Through the Social Web: Citizen-led Participation in Ontario Policy-making

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Information
University of Toronto

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Abstract

In the mid to late 1990s, many states developed eGovernment programs that included the use of consultation technologies. More recently, the social characteristics of the web have emerged as offering an alternative means for citizen participation, promising more openness and inclusion. In this dissertation I draw upon studies of the policy-making process and media design, to examine the implications of citizen-led production of infrastructures for public participation in policy-making through the social web and within the context of open government discourse.

My research methods for this research project were ethnographically informed. I participated in the design and use of social web infrastructures for participation in policy-making as a contributor to open government communities in Ontario, Canada. I also analyzed Hansard records as well as the popular press, and interviewed 15 citizen designers who created social web based infrastructures for public participation in the policy-making of four bills in Ontario. In my research, I develop and use the term citizen designer drawing on the more common phrase of citizen journalist. Both terms suggest that citizens can engage in creative
practices to encourage institutions such as government or the mass media to become more participatory.

The citizen designers in my project were found to act as policy entrepreneurs, sometimes for particular bills, but more generally for the broader ideal of open government that includes citizen participation. The major finding of this work is that citizens are using an integrated mix of social web tools across multiple policy windows to promote openness and participation. This work contributes to the policy, information and the internet studies literatures on the roles and experiences of internet-savvy policy entrepreneurs who are situated in civil society networks, which are not always tied to formal organizations. This work also expands our understandings of citizenship to include the design and use of the social web in everyday political life.
Acknowledgments

It takes a village to help a scholar to complete her PhD. My village includes my research participants, supervisory committee, colleagues, my friends and family and also some funders. I would like to begin by thanking my research participants who shared their insights with me and made this work possible.

At the university, there were many members of my village who were helpful. Foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Andrew Clement. Andrew has been a collaborator, coach, and mentor throughout my doctoral degree. Andrew has taught me much about the work of a public intellectual. My committee members Matt Ratto and Megan Boler were also highly supportive of my project. They asked critical questions at key points that helped me to develop my work. Outside of my committee, professors Gale Moore, Leslie Shade, Cara Krmpotich and Lynne Howarth assisted me to towards the end-goal of completing my degree.

A number of PhD students (or recent graduates) have provided assistance during my degree. Brenda McPhail, Joseph Ferenbok, Adam Fiser, Lisa Quirke, Diane Dechief, Tamara Shepherd, Alison Harvey, Terry Costantino, Lysanne Lessard and numerous others have been part of the process and demonstrated interest in this work. I am fortunate that my colleagues double as friends, they were willing to proofread work, provide feedback and debrief with me as the research unfolded.

Personally, I was also supported by my family and friends. My parents Sid and Linda Smith and my brother Greg and his partner Jordan Hale supported me throughout the PhD process. In particular, I would like to thank my mother Linda, who proofread early drafts of this work when
my eyes were bleary. Close friends Jen King and Adrian Ishak ensured that I continued to have a life outside of academia! Adrian was enthusiastic to take vacations to my conference destinations. Jen went as far as to cook me a pancake breakfast before my defence, only two days before she gave birth to her son.

I will now turn to some administrative matters in my acknowledgements. As a PhD student, I was fortunate to receive funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada as well as support from the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto. I am greatly appreciative of the funding that made my doctoral education and research possible.

As a final acknowledgement, I used a variety of images in this dissertation including images I created myself, photos shared on the web under Creative Commons licences, screen shots of websites and images from reports. Within the context of this dissertation I analyze the images produced by others to conduct criticism and review as a component of my scholarly research. My uses of images from external copyrighted sources are therefore permissible under fair dealing provisions of the Copyright Act of Canada. I acknowledge the creators and sources of the images I utilize as required under fair dealing provisions. Images without acknowledgements were created by myself, the author of this dissertation.
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1 Participation and openness: Contested democratic values

**October 2004** – At the start of Premier McGuinty's first term in office, the Ontario government begins to consult and engage citizens using an array of methods including an online budget consultation and Town Hall Ontario portal. This practice of online consultation and the Town Hall Ontario portal is subsequently observed to taper off provincially (Borins & Brown, 2007)

**February 2004** – Facebook is launched

**February 2005** – YouTube is launched

**May 2007** – Facebook is banned from the computers of Ontario government staff members (Benzie, 2007)

**June 2007** - News reports describe Toronto as the Facebook capital of the world (Shimo, 2007)

**October 2008** – At the Ontario legislature, public hearings are held on Ontario's Bill 85, The Photo Card Act. The hearings are held in the Standing Committee on General Government. Very few people participate to inform the policy on enhanced drivers’ licenses. Submissions to the hearings are posted online by academics, not government (http://www.idforum.ischool.utoronto.ca/)

**November 2008** – After 100,000 young people join a Facebook group protesting proposed laws for young drivers, McGuinty backs down on passenger restrictions for young drivers and suggests the need to consult with young people in their own digital environment. McGuinty does not see public hearings as an appealing participatory policy making process for youth (Campbell, 2008)

**November 2012** – Ontario launches an open data portal with 63 data sets (Ontario, 2012a)
This brief timeline of events is meant to sketch the basic background context of my research. It introduces some of the tensions of both use and non-use of the social web in policy-making by the provincial government and citizens in Ontario, Canada. In brief, the social web consists of digital interfaces, which facilitate individuals sharing data or content with other people. Creating a Facebook group, posting a YouTube video or mashing up government data are now widely acknowledged strategies for getting involved politically and socially through the internet. What constitutes “good” political participation in a social web based environment, however, remains debatable. Online activities where citizens create or share content exemplify a social version of the internet, but the implications of these activities are unclear.

In this dissertation, I critically examine the rise of these social modes of political participation online and whether optimistic perceptions of them as vehicles for effective citizen engagement are appropriate within the current rhetoric calling for open government. As illustrated by the timeline above, the relationship between the government and the social web in Ontario is an uneasy one. Through the Town Hall Ontario and the open data portal examples, I believe that government is attempting to use the internet in innovative ways to engage its citizens. Many factors, however, may hinder public involvement. Can participation be enacted effectively when social and participatory websites rise and fall under the same government leadership? Is participation via social media platforms worthwhile when government computers ban civil servants from accessing these sites? Finally, is robust, meaningful and open political participation in policy-making even possible at this point in our history given the current information communication technologies (ICTs)\(^1\) and our existing political system?

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\(^1\) In Appendix A I provide a list of the acronyms I use repeatedly in this dissertation. In Appendix B I provide a glossary of technical terms that are used in this text.
One of my foundational observations that informed this dissertation was that citizens are using the social web to engage in policy-making in Ontario, because of a lack of institutionalized government-led opportunities online. Despite an early vision for citizen engagement online in 2004 exemplified by Budget Town Halls and the Town Hall Ontario site, the government of Premier McGuinty of Ontario\(^2\) did not facilitate the creation of a robust in-house government infrastructure for citizens’ electronic participation, or eParticipation, as part of the normal process of policy-making (eParticipation and policy-making processes will be described in Chapter 2).\(^3\)

To critically examine the status of citizen participation in policy-making in Ontario, my doctoral research involved ethnographic research informed by actor-network theory. Throughout my doctoral program, I participated in communities advocating for open government and use of the social web in political life. I also completed a number of design projects to familiarize myself with the social web platforms and tools available to citizen advocates and activists for public participation.

The term citizen is used in this dissertation to refer to individuals who are a part of a community and interested or affected by its politics. In using the term citizen, recognize its complexities. In the Canadian context, individuals who are interested or affected by politics may include those who may not have formal citizenship rights (i.e., landed immigrants, migrant

\(^2\) Premier McGuinty was first elected premier in 2003 and re-elected in 2007 with majority governments. In 2011 he was re-elected with a minority government. On October 15, 2012, McGuinty announced that the Liberal Party should select a new leader as he was planning to step down as premier. Kathleen Wynne became Premier of Ontario on February 11, 2013.

\(^3\) As an example of regular or normal eParticipation for citizens, please consider the example of ePetitions in the United Kingdom. ePetitions with 100,000 signatures are considered for debate in the House of Commons. See: http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/ In the UK, citizens can bring any issue to the agenda of their elected officials using mass mobilization through ePetitions.
workers, etc.). The term citizen must also be understood to be problematic within Canada as a settler state. An Indigenous person may be a citizen of a First Nation as well as possess citizenship within Canada as a nation state.

My research activities ultimately led me to locate 15 citizen designers who created social web based infrastructures for participation in policy that relate to four bills discussed in the Ontario Legislative Assembly. My interviews with citizens reported in this dissertation were conducted primarily in 2010–2011. Interview participants reflected on their involvement in policy-making that led to bills being passed in the legislature in 2008–2009 after social media was popularized as part of everyday internet use and as open government discourse was emerging.

My dissertation contributes to the literature on policy-making by considering how the use of the social web factors into the policy-making process. Kingdon’s 1984 book titled *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* provides a model of policy-making where timing is highlighted as important. As described by Kingdon (2003) in the second edition of the book, three streams including the problem, political and policy streams must converge in order to open a policy window that allows decision-making to happen. Kingdon also highlights the important role that policy entrepreneurs play in helping the policy-making process along. My contribution to augmenting his model, further explained in Chapter 2, is by identifying how citizens are using existing policy windows surrounding bills discussed in the Ontario legislature, to create opportunities to promote political openness.

Through my research work, I identify that current discourses of open government in Canada are intertwining agendas of open dialogue, open information and open data (Canada, n.d.-a). There is little indication, however, that the Ontario government is fully ready to adopt its own citizens’ participatory and social practices as they attempt to engage in political life online. In
this dissertation I will contextualize how the challenges of citizens in Ontario, who engage in policy-making online, are interwoven into a diverse global network of people, technologies and practices of political participation online and in everyday life.

1.1 An introduction to democratic participation and the internet in Canada

Dissatisfaction with democracy

Poor voter turnout rates, hovering around 50% of eligible voters, in nations such as Canada are seen as signs of diminished confidence in the political system. Research by Samara, a non-profit organization concerned with the state of democracy in Canada, recently found that “only 55% of Canadians report being satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada” and that satisfaction has decreased by 20% over the last decade (Samara, 2012, para. 2). Samara also found that at the federal level, Canadians perceive that their elected leaders do a better job at representing party views than those of their constituents (Samara, 2012). It is widely perceived, therefore, that there is a democratic deficit in Canada and a lack of ways that citizens can participate meaningfully in democratic life under our current political system. This dissatisfaction persists even though substantial investments have been made in connectivity and eGovernment programs (Barney, 2005).

Internet usage and content production through the social web by citizens

Internet usage statistics offer some preliminary insights into how Ontario residents may use the internet to participate in policy. Data from 2010 shows that 81% of households in Ontario have access to the internet (Statistics Canada, 2010). Ontario is one of three provinces above the national average for household internet access (Statistics Canada, 2010). The Canadian Internet Use Survey (CIUS) “shows that 44.2% of Canadians who used the Internet from home went online to research community events in 2007” (Veenhof, Wellman, Quell, & Hogan, 2008, p.
What exactly this means in the context of participation in political events is unclear. In an introduction to their analysis of Canadian statistical data to better understand social life and civic participation, Veenhof et al. (2008) explain that there is a perception that civic participation is changing and traditional measures such as voter turnout and newspaper readership are inadequate. Some non-traditional political participation may be unfolding through content production on the social web.

![Stop the Meter campaign image](http://openmedia.ca/meter)

**Figure 1.1: Stop the Meter campaign image**

This image was part of the OpenMedia.ca against usage-based billing for internet service in Canada. OpenMedia.ca provides this image for users to download as a badge to embed on their websites or to turn into a profile picture to show support for the cause. This image was obtained from [http://openmedia.ca/meter](http://openmedia.ca/meter) and was last accessed December 13, 2012.

We know that Canadians and Ontarians create online materials, some of which can reasonably be expected to connect to political issues and political life. The 2008 CIUS shows that 20% of home internet users contribute to content online. By the definitions of the 2008 CIUS survey, contributing content can include blogging, writing on discussion boards or uploading photographs (Statistics Canada, 2008). There have also been cases of mass Canadian political participation online via the social web. Mass mobilization examples include the Fair Copyright
Facebook group, which Michael Geist started and where 38,000 members were recruited (Geist, 2008b), and the OpenMedia.ca Stop the Meter campaign to oppose usage-based billing for internet service in Canada, to which 508,425 individuals have signed on (Charney, 2011; Milberry, 2010; OpenMedia.ca, n.d.).

The imagery of the Stop the Meter campaign shown in figure 1.1 may be familiar if you are a Canadian or if you are a friend of a Canadian through social networking sites. In addition to successful mobilization campaigns in Canada, there is also some research that contextualizes social media use in political participation in Canada and even Ontario. Blogs, Facebook and Twitter have each been explored. Blogs are one of the more “mature” formats of the social web and hence there are a number of publications on this topic. Partisanship is a popular theme as shown in the analyses. For example, Brown (2010) used content analysis and a survey to study political blogs in Canada. From his survey of 77 bloggers, 45 English-language journalists and 12 federal government communication staff members, he found that partisan blogs are repeating the discourse available elsewhere. The Infoscape Research Lab (or Infoscape) has conducted a series of studies on political blogging and also has released datasets from its research (Elmer et al., 2009; Elmer et al., 2007). Elmer et al. (2009) analyzed partisan blogroll listings (hyperlinks leading to other blogs) and found more evidence of politically insular conversations within existing party lines than cross-party exchanges.

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4 The number of signatures collected by OpenMedia.ca were gathered from the organization’s website on December 9, 2012. As a representative of Library and Archives Canada, Charney (2011) describes the Stop the Meter campaign as the "most significant online movement in Canadian history." A timeline of the movement is provided in appendix 1 to show the mobilization trends and timeline in greater detail.

5 See http://www.infoscapelab.ca/politics2.0/data
In addition to blogging research, Infoscape also examined political participation through the social networking site Facebook in Ontario in 2007. In relation to the 2007 Ontario provincial election, Langlois, Elmer, McKelvy and Devereuax (2009) located 281 Facebook groups. In the case of the Ontario election they found that users joined groups related to issues (i.e., electoral reform or raising the minimum wage) and political parties. Langlois et al. (2009) identified that there is a need for more research to explore how social web platforms are used for the networking of publics.

Research has also been conducted on how Canadians use Twitter, a microblogging platform, and more specifically on the topic of the Canadian policy hashtag of #cdnpoli. Small (2011) examined Tweets between April 26 and 30, 2010 and found a variety of contributors such as individuals, bloggers, the media and politicians. Informing (71.1%) and commentary (18.9%) were the most common content types of tweets. As another example, Samara Canada documented Canadian locations in which political conversations occur via Twitter, such as the “Ottawa bubble” of political insiders and journalists (Samara, n.d.).

Although we know that Ontarians experience high rates of connectivity and are using the social web to produce content, little is currently understood in Canada about how internet use and content production translates into engaged political participation. Some design-based research activities have been undertaken to date. Infoscape designs and releases tools for collecting content generated on the social web. There are some examples in the privacy policy domain.

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6 In this context I use the term design-based research to refer to research that involves planning and implementing new social web design projects.

7 See [http://www.infoscapelab.ca/politics2.0/tools](http://www.infoscapelab.ca/politics2.0/tools)
where citizens are participating in the design and remix culture. The PIPwatch project\textsuperscript{8} encouraged citizens to participate in the collection of information on how a variety of websites were complying with Canadian privacy laws and then displayed the results in a web browser plug-in (Clement, Costantino, Kurtz, & Tissenbaum, 2008). There is also a video and remix project that connects youth to privacy policy issues (Cucinelli & Shade, n.d.).

Research motivations and policy trajectories

My research is motivated by the fact that a more participatory Canadian government and society remains an elusive goal as new ICTs are introduced to political life and which may serve to tackle the democratic deficit. In early eGovernment visions, the provision of information through government portal websites was expected to empower citizens to engage in debate or participate in policy-making (see for example Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003; United Nations, 2006b). Novel interfaces and new capacities to facilitate robust conversations between government and its citizens were also promises claimed for eGovernment. The participatory promise of the internet is by no means new. Like the internet, the printing press, radio and fax machine have been positioned as potentially transformative technologies that guaranteed social progress at previous points in history (Eisenstein, 1979; Winner, 1992).

In Canada and other democracies, many questions linger concerning the implications of digital technology for democracy (Barney, 2005; Jenkins, Thorburn, & Seawell, 2003; Sclove, 1995). Barney (2005) suggests that it remains unresolved whether or not ICTs have “helped to make politics in Canada more democratic – specifically more inclusive, participatory, and responsive –

\textsuperscript{8} PIPwatch participants helped collect compliance information of organizations with websites in relation to Canada’s Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (2000).
than it was prior to their arrival” (p. 179). He observes that government-initiated uses of ICTs may have program objectives, such as efficiency, whereas civil society organizations more intrinsically value “genuine democratic engagement” (p. 185). Government, civil society and individuals have each attempted to create opportunities for citizen participation in policy-making on the web.

