the ability to easily and cheaply modify many types of cultural products—from mashups (i.e., the overlaying of multiple albums or music tracks into a single hybrid work of music) to e-books. These trends may have important implications for how consumers (and young consumers in particular) understand their relationship with cultural producers, be they corporations, artists, or celebrities.

In fact, we argue that what may seem like clearly nonpolitical acts—petitioning about the Backstreet Boys on the Internet, for instance—are actually an indicator of deeper transformations surrounding cultural consumption and civic engagement. Specifically, we maintain that a notable share of what we argue to be civic engagement—especially on the part of youth or with regard to youth-oriented issues—involves cultural contestation that may or may not eventually involve the state, which is a significant departure from a conventional understanding of social movements as state-directed challenges.²

Furthermore, enabled by digital technology, consumers are engaging with the producers and owners of cultural products, staking a new kind of claim to those materials. As we will illustrate, online protest surrounding cultural products suggests a redefinition of long-standing relationships between consumers and producers in which consumers are becoming much more active and (literally) demanding more from producers. This redefinition is highly salient to young participants who are developing repertoires of contention that may shape later civic engagement.

This chapter will explore this emerging form of engagement by empirically tracing the outlines of one specific area in which cultural contestation is visible: the proliferation of online petitions contesting cultural concerns. After reviewing the literature that informs our approach, we provide an overview of culture-related online petition material to argue that (1) these petitions are not marginal sideshows; (2) these petitions tend to focus on products and industries associated with youth culture; and (3) many of the petitions represent consumer-based contestation. We also discuss potential implications of these processes for future research on online-enabled protest; we discuss how cultural contestation might be transformed into more state-oriented battles over cultural ownership and intellectual property; and we discuss approaches to civic engagement likely to be adopted increasingly by young people.

Civic Engagement in the Digital Age

Before trying to make sense of youth-culture petitions, it is useful to situate these petitions within the wider terrain of civic engagement. As noted elsewhere in this volume, attention

to civic engagement often comes in the form of concern about and debate over rising or falling levels of social ties, community connectedness, and electoral participation. Most assessments of these trends rely on formal definitions of civic engagement that focus heavily on explicitly political visions of civic engagement (e.g., research examining the relationship between social networks, voting trends, and protest participation). In fact, there is often only a thin distinction between political engagement and civic engagement, given that the activities that comprise civic engagement are marked by their institutional relationship to government (e.g., voting), or their noninstitutional relationship to government (e.g., protest).³ To the extent that civic engagement has been more broadly understood to include volunteering and community service of other types, the focus has been on community activity that seemed expressly related to a sense of a community as a body politic.

But, increasingly corporations and other private entities are having identifiable, powerful, and contested roles in the everyday lives of citizens. Instead of channeling discontent about these effects solely toward governments as regulators, many are protesting against corporations themselves in hopes of directly changing corporate policies or products.⁴ We argue that in a society where nongovernmental bodies wield so much obvious influence—whether at the global geopolitical level or in daily lived experience—it is important to reconsider protest against these bodies as a meaningful way of becoming civically engaged.

Thus, far from adding to a sense of crisis over an alleged paucity of civic engagement by youth, we step back and try to draw attention to ways in which younger citizens are engaging with issues that they find important and relevant to their lives, however removed these activities may seem from classic visions of civic engagement. Specifically, we draw attention to the ways in which younger citizens are focusing on nontraditional concerns—particularly more cultural concerns—using traditional methods of civic engagement such as petitioning.

In taking this approach, we are arguing that before certifying a crisis of civic engagement, one must ask whether existing notions of what comprises civic engagement tend to ignore, devalue, or otherwise marginalize ways in which younger citizens are connecting with one another to collectively make a difference in their own worlds. Culturally oriented concerns tend to be devalued, as shown by the skeptical reaction of many to the example petitions that opened this chapter. This devaluation has also been observed by Coleman, whose research compares attitudes of political enthusiasts to fans of *Big Brother*.⁵ As Coleman points out, a consequence of such skepticism is the narrowing of what is considered worthwhile engagement: “Official strictures about what constitutes respectable (and respect-worthy) political participation have the effect of narrowing the repertoire of political citizenship.”⁶ In suggesting that adults more seriously consider the ways in which youth may be redefining civic engagement, we join other authors from this volume, including Coleman and Raynes-Goldie and Walker. And, in our case, the informality and relatively un-“managed” style of the petitions may even be one reason this kind of engagement is appealing to youth, as suggested in Bers’s and Xenos and Foot’s arguments in this volume about the unappealing nature of highly managed media experiences to youth.

In addition, we argue that marginalizing and ignoring these activities causes us to risk missing a harbinger of potentially deep changes in the role of consumers. As we argue in more detail below, the relationship between consumers and producers is being remade in the digital age such that consumers are increasingly challenging the authority and judgment of producers. No longer content to passively wait for products to come to market, or to have products updated, fixed, or improved, consumers are increasingly challenging producers’ longstanding autonomy. In a world where corporations—and the goods and services that

they produce—matter so much to daily life, we argue that it is useful to expand notions of civic engagement to include cultural contestation that attempts to redefine the relationship between corporations and consumers of their products.

Specifically, we argue that the confluence of a movement society and contention over culture and cultural ownership is a new venue for making sense of civic engagement, one that suggests that civic engagement may not look like what we have tended to expect. It is not formal—facilitated through well-established community organizations, activist groups, or political parties—and it may not even be conscientiously understood as engagement, but instead as a seemingly natural aspect of using or watching or gaming. We argue that it is important to trace empirically this kind of cultural contestation—which we do by studying online petitions about entertainment-related issues—and to try to understand the context in which this activity is occurring, which is the subject of the next two sections of the chapter.

Movement Societies: Protest as Part of Everyday Life

Historically used as a way to notify the ruler of subjects' concerns, and eventually as an avenue for raising citizens' grievances with legislators, petitions have long served as a forum for airing problems and seeking redress.⁷ For instance, according to an interesting history of petitioning by Zaeske, petitions were a major venue for pressing for abolition when legislators tried to ignore concerns about slavery. However, while social movement scholars are increasingly attending to the often central role of cultural contestation in social movement struggles—such as struggles over language, media, and collective identities⁸—petitions have not previously been vehicles for much of that protest.⁹ Social movement research can, nonetheless, leverage our understanding of entertainment-related petitioning through consideration of movement society arguments.

As social movements and protest have become increasingly institutionalized forms of political participation in Western democracies, scholars have begun to discuss the growth of movement societies.¹⁰ In movement societies, a large and diverse population of actors uses forms of discourse and political involvement whose heritage can be traced directly back to social movements.¹¹ Unprecedented levels of diffusion of social movement discourse and tactics are characteristic of such institutionalization and may become so substantial that the forms of social action pioneered by social movements begin to pervade civic engagement and seemingly apolitical areas of life. For instance, classic protest tactics—such as petitioning—may be adopted by groups that had only used other forms of political participation before (e.g., only engaged in campaigning and voting before) and/or for purposes that seem distant from the protest heritage of petitioning. Movement society proponents argue that protest schemas and practices are becoming embedded in everyday life in some Western democracies. When this happens, people begin to understand their problems through the kinds of collective lenses that have been integral to classic social movements, and may begin to apply classic social movement practices, such as protest, to resolve their troubles.

Given this shift toward movement societies, at least in many Western industrialized states, we expect that new kinds of grievances—including grievances about products and celebrities, and more broadly about what we are referring to as grievances about cultural control—will be expressed using protest tactics that are now well-institutionalized means of engaging in collective conflict. Recent research conducted by Earl and Kimport on a quasi-random sample of Web sites discussing petitions, boycotts, and letter-writing and e-mail campaigns confirm these expectations.¹²

Earl and Kimport found that about 10 percent of online protest actions were focused on “nonstandard” claims, including entertainment-related claims like the ones discussed here. They also found claims that featured new combinations of individual and collective interests and action. Specifically, they found online protest actions attempting to address individual grievances with collective action, collective grievances with individual action, and individual grievances with individual action.