At various points in my career as a scholar and new media practitioner, I have grappled with the real-world complexities of creating a more participatory society through the use of ICTs. The most telling and influential of my research directions were my experiences with the Connecting Canadians strategy and the Government On-Line (GOL) initiative, both of which were intended to develop the capacity for online consultation in Canada.

Connecting Canadians to the internet was established as a policy objective in the mid to late 1990s. In the 1997 Speech from the Throne, the Connecting Canadians strategy outlined a broad policy framework of connectivity for the nation (Canada, 1997). A major component of the Connecting Canadians strategy was to put government documents, information and services online thereby “providing seven-day, twenty-four-hour service to Canadians and leading the way for Canadian businesses and consumers to follow” (Gutstein, 1999, p. 10-11). The 1997 Speech from the Throne also stated that government needed to “enhance the voluntary sector’s capacity to engage Canadians by improving their access to technology…to play a stronger role in Canadian life” (Investing in knowledge and creativity, para. 7).

The Government On-line (GOL) initiative was a program that operationalized the Connecting Canadians policy mandate through various projects. While many of the GOL services put online were intended to increase efficiency and improve services to citizens, other web functionality was premised on enhancing democracy. Web services such as consultation technologies have
democratic underpinnings that are not based on improving service efficiency. One of the services developed under the GOL program was the Consulting with Canadians portal. This portal lists current, ongoing and past opportunities for Canadians to become involved in policy-making. This aspect of the GOL program captured my attention.

Before commencing my doctoral studies in the fall of 2006, I completed a summer work term at Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC). While with PWGSC, I worked with the Online Consultation Centre of Expertise (OCCoE). My sense of the OCCoE’s mandate was that it existed to develop both social and technical infrastructures for consultations by the Canadian government. The unit contributed to some of the consultations that were listed on the Consulting with Canadians portal. Although my experience with the OCCoE was short, it solidified an interest to work in my community, province and country to contribute to the use of the internet to build a more participatory society. My work at the OCCoE enabled me to gain direct exposure to emerging literature on government-led consultations and the new roles for civil servants, analyzing consultations and practical implementation cases (Online Consultation Technologies Centre of Expertise, 2005a, 2005b; Richard, 2000, 2003, 2009). During some evenings after work, I also met with civil servants in Ottawa who were interested in using the social web in government.

My doctoral research project extends from my experiences and interests in online consultation, which turned my attention to my home province of Ontario. My evening conversations about the social web and government became my research interest for my doctoral work. In the next

9 Some references refer to the centre as the Online Consultation Technologies Centre of Expertise, but I will use this term unless directly citing another reference.
section, I will briefly introduce the literature in the area of the social web and citizen participation in democracy and define key concepts.

1.2 The social web and citizen participation in democracy

The literature on political life and the internet is vast. This literature spans topics including terms such as eGovernment, eDemocracy and eParticipation (S. Coleman & Gøtze, 2001; Heeks, 1999; Macintosh & Whyte, 2006), political campaigning online (Anstead & Chadwick, 2009; Bimber & Davis, 2003; Teachout, 2008), eVoting (Electronic Frontiers Foundation, n.d.-b; Rubin, 2006), social movements online (Garrett, 2006; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010), hacktivism (Beyer, 2011; Samuel, 2004) and, quite recently, open government and government using the social web (Booth, 2010; Eggers, 2005; Noveck, 2009; Osimo, 2008). Across these domains, the literature that pertains to my research most closely addresses how citizens might be able to influence or participate in public policy-making via the social web.

My research investigates the idea that citizen participation in policy-making is taking place, in part, on the social web. Policy participation through the social web has unfolded as Canada has transitioned from an eGovernment to an eParticipation culture, at least rhetorically (Chapter 2 will explain these concepts). As Coleman and Blumer phrase it, we have both “participation from above” and “participation from below” (2009). To describe this transition or flux, Loader and Mercea (2011) draw upon Papacharissi and state that, with a transition of participation to social media, we are in a “second generation of internet democracy” where there “is the displacement of the public sphere model with that of a networked citizen-centred perspective” (p. 758). Loader and Mercea (2011) as well as Noveck (2009) argue that virtual public sphere models of democracy are being updated to emphasize the collaboration of citizens via the social web. I will define the key concepts of democracy, participation, the social web, designers/end-users,
infrastructure, and citizen designers before introducing my research context and questions more closely within the current framework of open government.

1.2.1 Key concepts

Democracy

There are numerous definitions of democracy. For this thesis, I draw upon the Habermesian (1989) ideal of the public sphere, Mouffe’s (1999) model of agonistic pluralism, and emerging definitions of do-it-yourself (DIY) making and participation via the social web as components of democratic life. Habermas’s ideal of the public sphere is that it is a site where rational critical debate leads to the formation of public opinion, which is separate from the state but can influence government. I discuss the public sphere in greater depth in chapter 2. In brief, it is important to understand that numerous scholars identify that deliberation in the public sphere has been very influential in conceptualizing public participation in democracy via the internet (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007b; Noveck, 2009; Papacharissi, 2002). There are also numerous critiques of the public sphere in these works as well as Mouffe’s (1999). The public sphere model of democracy has been insufficient to describe online political participation and hence looking to other models is necessary.

Mouffe (1999) calls for a model of democracy which she names agonistic pluralism. The key tenet of agonistic pluralism and radical democracy for Mouffe is the “need to acknowledge the dimension of power and antagonism and their ineradicable character” (p. 752). Mouffe cautions, “democratic society cannot be conceived any more as a society that would have realized the dream of a perfect harmony or transparency” (p. 752). Mouffe encourages us to consider the contestations that are a part of democracy. In my research, I examine the kinds of contestations in democracy that can emerge through participation in social web media making.
Ratto and Boler (In press) describe that digital and digitally-mediated making is a “critical” activity for citizenship that allows for intervention into the existing systems of power. For Ratto and Boler, democracy includes DIY making activities ranging from the publishing of alternative zines to the political social web organization on Twitter and Facebook during the Arab spring revolutions. Building upon work that pushes against the public sphere models of democracy (Loader & Mercea, 2011; Mouffe, 1999; Noveck, 2009; Ratto & Boler, In press), my research explores citizens’ design practices in political life in my local context of Ontario. Having discussed various aspects of democracy, I will define the other interlinked concepts of political participation and social web media making.

Participation

At a rudimentary level, Richardson (1983) states, “participation can be defined in terms of undertaking some activity – doing something instead of doing nothing” in the domain of social policy (p. 9). What political participation looks like via the social web is currently emerging. To understand participation, past models are helpful to review. Arnstein (1969) created a ladder model to describe participation in urban planning which included three major categories: non-participation, “degrees of tokenism” and “degrees of citizen power” (p. 217). This model is widely cited in fields far beyond urban planning.

For the purposes of this dissertation, participation should also be understood to be in a state of contestation and in constant flux. Mouffe (1999) suggests that “perfect harmony or transparency” (p. 752) cannot be expected within democracy and other scholars have made similar arguments. Gaillie (1956) introduced the idea that “there are concepts [such as

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10 Arnstein (1969) uses the term “NonParticipation” but I have changed the spelling to non-participation.
democracy] which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users” (p. 169).

Some scholars have asserted that creating or sharing content via the social web or joining social web networks can be a form of participation (Burgess & Green, 2009; Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006). Jenkins et al. (2006) note that participatory culture can include an element of citizen empowerment or civic engagement. They define the concept as follows:

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created. (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 3)

From Arnstein (1969) to Jenkins et al. (2006) a shift in meaning of participation is detectable. Participation is now being framed to include the possibility for citizens to participate creatively using the social web. Now that I have defined participation and briefly described the role of the social web, I will define the meaning of social web more fully.

The social web

From approximately the mid 1990s to the early 2000s, websites were primarily static and offered few opportunities for lay users to contribute content. In the context of government websites, Richard (2009) explains the shift from static to participatory sites. She states, “a number of increasingly complex metaphors have inspired governments over the last decade of Internet presence. Starting with the static single-window, followed by the front door, a more welcoming metaphor, the emerging metaphor at the end of the first decade of the millennium, may well become the sand-box” (p. 177). On the prominent social website Wikipedia, the sand-
box page allows potential contributors to practice editing a wiki and to experiment playfully. The sand-box and “social” goals of the web are often referred to as version 2.0 of the internet, or web 2.0.

Web 2.0, social media and the social web are similar terms. In this dissertation, I will use the term the social web to refer to digital interfaces, which facilitate individuals sharing data or content with other people through screen based interfaces on devices including computers, tablets and mobile phones. Although the idea of the social web may seem relatively new, it has been around since the early days of the graphical web browser. Howard Rheingold is credited with coining the concept of the social web in relation to his Electric Minds website, launched in 1996. Electric Minds was a conversation-oriented website, complete with discussion moderators. In a Time magazine article on the launch, Rheingold explained the intentions behind Electric Minds: "the idea is that we will lead the transformation of the Web into a social Web" (quoted in Quittner, 1996, p. 99). Many of Rheingold’s ideas around community and user contributed content have been brought forward to more recent definitions of social media and web 2.0. In defining the culture of sociality of web 2.0, O’Reilly (2005) notes the importance of using the platform to “creat[e] network effects through an ‘architecture of participation’” (para. 1). In relation to web-based networks for collaborative production such as Wikipedia and the blogosphere, Benkler (2006) notes the role of peer production and sharing. Online social networking sites, social bookmarking, video and photo sharing platforms, blogs and wikis are examples of social media and the social web.

11 Howard Rheingold makes an archive of Electric Minds available at: http://www.rheingold.com/electricminds/html/. This website was last accessed Jan 4, 2013.
Within this dissertation, I will draw upon Rheingold and use the term *social web* to include corporate and non-corporate platforms for content sharing, social networking and collaboration. Corporately owned web 2.0 services such as Facebook, Flickr and Twitter are often used as examples of social media, but they do not constitute the full array of possible examples. The social attributes of the social web need not be tied to corporate platforms.

Within this dissertation, it is also important to note that the participatory and open ideals that are suggested as possibilities through the social web may simultaneously be threatened by the corporate platforms that have popularized it (see, for example, Beer, 2009; Fuchs, 2010; Langlois, McKelvey, Elmer, & Werbin, 2009). This tension between the open and participatory ideals of the social web and its actual usage are of central interest to me as a researcher. Historically in Canada, some exemplary consultations have occurred through the use of public platforms (see Chapter 2). Public platforms are potentially important to break down power differentials between groups such as policy elites and lay citizens. Power differentials can also exist between designers and end-users.

**Designers and end-users**

Simon (1969) provides what many consider to be a classic definition of design. He states, "everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (p. 55). It is notable in his chapter on the science of design, however, that he prioritizes the professional expertise of individuals such as engineers, doctors and policy developers as potential designers. Similar thinking about the importance of professionals in design processes is raised by Cross (1999, 2006). Cross (1999) suggests that there are

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12 Although I describe corporate examples here, any large organization including a nation state or civil society organization that runs a social web platform could inhibit participation in a variety of ways.
“designerly ways of knowing” and encourages us to examine “people, processes, and products” in relation to the generation of new knowledge (p. 5). He states that “design knowledge resides firstly in people: in designers especially, but also in everyone to some extent” (p. 5). I agree with Simon and Cross that participating in design can generate useful knowledge, but I remain critical about putting too much emphasis on the design activities of professionals.

Scholars in the fields of science and technology studies (STS), participatory design (PD) and computer supported cooperative work (CSCW) have critically challenged the idea of designers as the sole experts in technology design. I draw extensively upon the STS, PD, CSCW and DIY making traditions in my work and on the ideas that design occurs in the context of use and that “ordinary” people can collaborate in design projects (Oudshoorn, Rommes, & Stienstra, 2004; Simonsen & Robertson, 2013; Suchman, 1987). Some of this thinking developed out of system design in workplaces, particularly in Scandinavia in the 1970s, when there was a desire to promote workplace democracy as computers were introduced (Bjerknes & Bratteteig, 1995; Clement & Besselaar, 1993).

Consistent with a concern for workers, Suchman (1995) identifies that it is problematic that much “professional design work [is at]…a distance from workers as technology users” (p. 60). She claims that it is more desirable for “workers to define technology, as active creators” (p. 60). Simonsen and Robertson (2012) describe this participation as users being “legitimate and acknowledged participants in the design process” (p. 5). The idea of users contributing to design through everyday practice and outside of the workplace is seen in a variety of articles and books (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003; Sanders, 2008; Vicente, 2003). With the use of social web technologies, I observe that the boundary between designers and end-users becomes even
fuzzier. Within my research project I consider end-users of the social web, who envisioned or created something online related to policy participation, to be citizen designers.

Citizen designer is a term used by Heller and Vienne in their 2003 edited collection *Citizen Designer: Perspectives on Design Responsibility*. In the introduction, Heller (2003) calls for designers to demonstrate “responsibility to oneself and society” (p. xi). Latour, a leading STS scholar in the area of actor-network theory (explained in Chapter 3), defines design in a manner that suggests some possible contributions to society and where he appears to acknowledge some of the PD and CSCW ideals:

> It is never a process that begins from scratch: to design is always to redesign. There is always something that exists first as a given, as an issue, as a problem. Design is a task that follows to make that something more lively, more commercial, more usable, more user-friendly, more acceptable, more sustainable, and so on, depending on the various constraints to which the project has to answer. In other words, there is always something remedial in design. (Latour, 2008, p. 5)

Both designers and end-users are currently attempting to intervene to improve democratic society using a variety of approaches to prod at problematic or contested political concepts. Ratto (2011a, 2011b) for example, provides the example of critical making. Critical making combines “two modes of engagement…that are often held separate—critical thinking, typically understood as conceptually and linguistically based, and physical “making,” goal-based material work” (Ratto, 2011b, p. 253). Through critical making, individuals can create DIY designs using materials like the Arduino prototyping kit to interrogate concepts like digital rights management. DiSalvo (2012) also encourages the critical engagement with concepts in designing. DiSalvo introduced the concept of adversarial design “to label works that express or enable a particular political perspective known as *agonism*” (p. 2) in the tradition of Mouffe’s (1999) work. DiSalvo contends that design can engage with the contested parts of democracy. The design
problem and contested political concept I am concerned with is the one of open participation in policy-making. This connects to the infrastructures which facilitate political participation.

Infrastructure

Infrastructures such as ICTs and the internet are designed in alignment with particular values, such as openness, but they are difficult phenomena to research because they tend to be embedded and invisible to us (Star, 1999). Realizing the importance of infrastructure and the trend towards the commercialization of the internet in Canada, a number of scholars have attempted to strengthen the public interest perspectives in the development of networks and information highway policies (Clement, Gurstein, Longford, Moll, & Shade, 2012; Clement & Shade, 1996; Moll & Shade, 2004, 2001; Pendakur & Harris, 2002). In my research, I draw upon these critical infrastructure studies traditions to explore the social and technical aspects of information and communication.

Many of the social media infrastructures citizens have available to them for participation such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and so on are platforms which Gillespie (2010) notes are “eliding the tensions inherent in their service: between user-generated and commercially-produced content, between cultivating community and serving up advertising…” (p. 348). In contrast to closed proprietary platforms, open systems for participation also exist. My research focus became immediately clear to me when government rhetoric that envisioned social web tools as being participatory was on the rise.

While there is some research on social web infrastructures, much recent scholarship in the infrastructure studies area has focused on the cyberinfrastructure that supports scientific research (Bowker, Baker, Millerand, & Ribes, 2010; Jackson, Edwards, Bowker, & Knobel, 2007). For cyberinfrastructures but also for other information infrastructures more broadly, Bowker et al.
(2010) suggest the importance of exploring the work to design and maintain the system. Bowker et al. (2010) state that “understanding the nature of infrastructural work involves unfolding the political, ethical, and social choices that have been made throughout its development” (p. 99). In this direction, I will introduce citizen designers who created infrastructure within my research and who demonstrated interest in openness and participation.

Citizen designers

In my research, I develop and use the term citizen designer. My use of this term blends together my interests in democracy, STS and ICTs in society. To provide my initial definition of the phrase citizen designer, I draw upon Heller’s (2003) call for designers to demonstrate “responsibility to oneself and society” (p. xi). In examining the practices of citizen designers it is also important to draw upon the more common terms of citizen scientists, known to STS scholars, and citizen journalists, familiar to communication scholars. Irwin (1995) explains that the term citizen scientist “evokes a science which assists the needs and concerns of citizens…[and] implies a form of science developed and enacted by citizens themselves” (p. xi). Furthermore, he identifies that with citizen scientists there are “‘contextual knowledges’ which are generated outside of formal scientific institutions” (p. xi). There are many similarities between citizen scientists and citizen journalists.