However, since their data set only had a small number of protest actions on these types of nonstandard causes, Earl and Kimport were not able to thoroughly outline these developments. We add to their initial contribution by examining a sample of petitions that we expect to be wholly focused on entertainment-related claims, which will allow us to dig even more deeply into movement society dynamics.

Affordances of Internet Technologies

We also make two arguments about the affordances of Internet, and digital technologies more broadly: (1) the online production of protest activities—such as online petition hosting—has dramatically reduced the costs of organizing collective actions, which has accelerated the growth of movement societies; and (2) digital technologies afford capacities to easily and cheaply change, recombine, and otherwise entirely reshape cultural products, which we argue is leading to more extensive changes in the roles of consumers and producers.

Making It on the Cheap

Research on a variety of different types of protest, social movements, and collective action has demonstrated that lower organizing and production costs seem to be a general affordance of Internet technologies.¹³ Relevant to this chapter, it is much less expensive to create an online petition than it is to create and run an offline petition drive. In an offline petition drive, one would have to create the petition, get it printed in sufficient quantities (which can be expensive), and then either recruit volunteers or hire paid signature gatherers to go out to large public spaces to collect signatures.

In contrast, with sites like PetitionOnline (discussed further below), which offers free online petition setup and hosting, online petitioning can be quite easy and inexpensive to start and manage. Even users with fairly remedial computer skills can open a Web browser and fill out a Web-based form to create a petition. They can then send links to the petition to a wide variety of potentially interested parties and let the back-end software manage the signatures as they come in.

Research also suggests that the lowest organizing and production costs for protest or other forms of collective action are achieved when a movement emerges online and then stays online, instead of emerging offline and migrating online. Earl and Schussman call these fully online movements “e-movements.”¹⁴ Illustratively, in Earl and Schussman’s research on the strategic voting e-movement, the authors identified an online organizer who put a notice on his Web site saying he did not need any donations (some people had clearly offered to donate to him) because operating his Web site was so inexpensive. It is difficult to imagine Amnesty International posting a sign indicating that donations are not needed!

There is a wide array of potential consequences for this change in the cost structure of starting and maintaining protest actions online.¹⁵ Particularly relevant, though, is Earl’s argument that the low cost of producing protest actions online (see below) should accelerate movement society trends.¹⁶ She argues that very low organizing costs allow people to

organize around issues that have never before (or at least rarely) been the subject of protest organizing. Put differently, the cost restriction that may have prevented people from applying traditional social movement schemas and practices to some cultural issues can be removed by Internet technologies. Earl and Kimport's research bears out this claim, showing that the low-cost production of protest facilitated by the Internet has allowed a variety of inexpensive petition and letter-writing campaigns to develop around entertainment-related issues.¹⁷

We are interested in how this cost structure affects the way young people use the Internet to engage in issues that seem relevant and important to their everyday lives. If young people are growing up in movement societies, where scripts and practices from social movements have become part of everyday thinking, and where producing online protest actions has become extremely inexpensive, then we should expect that young people will begin to use online protest-organizing tools to mount protests about issues they care about. As the next section argues, one set of issues that is likely to be proximate to many teenagers' and young adults' lives involves the cultural products and personalities that make up "youth culture" or "popular culture" more broadly.

Using, Making, and Owning Culture

As noted above, digital technologies have helped transform audiences into producers. Where digital media are concerned, inexpensive digital cameras, inexpensive but powerful video-editing software, and video-sharing services like OurMedia and YouTube allow everyday people to become filmmakers and distributors. This latter aspect is particularly important because it allows users to easily and widely spread home movies, amateur films, video clips, and music videos. Previously, this would have required users to have large amounts of their own storage and bandwidth, but YouTube users simply need to upload their digital movie files and then share the Web location; the service handles the storage and bandwidth for distribution. As the tools to make and edit music, video, and images become more and more accessible, these activities will continue to proliferate, a point that is developed more fully in Rheingold's discussion of participatory media in this volume.

Not only have digital technologies made it easier for everyday, "garage" cultural production to occur but digital media also make it easy to modify existing digital products, exemplified by mashups. One of the most well-known mashups was the "Grey Album," made by combining samples from the Beatles' "White Album" with the vocals from rapper Jay-Z's "Black Album." The *Village Voice* named the album one of the top ten records of 2004, but more recognition came when the owners of the Beatles' catalog cracked down over copyright infringements. Activists used the opportunity to highlight what they saw as overly restrictive copyright policies. As Howard-Spink notes, mashups signify an important role for amateurs and consumers: consumer participation in a culture where "the struggle for power over meaning-making has been concentrated in fewer and fewer hands."¹⁸

Massively multiplayer online games similarly seem to typify this potential for transforming relationships between products and consumers. In online worlds such as Second Life or World of Warcraft, players accumulate wealth, build on their own digital property, and engage in longitudinal campaigns with in-game alter egos. But they have an ownership in the game world that is more than symbolic, sometimes paying real money for rare in-game artifacts or abilities. Some stake further claims to their digital domains by petitioning game producers for enhancements and bug fixes.

Scholars have begun to consider the implications of these phenomena. Benkler discusses how a networked information economy, in which cultural goods are primarily digitally produced and distributed, has a profound effect on contemporary culture.¹⁹ He considers collaborative platforms (e.g., Wikipedia and massively multiplayer online games) and more nominally individual activities (e.g., posting photos to the photo-sharing site Flickr), arguing that these platforms facilitate the “appropriation of media content for the purpose of commentary, annotation, and innovation” that Jack Balkin calls “glomming on.”²⁰ Consumers are now empowered to participate in a new kind of “folk culture” that stands in sharp contrast to the “highly choreographed cultural production system of the industrial information economy.”²¹ Benkler writes that this form of engagement with cultural products means an important transformation in our understanding of culture’s role in society:²²

This plasticity, and the practices of writing your own culture, then feed back into the transparency, both because the practice of making one’s own music, movie, or essay makes one a more self-conscious user of the cultural artifacts of others, and because in retelling anew known stories, we again come to see what the originals were about and how they do, or do not, fit our own sense of how things are and how they ought to be. There is emerging a broad practice of learning by doing that makes the entire society more effective readers and writers of their own culture.²³

Jenkins speaks similarly of these transformations, identifying the power found in “writing over [culture], modding it, amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it.”²⁴ But Jenkins goes further to argue that such developments, taking place as they are “in the affinity spaces that are emerging around popular culture,”²⁵ are particularly relevant and important to young people who need to learn how to participate in “the deliberations over what issues matter, what knowledge counts, and what ways of knowing command authority and respect.”²⁶

Existing information indeed suggests that young people may be a particularly important segment of the population for whom the relationship between consumption and culture is changing. As Rheingold discusses elsewhere in this volume, youth are far from passive when it comes to consumerism: young people in the United States are both highly wired (87 percent of teens between twelve and seventeen are online) and have a seeming naturalness with reappropriating and remaking cultural products that is attendant with coming of age surrounded by media and media technologies. Furthermore, data from the WebUse survey of college students suggests that a large fraction of young people are doing creative things online: close to 27 percent of surveyed students report making music, while almost 22 percent report writing fiction or poetry.²⁷ Much higher percentages of respondents report daily or weekly use of online services to download or listen to music (78 percent), download or watch videos (58 percent), or browse online photo albums (57 percent). The explosion in popularity (and attendant controversy) of the MySpace service, where the majority of users are between fourteen and twenty-four,²⁸ further suggests that online public spaces—where users post photos and comments and share music, for example—constitute especially important avenues for young people. Chapters by Montgomery and Raynes-Goldie and Walker in this volume also discuss the youth focus of MySpace (and the adult concern prompted by that focus).