Rosen (2008) says citizen journalism is “when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another” (para. 1). In 2005, when citizens submitted photos, texts, emails and videos in the aftermath of the bombing of the

13 The (2003) anthology Citizen Designer: Perspectives on Design Responsibility edited by Steven Heller and Veronique Vienne contains numerous chapters that focus on graphic design. A limited number of chapters focus on digital and interactive design examples.
London transit system, one optimistic interpretation of the media coverage is that citizens began to change the media system in the United Kingdom (Sambrook, 2005). Sambrook describes the citizen journalist contributions to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the following terms, “…news-gathering had crossed a Rubicon. The quantity and quality of the public’s contributions moved them beyond novelty, tokenism or the exceptional” (para. 2).

Citizens’ contributions to the mass media are not the only possibility suggested by the term citizen journalist however. The participation ethos which underpins the concept of citizen journalism can be traced outside of mass media institutions to the alternative media sphere. Couldry and Curran (2003) provide a definition of alternative media\textsuperscript{14} that has been taken up in a recent Canadian volume on this topic (Kozolanka, Mazepa, & Skinner, 2012). Alternative media “challenges…at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power” (Couldry & Curran, 2003, p. 7). Alternative media including instantiations through the social web can demonstrate challenges to the concentrations of media power but also reflect the contestations of democratic values suggested by Connolly (1974) and agonistic pluralism suggested by Mouffe (1999). Some examples of alternative media in the social web space include tactical media and independent media.

In 1997, Garcia and Lovink introduced the term tactical media to describe the strategic and oppositional use of media that could emerge quickly and are sometimes ephemeral in nature. They state

\textsuperscript{14} For differentiation of related terms such as alternative media, independent media, citizens’ media and community media please see Alternative Media in Canada (2012) edited by Konzolanka, Mazepa and Skinner. Boler’s (2008) edited collection Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times provides an extensive glossary of terms related to alternative media in the online environment.
Tactical Media are what happens when the cheap “do it yourself” media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture. Tactical media do not just report events, as they are never impartial. They always participate and it is this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media. (Garcia & Lovink, 1997, para. 1)

The Yes Men, posing as a global body or corporation and spoofed website, stand as a prominent example of tactical media (see further examples in Renzi, 2008). Garcia and Lovink noted advantages for tactical media makers in “being able to move between the different entities in the vast media landscape without betraying…original motivations” (para. 9). Renzi (2008) emphasizes that definitions of tactical media should not exclude however any “lasting networks” that are formed (p. 72).

The Independent Media Center (IMC) or Indymedia network is one example of alternative media that is oppositional and tactical, but which focused on building open digital infrastructures. Indymedia began in 1999 in Seattle when media activists set up a storefront to use the internet to report on the protests during the World Trade Organization meeting and extended as part of the counterglobalization movement (Dyer-Witherford, 2005; Kidd, 2003; Tarleton, 2000). Tarleton describes that “the IMC was an end-run around the information gatekeepers, made possible by the technology of the Internet” (para. 6). In Canada, IMCs were established in numerous cities including Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Windsor. Skinner, Uzelman, Langlois and Dubois (2010) write about some of the organizational factors that eventually led to “diminished activity at IMCs in Canada” and the rise of other alternative media (p. 183).

Alternative media has taken new forms following the creation of Indymedia infrastructures. As recent examples, the loose global network known as Anonymous was integral to protest movements such as The Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, as I will describe in the next section.
At present, it is not just radical activists who are using the internet and the social web to protest or participate politically. Governments are also adopting the social web through open government programs (see for example Canada, 2012; United Kingdom, n.d.; United States, 2011) and simultaneously, the same “open” tools are being leveraged by civil society workers and citizens who are located outside of government and seek to participate in policy-making. In my research, I use the term citizen designer because my participants were not uniformly politicized in opposition to media or government institutions. My participants’ design and use of the social web demonstrates how the social web, alternative media, mass media, and civil society and government web sites can be interwoven to co-construct openness. The rise of openness as a theme of political participation will be explored next across government and recent social movements.

1.3 Openness as the current rhetoric of participation

Obama and open government

Openness is a political value that intersects with the concepts of participation, the social web, designers, end-users and infrastructures. Like participation, openness also has a long history in political discourse and practice.\textsuperscript{15} For the purposes of brevity, I will begin with President Obama’s call for openness in the American governmental context. The 2008 Presidential Campaign in the US involved extensive social web content, such as the will.i.am \textit{Yes We Can} YouTube video that went viral (WeCan08, 2008) and a direct email message Obama sent to the

\textsuperscript{15} Principles of openness in government date back to at least the 1700s. The first access to information (ATI) law in the world was enacted in Sweden in 1766. In the Westminster parliamentary tradition, the Hansard record is another example of a government system for openness. The Hansard report was created because of the belief that the public has a right to know what is discussed by elected officials during debates. This tradition emerged after government’s suppression of reports of what was said during debates came to an end following a legal challenge in 1771. The United Kingdom’s Hansard report went online in 1997; see this website for a timeline of key Hansard history events http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/parliamentwork/communicating/keydates/publicationofofficialreport/
social network of his supporters after he won the election (Carr, 2008). In 2009, when Obama became President, the social web was an integral component of his leadership strategy. As well, the social web played an implicit role in other international social movements that were becoming popular.

Figure 1.2: Open Government Initiative on the White House website in the United States

This image highlights the Obama commitment to transparency and open participation in his first term in office as President. This image was obtained from http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/about last accessed August 4, 2012

On his first day in office as President of the United States, Barack Obama signed the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government (Obama, 2009) (see figure 1.2). The Memorandum set forth a plan that would track economic recovery spending and use new technologies to facilitate participation by citizens so they could “influence the decisions that affect their lives” (White House, n.d., para. 3). The Memorandum was sent to the heads of US government departments and agencies to assert that Obama’s administration was committed to “creating an unprecedented level of openness in government” through transparency, participation
and collaboration with citizens (Obama, 2009, para. 1). Figure 1.2 shows the graphic design used to interweave the rhetoric of openness with digital interfaces to promote its practice by using a transparency dashboard.

Following Obama’s national commitments to openness in government, the international Open Government Partnership (OGP) was formed in 2011. The partnership was launched on September 20, 2011, with eight founding member nations (Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States). Each member nation was asked to endorse a declaration and create a country-specific action plan. The OGP declaration espouses the need to:

- “Increase the availability of information about governmental activities…”
- “Support civic participation…”
- “Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations…”
- “Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability…” (Open Government Partnership, 2011, para. 7-10)

Canada signed on to the OGP declaration as part of a second wave of endorsing nations in 2012. In the Canadian context, open government is defined by the federal government to involve the following three components:

- Open Data offers “government data in a more useful format to enable citizens, the private sector and non-government organizations to leverage it in innovative and value-added ways.”

- Open Information “is about proactively releasing information, including on government activities, to Canadians on an ongoing basis. By proactively making government information available it will be easier to find and more accessible for Canadians.”

- Open Dialogue gives “Canadians a stronger say in Government policies and priorities, and expand[s] engagement through Web 2.0 technologies.” (Canada, n.d.-c, para. 2-4)
These aspects of Canada’s Action Plan are highlighted on Canada’s Open Government website shown in figure 1.3. Whether or not these goals will be operationalized to the satisfaction of Canadians remains yet to be seen.

![Open Government website for Canada](http://open.gc.ca/index-eng.asp)

**Figure 1.3: Open Government website for Canada**

This shows Canada’s open government website and an emerging commitment to international political discourse. This image was captured March 22, 2013 from http://open.gc.ca/index-eng.asp.

The Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street

Although Canada and many other nations are signing declarations committing their nations to openness, and encouraging dialogue that may include the use of the social web, there are also grassroots protests that may initiate very different kinds of participation in pursuit of political openness.
At present, I observe that alternative uses of social media are being recognized as significant by major institutions and organizations. In its 2011 report on the status of global human rights, Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, notes that “the year 2010 may well be remembered as a watershed year when journalists and activists used technology to speak truth to power” (Amnesty International, 2011, p. xi). Dialogue via the social web has been significant in activists’ democratization protests for regime change during the Arab Spring protests and also during the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. Openness in these contexts is about ending repression and corruption.

During the Arab Spring protests, the social web was used to organize demonstrations in the hopes of ending the political repression experienced by ordinary citizens. The movement began in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread to 17 nations in the Middle East and Northern Africa (Amnesty International, 2011; Blight, Pulham, & Torpey, 2012). The protests began when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire after police stole the produce from his vegetable cart. Bouazizi died from his wounds but the anger about “police harassment, humiliation, economic hardship and the sense of powerlessness felt by young people like himself in Tunisia” were carried on through protests (Amnesty International, 2011, p. xii). A month after Bouazizi’s act of protest, the “unaccountable rule” of President Zine El’Abidine Be ‘Ali was ended when he fled the country (Amnesty International, 2011, p. xii).

It is notable that the Wikileaks website, dedicated to releasing information, provided access to diplomatic cables about the opulence of the leaders’ lives in Tunisia as well as human rights failures in advance of the protests (Amnesty International, 2011; guardian.co.uk, 2009). The transparency mediated by the website and data-driven journalism by The Guardian and other publications likely strengthened support for the revolution from the outside world. Solidarity
events for protesters in Tahrir Square in Egypt happened in cities such as Toronto using promotion on Facebook and Twitter.

![Protest signs for Occupy Wall Street Toronto in St. James Park](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ryanready/6252929670)

**Figure 1.4: Protest signs for Occupy Wall Street Toronto in St. James Park**

This image was taken by user ruffin_ready and obtained from Flickr.com under Creative Commons licence Attribution 2.0 Generic. The source URL for the image is [http://www.flickr.com/photos/ryanready/6252929670](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ryanready/6252929670)

The prominent role of Twitter in both the Arab Spring protests and the OWS movement provides a bridge for discussion between the two. Analysis of Twitter usage during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions was found by Lotan *et al.* (2011) to show how news was co-constructed through the social web as a conversation between “bloggers and activists alongside journalists” (p. 1400). With the Occupy Wall Street movement, a hashtag and homage to the Arab Spring was inserted into the movement from the start. As described by *Adbusters* magazine, which initiated the protest:

#OCCUPYWALLSTREET is a leaderless people powered movement for democracy that began in America on September 17
with an encampment in the financial district of New York City. Inspired by the Egyptian Tahrir Square uprising and the Spanish acampadas, we vow to end the monied corruption of our democracy. (Adbusters, 2011, para. 1)

Although the Arab Spring protests and OWS movement were not a central component of my research, they provided a backdrop of social and technical practices related to democratic life. The example of the Arab Spring and OWS show how information practices can be spread culturally and taken up in disparate global locations. As figure 1.4 suggests, protests in solidarity with the Arab Spring activists and the OWS movement occurred in Toronto. The social web is clearly a part of the toolkit available to individuals who promote political change.

### 1.3.1 Openness in Ontario

Having demonstrated that the social web has become an important component of political life online for many citizens, I will return to the context of Ontario. Openness in Ontario has been defined in part through the practices of the Ontario government since the mid 2000s. Consistent with other government visions, in 2003 the Liberal government of Premier McGuinty committed itself to democratic renewal to “make the entire public sector more transparent and responsible to Ontarians” in the Speech from the Throne (Bartleman, 2003, Government that works for you, para. 5). Using the internet in social ways was part of this vision. For example, the Ontario

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16 A major participatory initiative which I do not address in this text is the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform in Ontario. The Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform was formed during McGuinty’s first term in office (see the original site at http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/en-CA/Home%20Page.html and an informational site at http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/). Following a similar Assembly in British Columbia, the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly was formed in 2006 with one random representative from each electoral district in Ontario. The participants in the assembly recommended a mixed member proportional system of voting. Animations such as the Billy Ballot clip were shared on the web to explain the proposed changes (see http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/en/resources/new_billy_final.html). The recommendation went to a provincial referendum and was defeated in 2007. The web links in this footnote were last accessed on December 13, 2012.
Ministry of Government Services page listing citizen engagement activities notes the “OPS [Ontario Public Service] Ideas Campaign,” which was held in December 2003. Like Obama’s later Memorandum on Transparency (Obama, 2009), McGuinty initiated participation activity in his early days in office. The OPS Ideas Campaign invited civil servants to submit suggestions to improve public services; 11,500 suggestions were received, 92% of them via an intranet site which was established for the campaign (Borins & Brown, 2007).

Following the OPS Ideas campaign, the McGuinty government initiated a Town Hall Budget consultation that was presented through www.townhallontario.gov.on.ca (Borins & Brown, 2007). This consultation was described briefly in the timeline at the opening of this chapter. The Budget Townhall site was visited by 14,000 web surfers and 1,500 completed an online questionnaire about budgetary directions for the province (Borins & Brown, 2007). In addition to the website, in-person meetings and events were held. Both the OPS Ideas Campaign and Town Hall Budget examples demonstrate using crowdsourcing expertise, a technique in which elected officials seek knowledge and insights from government employees and citizens.

Borins and Brown (2007) describe that both the OPS Ideas campaign and Town Hall Ontario portal had challenges. In the case of the OPS campaign, there were too many ideas to deal with. With the Townhall Ontario website, they note, it underwent “a spectacular rise and fall” (p. 267). They point out that McGuinty’s government consulted extensively in its first year in office, however this practice tapered off.

Although, the Townhall Ontario site no longer exists, there are some lingering examples of consistent social web use for citizen participation. For example, the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry has been sustained provincially for a number of years. The province describes it as
a website that provides public access to a database holding information about environmental proposals and decisions made by the Ontario government. The Registry is an important part of ensuring that the public can participate in decisions being made on environmental issues. The Environmental Registry is the only one of its kind in Canada and was created under Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993 (EBR). (Ontario, 1994-2012)

In recent years, other open projects have also been launched within ministries. For example, the Ministry of Government Services ran ePanels on the theme of digital Ontario in 2008 (Ontario, 2008a). Within the OPS, a wiki for internal collaboration known as OPSpedia was launched in 2009 (Harpham, 2010). These examples were completed well before the 2010 Speech from the Throne in which McGuinty announced “a new, five-year Open Ontario Plan” (Ontario, 2010). The Speech was not closely tied to using technology as a way to facilitate citizens’ participation, although some subsequent initiatives may be loosely linked to it. For example, a wiki was used to crowdsourse the writing of an Ontario policy paper on social innovation in association with the MaRS Centre in Toronto (Cahill, 2011). The Ontario Open data portal, launched in November 2012, might also be said to follow the rhetoric in the Speech (Ontario, 2012a).

It is clear that Ontario has explored the use of the internet and the social web in numerous ways to promote openness. What motivates my research is the fact that openness still remains somewhat challenging or even risky in the Province of Ontario. Governments open themselves to critique when they implement openness and therefore the implementations can be weak. As an example of the difficulties of enacting openness, let us consider a presentation abstract by civil servant David Tallan, Senior Manager of Enterprise Web Development for Ontario and the leader of the OPSpedia initiative. In a public talk he stated he would speak

[not] about OPSpedia itself, but rather how we made it happen in the face of stiff, and common, bureaucratic challenges.
So what did we face? Minimal resources (no additional funding or people were available), a complicated existing technology landscape, people and policy issues. These challenges are common to internal government projects (e.g. managing worries about “inappropriate use” or “access to information” requests, cultural mindsets of “not invented here” or “not ready for publication”, broader issues of governance and funding). (Tallan, 2010, para. 1-2)

Similarly, Tonya Surman (2011) a prominent social innovation leader in Ontario described the government’s use of wiki technology in partnership with MaRS to crowdssource the authoring for a policy paper as “a risk” and that social entrepreneurs should participate to help prove that the process could work. With broad expertise in Canadian and Ontario IT in government, Borins (2010) states that “the politicians and public servants involved in policy-making are not yet as ready to jump into the unpredictable and uncontrollable world of social networking as avidly as politicians in seeking office” (p. 198). Borins also observes that government is “pondering…how to respond to the spontaneous citizen, especially Net Generation, use of social networking sites for policy discussions” (p. 196).

1.4 Research questions

My research questions stem from the realization that participatory and sociable uses of the internet were components of eGovernment programs that have not been easy to sustain and continue. Activists have made wide use of the social web in diverse examples including tactical media, Indymedia, and the use of corporately owned social media to mobilize protesters. Currently, there is a paradox in Ontario and elsewhere in that citizens are using the social web to participate politically but that government remains somewhat uneasy with this development. Government infrastructures for citizen participation in Ontario policy-making have not been significantly updated to make use of the internet and the social web. Given this context, my overarching research goal is to better understand civic participation that happens, at least in part,
via the social web and intersects with current policy-making processes. The questions that guide my research are:

1. What are the motivations, experiences and results of citizen-designers’ efforts to participate politically through the social web in ways that are adjacent to or intersect with official policy-making processes?

2. Are citizens’ web based participation activities in policy-making shaping the operationalization of democratic values such as participation and openness in Ontario politics through the social web?

3. What socio-technical interventions might be necessary to create an infrastructure where the social web can be effectively used to facilitate the involvement of citizens in policy-making in Ontario?

My dissertation responds to these questions through the six chapters that follow, as outlined in the next section.

1.5 Chapter overview

My doctoral research project involved my ongoing ethnographic involvement in communities interested in open government and the social web in government from 2006 until the present. I conducted design work to familiarize myself with the social web tools available to citizens and activists. I also traced the policy narratives of particular Ontario bills using the Hansard and press sources. Additionally, I conducted interviews with 15 participants with experience in creating social web based materials for citizen participation in policy-making. Interviews were conducted primarily in 2010–2011, when discourses about using the social web and open government were present and still developing. This dissertation contains seven chapters that address the foundational literatures, theory, methods, results and discussion that frame this project.
In Chapter 2, I explore the policy-making and participation literature. I begin by presenting historical examples of how citizens have participated in policy-making in exemplary ways in Canada in the past, as well as the current challenges to operationalize participation in policy-making. This chapter draws heavily upon Kingdon’s model of agenda-setting to describe how streams converge to form a policy window and how decision making happens (2003). I will return to Kingdon’s model of policy-making repeatedly throughout the dissertation. This chapter provides a description of the policy-making process and how practices of citizen involvement have developed and it introduces the concept of policy entrepreneur. It explores key concepts from the literature, including the public sphere, eGovern and eParticipation, and considers how they are being enacted in the Ontario context.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical and methodological literatures that serve as scaffolding for my research. Ethnographic research traditions and actor-network theory are discussed as my major influences. I present a framework for the integrated use of descriptive, politically engaged and design-oriented practice within ethnographic research. Additionally, I describe in brief the process of locating four Ontario bills discussed in the Legislative Assembly and 15 citizen designers who created social web based infrastructures for civic participation in the policy-making process.

Chapter 4 provides a discussion of four policy narratives that link to the bills of interest for this research. I examine the legislative process for the four bills passed in the Ontario legislature in 2008–2009 (39:1) that form the basis for my research. I use policy narrative to describe the four bills, which are Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act (2008); Bill 85, Photo Card Act, (2008); Bill 126, Road Safety Act (2009); and Bill 210, Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others) (2009). In this chapter, I present policy windows,
policy entrepreneurs and framing as recurring components of the policy narratives. Through this chapter, I begin to contribute to updating Kingdon’s understanding of policy-making processes to include citizens who use the social web as policy entrepreneurs.

Chapters 5 to 7 present the bulk of the results and discussion resulting from my research. Chapter 5 introduces the citizen designers and the characteristics of the interfaces they have created. This chapter responds extensively to the first research question to report on citizen designers’ experiences in rich detail. I argue that, at present, there remain systemic challenges for citizens using the social web in Ontario in the pursuit of effecting policy change when they are situated outside of policy-making processes and are only adjacent to them. I also analyze the social web infrastructures used by my participants to promote openness.

In Chapter 6, I delve more deeply into the ambiguity of the experiences of citizens’ open participation in policy-making. This chapter responds most directly to research question 2, which examines if citizens’ web based participation activities in policy-making are shaping the operationalization of democratic values such as participation and openness in Ontario politics through the social web. I argue that the social web designers and users from this research call for the “democratic” aspects of open government, which may get lost in government program delivery. Ontarians and society more broadly need to continue to participate in critiquing and improving the operationalization of openness and participation as political values. As this introduction has already begun to explore, democratic values are highly contested concepts with different understandings of terms emerging among various stakeholders.

Chapter 7 builds on the analysis from the previous chapters and integrates thinking about design with policy-making processes. In this chapter I consider how policy entrepreneurs can use the social web to leverage or create policy windows to promote more robust citizen
participation in policy-making. These usages of policy windows are potential socio-technical interventions discussed in research question 3. To conclude, I review the contributions my research makes to broader understandings of social media use within the context of policy-making and engaged citizenship, and identify some of the limitations of my research. I also highlight the research possibilities that emerge from this project.
2 Participation pre “open” government

People all around the world are demanding more openness in government. They are calling for greater civic participation in public affairs, and seeking ways to make their governments more transparent, responsive, accountable, and effective. (Open Government Partnership, 2011)

Governments around the world are committed to more actively engaging citizens in the democratic process. Ontario is no exception. (Ontario, 2011)

This chapter asserts that many of the socio-technical assemblages (of people, practices and information communication technologies [ICTs]) which have been brought together to facilitate citizen participation in policy-making are temporary and in flux. The contemporary or currently popular discourses of open government, which stem from President Obama and the Open Government Partnership, are relatively new, but the value of participation in democracy is a much older phenomenon.

This chapter describes an array of past practices that intend to provide “good” governance benchmarks for the values of participation and openness in policy-making in Canada. I begin by introducing the historic networks or assemblages of participation in policy-making that involve ICTs in Canada. Next, I discuss policy-making in Canada and expand upon my description of Kingdon’s (2003) model of agenda setting in policy-making. I proceed to introduce how citizens participate in policy-making. I also examine the public sphere, its limitations, and its extension to the internet. Finally, I explore definitions of eGovernment and eParticipation and consider how we can move beyond the public sphere model of democracy. A review of this literature provides background context for more recent participation in policy-making in Canada.
Understanding this context is necessary to explore the experiences of my interviewees who participated politically through the social web.

2.1 Exemplary moments of citizen participation in Canada

Social networking sites such as Facebook were common infrastructures used by my interviewees for political participation in Ontario policy-making. Long before Facebook and social networking sites were even invented, network technologies played a key role in Canadian nation building. Historically, Canada’s regionally located industries extracted raw resources (i.e., lumber, fur, minerals etc.), exported them and then imported finished goods from Europe. Under this system, the urban areas of Canada’s “heartland” were dependent on the rural “hinterland” to build political power through trade and commerce. To establish the Canadian nation and link the heartland to the hinterland, network technologies like the railroad and radio were of great significance both economically and politically in the promotion of Confederation. Innis’ (1951) writings on the space and time biases of communication provide insights into the challenges that motivate the implementation of ICTs in Canada. Problems of geography, including a dispersed population and vast size, are perceived as problems to be overcome in the political sphere, as well as others, with information communication technologies in the Canadian context. Let us consider four examples: the Aird Commission, the National Farm Radio Forum, the Fogo Process and the Berger Inquiry.

When it came to envisioning and implementing a public broadcasting network in Canada, the Aird Commission was of great importance. Launched in 1929, the commission held public hearings during the consultation process that resulted in the establishment of a national public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting System (CBC) (Gasher, 1998). Since the Aird Commission, it is notable that ICTs are in place to overcome the geography of Canada,
separating Canadians from each other and federal political institutions in Ottawa. In the case of the Aird Commission, the topic of the consultation pertained to ICT networks as public infrastructure.

Following the emergence of public broadcasting networks, the newly established communication infrastructure could be used to facilitate citizen participation in policy-making. Some historic Canadian initiatives that involved ICTs, notably radio and film, in public participation in policy-making are described chronologically. An early ICT to gain wide acceptance as a dialogue tool was the radio. From 1942 to 1965, the National Farm Radio Forum (NFRF) created dialogue opportunities “around issues of major importance to farmers” (Dale & Naylor, 2005, p. 208). The NFRF broadcasts and discussions were a partnership developed by the CBC, the Canadian Association for Adult Education and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (Dale & Naylor, 2005).

During NFRF broadcasts farmers across the country would gather in groups to listen, discuss the issues (i.e., international trade or agricultural policy) and write down feedback that would be compiled regionally. Both Innis and Adria note that radio in this period can be associated with centralization of power by administrators (Adria, 2008; Innis, 1951). Unique to the NFRF model was that centralized decision-making by policy-makers and civil servants in Ottawa was informed by distant farmer citizens. Sometimes policy-makers would respond to what they heard with policy and program changes (Sim, n.d.).

The second ICT prong is film, which has been used in community settings by the National Film Board (NFB) to encourage dialogue between citizens and government. One key example of this took place on Fogo Island in Newfoundland. In the 1960s, Fogo Island residents were slated for relocation due to the economic depression on Fogo Island. Donald Snowden from Memorial
University and NFB filmmaker Colin Low partnered to make a participatory film on rural poverty in Newfoundland (Quarry, n.d.). The ongoing use of community-based film and video constructed a forum for dialogue between residents of the island’s fishing villages who were slotted for relocation and civil servants in Ottawa (Low, 1968). Through a series of films, the Fogo community articulated a willingness to collaborate across previously segregated religious communities and a developed a collective vision to develop the economy locally and successfully avoided relocation (Low, 1968).

The Fogo Island process was an important component of the NFB’s larger Challenge for Change (C4C) program that included over 100 films. George Stoney, the executive producer on the C4C program described in an interview that the program transitioned to using video, instead of film, so that participants could film themselves (Sturken, 1984). Stoney reported that with film during the Fogo process, “the turnaround time was much too long, and the use of complicated film equipment caused the whole process to be dominated by a professional crew” (para. 5). Other C4C projects in others parts of Canada proceeded to use “video as a tool for social change” (Sturken, 1984, para. 6).

The MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, presided over by Judge Berger in the 1970s and known as the Berger Inquiry, serves as the fourth exemplary model. The MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry made use of the CBC radio system for public participation in policy-making (Salter, 2007; Sclove, 1995). The decision to delay an oil pipeline through the MacKenzie Valley was reached through a highly innovative public inquiry format. Sclove (1995) notes that the process included “formal, quasi-judicial hearings comprising of conventional expert testimony with cross-examination” (p. 28), but, also less formal hearings in communities in the Canadian North. In his role, Judge Berger travelled to remote communities and “took testimony
from nearly 1,000 native witnesses” (p. 29). The inquiry provided travel funding for groups to participate, and the CBC provided daily radio programming in English and native languages to ensure the process of the inquiry was communicated to the public (p. 29). Sclove notes that the inquiry “interspers[ed] formal hearings with travel to concurrent community hearings,” and carefully considered “testimony of both Ph.D. scientists and teenaged subsistence fishermen” (p. 29). Salter (2007) explains that the inquiry’s format was unique in that it recognized and honoured the expertise of lay Canadians: the process made the public the expert.

These four cases are strong examples of robust and meaningful citizen participation using an array of ICTs throughout the 20th century in Canada. I argue that “new” ICTs are not necessarily required to meaningfully engage the public in policy-making processes. There are numerous historic examples that demonstrate that with sufficient political will, championing and the involvement of a skilled facilitator, “old” technologies such as radio and video can provide robust opportunities for citizen participation in policy-making. Today, the majority of policy in Canada is drafted by bureaucrats, debated by politicians and proceeds through the legislative process without exemplary opportunities for citizens to get involved. In the next sections, I describe the policy-making process in Canada and how citizens can typically get involved.

2.2 Policy-making in Canada

Brooks and Miljan (2003) define policy as “conscious choice that leads to deliberate action---the passage of a law, the spending of money, an official speech or gesture, or some other observable act---or inaction” (p. 4). There are various approaches to studying public policy. The pluralist model of politics suggests that groups form to influence government (Brooks & Miljan, 2003; Dyck, 2008). The public choice model suggests that individuals, including politicians, bureaucrats and voters, act in “rational self-interest” and aim to “maximize satisfaction at the
least cost” (Brooks, 1998, p. 29). Class analysis can also be utilized to explore issues such as the influence of business elites in shaping policy and broad trends such as neoliberalism (Dyck, 2008). Within these respective approaches, researchers may be encouraged to study groups for pluralist inquiry, economics for public choice models and class structures as a part of class analysis. Researchers may also be motivated to study actors outside of government, such as social activists and non-governmental organizations.

2.2.1 Policy windows and policy entrepreneurs

To research actors outside of government, including citizens, it is useful to turn to Kingdon’s (2003) description of the policy-making process. Originally published in 1984, Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies (2003) explores how issues get onto the political decision-making agenda. Howlett (1998) points out that “Kingdon’s model of agenda-setting is now considered the standard in policy studies” and has been applied widely in numerous policy domains (p. 497). For his research, Kingdon interviewed 247 people from both inside and outside the US government who were involved with health and transportation policy-making. In a simplified model, Kingdon identifies four conventional stages to policy-making, involving agenda setting, articulating policy choices, making “an authoritative choice” from the available options and policy implementation (p. 3). Kingdon recognizes, however, that there are also many unseen aspects of the process and he attempts to illuminate them.

For possibilities to be enacted as decisions or policies, Kingdon outlines three streams that must be joined together. These streams are (1) the problem stream, (2) the policy stream, and (3) the political stream. The problem stream is the flow of issues that is continually assessed and considered for attention. The policy stream is where policy ideas are floated around the community, are championed, get revised, and are sometimes positioned on the decision-making
agenda if enough consensus supports this. Finally, the political stream includes “public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions…and changes of administration” (p. 145). When these streams converge at a policy window, they move an issue onto the decision-making agenda (see figure 2.1).

For decision-making to happen, the problem, policy and political streams can only “come together at certain critical times” (Kingdon, p. 194). When policy windows open, “solutions become joined to problems, and both of them are joined to favorable political forces” (p. 194). Kingdon outlines that many types of policy windows exist. Sometimes policy windows are expected on a schedule, other times they are not. Sometimes pressing “problems” compel policy solutions; other times “solutions” find policy “problems” they can be coupled with. Coupling occurs with the assistance of policy entrepreneurs. In Kingdon’s account, policy entrepreneurs are persistent individuals who have domain expertise, represent others or are in a leadership position.

![Figure 2.1: Policy decision-making, a convergence of streams through a policy window](image)

This figure is adapted from Kingdon’s (2003) description of the problem, policy and political streams converging at the policy window that leads to policy decision-making.
Kingdon’s (2003) description of the policy-making process is significant for this research. The model allows for the consideration of ideas to be floated throughout the public participation processes as a policy window emerges. The model also allows for the possibility of exploring ideas which are in streams, but which have not yet converged at an open window. I will continue to explore these themes in the context of public involvement in policy-making. In presenting the Kingdon model, I acknowledge that modelling policy-making processes involves “making many simplifications and ignoring many details” but that the model can still be of analytic use (Mintrom & Vergari, 1996, p.421).

2.2.2 How do citizens participate in policy-making?

The opportunity for citizens to participate in policy-making is an expectation that ebbs and flows in popularity in many government bodies (Canada, n.d.-a; Open Government Partnership, 2011; United Nations, 2006a). Richard (2009) describes the development of this expectation in the following way: “as the role of government in western economies shifts from direct service provision to increased regulation in a wider variety of social-economic domains, a more direct and open engagement of external opinions and resources from citizens and experts is needed in specific phases of decision-making” (p. 177).

In Canada, the transition to this kind of thinking, where engagement is clearly welcomed by government, can also be traced through policy documents. In 1999 the Federal Government of Canada and the governments of nine of the 10 provinces and the territories signed an agreement known as the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) (The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2000). Quebec chose not to sign the SUFA. The document remains significant because section 3 of the SUFA emphasizes that each level of government should be transparent and accountable to its constituents. The “Involvement of Canadians” is established as a priority
where the federal, provincial and territorial governments agree to “ensure effective mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing social priorities and reviewing outcomes” (The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2000, p. 245).\(^\text{17}\) Phillips and Orsini (2002) identify that the SUFA accord was the first time these kinds of commitments to involve Canadians were “made explicit…in an intergovernmental agreement” (p. 1).\(^\text{18}\)

Following the SUFA, the federal government and Voluntary Sector Initiative published *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*, which explained how non-profit organizations could be involved in policy-making and how they in turn could involve the public in the process (Joint Accord Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2002). Figure 2.2 shows an idealized public policy process as outlined in *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*, which would involve citizen participation at every stage of policy from vision to evaluation.

Table 2.1 outlines some possibilities for citizen involvement in the policy-making process that are closely connected to the stages identified in figure 2.2. The SUFA, figure 2.2 and table 2.1 demonstrate how the public sphere model of democracy is taken up in government and the voluntary sector in Canada.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* first published in 1962, Habermas (1989) argues that the development of capitalism and nation states paralleled the creation of spaces for rational critical debate by the public. His main idea concerning the public sphere is that it is a site where rational critical debate


\(^{18}\) Phillips and Orsini (2002) are incredibly helpful in tracing the non-profit sector in policy participation.
leads to the formation of public opinion, which is separate from the state but can influence government.