If we are correct that consumership is changing at the same time that protest organizing costs are dropping and people are thinking of using protest practices to solve their problems, then we would expect to find cultural contestation through collective action, thereby also contributing weight to Scammel’s broader argument that “consumer critique is fundamental

to citizenship in the age of globalization.”²⁹ Anecdotes such as fan-led campaigns to “Save Firefly” being instrumental in the production of the film *Serenity*, for example, suggest this is the case. Our chapter moves beyond anecdotes to a more systematic empirical examination. In what follows, we consider how the rise of a movement society makes these instances of collective action more than an aberration on the part of fans or fanatics, but rather a part of an increasingly standard repertoire of action, used by savvy consumers as a seemingly natural way to shape the worlds of culture in which they participate.

Data and Methods

In order to study how contestation around youth culture may be taking shape through online petitions, we examine a large, random sample of online petitions targeted around entertainment concerns. Specifically, our data are drawn from a 5 percent sample of the 12,848 petitions that were included in the entertainment category on PetitionOnline³⁰ in June 2006. PetitionOnline is a free online petition-hosting Web site where individuals can use the site’s software and servers to create, host, and manage a petition on any subject. Over time, the site has housed tens of thousands of petitions and collected more than 33 million signatures.³¹

This site was selected for several reasons. First, it is one of the largest and most popular petition-hosting sites online, allowing access to a wide variety of petitions on a large number of topics. Second, prior research suggests that so-called warehouse sites³² like PetitionOnline, which house online protest actions for others, are important centers for organizing on non-standard issues.³³ Thus, data from this site will allow us to paint a vivid and deep portrait of online petitioning on nonstandard subjects.

The site allows access to an overall list of active petitions, a searchable list of active petitions, a list of the top twenty-five petitions (in terms of signatures) from the previous day, and lists of petitions by category. Categories include “Politics & Government—International,” “Politics & Government—USA,” “Politics & Government—State,” “Politics & Government—Local,” “Environment,” “Religion,” “Technology & Business,” and “Entertainment & Media.”

We focus here on petitions categorized as “Entertainment & Media” petitions in an effort to showcase and make sense of the outcropping of youth-culture petitions that can be found on the Internet. It is important to note that our data do not allow us to directly establish the age of either petition authors or petition signers as we collect data on the petitions themselves, not their authors or signers (on whom data was not available). However, we strongly argue it is reasonable to assume that many, if not most, of the youth-culture petitioning we observed was undertaken by youth. Our argument is based on several grounds: (1) data we reviewed here suggests that youth are far more likely to be the consumers of the products and celebrities discussed in the petitions we study and have been statistically more common producers of similar online content; (2) consumer distribution makes it more likely that youth, versus other age groups, will engage in contestation over the products found in the entertainment and media sections of sites such as PetitionOnline (e.g., later we discuss the difference between petitions on video games versus Microsoft Office products); and (3) a reasonable reading of the actual text of many petitions also strongly suggests younger authors (i.e., the look and the feel of the petitions is suggestive of youth authoring).

In order to gather data on these youth-culture, and likely youth-authored, petitions, we collected data from PetitionOnline in June 2006. At that time, there were 12,848 petitions on the list of active petitions³⁴ available when Web site visitors clicked on the “Entertainment

& Media" link. We randomly sampled from this list at a 5 percent rate, yielding 642 sampled petitions. We then used freely available mirroring software to download the content of each petition from PetitionOnline.

We were also provided raw data, based on data that appeared publicly on PetitionOnline, by the operators of PetitionOnline. These data covered all petitions housed within the Entertainment category, and we extracted from that larger set the data on the 642 petitions we had sampled and mirrored. Data provided by PetitionOnline included whether a "community support" constituency (i.e., a set of people expected to support the petition) was indicated by the petition creator, preferred characteristics for potential signers that were listed by petition creators, whether or not the names of signers were displayed on PetitionOnline, what country and/or U.S. state (if any) the petition focused on, the listed target(s) of the petition, and the total number of signers as of the date the data was provided in July 2006.

These data were imported into a statistical package and variables were content coded to create categorical values out of the free text data, as depicted in tables and figures in the Findings section.³⁵ All results below exclude the seventy-eight petitions from our sample that were not in English and were therefore not coded, meaning that results shown below are based on a maximum of 564 petitions (the number of petitions is sometimes lower because of missing data or nonresponses on the petition startup form).

Furthermore, the actual petition text, which was mirrored from PetitionOnline, was manually content coded to determine what kinds of claims were made in the petition text, what types of industries and products were targeted in the text of petitions (separate from the target listed in the data provided by PetitionOnline), and how the petition labeled potential signers (e.g., "fans of WWE"). In all cases, data were coded by one of the two authors and postcoding checks for invalid values were completed. Using these data, we are able to paint a vivid portrait of online petitioning around youth-culture issues, as the next section demonstrates.

Describing Youth-Culture Online Petitioning

Data from PetitionOnline demonstrate four clear empirical points. First, they challenge the assumption that entertainment-related petitioning is a marginal activity in terms of prevalence, participation, reach, or impact. Where prevalence is concerned, the overall volume of entertainment-related petitions is itself impressive: on the day in June 2006 on which we sampled petitions, there were an astounding 12,848 petitions shown in the Entertainment & Media category. Only petitions signed within the last thirty days and with ten or more signatures are displayed in the category sections on PetitionOnline, so the 12,848 figure actually understates the total number of active entertainment-related petitions housed on the site. Data provided by PetitionOnline that include petitions with fewer than ten signatures indicate that there were 21,251 entertainment petitions in July of 2006. It is difficult to cast such a large volume of online petitions as a truly marginal activity.

Another way to consider prevalence is in relation to the number of petitions hosted by PetitionOnline in other categories. As mentioned above, PetitionOnline allows petitions to be assigned to one of eight categorical groupings. In November 2006 we returned to PetitionOnline and recounted the active Entertainment & Media petitions. In the months between June, when we sampled petitions from the site, and November, the Entertainment & Media category continued to grow: there were 14,395 active Entertainment & Media petitions in November. This was by far the largest of the eight categories at that time. In order

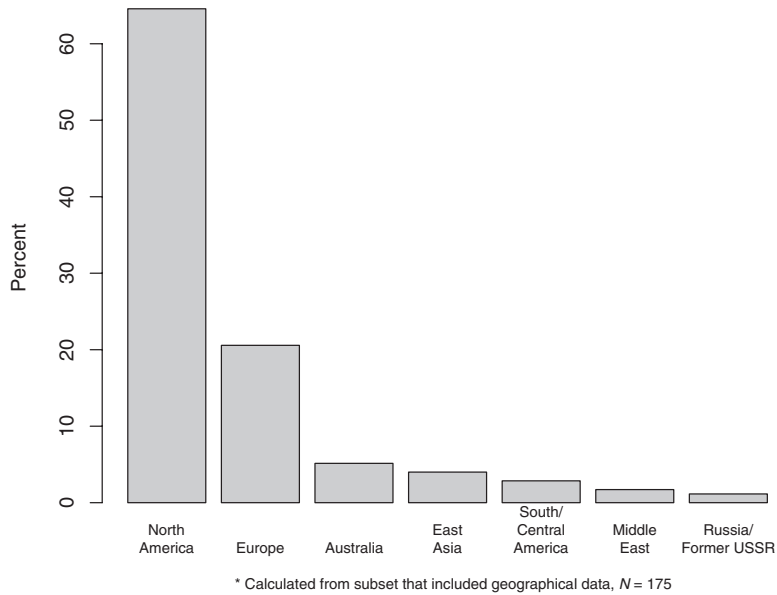


Figure 1
Geography of petitions*.

of size, from next largest to smallest, the other categories were: “Politics & Government—International” with 3,470 active petitions; “Politics & Government—Local” with 2,687 active petitions; “Technology & Business” with 2,478 petitions; “Politics & Government—USA” with 2,208 active petitions; “Environment” with 1,379 active petitions; “Politics & Government—State” with 1,336 active petitions; and “Religion” with 662 active petitions. Given that the Entertainment & Media category hosts more than four times as many active petitions as the next largest category on PetitionOnline, there is evidence of strong interest in cultural concerns.

Participation is also impressive. Of the 642 petitions we randomly sampled in June, the mean number of participants was 965, the median was 143 participants, and the maximum was 81,260 signers. The bottom 25 percent of petitions in our sample still had up to thirty-seven signers, and the top 25 percent had 528 signers or more. Thus, in terms of sheer participation, it is difficult to cast these petitions as marginal.³⁶

We also coded data on any geographic focus of the petitions, as indicated by petition creators when they registered with PetitionOnline. Although the majority of petition creators indicated no geographic focus, those that did have a geographic focus confirm that petitions nearly blanket the globe. As Figure 1 indicates, the majority of petitions in which authors indicated a geographic location were located in North America or Europe. Nonetheless, entertainment-related petitions focusing on Central and South America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Australia were also found in our sample. This suggests that, although entertainment-related petitions on PetitionOnline were largely American or European, the sample of petitions still had global reach and thus cannot be seen as extremely geographically confined, and hence marginal, activity.

This sense of a global reach is also supported by data we collected on second languages used in petitions. While we only coded petitions that were written in English, some petitions were

written in both English and a second language. Data on those additional languages show that petitions were translated into Spanish, German, Portuguese, French, and even Maori.³⁷

Although we lack systematic data on the outcomes of these petitions, we do have access to some anecdotal reports, as published on the PetitionOnline Web site, that document corporate reactions to these petitions. For instance, in one reaction recently featured on the Web site, a WebTV vice president wrote to express his concern for the customer complaints aired in the online petition that garnered fewer than a thousand signatures.³⁸ The official provided a detailed account of the ways in which WebTV was trying to resolve the set of customer complaints from the petition, including setting up special customer response teams and an ombudsperson e-mail address, among other responses. In other cases, “revival” movements attempted to bring particular programs back on air. While it can be hard to determine what role the petitions we studied play in corporate decisions to bring programs back, the goals of these groups are sometimes clearly achieved. For instance, a petition signed by just 592 fans of a canceled program was submitted, and shortly after the submission of the petition, the program was brought back.³⁹ Thus, there is some evidence that even smaller petitions still may affect their corporate targets.

Youth-Cultural Focus

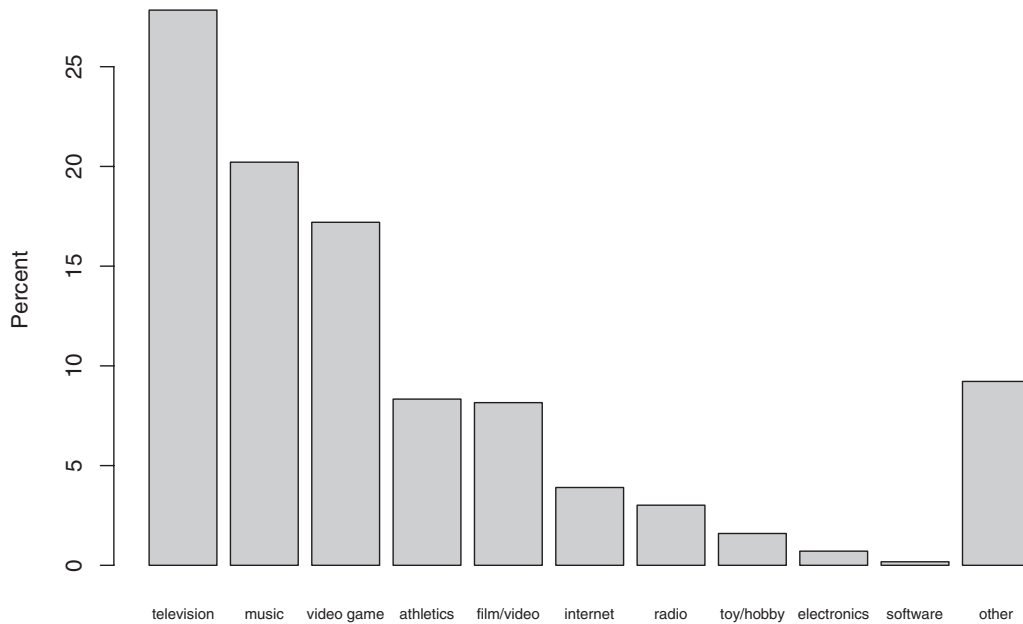
Furthermore, data on the content of petitions convincingly demonstrate that these petitions tend to focus on products and industries associated with youth culture. Figure 2 shows what industries were discussed in petitions. Television tops the charts with 27.8 percent of our sampled petitions. Music (20.2 percent) and video games (17.2 percent) followed. When one looks at specific products discussed, as shown in Figure 3, television and TV shows (22.3 percent), singers and bands, or music generally, (21.3 percent), and video games (16.7 percent) are also major foci of attention.⁴⁰ For example, petitions frequently sought to bring bands—ranging from Evanescence to Asian boy band sensations—in concert to specific cities or countries, or encouraged game publishers to make sequels to popular video games. One such music petition, addressed to record company Sony BMG, read:

After hearing the news that YG Entertainment will be having a worldwide tour in celebration of their 10th Year Anniversary, I would like to gather those living in the states of Australia to sign a petition for YG Entertainment to bring their tour to this country. (Petition number 158)

Another petition was addressed to video game publisher Ubisoft:

Beyond Good & Evil—one of the greatest games in modern history and one of the few games that actually needs a sequel. It’s a shame that the game didn’t sell better, but with your help there may be a chance for us to get some attention and convince Ubisoft that they would be making a huge mistake not releasing a sequel. Sign up now to show your support and tell all your Jade-loving friends about this petition. (Petition number 201)

When one compares specific categories—like the prevalence of petitions on nongame software versus that of video games—the youth focus of these petitions becomes even clearer. Put bluntly, the petitions we analyzed were not predominately about whether Microsoft Access or PowerPoint should be updated (a decidedly non-youth-oriented set of concerns), but were instead about whether Halo was challenging enough. In fact, petitions about Microsoft Office products did exist on PetitionOnline but tended to be housed in the “Technology & Business” category. Instead, the petitions we examined called for such things as the publisher of World of Warcraft to fix “ridiculous downtime, unstable, laggy uptime and sub-par customer service.”⁴¹ Petitioners, who cast themselves as loyal fans, asserted that they face so



* Calculated from subset of English petitions with industry information, $N = 564$

Figure 2
Industry of product*.

much “pain and frustration” from the problems with the game. They saw their concerns as not only important for their own gaming experience, but important enough to make known to the game’s producers.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the explicit targets of petitions. Data were coded from information petition creators provided when they started a petition. Results provide powerful additional support for the youth-culture focus of these petitions, as shown by the substantial percentage of petitions that targeted entertainment-related companies, industry groups, or company representatives for such firms. Not surprisingly, given results from the prior section, companies that produce film, TV, video, and video games were primary targets. For instance, one petition implored:

As fans of college baseball and college universities, we politely ask EA Sports to either make a patch including more NCAA baseball conferences for MVP NCAA Baseball 06 or to include them all in NCAA Baseball 07. (Petition number 383)

The content of petitions on other market segments, such as athletics, also suggested a strong youth-focus. For instance, several of the “sports/athletics” petitions were focused on wrestling. One such petition read:

To: World Wrestling Entertainment Inc.

The fans of sports entertainment, are banding together and are pleaing [*sic*] with the powers to be at World Wrestling Entertainment, to induct Eddie Guerrero as a member of the 2006 Hall of Fame in Chicago during Wrestle Mania 22. (Petition number 552)

Table 1
Targets of petitions*

Target	Percent
Cultural producers and companies:	
Film/TV/video	28.014
Video and computer game	18.085
Music/radio	13.652
Company representative	13.298
Sports/athletics	6.028
Celebrity	4.078
Other producers	6.028
Private individuals and/or groups	10.816
Governmental target	3.546
Other, not elsewhere specified	2.305

*N = 564; table does not sum to 100% because petitions may have more than one target.