Figure 2.2: Public policy process including public involvement

This figure was obtained from A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue (2002) from the Voluntary Sector Initiative. The original image is on page 16 of the document.

Some scholars such as Ku (2000) and Salter (2007) see the public sphere as being inclusive of both the government and civil society. Ku explicitly critiques Habermas for ultimately failing “to find an adequate locus of the activity of the citizen on the institutional and cultural levels” (p. 218). A “cultural public sphere” could expand the definition of the concept to incorporate the
practices where “citizenship is practised as much through everyday life, leisure, critical consumption and popular entertainment as it is through debate and engagement with capital ‘P’ politics” (Burgess, Foth, & Klaebe, 2006, p. 1).

Table 2.1: Citizen involvement at each policy development stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy stage</th>
<th>Dimensions of citizen involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Problem identification</td>
<td>Mobilizing interest, spanning and bridging, claims making, knowledge acquisition, convening and deliberating, community capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Priority setting</td>
<td>Claims making, spanning and bridging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy formulation and design</td>
<td>Claims making, knowledge and acquisition, spanning and bridging, convening and deliberating, analysis and synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Passage of policy instruments</td>
<td>Claims making, spanning and bridging, transparency and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Implementation</td>
<td>Knowledge acquisition, community capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Evaluation</td>
<td>Knowledge acquisition, transparency and feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Drawing on a Habermasian ideal of the public sphere, where the government engages its citizens, Phillips and Orsini (2002) assert that mobilizing interest (see table 2.1) involves creating a “public space for debate on an issue, potentially igniting or increasing interest in the issue and encouraging citizens with a latent but not yet active concern to develop positions and acquire information” (p. 10). Claims making is when individual citizens state their positions or stance on a policy issue. Claims that are made during the policy-making process can be tied to a
value stance. Knowledge acquisition is about citizens and civil society organizations sharing their analytical research or experiences. Spanning and bridging refers to when government “taps into a breadth of knowledge and facilitates participation across a broad span of society” (p. 10). Convening and deliberating can refer to organization and facilitation of dialogue. Community capacity building allows for “the emergence of leaders” and aids communities to gain needed resources (p. 10). Analysis and synthesis is about the reporting of citizen participation so that it can be used in policy-making. Finally, transparency and feedback refers to the evidence that demonstrates how citizen participation contributed to the policy-making process in some way.

How citizen participation with the involvement of the social web will unfold continues to shift and remains contingent. Torgerson (2003) finds that Castells’ network society concept “is helpful in drawing attention to often neglected patterns of complex social interaction in policy processes” (p. 114). He goes on to explain that there can be “interchanges between the administrative sphere and the public sphere of civil society” (p. 115), which can be brought to bear on policy making. Dahlberg and Siapera (2007a) caution that liberal-consumer models of eDemocracy may advance only a “limited notion of democracy” (p. 5) and may “fail…to provide for meaningful participation and adequate contestation of power” (p. 5).

2.3 From the public sphere to eDemocracy and eParticipation

When considering the possibility of a public sphere that includes virtual or online spaces, it is important to consider that states such as Canada have actively worked to create the infrastructure for connectivity. Specific to the internet, Dahlberg states that it is his intention to study deliberative democracy in which there is
the public sphere of rational-critical citizen discourse – discourse autonomous from state and corporate power through which public opinion may be formed that can hold official decision makers accountable. (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 616).

There are many reasons that deliberation may be beneficial. Coleman and Blumer (2009) outline three rationales for public deliberation: (1) arguments need to be debated to promote “the best decisions being reached”; (2) the public (not just elites) should be involved in debate “via…mediating processes such as the press…the Internet…and by more direct participation in parties, pressure groups, public meetings, petitions and contact with representatives”; and (3) “[t]he best and most democratically legitimate policies and decisions are ones which are understood and accepted by the public” (p. 17).

Dahlberg and Siapera’s (2007) however identify that eDemocracy may be limited and constrained by liberal-consumer models. Political economy critques of the internet’s ownership become relevant. As identified by Mosco (1996), political economy scholars have long been interested in the “oppositional spaces” that form as communication media and ICTs are developed (p. 168). The transition from eGovernment to eParticipation cultures helps to lead us to consider what is beyond policy participation via public sphere models of democracy.

2.3.1 eGovernment

Electronic government refers to the interactions between a state and its citizens, other governments and businesses. As the “information highway” was first being envisioned in Canada, governments, and particularly the federal government, imagined themselves as model users of the internet (Information Highway Advisory Council & Industry Canada, 1995). The Province of Ontario followed a similar course in placing information and services online for its citizens and residents and through the transformation of the government’s digital services (Ontario). At the federal level, Government On-Line (GOL) projects were completed between
October 1999 and January 2006 and placed 130 commonly utilized services online (Western Economic Diversification Canada, n.d.). One of the related projects was to create a consultation portal that would enable citizens to participate in policy decision-making processes online (Borins, 2010; Borins & Brown, 2007). GOL at the federal level was housed in Service Canada. At the provincial level, service transformation led to the creation of a consultation portal during the start of Premier McGuinty’s first term. The consultation portal was later pulled from the site. Provincially, Service Ontario also facilitates online transactions between citizens and government.

Consistent with United Nations’ (UN) (2006b) measures of eGovernment readiness, both Canada and Ontario have progressed through a number of levels of eGovernment readiness and implementation:

- Stage I, “emerging presence” is characterized by having a basic online site and static information.

- Stage 2, “enhanced presence” continues to facilitate government to citizen information flows and basic information is augmented with an eGovernment strategy, site map, and downloadable information.

- Stage 3, “interactive presence” includes downloadable forms, audio and video, and contact information for government. The site is also updated.

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19 In 2006 I accessed similar information from the website http://www.ged-gol.gc.ca/ where information on the GOL and annual reports were directly available. I am providing the Western Economic Diversification Canada reference instead because the GOL site is no longer live.
• Stage 4, “transactional presence” enables bi-directional communication between citizen and government to complete transactions.

• Stage 5, “networked presence” is the most advanced stage of eGovernment and it allows for robust bi-directional communication channels (i.e., government to government, citizen to government). In this stage, government engages citizens in “participatory deliberative decision-making and is willing and able to involve the society in a two way open dialogue.” (para. 8–12)

Within the fifth and final stage of eGovernment, online consultation technologies are presented as tools through which to enact participatory dialogues and deliberations.

Although forums such as the threaded discussions, online meetings and listservs of online consultation were envisioned to be characteristic of the UN’s final stage for eGovernment, in the Canadian context, research on their design and use is so far quite limited. Applied design research to create consultation infrastructures was undertaken by the McLuhan Institute and affiliated partners (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, n.d.). Research was also conducted on accessibility for the disabled in consultations (Disability and information technologies research alliance, 2005) and moderation (Hurrell, 2005). Additionally, Borins and Brown (2007) examined the federal government’s Consulting with Canadians portal and similar provincial initiatives in Ontario. Borins (2010) also updated his analysis in 2010 to reflect the rise of web 2.0.

A number of scholars have also examined how consultations have not fully lived up to their democratic promise. As identified by Geist, online consultations in Canada are typically government-centric as the government expects citizens to come to its consultation sites but
refuses to go out to where the relevant public dialogue emerges online (Geist, 2008c). Hurrell (2005) found that within the foreign policy dialogues, civil dialogue “does not necessarily allow dialogue participants to effectively transmit their opinions to government decision-makers” (online). Felczak, Smith and Glass raise concerns about the digital divide and lack of support of open source web browsers in relation to eGovernment and eConsultations (Felczak, Smith, & Glass, 2009).

International research has also raised concerns about shortcomings. Studies from South Korea point to the pivotal role of civil servants (intensive labour) who are relied on to make an eConsultation a valuable endeavour (Kim, 2005). The key point is that consultation does not work without what is often the invisible work of facilitators. From the UK, Dunne (2008) found that participation was less likely to occur in government-hosted forums rather than forums hosted by civil society. In Dutch online forums on multiculturalism issues, Witschge (2008) observed that the rules and regulations of the web forums can limit the discourse. Issues of publicity, accessibility, analysis and follow-up may impair the success of online consultations or online forums, which are implemented with the best of democratic intentions. Additionally, scholars have noted the possibility that the public sphere “become absorbed by…commercial culture” online (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 12).

Now that I have noted that plans for eGovernment to facilitate participation in public policy are difficult to operationalize in practice, I will next describe eParticipation, an emerging theme in the literature that includes but builds upon and extends the government initiated processes of eGovernment.
2.3.2 eParticipation

eParticipation is an emerging term, one which Sæbøa et al. (2008) have attempted to situate and define though a systematic review. A major driver for the establishment of eParticipation as a field is DEMO-net, the eParticipation research network formed in 2006 and funded through the European Commission's sixth framework program on Information Society Technologies (Medaglia, 2007). eParticipation explicitly recognizes that civic participation cannot be housed in government sites alone.

Although the use of eParticipation as a term is still emerging, at least two useful definitions have been articulated in the literature:

- eParticipation involves the extension and transformation of participation in societal democratic and consultative processes mediated by information and communication technologies (ICT), primarily the internet. (Sæbøa, Rose, & Flak, 2008, p. 400-401)

- [eParticipation is] the use of ICTs to support information provision and “top-down” engagement, i.e. government led initiatives or “ground up” efforts to empower citizens, civil society organisations and other democratically constituted groups to gain the support of their elected officials. Effective information provision is often seen as a corollary of effective engagement and empowerment. (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006, p. 2)

These definitions demonstrate how eParticipation affords an opportunity to explore participation initiated by government or citizens. This area of the literature offers a framework with which to situate social web usage as something that can be sponsored or welcomed by government or alternatively leveraged by citizens without any means of formal support, which is more characteristic of activism. These definitions of eParticipation are highly compatible with Kingdon’s (2003) research on participants active inside and outside of government. The emphasis on deliberation and dialogue is not the only model of democracy however.
2.4 Moving beyond public sphere models of democracy

There is some recent literature which encourages democracy via the internet to extend beyond the limitations of the public sphere model and an over emphasis on citizen deliberation (Loader & Mercea, 2011; Mouffe, 1999; Noveck, 2009; Ratto & Boler, In press). In chapter 1, I introduced the idea of participatory culture by Jenkins et al. (2006), which suggests that people can use the social web to become civically engaged and creatively express themselves. Other scholars have also explored citizens’ creations rather than merely their rational debates.

As one example of a research project that pushes the boundaries of public sphere models of democracy, Boler (2008) analyzed video clips from the Bush in 30 Seconds contest, sponsored by MoveOn.org. Bush in 30 Seconds encouraged citizens to explain President George W. Bush’s policies in short web videos. This contest allowed non-professional video producers and lay citizens to contribute political advertisements for public consumption. To produce a video for this contest a citizen would need to consider how to use visual imagery and how to construct a compelling narrative and hence their production activities extend beyond deliberation. Essays on further research about do-it-yourself (DIY) versions of citizen participation are forthcoming in DIY Citizenship: Participatory Practices of Politics, Culture and Media (Ratto & Boler, In press).

To help us understand what social web based political participation might mean, I find it helpful to consider Bennett’s (2008) models of dutiful and self-actualizing citizenship for youth. Bennett describes that in past generations, citizenship was dutiful and that, in the digital age, it
has become more self-actualizing. With dutiful citizenship, the focus was on “government centered activities” where “voting [was] the core democratic act” and citizen participation in politics was possible through civil society organizations or political parties (p. 14). Self-actualizing citizenship is characterized by a “diminished sense of government obligation” and “higher sense of individual purpose” (p. 14). Voting is of less importance as “the [formerly] core democratic act” (p. 14). Additionally, citizens may participate in “loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies” (p. 14). Bennett argues that the “pathways to political engagement” (p. 5) are typically designed to accommodate out of date versions of citizenship.

As a scholar, I have observed that governments in Canada and elsewhere have emphasized deliberative democracy in their eGovernemnt and open government models and perceive that this may be too restrictive a pathway to political engagement. Coleman and Blumer (2009) suggest that is is possible to “favour a more deliberative democracy, without being committed to the normative and teleological case for Deliberative Democracy as a political end itself” (p. 26-27). Like Coleman and Blumer (2009), I see continued value in deliberation but also in other approaches to understanding democracy. In addition to the deliberative affordances that have been built into eGovernment and eParticipation infrastructures, I see value in also looking to the contestations and oppositions in politics and media-making.


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20 In my description of Bennett (2008) I want to note that I reference pre and post internet forms of citizenship which are overly simplistic. Still, I find these ideas helpful as archetypes.
references the documentary, *This is What Democracy Looks Like* (2000), which was produced from the footage of 100 citizen journalists at the 1999 World Trade Organization counterglobalization protests in Seattle. DiSalvo states

The varied forms of demonstrations reflected the varied positions of the people who participated. Some groups organized marches and carried signs, others performed theater in the streets and drum circles in parks, and some engaged in civil disobedience. To declare that such a cacophony of voices and actions “is what democracy looks like” is bold and, to many confusing and alarming. Such scenes run counter to North American ideas about democracy, which is exemplified by town meetings, party caucuses and elections. (DiSalvo, 2012, p. 4)

The design of infrastructures for open participation in policy-making cannot be limited to sites where citizens embark in deliberation to reach rational consensus. Oppositional and alternative media are also part of the mediascape that I wish to explore.

### 2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter established foundational ideals for participation through the presentation of exemplary cases where Canadian citizens got involved in policy-making. Examples such as the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry and the Fogo process are in some ways aspirational models for their use of public communication infrastructures to involve citizens in policy-making. These examples reinforce the idea that discourse and public deliberation can lead to better informed policy decision-making.

The broader tradition of deliberative democracy and the public sphere have been taken up in the Canadian context and can be traced through policies such as the Social Union Framework Agreement (1999) and eGovernment programs. An interest in deliberative democracy however, does not necessitate the exclusion of other models of democracy. At the end of this chapter I returned to the types of citizenship and democracy that are emerging through the use of the internet and the social web. Exploring the contested aspects of democracy as demonstrated by
alternative media practitioners is a tradition I will take forward as part of my research scaffolding.
3 Research scaffolding

My decisions about how to study participation in Ontario policy-making are informed by both my involvement in design and my theoretical understandings. The methods used in this project were intended to combine a range of ethnographically informed research strategies that drew upon the actor-network theory (ANT) literature, traditions of studying public participation and technology use and design research. In this chapter, I begin by briefly reviewing a range of relevant ethnographies that explore everyday public life and end-users. Subsequently, I explain how descriptive, politically engaged and designerly activities were undertaken and informed by both ANT and ethnographic traditions. My use of ANT and ethnography may be useful for scholars seeking to embark on similar research in the future. In this chapter, I begin by describing ideas from the literature and then outline the type of data I collected for this project.

3.1 Ethnography in everyday (public) life

Ethnography as a family of methods has historically been associated with understanding human culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To understand social activities, de Certeau (2002) emphasizes the importance of foregrounding the everyday practices of how people actually do things. My overarching research questions for this project pertain to how politics are carried out in everyday life. Boyte (2004) provides a definition of everyday politics as being "of the citizen" and that it "taps and develops the public talents of ordinary citizens" rather than being a process dominated by experts (p. 4). In this section, I examine how ethnography as a research method informs this proposed work in both offline and online environments. For my research, this
necessitates exploration of ethnography in public participation contexts and in order to understand end-users.

Ethnography in public participation contexts

Ethnographic researchers can use methods such as participant observation, interviewing and document analysis to both understand experiences of public policy and to inform policy-makers (Becker, Gans, Newman, & Vaughan, 2004). Feldman and Biernacki (n.d.) carried out participant observation and interviewing with intravenous drug users to better understand impacts of public policy. Additionally, fieldwork within participatory policy processes has been carried out. Lang (2007) for example, attended the Government of British Columbia’s Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform to gain a better understanding of the process. Jensen (2005) examined the consensus conference on electronic medical records in Denmark. Clearly, there is a research tradition that examines participatory processes in which citizens can become engaged.