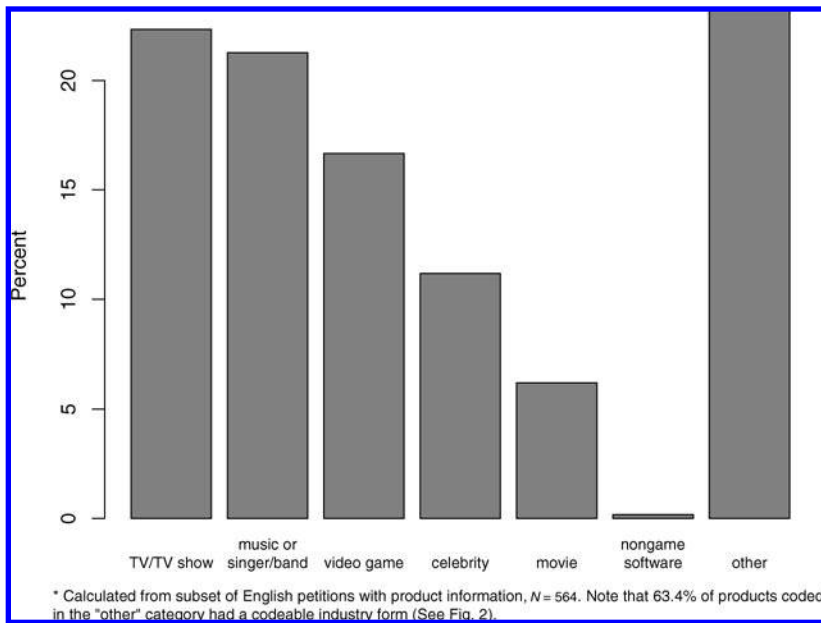


Figure 3
Product type*.

Active Consumers

Not to be lost among the findings shown in Table 1 is a major trend: the vast majority of targets in entertainment-related petitions were corporations (or their representatives), artists and celebrities, and other individuals and private groups. Government, however, was almost absent—quite conspicuously so—with fewer than 4 percent of petitions including a government target at all. Of course, this does not mean that only 4 percent of all online petitions target the government, but among petitions in the Entertainment & Media category, government was seldom seen as an appropriate target.⁴²

Table 2
Claims made on petitions*

Claim	Percent
Advocacy:	
Revive	17.021
Oppose	11.702
Save	7.801
Support	6.738
Promote	3.546
Change:	
Add or expand	21.099
Change or modify	13.652
Update	6.383
Fix or repair	4.078
Port	2.482
Policy-related claim	2.482
Customer-related claim (e.g., service)	1.241
Other, not elsewhere specified	11.879

*N = 564; table does not sum to 100% because petitions may have more than one claim.

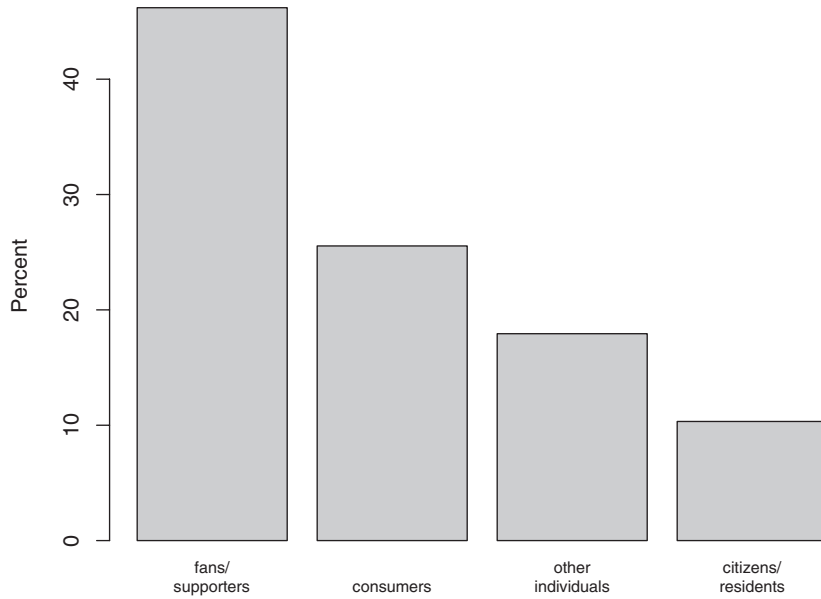
Table 2 provides data on the specific concerns, or claims made, in these petitions. Legal issues such as copyright or intellectual property, or law and government policy more generally, were rarely of concern: only about 2.5 percent of petitions focused on these issues. Instead, Table 2 shows that petitions tended to make claims in support of or opposition to products and celebrities, request changes to products, or voice concern about pricing and/or customer service. For instance, 17 percent of petitions were “revival oriented.” These petitions usually sought to bring television programs such as *American Dreams* back to broadcast or tried to persuade record companies to release recordings of live concert performances.

Similar to this type of claim were claims about “saving” products, meaning that a product had not yet been cancelled but was at risk. About 8 percent of petitions we coded made such claims, which often sought to keep canceled TV shows such as *Conviction* on the air. Petitions in this category were by no means limited to television, however; they sought to save radio stations, video games, or music venues.⁴³

In stark contrast to supportive petitions, roughly 12 percent expressed opposition to particular products or celebrities. Sports-related petitions in this category were not uncommon: one petition argued that the owner of the Baltimore Orioles had hurt the team and should no longer control the franchise. Another sought to have English soccer star David James dropped from the roster after too many “clangers.”⁴⁴

Between these two poles were generally supportive petitions that sought to support celebrities and products in some way (6.7 percent) and petitions that wanted greater promotion for products or celebrities (3.5 percent). One of these petitions sought to persuade MTV to broadcast more programming about the Backstreet Boys⁴⁵ while another expressed support for Ashlee Simpson after the singer had an embarrassing live performance on Saturday Night Live.⁴⁶

Twenty-one percent of petitions requested an addition or an expansion to a product. Petitions sought to see the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame expanded, to bring Pearl Jam in concert to Columbia or No Doubt to play a show in Brazil, and to add a video screen to a



* Calculated from petitions with formal participant label, N = 249

Figure 4
Participants named in sign-up form*.

municipal concert venue. About 14 percent of petitions featured claims that did not postulate a specific problem with a product but nonetheless wanted a modification that did not clearly involve other coded types of change. One petition, for example, advocated casting Lucy Lawless in the role of Wonder Woman in an upcoming film; another sought to move the site of a large college football game; and another petition attempted to persuade Harry Potter filmmakers to include a favorite character. Similar in spirit to these two categories, another 2.5 percent requested that products (in this case, exclusively video games) be “ported” to different systems.⁴⁷

Another 4 percent of petitions wanted changes that would fix what consumers saw as a defect in the original product. Games were prominent in this category, with petitions complaining about the ability to cheat in Halo 2 or errors in Warcraft III that prevented the game from running correctly. Slightly over 6 percent of petitions requested updates to products. Sequels were a common request here, with petitions that asked for a third *Bill and Ted* film, a sequel to the video game *Skies of Arcadia*, or a sequel to the film *Last Dragon*.

As is evident from the examples and their frequencies, the vast majority of these petitions attempted to compel producers to alter their practices or products. But is there any evidence that these petitioners understood these activities as part of their role as consumers? Data shown in Figures 4 and 5 provide some leverage over these questions, showing that the answer seems to be yes.

Figure 4 is based on data that petition creators provided when they created a petition. Specifically, in the petition startup form, creators are asked if there are particular “eligible signatories” for their petition. Unfortunately, over half of petitions did not have a specific

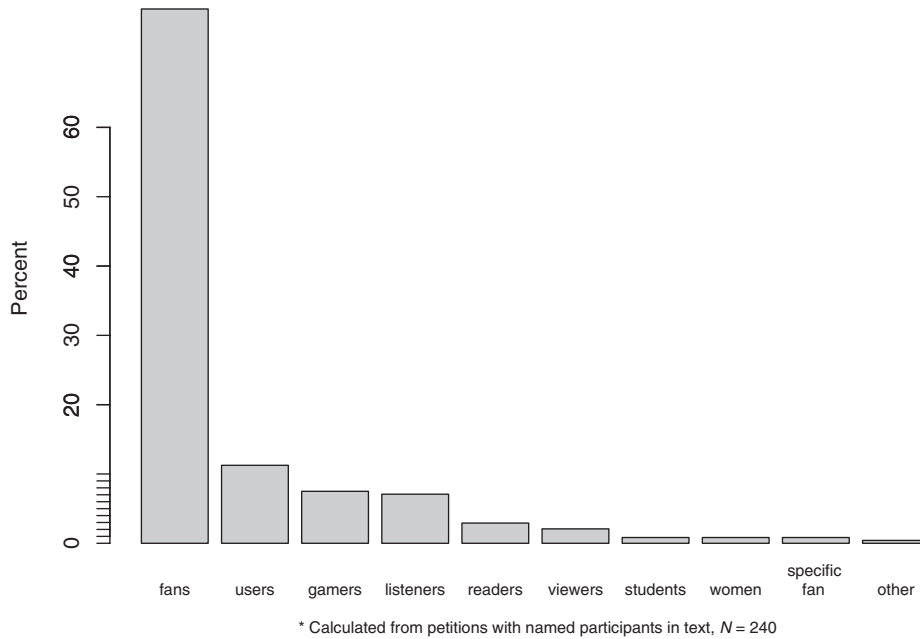


Figure 5
Signers named in petition text*.

set of eligible signatories according to the signup form, and are thus not included in Figure 4. However, of data that were entered in the signup form, fans/supporters (46.2 percent) and consumers (25.5 percent) were among the most frequent categories.

Figure 5 is based on coding of the petition text itself, which often indicated some audience for the petition and/or characteristics of likely petition supporters. These data provide an interesting counterpart to the optional field in the signup form, confirming that petitions were overwhelmingly expected to be signed by “fans.” Where an identity could be determined, 77 percent of petitions were designed for fans,⁴⁸ as in these examples: “We have been loyal fans to ECW since the beginning”⁴⁹ and “We, the loyal fans of the Dodgers and respecters of tradition, are appalled at the treatment of long time announcer Ross Porter.”⁵⁰

Beyond this general category of fan was a more specialized one in which signers or petition authors identified themselves as members of a very specific, named fan group: “Kopites”⁵¹ are fans of Liverpool soccer; “Pottermaniacs”⁵² are particularly enthusiastic Harry Potter fans. This category of fan was a small proportion of the total set of petitions (2.9 percent), but they are noteworthy for the highly specialized, personalized nature of the self-identification.

Other popular potential signers were identified as viewers or watchers (7.5 percent; one such petition identifies its signers as “Space-oriented viewers worldwide”⁵³ and another identifies signers as “Old Nickelodeon watchers”⁵⁴). A number of petitions (7.1 percent) identified signers as gamers. Others were designated as users (2.1 percent): “This petition is designed to express the heartily [*sic*] disappointment and frustration of users using Valve™ Steam Platform for online gaming.”⁵⁵ Smaller numbers (.83 percent) of petitions identified petition

signers as listeners or readers, writing, for example, “We, the listeners of Hot 97 (WQHT) and family/friends/fans of Aaliyah Haughton, were outraged when morning show host Star made fun of the death of Aaliyah on August 27th 2001.”⁵⁶

Together, these data on petitions and desired signers support our claim that these petitions represent a reformulation of the consumer role. Far from passive consumers of prior decades, these consumers expect—and demand—particular things from producers. As such, these consumers are defying expectations that they are passive, instead challenging the authority of cultural producers to decide which products to produce and how they should be produced. These data also suggest a sense of something akin to collective identity, where consumers understand themselves not as part of a body politic but a cultural public that shares common interests, common desires, and common cause with other fans, or Xenites, or Pottermaniacs. We further see this as fitting well with Jenkins’s suggestion that consumers’ self-identification with fan communities “does not simply affirm their brand affiliation, but also empowers these groups to assert their own demands on the company.”⁵⁷ To the extent that the petition writers identify themselves as fans, or as having specialized product-related identities, they are creating communities through which they can and expect to make claims about the products they consume.

Active Communities

To the extent that our data show some nascent sense of collective identity, or at least some shared perspective among consumers, does it also imply any collective organization behind these petitions and/or in support of these petitions? We have two pieces of evidence with which to address this question. First, the petition startup form asked petition authors to name any specific group or community what would likely support the petition, such as “members of the Sierra Club.”⁵⁸

We categorized the communities named and found that 178 of 564 petitions (or about 32 percent) did name some informal or formal group, including seventy-six petitions (13.5 percent of all petitions) that indicated some named fan community, forty-one (7.3 percent of all petitions) that indicated some organization or group that was not fan-based, thirty (5.3 percent of all petitions) that indicated the membership of some formal organization, and thirty-one petitions (5.5 percent of all petitions) that indicated a looser version of community where supporters shared common characteristics but did not come together in groups. While not a majority of petitions, it is notable that nearly a third of the petitions we coded were expected to be supported by a specific community.

Second, the petition startup form also asked petition creators to indicate whether expected supporters and/or support communities had a Web presence. About two-thirds of the petitions that were expected to be supported by communities had a Web presence (112 petitions out of 178). Another thirty-four petitions had a Web presence for supporters who were not labeled as a community (and hence not coded as part of the 178 community-supported petitions). These data suggest that the communities that underlie these petitions may be constituted or maintained online, potentially deepening the digital impact on civic engagement (and on the definition of *civic*) examined in this chapter.

Discussion and Conclusion

The prominent role of cultural industries in the day-to-day lives of consumers seems undeniable. We have argued that contestation centered on the goods produced by those industries

is a meaningful form of civic engagement—perhaps even one that signals a significant shift in the relationship between consumers and producers. We have also argued that this engagement may be particularly important for youth. Petitioners are not passive consumers, content with whatever producers offer. They are active users who both take meaning from and assign it to cultural material. By asking for fixes, sequels, and improvements, users are making a different kind of claim to ownership, claims made even more pronounced when consumers reshape and redistribute those goods.⁵⁹

Our findings have implications beyond the institutionalization of movement tactics and new relationships between consumers and products. One important implication concerns legal issues and digital property, a concern that has been raised by numerous scholars. DiMaggio et al., for example, identify some of the areas in which both political engagement and culture are subject to change as digital technology proliferates.⁶⁰ They highlight one of the issues that has been most enduring in the study of intersecting politics and culture online, suggesting that widespread “ideals of openness” online are likely to conflict with the needs of commercial actors in the digital marketplace to protect their investments via copy protection and copyright policies. Healy notes that policies about how cultural goods are shared and distributed will affect the extent to which consumers of those products will be passive or active users; that is, the protections that guarantee markets for cultural producers are likely to impinge on the ability of consumers to modify or redistribute digital products.⁶¹ To the extent that policies favor producers, those producers might, as Balkin writes, “push consumers back into their pre-Internet roles as relatively passive recipients of mass media content.”⁶²

Lessig recognizes that this openness is not guaranteed, noting that the tradition of a “free culture” of fair use, or of reappropriating music, images, and text to make new creative or cultural works, is transformed into a “permissions culture” by restrictive policies or copy protection technologies.⁶³ It is clear that the mold of future digital products is yet to be cast, and, while consumers seem to be asserting new kinds of relationships with culture, the further development of law and policy will greatly affect the realization of those relationships. We take the fact that petitioners are collectively pursuing changes to cultural goods as an important opening for a potentially larger engagement between consumers (and youth as a critical subset of consumers), producers, and the state over these issues.

There are reasons to believe that the kinds of engagements we discuss here could in fact lead to more standard forms of political and civic engagement later. As Rheingold discusses in his chapter in this volume, research on online engagement suggests that some kinds of online interaction can lead to more explicitly political online engagement.⁶⁴ Rheingold also suggests two criteria for activities (or broader projects) that are more likely to turn Internet use into online political engagement: (1) whether the activity involves connection to others and (2) whether young people learn to express themselves. We think the cause-oriented engagements we studied here provide that connection to a community of other interested persons and that petition writing and signing can be a forum for learning how to express oneself in a collective context. Furthermore, we think it is important to note that young people are learning these things while they work on issues they care about—as opposed to issues that adults believe they should care about—and using tools that they appropriated—as opposed to tools that were assigned to them. The authenticity of these actions, then, might also be independently important to the experience of young people involved in cultural contestation.