Ethnography of ICT use and end-users

In an ethnography of youths’ use of diverse digital technologies including games, podcasting, and text messaging, Ito et al. (2009) describe that “[u]sing an ethnographic approach means that we work to understand how media and technology are meaningful to people in the context of their everyday lives” (p. 4) The internet has been explored ethnographically in everyday life and some examples include how the internet is used in a developing Caribbean nation (Miller & Slater, 2000), at the public library (Balka & Peterson, 2002), in a Toronto neighbourhood (Clement, Aspinall, Viseu, & Kennedy, 2004) and in domestic contexts (Bakardjieva, 2005). In a similar vein, in my master’s thesis I used ethnographic methods to study access to consumer health information portals in the waiting room of a community health centre (Smith, 2006).
In a broad sense, ethnographic scholarship which involves the social web or ICTs grapples with the issue of defining the field site. Historically, ethnographers could study a culture within a geographically bounded space such as an island or a neighbourhood. In an early book on internet ethnography titled *Virtual Ethnography*, Hine provided two discrete analytical positions for researchers to adopt. She suggests the internet can be understood as an artefact, or as a place “where culture is formed and reformed” (Hine, 2000, p. 9). In response to Hine, boyd (2008) suggests that ethnographic research can explore both of these aspects at once.

Various examples of how technology is used draw heavily upon the uptake of ethnography as a method in human-computer interaction (HCI) and computer-supported co-operative work (CSCW) fields (Suchman, 1987). In these research contexts there has been an interest in the field site as broader than a technological artefact or “place.” The use of anthropological methods to inform design or policy is part of a trend to apply ethnographic knowledge gained from everyday life (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1992). Some researchers in the Canadian context (i.e., Clement, Aspinall, Viseu, & Kennedy, 2004) study the implication of connectivity policy in an attempt to understand and contribute to the design and implementation of such services.

Ethnographic accounts of how the social web is used are emerging in the literature. In recent years, creative content production by youth with an emphasis on California (Ito et al., 2009), how Facebook is used in Trinidad (Miller, 2011) and how hacktivism collaboration unfolds through internet relay chat (IRC)\(^{21}\) and other social web tools (E. G. Coleman, 2012) have been explored ethnographically.

\(^{21}\) Coleman discusses the use of IRC as a site for hacktivist collaboration and humour on page 110 of her book *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Making jokes via IRC is a major topic of discussion.
3.2 ANT (Actor-network Theory)

I will now briefly introduce ANT and then outline three traditions of ethnographic ANT research that inform my research practice.

Background

Beginning in the 1980s, constructivist approaches to technology studies were in part developed through the social construction of technology (SCOT) research and actor-network theory (ANT). In developing SCOT, Pinch and Bijker (1984) drew upon the model established by scholars in the field of sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) to examine the innovation of technology. Pinch and Bijker determined that it was important to consider both failed and successful designs when examining how technologies became stabilized. Actor-network theory is a second STS approach that draws upon a similar constructivist epistemological foundation. Like SSK, early ANT studies were studies of scientific knowledge production in laboratories (Latour, 1987). Like SCOT, ANT can be rooted within constructivist epistemology. Latour (2005) explicitly defines the term “social” in relation to social construction. He states that the term “social” was misunderstood in relation to ANT’s scholarly examination of the construction of scientific facts. Overall, ANT can be understood as an approach to study socio-technical systems that stabilize (or fail to stabilize) and include both human and non-human entities. In describing the basic characteristics, Law encourages us to think of an actor-network as the semiotics of materiality (2009).

Within the STS community, Winner (1993) critiqued social constructivist approaches for their apolitical attention to the values that are associated with technology. Politically engaged STS, however, remains a potential research approach for activist or intervention-oriented scholars. Participatory approaches to STS research include cases where lay citizens have become involved
in defining which scientific issues require attention in their own communities through the science shop model in the Netherlands and other countries including Denmark and Canada (Wachelder, 2003). Science shops are set up as centres where lay citizens can go to get scientific research advice on community relevant issues such as air pollution or soil contamination. Additionally, feminist and equity-oriented STS scholars have also contributed to the development of participatory approaches in STS.

ANT can be used to study socio-technical systems that stabilize (or fail to stabilize) and include both human and non-human entities. In describing the basic characteristics, Law (1999) states that actor-network theory is a study of performativity where “entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located” (p. 4). Simply stated, ANT is used to describe networks that are socio-technical systems.

Latour (2005) states that describing networks is significant because often researchers in the social sciences use static conceptions of the social as explanations for phenomena without examining the actual actors, connections and traces that are present in a situation as it unfolds. In this manner, an ANT approach to the research of the social can be attempted by going back “to trace connections again” (Latour, 2005, p. 1), or alternatively one can follow the actors. In attempting to trace connections or follow the actors, it should be noted that ANT can be considered a confusing and messy research approach. Latour (1999) identifies that there are “four difficulties of actor-network theory, that is the words ‘actor,’ ‘network’ and ‘theory’ – without forgetting the hyphen” (p. 15). In the subsequent paragraphs, each term in the acronym will be defined, drawing upon a variety of sources. The two theoretical influences that underpin ANT-semiotics and the traditions present in the study of narrative, literature and
ethnomethodology will be leveraged to better define the terms actors, network and theory (Law, 2009).

• Actors or actants are terms used interchangeably to describe the human and non-human entities that are components of actor-networks. In ANT, the term actant was intentionally borrowed from Algirdas Greimas and other scholars who studied literature and semiotics (Latour, 2005). The literary tradition is important to ANT because in a work of fiction, an actor’s agency is not restricted; it can come from “the agency of a magic wand, a dwarf…” (p. 54). ANT seeks to maintain this freedom of agency for actors.

• Network is a term that refers to a socio-technical assemblage. It can include actors (human and non-human), the connections or traces that link the actors and, additionally, spaces that are not occupied within the network. When the word ‘network’ was selected for inclusion in ANT, Latour explained that it was meant to convey “a series of transformations – translations, transductions – which could not be captured by any of the traditional terms of social theory” (Latour, 1999, p. 15). It is also important to note that in ANT the actor is connected to the network with a hyphen. Law (1999) states that an actor-network presents a tension that “combines-and elides the distinction between-structure and agency” (p. 1).

• Theory in an actor-network account is not a description of what constitutes the social or how society influences actors (Latour, 1999). Latour states that ANT paradoxically is a “method not a theory” (p. 20). He explains that at the time it originated, ANT was “another way of being faithful to the insights of ethnomethodology: actors know what they do and we have to learn from them not only what they do, but how and why they do
it” (p. 19). ANT, as did Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology, allowed researchers to “access sites…a way to travel from one spot to the next, from one field site to the next, not an interpretation of what actors do simply glossed in a different more palatable more universalist language” (Latour, 1999, p. 20–21).

### 3.2.1 Descriptive, politically engaged and designerly traditions

Three traditions of ethnographic ANT research that inform my research practice are as follows: (1) descriptive ANT, (2) politically engaged ANT and (3) ANT involving creative practice (see figure 3.1).

![Diagram of ANT possibilities](image)

**Figure 3.1: ANT possibilities**

This figure shows the three ethnographically informed research practices that can be carried out: descriptive, creative or designerly or politically engaged.

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22 Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011) was a well known professor of sociology at the University of California Los Angeles. He developed ethnomethodology after research in the mid 1940s where he looked at jurors’ conversations to examine how they knew how to act as jurors.
Descriptive ethnography

Latour and Woolgar’s initial uses of ethnography with ANT were descriptive. For example, the book *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* was based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in a neuroendocrinology laboratory (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). One of the most important contributions of the work was to draw upon fieldwork to identify how scientists deal with problematic data sets and how these practices do not conform to standard views of science. Using ethnographic methods made a discussion of the construction of scientific facts possible.

Politically engaged

A number of scholars who utilize ANT recognize that it need not be politically disengaged scholarship that is based solely on observation. An exemplary model of this approach is the work on the IssueCrawler software application for crawling hyperlinks (Marres, 2004; Marres & Rogers, 2005). As a researcher, Marres (2004) was interested in the controversy surrounding the ownership of the Development Gateway website. A number of non-governmental organizations were concerned that while the site claimed to be run by an independent NGO called the Development Gateway Foundation, the World Bank was actually running the site. To better understand the issue, Marres deployed the IssueCrawler software to crawl the Development Gateway site. The IssueCrawler software can be deployed in various ways such as tracing a network to explore a civil society organization’s connections or to discover which organizations are involved in a particular issue (Govcom.org, n.d.). Crawling the Development Gateway Foundation website with IssueCrawler was not welcome by the site owners. From a cease and desist email that Marres received, she determined that the World Bank was running the site. What I find significant about this research is how it demonstrates that tracing connections can be a political act because it exposes what is hidden from public view.
In describing sites for online politics, Langlois, Elmer, McKelvey, and Devereaux suggest that they are “assemblages where software processes, patterns of information circulation, communicative practices, social practices, and political contexts are articulated with and redefined by each other in complex ways” (2009, p. 416). A researcher’s actions and interactions with people and the web can shape the understanding of a political issue by tracing its origins and relationships.

Creative or designerly ANT

As the IssueCrawler example indicates, it is possible to incorporate creative practice into a researcher’s methodological toolkit. The IssueCrawler required conceptualization and design development to be useful in research contexts. Similarly, research carried out much earlier by Latour reflects a potential role of creative practice for the researcher. In *Aramis, or, For the Love of Technology*, Latour (1996) provides an interesting example of ANT. *Aramis* was a technology envisioned in France that intended to combine the convenience of the automobile with the mass transit attributes of the train or subway. *Aramis* was planned to be a train with private modular cars. The *Aramis* technology was invested in extensively. The story of *Aramis*, however, is tale of a failed transit vision. To tell this story through *Aramis*, Latour uses “scientifiction” (Latour, 1996, p. 82) that combines ethnographic practice with narrative fiction. While ANT clearly contains the elements necessary to frame and situate ethnographic research, other literature also provides important influences.

3.3 Concepts informing my conceptualization of the research site

I have found three ideas particularly helpful in conceptualizing my research site: (a) controversies in ANT, (b) design research and (c) media ecology.
a) Controversies in ANT

Latour (2005) defines controversies as objects or locations that are not stabilized. They can help to define the sites of interest for researchers who use actor-network theory. Latour identifies five broad controversies in the social sciences:

- “the nature of groups”
- “the nature of actions”
- “the nature of objects”
- “the nature of facts”; and
- controversies about “the type of studies done under the label of the science of the social” (p. 22)

In the case of my research, I explore whether participation in policy-making is a controversy of groups (i.e., community, stakeholders), actions (i.e., design) and objects (i.e., policy documents and websites). I also examine how openness and participation become contested facts of political life. Given that openness and participation are social and political values they are also a controversy type.

The openness of public participation in policy-making is a kind of socio-technical system that can be studied. In Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy (Latour & Weibel, 2005), Latour and Weibel lay the groundwork for this type of inquiry. Making Things Public is a book and exhibit that brings together approximately 100 contributors to explore the controversial things that people gather around as part of political life. In the introductory chapter, Latour (2005) calls for a consideration of “object-oriented democracy” where each socio-technical
network associated with politics is examined as something which can be assembled or disassembled. Latour and colleagues effectively demonstrate that ideals such as deliberation or participatory politics can be examined as a relationship of assemblages. *Making Things Public* explicitly challenges readers to look at controversies that occur outside of the traditional spaces of political life.

b) Design research

Given that public participation in policy-making processes is something that can be designed using the social web, the concept of design research becomes relevant to understanding my research site. Building on Schön (1983) and constructivist approaches to understanding design practice, Cross (1999, 2006) suggests that there are “designerly ways of knowing.” Examination of “people, processes, and products” can generate new knowledge (1999, p. 5). Cross states that “design knowledge resides firstly in people: in designers especially, but also in everyone to some extent” (p. 5). Processes are explained to be the “tactics and strategies of design” (p. 60). Finally, products are the forms or artefacts of the design process. For my research, exploring the design of public participation infrastructures that utilize the social web allows me to look to designers, their processes and artefacts to generate new knowledge.

Researching the contested aspects of political participation that are expressed through social web infrastructures made by citizens are at the center of my inquiry. As introduced in chapter 1, I am influenced by design and alternative media traditions where end-users or citizens are brought into the design or media making process. In an article which attempts to integrate activist media traditions with participatory design, Lievrouw (2006) identifies that design scholars need to look at practices with oppositional views on democracy such as Indymedia and culture jamming which “talk back” to the existing power structures in society (p. 115).
“Talk back” is also an idea in Schön’s (1985) study of the design studio. In a previous paper (Smith, 2009), I draw upon Schön’s definition of talk back where the materials speak to the designer, but I suggest that the social web provides examples of wider forms of talk back by end-users. The design traditions I introduced in chapter 1 including participatory design (PD) (Bjerknes & Bratteteig, 1995; Simonsen & Robertson, 2013), computer supported cooperative work (CSCW) (Star & Strauss, 1999; Suchman, 1994), critical making (Ratto, 2011a, 2011b; Ratto & Boler, In press) and adversarial design (DiSalvo, 2012) each allow for talk back in different ways in relation to democratic concerns during design. There are various other forms of design that also allow for talk back with democratic concerns including critical technical practice (Agre, 1997; Dourish, Finlay, Sengers, & Wright, 2004), critical design (A. Dunne, 2006) and value oriented design approaches (Friedmann & Nissenbaum, 1996; Kling, 1984; Sellen, Rogers, Harper, & Rodden, 2008). In chapter 1, I also introduced alternative media traditions such as tactical media (Garcia & Lovink, 1997) which overlap with these design types because they share a concern with trying to better instantiate democracy through the production of new media. Taking a media ecology approach may provide some ways to draw further linkages between various design modes.

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24 Critical design is a term used by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby to describe design that challenges the status quo. Dunne and Raby describe that they along with their graduate students at the Royal College of Art practice critical design. Critical design typically involves artefacts which are exhibited. Dunne and Raby’s definition of critical design is available online http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0
c) Media ecology

The concept of media ecology was also central to defining my research site. In a 1977 television interview captured in *Understanding me: Lectures and interviews*, McLuhan states that media ecology:

...means arranging various media to help each other so they won't cancel each other out, to buttress one medium with another. You might say, for example, that radio is a bigger help to literacy than television, but television might be a very wonderful aid to teaching languages. And so you can do some things on some media that you cannot do on others. And, therefore, if you watch the whole field, you can prevent this waste that comes by one canceling the other out. (McLuhan, 2003, p. 271)

Postman adds moralism to the concept of media ecology. He states, “we put the word “media” in the front of the word “ecology” to suggest that we were not simply interested in media, but in the ways in which the interaction between media and human beings give a culture its character and, one might say, help a culture to maintain symbolic balance” (Postman, 2000, p. 11).

The case of Peretti’s (2001) attempt to order a customized pair of Nike shoes with the word “sweatshop” added as a slogan to protest the corporation’s labour practices, represents how a media ecology can work when an individual is oriented to promote social justice or political change. Peretti forwarded his correspondences with Nike representatives to some friends and then they were further circulated leading to an estimated 11.4 million recipients (Bennett & Lagos, 2007). The email exchange was also posted on blogs and websites which eventually led to mass media coverage of the story. In this case no single media existed in isolation, there was “viral transmission, network jumping and media boundary crossing” (Bennett & Lagos, 2007, p. 196).

The idea of watching the whole field, or attending to all possible sites of participation (online and offline), was key even though I located my participants through their online presence. I was
aware that, although some social web research focuses distinctly on a specific social media such as YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2009) or Facebook (Miller, 2011), I wanted to consider participation across an array of spaces and platforms. Helpful in this was an early web research methods chapter by Mitra and Cohen (1999) where the characteristics of the internet, including intertextuality, nonlinearity and end-users as authors, are emphasized as possibilities. More recently, Horst, Herr-Stephenson and Robinson’s (2009) research on youth and digital media defines their use of the ecology metaphor to “emphasize the characteristics of an overall technical, social, cultural, and place-based system, in which the component are not decomposable or separable” (p. 31).

3.4 Research process

Ethnographically informed ANT and design research perspectives inform my research activities as outlined above. The basic steps of my data collection and analysis are outlined in figure 3.2. Throughout my research process I participated in the open government and government 2.0 activities. Reflection and analysis were also ongoing and spanned the entire research period. Using the social web to design infrastructures for public participation in policy-making, locating bills of interest, authoring policy narratives, finding social web-based policy participation and individuals to interview were shorter term involvements.

With figure 3.2 I attempt to represent that my research was a non-linear process. I acknowledge that there is an overlap in the process and mess in research practice. (See for example Law’s After Method: Mess in Social Science Research (2004) in which he describes the phenomena of mess in social science research.) Additionally, the perhaps less visible background context to this figure is my political engagement and my own designerly work. I
will explain how I participated in the open government community and conducted design subsequently.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3.2: Steps in the research process**

This provides an outline of the steps I followed in the research process.