Beyond the potential to spur political activity over time, the implications of our study for research are also significant. For instance, scholars need to consider how it is that participants come to take part in online petitions, or online protests more generally. Some well-known models for recruiting participation seem to be a good fit for explaining this kind of engagement: being asked to participate, for example, is a factor that seems important to offline political and protest engagement⁶⁵ and is also likely to fit an online model of forwarded e-mail, blog entries soliciting comment, and petitions that encourage signers to add their e-mail address to the list. Other models of participation, however, such as those rooted in organizational membership⁶⁶ may find less support online. It also seems likely that additional factors, unanticipated by prior models of participation, are at work; future research should explore this in more detail.

Much of the research ahead is also specifically focused on youth. For instance, in addition to the importance of cultural products to youth culture, are there other reasons why young people seem so interested in Internet petitioning on entertainment-related topics? One likely possibility is that people are often more likely to participate in protest, or politics more generally, when they think that their efforts may “matter.” There are numerous anecdotes, some relayed above, of even small online petitions (a few hundred signers or less) resulting in changes to corporate policies or products. This fits with existing expectations on the part of scholars that a personal sense of efficacy may be an important factor that prompts people to engage in collective action. That sense of efficacy may be something young people are gaining from their cultural contestation that they do not get from interactions with government. For instance, research by Coleman suggests that in more formal political arenas, cultural consumers—such as *Big Brother* enthusiasts—often feel as though their opinions and actions won’t matter.⁶⁷ If this efficacy is a motivator for participation, then online petitioning will translate into broader political engagement only where youth feel like their voices will matter. Consequently, it remains to be seen whether an early sense of efficacy in cultural contestation will translate into explicitly state-oriented activity in the future.

Another question for future research involves whether the kind of petitioning we analyzed here will continue. We suspect that it will and that we have actually only begun the chart the long course of Internet petitions involved in cultural contestation. Even if young people or adults begin to translate the concerns we discussed here into more explicitly political concerns over intellectual property, as we discussed just above, we suspect that this will be an extension, not a replacement, of ongoing petitioning. Of course, only time, and future research, will determine whether our best guess is correct.

Methodological Appendix

This appendix covers technical details of the manual content coding completed by the authors.

Data From PetitionOnline

Where data provided by PetitionOnline is concerned, the coding scheme was as follows:

- 1 “Support groups” was coded from data entered by petition authors in the COMMUNITY_SUPPORT field of the petition setup form. This field indicated which individuals or groups, if any, were likely to support the petition according to the petition author. Coding categories included fans (e.g., “fans of WWE” and “Xenites,” who

- are fans of Xena), individuals who shared specified characteristics other than being fans (e.g., “people who have taste”), groups or formal organizations (e.g., the Example Guild), and members of a group or formal organization but not the actual group (e.g., members of Example Guild).
- 2 “Web Presence of Support Group” was coded “1” if the individuals or groups coded in Support Group had a Web site or other identifiable Internet presence and “0” if they did not.
 - 3 “Continent” was coded based on the country (if any) that was listed by the petition creator in the geographic fields in the petition setup form. Categories included North America, South or Central America, Europe, Africa (which had an observed frequency of 0), the Middle East, the former Soviet bloc or Russia, East Asia (including Japan but excluding former Soviet block countries), and Australia.
 - 4 “Governmental Target” was coded based on the target listed by the petition creator in the petition setup form. Categories included governmental entities, quasi-governmental entities, private entities, and “other.”
 - 5 “Specific Target” was coded based on the target listed by the petition creator in the petition setup form. Categories included individuals based on a shared characteristics except for youth and/or students (e.g., fans, women); youth and/or students; celebrities (including musical bands); religious organizations; individual managers or employees of a company or other organization; a film, video, or television company or industry group; a music or talk radio company or industry group; a computer-related company or industry group (including video game producers and Internet Web sites); a publishing and print media company or industry group; a sports/athletics company or industry group (including wrestling and NASCAR); a toy company or industry group; an explicitly multimedia company (e.g., Sony); an entertainment company or industry group not elsewhere classified; a non-entertainment-related business not elsewhere classified; a private club or organization; the executive branch and/or an executive figure; a government agency (e.g., attorney general, IRS, FDA); a legislative branch of the government and/or a legislative figure; a judicial branch of the government and/or a judicial figure; a foreign government or their embassy; a tribal government; law enforcement and/or corrections; government bodies not elsewhere classified; and a category for “Other, not elsewhere classified.”
 - 6 “Total Signatures” was simply the count of signatures provided by PetitionOnline; it did not require any coding by the authors.

Data Coded From the Text of Mirrored Petitions

Additional data were coded from the text of petitions themselves, as detailed below:

- 1 “English” was coded “1” when petitions were written in English (including those written in English and a second language), and “0” otherwise. Non-English petitions were not coded further.
- 2 “Second Language” is the name of the second, non-English language that appeared in the petition, if any.
- 3 “Claims:” As many as four claims were coded for each petition. The claim is coded to represent the action sought by the petitioner. Claims codes included the support or revival

of a product or celebrity; seeking to save a product from being discontinued or canceled; calls for publicity for a product; expressions of support, concern, or care for a product or celebrity; requests to fix or repair a product that is asserted to be broken; requests to update an existing product, such as through the creation of a new album or a sequel; expansion of an existing product, such as by broadcasting to a wider area or distributing in an additional format; changes to a product otherwise unspecified; requests to “port” a product such as a game to another platform or hardware system; claims regarding intellectual property such as patent or digital rights management issues; claims regarding copyright as a specific issue; issues regarding prices of products or services; claims relating to customer service; claims pertaining to law or policy specifically; and a final category for other claims not represented by this list. In the case of claims not specified in by the earlier categories, text was entered to more fully describe the petition’s claim.

- 4 “Product/Celebrity” is a categorical variable coded to represent the type of product on which the petitions are seeking some action. It contains the following categories: specific celebrity or group of celebrities (Eddie Guerrero or the Rat Pack); specific movie or set of films; specific television show or shows; specific singer, band, song, or music source (such as a radio station); specific video or online game(s); specific nongame software; and a category for other types of products.
- 5 “Product name” is a text field containing the actual name of whatever product is the focus of the petition.
- 6 “Industry” is coded to represent the umbrella industry that produces the focal product, and is coded with the following categories: radio, television, film and video, games, music, software, athletics, and a final category for industries not otherwise specified. When this last category was indicated, an additional text field was completed to describe the industry.
- 7 “Date” was coded any time the petition indicated a specific end date, and included fields for standard date elements (year, month, day) plus season (winter, spring, summer, fall).
- 8 “Signers” were coded up to four times for each petition to represent the types of people identified as the petitioners. Signer categories include fans, users, gamers, watchers, listeners, readers, students, men, women, and specific types of named fans such as “Pottermaniacs.” A final category was included to allow text for types of signers not otherwise classified, such as “loyal followers,” “family members,” or “friends.”

Notes

1. See David S. Meyer and Sydney Tarrow, A Movement Society: Contentious Politics for the New Century, in *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for the New Century*, ed. David S. Meyer and Sydney Tarrow (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 1–28, for a longer discussion of this point.
2. Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
3. Recent research has suggested that a large share of historical protest did not target the state, but instead targeted other powerful actors (Nella Van Dyke, Sarah A. Soule, and Verta A. Taylor, *The Targets of Social Movements: Beyond a Focus on the State*, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 25

[2004]: 27–51). This work shows that the centrality of government to classic forms of civic engagement such as protest has been more of an assumption on the part of scholars and policy makers than it was an empirical reality.

4. See Van Dyke, Soule, and Taylor for historical figures on offline protest in the United States, and Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *The Targets of Online Protest: State and Private Targets of Four Online Protest Tactics* (unpublished manuscript, 2006), for data on online protest in the United States.

5. Stephen Coleman, *How the Other Half Votes: Big Brother Viewers and the 2005 General Election* (London: Hansard Society, 2006).

6. Coleman, p. 12, is contributing to a broader debate about how to define politics, activism, and community both online as well as offline. Online, boundaries between institutional and extra- or anti-institutional activity are becoming less distinct and the costs of engaging in those activities are shrinking. Offline, the tactics of social movements are increasingly appropriated for new ends in a movement society. As both trends continue, scholars are increasingly confronting the question of how to define challenges to power.

7. Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

8. See Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), for an interesting discussion on this point.

9. W. Lance Bennett, Branded Political Communication: Lifestyle Politics, Logo Campaigns, and the Rise of Global Citizenship, in *Politics, Products, and Markets: Exploring Political Consumerism Past and Present*, ed. Michele Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal, and Dietlind Stolle (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 2004), 101–26, provides some discussion that is complementary to this idea, exploring the way that activists engage in contestation over the public images of companies whose behavior they seek to change. While the domain of culture and consumer goods is common between our work and Bennett's, we differ in that the activists Bennett identifies are much more explicitly political in both their goals and tactics.

10. Meyer and Tarrow.

11. See Sarah A. Soule and Jennifer Earl, A Movement Society Evaluated: Collective Protest in the United States, 1960–1986, *Mobilization* 10 (2005): 345–64, for a review of this literature.

12. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Movement Societies and Digital Protest: Non-traditional Uses of Four Protest Tactics Online* (paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, Canada, 2006).

13. See research by Jennifer Earl, Pursuing Social Change Online: The Use of Four Protest Tactics on the Internet, *Social Science Computer Review* 24 (2006): 362–77; Jennifer Earl, Step-Child Forms of Activism? Online Production and Participation in Protest Actions (unpublished manuscript, 2006); Jennifer Earl and Alan Schussman, The New Site of Activism: On-Line Organizations, Movement Entrepreneurs, and the Changing Location of Social Movement Decision-Making, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 24 (2003): 155–87; Jennifer Earl and Alan Schussman, Cease and Desist: Repression, Strategic Voting and the 2000 Presidential Election, *Mobilization* 9 (2004): 181–202; Alan Schussman and Jennifer Earl, From Barricades to Firewalls? Strategic Voting and Social Movement Leadership in the Internet Age, *Sociological Inquiry* 74 (2004): 439–63; Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment, *Communication Theory* 15 (2005): 365–88; and Andrew J. Flanagin, Cynthia Stohl, and Bruce Bimber, Modeling the Structure of Collective Action, *Communication Monographs* 73 (2005): 29–54.

14. Earl and Schussman, *The New Site of Activism*.

15. See Earl, *Step-Child Forms of Activism?* for a host of implications.

16. Earl, Step-Child Forms of Activism?
17. Earl and Kimport, Movement Societies and Digital Protest.
18. S. Howard-Spink, Grey Tuesday, Online Cultural Activism and the Mash-up of Music and Politics, *First Monday* 9 (2004). Retrieved October 1, 2006. http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue9_10/howard/.
19. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
20. Jack M. Balkin, Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society, *NYU Law Review* 79 (2004): 10.
21. Benkler, 299.
22. In some ways, this kind of production mirrors that of “pro-ams” (i.e., professional-amateurs) in systems of “user-driven innovation,” where it has been understood for some time that the skilled users and consumers of products can have an important role in subsequent development (Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, *The Pro-Am Revolution* [London: Demos, 2004]); Eric von Hippel, Open Source Shows the Way: Innovation By and For Users—No Manufacturer Required! *Sloan Management Review* 42 (2001): 82–86; Howard-Spink). But the significant difference is the scale of activity in an economy where malleable cultural goods are ubiquitous.
23. Benkler, 299.
24. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 257.
25. Jenkins, 259.
26. Jenkins, 258–59.
27. Eszter Hargittai, Just a Pretty Face(book)? What College Students Actually Do Online (2006), <http://results.webuse.org/uic06/> (accessed June 1, 2006).
28. danah boyd, Identity Production in a Networked Culture: Why Youth Heart MySpace (2006). Retrieved June 1, 2006. <http://www.danah.org/papers/AAAS2006.html>.
29. Margaret Scammell, The Internet and Civic Engagement: The Age of the Citizen-Consumer, *Political Communication* 17 (2000): 351–55.
30. <http://www.petitiononline.com> (accessed June 2006).
31. <http://www.petitiononline.com> (accessed July 2006).
32. Earl, Pursuing Social Change Online.
33. Earl and Kimport, Movement Societies and Digital Protest.
34. As discussed more later, active petitions are defined by PetitionOnline as petitions with more than ten signatures that have been signed within the last thirty days. Petitions that do not have at least ten signatures, or that have not been signed in the last month, are still hosted by PetitionOnline, but are not displayed in the category views.
35. See the methodological appendix for details on coding.
36. Admittedly, for a petition to appear within the category we sampled from it must have had at least ten signatures (see earlier), which does bias participation estimates upward. But, if participation was very low, then most of the petitions we did observe would have had just over ten signers, which was not the case.

37. Although we did not systematically identify the languages for all seventy-eight non-English petitions, it is clear that some of these were written in Chinese and Italian, among other languages.
38. See <http://www.petitiononline.com/BAMMO49/petition.html> (accessed August 2006).
39. See <http://www.petitiononline.com/qzmania/> (accessed August 2006).
40. Regarding “other” categories for industry and product types, 8.5 percent of all petitions could not be coded with at least one industry or product category. We suggest that given the highly particularistic nature of claims facilitated by a movement society, this level of unclassified products is acceptable.
41. Petition number 56.
42. In fact, Earl and Kimport, *The Targets of Online Protest*, sampled online petitions and found that over 50 percent of online petitions targeted the government across various samples and populations.
43. We also coded petitions related to video games that were cancelled before they went to market (i.e., cancelled while in production) as making a “save” claim. Although the games had not reached market, we coded these as such because game developers regularly “hype” in-development products by releasing previews in order to build a consumer base. These events could not be readily coded as “revivals” since the products were not fully released.
44. Petition number 262.
45. Petition number 212.
46. Petition number 257.
47. Software is usually tied to a single gaming machine or computer system. Porting is the process of converting software built for one platform so that it will work on another system.
48. This percentage excludes the petitions where an identity category could not be coded, and so uses 240, instead of 564, as the denominator for the percentage.
49. Petition number 23.
50. Petition number 96.
51. Petition number 352.
52. Petition number 173.
53. Petition number 137.
54. Petition number 407.
55. Petition number 492.
56. Petition number 495.
57. Jenkins, 80.
58. See http://www.petitiononline.com/create_petition.html (accessed July 2006).
59. Some might alternatively consider the role of online petitions to be a source of information about cultural goods, rather than a genuine display of contention. However, our detailed reading of the petitions does not support this alternative reading. Authors generally phrased their concerns as a set of demands or desires, not as simply informative. As well, the choice of a petitioning Web site is highly suggestive of an at least somewhat adversarial posture.
60. Paul DiMaggio, Eszter Hargittai, W. Russell Neuman, and John P. Robinson, *The Social Implications of the Internet*, *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 307–36.

61. Kieran Healy, Survey Article: Digital Technology and Cultural Goods, *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10 (2002): 478–500.
62. Balkin, 21.
63. Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).
64. See his discussion of Livingstone, Bober, and Helsper's 2005 research from the UKCGO project, for example.
65. See Bert Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997); Alan Schussman and Sarah A. Soule, Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation, *Social Forces* 84 (2005): 1081–106; and Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
66. Doug McAdam, Recruitment to High Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer, *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1986): 64–90; Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism, *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1993): 54–90.
67. Stephen Coleman, A Tale of Two Houses: The House of Commons, the *Big Brother* House and the People at Home, *Parliamentary Affairs* 56 (2003): 733–58.