### 3.4.1 Participating through political engagement at barcamps and beyond

In line with the advice of Bruno Latour to students of ANT, I followed the actors. One place where I could follow human actors was at Ontario-based barcamps and related events.\(^{25}\) In the

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\(^{25}\) See Appendix C for a list of selected events attended.
case of infrastructures for participation in Ontario policy-making, some of the actors who were most accessible to me were the citizen designers working outside of government to create social web based participation systems. These individuals might self identify as “geeks” or “policy wonks.” During the period of my doctoral studies, I was able to connect with a number of these individuals in person at these events, all of which drew upon Web 2.0 or social web inspired organizing principles.

Barcamps are often technologically oriented meet-ups and they can be described as an “ad-hoc gathering born from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment” (BarCamp.org, 2008). The first barcamp was held in Palo Alto, California, in 2005 at the offices of a company called SocialText, just as interest in Web 2.0 was emerging (Aguiton & Cardon, 2007; BarCamp.org, 2008). The barcamp concept emerged as an open-source alternative to an invitation-only event called the Foo Camp (for Friends of O'Reilly) for the associates of a technical publishing company. It is also notable that the terms foo, bar or FooBar are sometimes used by computer programmers when a nonsensical term is needed to label a command or variable to demonstrate a concept. Foo camps and barcamps are therefore concepts that have meaning for software developers and programmers.

In the Ontario context, barcamps were extended to the policy realm through an event called TransitCamp (Kuznicki, Singer, & Goldman, 2008). TransitCamp was organized in Toronto when bloggers and the social web community became concerned that the Toronto Transit Commission’s (TTC’s) request for proposals (RFP) to design the TTC’s website was woefully out of touch with the needs of a ridership who were users of the social web. The event brought
together geeks to work on a policy problem and resulted in the scrapping of an inadequate RFP (Kuznicki et al., 2008).  

Since TransitCamp, a variety of spin-off events have been inspired in Toronto, each of which pertains to provincial policy-making. One of these was ChangeCamp, a barcamp held after Obama’s election in the United States and convened on the topic of “the demand for a renewed relationship among citizens and between citizens and our civic institutions” through the use of “new tools of communication” (http://changecamp.ca/). Another was WiredCamp, a barcamp held within the Ontario Public Service but open to non-government employees. WiredCamp was held at Showcase Ontario, a governmental technology fair but brought the ChangeCamp model to an annual government event (Floresco, 2009).

I became a frequent attendee and participant at both the Toronto and Ontario barcamps, which bridged policy and technology. Figure 3.3 shows a schedule of crowd sourced session topics for ChangeCamp, at which I led a session. My involvement at these barcamps ranged from taking notes for the event wikis, getting involved with a blog after the camp and facilitating sessions. Through my participation at such events, I became a familiar face to the individuals who were part of the assemblages of my research topic. I clearly presented myself as someone who was interested in making participation in policy-making better for citizens, and in this way I was and am politically engaged. Table 3.1 lists seven talks with notable members of the public service or civil society whom I have incorporated into my research trajectory.

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26 Karen Quinn Fung completed an undergraduate honours communications project on the Toronto TransitCamp model. Her website is located at http://www.countablyinfinite.ca/blog/2008/05/closing-the-loop-on-honours/ but the honours project was not live as of Jan. 5th, 2013.  

75
Figure 3.3: Session grid from ChangeCamp event in Toronto

This image was taken by user MarinaToronto and obtained from Flickr.com under Creative Commons licence Attribution 2.0 Generic. The hand written session proposals on the grid demonstrate that the schedule of the unconference is not preset and is participant driven. The source URL for the image is http://www.flickr.com/photos/14769149@N08/3227606848/

Table 3.1: Talks at barcamps and related events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Influential concepts</th>
<th>Web archive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nov. 27, 2008</td>
<td>Mark Surman, Executive Director, Mozilla Foundation</td>
<td>A City that Thinks Like the Web</td>
<td>Open data and crowdsourcing</td>
<td><a href="http://commonspace.wordpress.com/2008/11/27/city-thinks-like-the-web/">http://commonspace.wordpress.com/2008/11/27/city-thinks-like-the-web/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June 8, 2009</td>
<td>Nicholas Charney, Office of the Assistant Deputy</td>
<td>The Future of Documentary Heritage</td>
<td>Library &amp; Archives Canada is</td>
<td><a href="http://www.snwebcastcenter.com/custom_events/govcamp/indexA-">http://www.snwebcastcenter.com/custom_events/govcamp/indexA-</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 Each of these talks link to barcamp culture. The talk by Mark Surman (number 1) at the city of Toronto was introducing the participatory culture of the web to government officials at an event called the Web 2.0 Summit. Surman challenged government to take up the participatory culture of the web, but the event that hosted his talk was not a barcamp per se. Each of the talks which occurred on June 8, 2009 (numbers 2, 3 and 4) were at GovCamp, which was clearly a barcamp. Talks 5 and 6 were events I included as a follow-up from GovCamp. Talk 7 by the president of the Treasury Board of Canada, Tony Clement, was at a meetup of Toronto’s Third Tuesday group. Third Tuesday is a loose network that bills itself as “Digital Canada’s Meetup: Meet other communications professionals to explore new developments in digital media and emerging best practices” http://www.meetup.com/third-tuesday-toronto/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Influential concepts</th>
<th>Web archive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 7, 2011</td>
<td>Ines Mergel, Syracuse University; Anne Bermonte, Ontario’s Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation; Allyson Hewitt, SiG@MaRS</td>
<td>Crowd-sourced Wikis in Government</td>
<td>Use of wikis in government</td>
<td><a href="http://www.howto.gov/training/classes/crowd-source-wiki">http://www.howto.gov/training/classes/crowd-source-wiki</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The talks in table 3.1 occurred at a variety of events and barcamps at the intersection of policy and technology in Toronto and Ontario. I am a frequent attendee and participant at such events. Appendix C more fully outlines my role at these events. Figure 3.4 maps the potential uses of ANT in my research. These elements are outlined in section 3.4.2 and 3.5.
3.4.2 Participating as designer of social web spaces for policy participation

As described previously, Cross suggests that there are “designerly ways of knowing” that are distinct from the way knowledge is generated in the sciences or arts (2006). Cross recognizes that the process of design values the making process and the appropriateness of what is developed. These general statements about design serve as an important foundational component of my epistemological position as a researcher. I agree that new knowledge and insights can be generated from design, and also believe that my use of ethnographic and social science approaches can be greatly informed by my own design practice.

Therefore, to embark on this research project, it was essential that I became familiar with the types of social web technologies that were being used by my potential research participants. To
this end, I participated in three major initiatives: (1) blogging with Metronauts.ca on sustainable transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas, (2) acting as a moderator and facilitator for IDforum.ca around enhanced driver’s licences and Bill 85: Photo Card Act, and (3) co-convening a wiki for a collaborative submission to the Canadian federal government’s 2010 consultation on the digital economy strategy.

The story of my blog posts with Metronauts.ca began in late 2007, when a news article explained that Metrolinx, a provincial agency with a mandate to improve and integrate transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), intended to consult the public while forming a regional transportation plan (RTP) (Kalinowski, 2007). In addition to the government-initiated consultation, an informal barcamp inspired public participation event was to be held in the spring of 2008 with the sponsorship of Metrolinx and the organization of community members (Kalinowski, 2008; Kuznicki et al., 2008). As a Metronauts blogger, I was exposed to the practices of group blogging and to the WordPress blogging platform for the first time. Figure 3.5 shows the 10 blog posts which I authored as a part of Metronauts.

In my second initiative with the IDforum, I participated in planning for the Drupal design for the IDforum.ca website and in moderating the site’s discussion forum. IDforum.ca was a component of Dr. Andrew Clement’s Performing Identities research grant. The website was created in 2008 when the Ontario government introduced a bill mandating the introduction of enhanced driver’s licences (EDLs) with radio frequency identification (RFID) chips that Ontario residents could use as border-crossing documents. Numerous security and privacy risks exist with EDLs, and we created the website as a way to share information and to host a public

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28 This website was not online at the time of submission of this dissertation.
discussion in which citizens could be involved in a discussion about their ID documents (see figure 3.6).

**Figure 3.5: Metronauts blog posts**

This screenshot shows the blog posts I wrote and posted as a part of the Metronauts initiative between December and August 2008. This image is used under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike licence governing content on [http://metronauts.ca/](http://metronauts.ca/)
In addition to the discussion forum, I conducted other designerly and advocacy oriented activities related to Bill 85: The Photocard Act. As reported in Smith, McPhail, Ferenbok, Tichine and Clement (2011), our research team built a mock infrastructure to demonstrate risks to privacy and civil liberties using ID infrastructure. As described in Chapters 4 and 5, our critique raised awareness about privacy and civil liberty issues to a limited degree but did not change the Ontario government’s policy direction.

![Image of IDforum discussion forum](http://www.idforum.ischool.utoronto.ca/)

**Figure 3.6: IDforum discussion forum**

This screenshot shows the discussion forum from [http://www.idforum.ischool.utoronto.ca/](http://www.idforum.ischool.utoronto.ca/). Content from this website is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 License.

My third initiative was with the 2010 Digital Economy consultation as a co-convenor of a roundtable at an in-person event and as a co-author of a collaborative, consensus submission that was sent to the federal government. The consultation was called by the government to inform policy directions for Canada’s renewed digital economy strategy. The half-day event was held at
the University of Toronto with 33 people participating in-person and 50 people participating online via a wiki. Following the discussions, we collaborated in the writing of the consensus submission. In the end 78 signatories endorsed the submission in which we asked the federal government to create a more inclusive digital society rather than focusing on the digital economy. The submission’s key points were communicated through a video and edited by Dave Kemp, which is now available on YouTube and through our wiki.


**Figure 3.7:** Digital Economy consultation roundtable wiki

This screenshot shows the wiki interface provided by PB Works to scaffold the Digital Economy Consultation roundtable. The video in the screenshot was created by Dave Kemp and is under a Creative Commons licence Attribution Share-alike Non-commercial. See the wiki page [http://ipsi2010.pbworks.com/w/page/26817658/Digital%20Economy%20Consultation%20Roundtable%20-%20Home%20Page](http://ipsi2010.pbworks.com/w/page/26817658/Digital%20Economy%20Consultation%20Roundtable%20-%20Home%20Page)

My involvement in blogging on Metronauts.ca, facilitating IDforum and co-convening the consensus submission to Canada’s 2010 Digital Economy consultation provided me with an opportunity to get to know many of the major platforms and tools available to citizens who wish to become engaged in policy-making processes. I have a strong familiarity with web
technologies, having taken university courses in 1998 that introduced me to web design, multimedia communications and digital video. As a producer for the social web through Metronauts, the IDForum, and the Digital Economy Strategy Consultation Roundtable wiki my own fumbles, errors and challenges were beneficial to me when I later met individuals in similar and related roles at barcamps and other online channels. Some of these individuals became my research participants.

3.5 Tracing policy development online

To carry out other parts of my research, I used the internet in various ethnographically descriptive ways to follow policies of interest and to write narratives describing the policy development. Using the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as a launching off point, I searched Ontario bills passed into law or discussed in the first session of Ontario’s 39th Legislative Assembly (39:1). At this time there was a Liberal Party majority under the leadership of Premier Dalton McGuinty. A general election was held in October 2007 and the first session ran from November 28, 2007 to March 4, 2010. During this seating of the Legislative Assembly, a total of 248 Government and Private Members’ bills were considered by the legislature. Additionally, there were 29 Private Bills introduced, which involved the formation or dissolving of corporations. I omitted the Private Bills from my research because according to the Archives of Ontario Guide for Researching Ontario Bills and Statutes (2011), they typically “affect a particular individual or corporation” only (p. 2). I was interested in focusing on the Government and Private Members’ Bills because they are more likely to represent “issues of public concern” which “affect all of Ontario” (p. 2).

To characterize the 248 Government and Private Members’ Bills discussed in the 39:1 legislature session, some of the most prominent themes for bills were labour, transportation and
memorial days and months. Twenty-five (or 10%) of the bills discussed in the legislature pertained to labour issues such as raising the minimum age (Bill 7), or legislating striking union members back to work (Bills 135 and 225). Twenty-one bills (or 8.5%) pertained to transportation issues such as amending the highway traffic act (i.e., Bills 3, 27, 40, 41, 73, etc.) or legislating for public transit (i.e., Bills 151, 163, etc.). Sixteen bills (6.5%) discussed in the legislature were to honour a person or a social cause on a particular day or month of the year (i.e., Bill 5 Katelyn Bedard Bone Marrow Awareness Month Act and Bill 207 Black History Month Act).

Amidst these major categories, I came across proposed legislation that could be categorized as pertaining to access to information, transparency, identification and participation. These bills were of interest to me because I believed they might pertain to democratic rights or processes. I assembled a list of 17 bills (6.9% of the total bills) recognizing that the categories are not discrete and overlap substantially. Based on the social web makers who I was able to recruit for my research (as described later), I developed a stronger focus on three bills with a substantive link to identification or identity documents.

- Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act (2008, 39: 1)
- Bill 85, Photo Card Act (2008, 39: 1)
- Bill 126, Road Safety Act, (2009, 39:1)

The substantive links between these bills and identity and identification documents were apparent to me because of related research projects I have completed. The linkages of these bills to identity and identification themes may not be as apparent to others so I will describe them here in brief. Bill 12 deals with the records that contain biographical life history information that has
typically been concealed from adopted individuals and their biological parents. Bill 85 pertains to updating Ontario’s driver’s licences to include radio frequency identification chips for citizens who wish to use their licences as border crossing documents to enter the United States. Bill 126 involved new regulations for young drivers that would be tied to the ages on their driver’s licences. With Bill 126, it was proposed that a young person’s age would mean an automatic restriction in their privileges to carry passengers.

After I completed an initial round of interviewing participants, I realized that my interviewees were predominantly male and did not reflect the cultural diversity of Canada. I decide to add another bill in an attempt to diversify the participants I recruited that links to identification documents. The additional bill is

- Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others) (2009, 39: 1)

Bill 210 involves strengthening the protections for live-in caregivers who are predominantly female and from the developing world. Bill 210 included provision to restrict the seizure of migrant workers’ passports by their employers or agencies involved in the live-in caregivers program. After including this bill, I successfully diversified my research participants to include more women.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the methodological and theoretical scaffolding that helped me to define the field site of my research. I reviewed traditions in ethnography to study public participation and the internet. I also presented three types of ANT inquiries that are useful for my research: descriptive, creative and politically engaged. This chapter served to document my ongoing
involvement in the open government and design communities working at the intersections of policy and technology. In Chapter 4, I describe the in-depth policy narratives that I wrote to contextualize Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210. These policy narratives provide an entry point into better understanding how the social web is used in relation to Ontario policy-making.
4 Ontario policy narratives

Ontario’s laws – their origins and intent, the politicians championing them, and the way in which they have evolved – tell us a great deal about our roots and our changing values. (Archives of Ontario, 2011)

In the previous chapter, Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act (2008, 39: 1); Bill 85, Photo Card Act (2008, 39: 1); Bill 126, Road Safety Act (2009, 39:1); and Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others) (2009, 39: 1) were introduced as central to my research. What is significant for my research is that, while these bills share a connection in various ways to identity or identification documents, I found individuals who were potential policy entrepreneurs working on each of the bills and using the social web to facilitate participation in the policy-making process. In this chapter, I will present the narratives of the policy-making process for each of the selected bills.

The role of narratives in policy-making has been explored by a variety of scholars. Bennett and Edelman (1985) observe that “stories are among the most universal means of representing human events. In addition to suggesting an interpretation for a social happening, a well-crafted narrative can motivate the belief and action of outsiders toward the actors and events caught up in its plot” (p. 156). In this chapter, my narratives of Ontario Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210 provide information related to the actors involved in creating policy windows and framing the debates. Subsequently, I examine the continuing role of the traditional media in agenda setting and consider some of the potential strategies for citizens that present themselves when using the social web.
Elements for policy narratives

Bennet and Edelman (1985) claim that a political narrative must include “the who, what, where, why, how, and the when that gives acts and events a narrative frame” (p. 159). Some scholarly literature analyzes policy-making narratives that expand upon these elements to include a description of the use of the social web and related technologies (Bekkers, Beunders, Edwards, & Moody, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Drawing upon Bennet and Edelman (1985), I will present the narratives of the four bills selected for this research. To answer the questions of who, where and when, each of Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210 was introduced during the first session of the 39th legislature in Ontario in 2007 (39:1), and each one was put before the Legislative Assembly for first reading between 2007 and 2009 (see figure 4.2 for a timeline).29

As I began to write the policy narratives presented here, I scanned the popular press and reviewed the Hansard records associated with each bill. For some of the bills, participation in policy-making via the social web was part of the narrative described through the Hansard and in the mass media. Within my narratives, I also refer to the literature on policy windows and policy entrepreneurs (Bekkers et al., 2011; Howlett, 1998; Kingdon, 2003; Pralle, 2006) and on policy frames (Bennett & Edelman, 1985; Schön & Rein, 1994). Before presenting each of the policy narratives, I identify the types of policy windows and key junctures for citizen participation in Ontario policy-making that are woven into the narratives.

How policy windows emerge

In his book on agenda setting, Kingdon (2003) provides numerous ideas about how policy windows emerge. He suggests there are predictable windows, unpredictable windows and

29 For a bill to become law in Ontario, it must have three readings in the Legislative Assembly, be passed by the Legislative Assembly and receive Royal Assent when it is signed by the Lieutenant Governor of the Province.
Kingdon suggests that there is a “scarcity of open windows…due to the simple capacity of the system” (p. 184). Some of the capacity to develop policy within the political system is taken up by policy issues that need to be revised or renewed on set schedules. These renewal points are predictable policy windows. Kingdon also observes that there are unpredictable policy windows. The mechanisms for bringing together the three streams (problems, politics and policy) that have to come together for a policy window to open are not always easy to see in advance. Kingdon notes that sometimes a crisis can be a “focusing event,” which is by “its nature of short duration” (p. 169). Finally, he suggests that there are spillovers of issues during policy development that help to create policy windows. Kingdon’s (2003) definition of spillover policy windows is multi-faceted. For example, he explains that “the appearance of a window for one subject often increases the probability that a [spillover] window will open for another similar subject” (p. 190). The idea that an issue can become so involved as to outgrow the capacity of one policy window thus forcing the issue to overflow into a second one, is the concept Kingdon points to when describing the spillover window. He also states that with spillover, “a given window sometimes establishes a principle that will guide future decisions within a policy arena” (p. 190).

Howlett (1998) built upon Kingdon’s theory (2003) to consider the particularities in policy windows in specific contexts. Figure 4.1 draws extensively upon Howlett’s model (1998) that policy windows can be strongly or weakly institutionalized in government. He notes that routine windows are most highly institutionalized with spillover windows, discretionary windows and random windows, each being progressively less institutionalized. Howlett (1998) tested and proved the hypothesis that routine windows occur most frequently while spillover windows and discretionary windows occur less frequently in the Canadian federal policy context. Little research has been conducted to consider policy windows in relation to citizens’ social web
activities. The concept of frames helps to introduce some of the reasons why scholars may wish to explore these connections.

Figure 4.1: Types of policy windows
This image is adapted from Howlett (1998) who draws upon Kingdon’s model of policy-making.

Frames

The concept of *frames* in policy-making is described by Schön and Rein (1994) in *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies*. Schön and Rein (1994) state that the “design …of social service systems or social policy, is not a process of problem solving governed by criteria of technical-rational analysis” (p. vii), and they point to the importance of the “frames which underlie policy controversies” (p. viii). They define frames as “assumption structures held by participants in the policy discourse and by actors in policy-making arenas” (p. viii). The collaboration of Schön and Rein on this book and on the concepts of frames is notable in that it explicitly brings in design thinking to describe policy-making. Previously, Schön (1985) had studied the reflective practice of architects in their studios, and the book with Rein emerged out of a collaborative effort to create a course on “the design of social service systems” at MIT (p. vii).
I will rely on framing as a concept in section 4.2 of this chapter to describe the controversies that emerged in the policy narratives about the four bills explored in this research. Frames are applicable as well to a second aspect of these policies relative to participation and openness as political values that can be interrogated through citizen designers’ production of social web content in relation to Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210.

Government-led participation before and during policy windows

In terms of public participation in policy-making, there are some key junctures in this process in Ontario that are significant and that may contribute to getting an issue on policy-makers’ agendas. Three relatively routine junctures are petitions, committee hearings and commenting. First, an issue that citizens want to see as part of a bill may be raised through a petition. The Legislative Assembly of Ontario website states that a petition is

…a request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario take some specific action (or refrain from taking some action) to redress a public grievance.

The action requested must be within the scope of jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly, and the request must be clear, temperate, proper and respectful. (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-c, para. 1)

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario specifies that “email, faxed or photocopied petitions are not admissible and will not be presented” but that individuals under the age of majority may sign petitions (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-c, para. 3). Petitions can be read in the legislature by Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) (excluding Cabinet Ministers or the Speaker of the House) or they can be submitted to the Clerk of the House (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-d).

A second key juncture for public participation is committee hearings, once bills are being discussed in the legislature. The Archives of Ontario state that during this legislative process, bills often go to a standing committee, which is made up of members of the Legislative
Assembly. Standing committees consider bills connected to particular themes such as finance and economic affairs, government agencies or social policy (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-b). As described by the Canadian Policy Research Network and Ascentum Inc. (2005) in relation to the federal policy-making process, it matters when (and if) a bill is sent to committee:

A key area of note is whether a bill is referred to committee before or after second reading. If it is referred to committee after second reading, amendments can be made, but none that propose changes to the principle of the bill. If a bill is referred to committee before second reading then the government is willing to consider changing any or all aspects of the bill including the principle of the legislation. (p. 4)\(^{30}\)

Similarly, the scope of potential changes to a bill are shaped by the practices of how committees work. The Legislative Assembly of Ontario site explains that in relation to policies under consideration committees “may hold public hearings, allowing citizens from across Ontario the opportunity to comment on, or provide evidence relating to, the matter under review” (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-a, para. 2)

Important limitations of federal committees in the policy-making process were noted by Phillips and Orsini (2002):

\[30\] This is a federal example, but the same structure applies at the provincial level.
A third key juncture that would offer citizens an opportunity to become involved in policy-making is through inviting their comments on regulation. Proposed regulatory changes to Ontario laws are announced in the Ontario Gazette, and citizens typically have the opportunity to comment on these regulations before they are enacted. Additionally, there are is an online Regulatory Registry intended as a listing of regulations that may impact businesses and an environmental regulation registry for the province (Ontario, 2012b). At the stage of regulation-making, the language used is often highly technical or at an advanced reading level and not broadly accessible for participation.31

When considering the junctures at which government regularly allows citizens to participate in policy-making, it is important to critically question the quality of the participation. Phillips and Orsini (2002) caution that public consultation in “many instances…does not produce a genuine dialogue, nor does it give citizens much real influence over policy outcomes” (p. 4).

For Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210, I will draw upon the literature concerning policy windows, frames and the expected junctures for participation within my policy narratives. The policy narratives will provide further details on “the who, what, where, why, how, and the when” of policy development in Ontario (Bennett and Edeman, 1985, p. 159).

31 To provide evidence for my assertion of the difficulty of reading regulatory text, I ran text from a regulation under consideration through an online utility which assesses readability http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp. Under proposal number 12-HLTC012, the Ontario College of Pharmacists submitted a request to be permitted to administer influenza vaccines. The text about this regulatory change was rated by the readability utility to be at a Flesch Kincaid Grade level of 13.13 and to require 16.43 years of formal education to understand it. Both measures indicate a person would need post-secondary education to comprehend the proposed regulatory changes.
4.1 From early policy ideas to implementation

In figure 4.2, I provide a high-level timeline of the stages in policy development for Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act; Bill 85, Photo Card Act; Bill 126, Road Safety Act; and Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others). This section will describe the policy narratives that augment the timeline. The policy narratives will provide background information to better understand the role of citizen designers who became involved through the social web before, during and after these policies were implemented in Ontario.

Figure 4.2: Policy timeline

This figure provides the stages of policy-making mapped against time for each of the four bills.
4.1.1 Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act (2008)

Chronologically, the first bill that was a part of my research was Bill 12. It pertains to adoption, which is an issue that is important at numerous levels of government. At the international level, Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “the child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents” (United Nations, 1990). The information about one’s birth is therefore considered foundational to the identity one is able to construct throughout life.

One’s biological parents, however, are not always able to care for their children. Adoption is a legal and social way to transfer parental rights and responsibilities from biological parents to other parents (or a single parent). In Ontario, and other jurisdictions, “‘sealing up’ the documents and records pertaining to the adoption and issuing a new birth certificate for the child in the adoptive parent's names” was part of the institutional adoption practices (Schneider & Holosko, 1992, p. 56). Ontario first introduced an adoption act in 1921. Amendments in 1927 established the practice to seal up details of an adoptees birth and biological parents.

Since 1980, Ontario has maintained an Adoption Disclosure Registry. Establishing this registry began a move toward greater openness regarding adoption information for adoptees and birth families. In the mid 1980s, Dr. Garber (1985), Dean of Social Work at the University of Toronto, examined adoption disclosure and recommended further reforms toward openness and access of adoptees and biological parents to information. In Ontario, former MPP Marilyn Churley of the NDP was very active through the 1990s in proposing adoption disclosure reform in the legislature. An Adoption Information Disclosure Act (Bill 183) was put into force in September 2007 and then overturned by Judge Belobaba of the Ontario Superior Court because it
did not respect privacy rights (Infant Number 10968 v. Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario, 2007; Ontario, 2007). Ontario’s Privacy Commissioner Dr. Ann Cavoukian had also spoken against the violations of privacy (Ontario, 2007). The ruling by Judge Belobaba established that it was problematic for the government to retroactively decide to disclose identifying information about adoptees and birth families.

Rather than appealing the decision of Judge Belobaba, the Ontario government introduced a new act with a disclosure veto option in the next sitting of the legislature. Bill 12 appears to be a spillover policy window based on Kingdon’s (2003) definition. Bill 12 emerged because of problems and difficulties with the content of a previous bill that needed to be addressed by policy-makers following the intervention of the court (see table 4.1).

Changes to the access of adoption records in Ontario as outlined in Bill 12 were introduced to the legislature by the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services, in 2007. In her opening remarks she stated:

"The Access to Adoption Records Act, 2007, if passed, will enshrine openness in future adoption records in the province. It would give adult adoptees and birth parents access to identifying information in their adoption records and information about their personal past, which so many people have wanted for so long. If passed, the legislation will allow adoptees to learn where they were born, their original name at birth and the names of their parents, and will allow birth parents to learn about the child they placed for adoption, including their new name and where the adoption took place. (Ontario, 2007, 1400)"

To respond to the Superior Court ruling, disclosure vetoes for adoption orders from before September 1, 2008, were a part of the legislation. Bill 12 would protect the privacy for adoptees

\[\text{32 In citing from the Ontario Hansard and committee hearings, I will utilize the preceding time stamp or paragraph number from the records where available.}\]
and birth families that were involved in adoption before September 1, 2008. The idea of opening up adoption records was still perceived as being incredibly controversial by MPP Julia Munro. During the first reading of Bill 12, Munro stated that Bill 183 had been problematic because individuals “could not speak to the committee about the bill because of their desire to protect their anonymity” (Ontario, 2007, 1700). After the second reading of Bill 12, it was sent to the standing committee for social policy. During the committee hearing, a very limited number of individuals and organizations spoke. These included individuals with adoption experiences as well as the Bastard Nation: The Adoptee Rights Organization;\(^{33}\) the Coalition for Open Adoption Records; former MPP Marilyn Churley; Joy Cheskes who was involved in the Charter Rights court challenge of Bill 183; and the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers, and each of these organizations acted as deputants. Information submitted by the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies was also discussed.

Within the Hansard record, there was some mention of communication technologies. For example, the first deputant participated via teleconference (Standing committee on social policy, 2008). Within the committee hearing, Karen Lynne of the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers referenced her use of the internet to mobilize others with experiences of wanting to reunite with their birth children in the late 1990s:

\[
\text{No one wanted to listen to our story and everybody seemed to know all about it. Therefore, I met a few similar women on the Internet and we established the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers. We now have members across Canada and even around the world.} . . .
\]

\(^{33}\) The Hansard transcripts reveal that the speaker in the committee was uncomfortable with the provocative name of this organization. The chair and MPP Shafiq Quadri referred to the organization as the Adoptee Rights Organization.
Our mandate is simply to be the voice of mothers who lost their children to adoption. (Standing committee on social policy, 2008, 1650)

From a different perspective, Joy Cheskes, a “non-searching adoptee” who had been involved with the lawsuit against the province’s Bill 183, mentioned how she had mobilized others via the social web. During her committee hearing deposition, Cheskes stated she had “set up a website, wrote letters to the paper and to MPPs and started a petition, and of course, all of that was to no avail” in relation to getting a disclosure veto-type option added to Bill 183 (Standing committee on social policy, 2008, 1640)

In the case of Bill 12, much of the controversy seems to have been addressed by Judge Belobaba’s Ontario Superior Court ruling (Infant Number 10968 v. Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario, 2007; Ontario, 2007). The discussion during the committee hearings for Bill 12 were not highly controversial. The key issue to emerge from the deputants was summarized by NDP MPP Michael Prue after Ms. Joy Cheskes’ participation:

Every deputant, including yourself, wants the bill to be passed. So far I haven’t had anyone say, “Don’t pass this bill.” The only question comes down to whether we pass it as is or whether we take the suggestion of two or three of the deputants and put a 10-year time limit. You’re suggesting that you don’t want that time limit. Am I correct in that? (Standing committee on social policy, 2008, 1650)

During the third reading of Bill 12, Minister Meilleur stated that modernization and openness were key aspects of the legislation:

Our adoption information disclosure legislation is at the core of our government’s plan to bring adoption information disclosure laws into the 21st century. This is a proposed bill that would make open adoption records a cornerstone of Ontario’s adoption laws. It would usher in a new era of progress for Ontario’s adoption information disclosure system. (Ontario, 2008d, 1558)

During question period, there was concern that children who had been abused could be located by their birth parents through the adoption disclosure changes. This issue of abused children being located as adults was raised in the committee hearings with the input of the Children’s Aid
Societies of Ontario. The legislation passed with the understanding that individuals could use the disclosure veto without time limits.

Following the passage of this bill, it became possible for adoptees or birth parents to actually request birth information on or after June 1, 2009. The adoption information disclosures were changed to allow

adopted individuals…[to] apply for copies of their birth registration and adoption order. Birth parents can also apply once the adopted adult has reached the age of 19. While there is no standard for adoption orders, they may contain:

- The adopted person's birth name and adoptive name
- The date and place of birth
- The names of the birth parents (Ontario, 2009b, Getting information section)

The government service of providing this information was described as a “free service offered through ServiceOntario” (Ontario, 2009b). The provision of information about adopted individuals and birth parents became especially important because of the widespread understanding that the social web could be used to find the individuals involved in adoption cases (see figure 4.3).
Cases of adoptees and birth parents reuniting through the use of the social web were widely reported in the media from 2007 onward (Canwest News Service, 2007; CBC News, 2009a; Fletcher, 2012). A CBC News story (2009a) states that “a spokesperson for Kijiji Canada said the website has already heard of 10 stories of people reuniting with long-lost relatives since 2007, as far west as Calgary and as far east as Ottawa.” In British Columbia, Lori Haas was reported to find her biological son through Facebook in 2007, just one month after she joined the social networking site.
Table 4.1: Bill 12 policy narrative synthesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of policy window</th>
<th>Event(s) related to the policy window</th>
<th>Government-led participation opportunities</th>
<th>Controversies in framing the issue</th>
<th>Role of the social web in the policy narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Spillover             | Court challenge to Bill 183 and adoption records related to bill from 2007 | Committee hearings  
Regulation commenting | The trade-offs between privacy and openness in adoption records | Mobilizing by adoptees, birth families or other groups  
Adoptees and birth families using disclosure information to find each other via the social web |
4.1.2 Bill 85, Photo Card Act (2008)

While Bill 85 was introduced in the same way Bill 12 had been through a spillover policy window, it had very different origins. Unlike Bill 12, Bill 85 was a direct response to changes in US anti-terrorism policy; specifically, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). The WHTI is part of the US Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (United States, 2004), and requires that all persons entering the United States must present a valid passport or alternate secure identity and citizenship documents. Many Canadian citizens who live on the US border are accustomed to crossing the border with their drivers’ licences. The Government of Ontario began implementing a WHTI-compliant driver’s licence in late 2007, when it adopted techniques such as laser-engraved photos and personal information, a two-dimensional barcode and micro printing to better prevent fraudulent licences (McPhail, Boa, Ferenbok, Smith, & Clement, 2009). In 2008, the province proposed Bill 85 to enact further changes that would increase the WHTI compliance by including a contactless RFID chip, a machine-readable zone and citizenship information. The bill also allowed for the creation of an identification card for non-drivers, a document that organizations such as advocacy groups for the blind saw as essential.

Bill 85, the Photo Card Act, was first introduced in the legislature by James J. Bradley, Minister of Transportation, on June 3, 2008. Before the bill was introduced, there were a number of news stories that highlighted privacy concerns and drew on the expertise of Ann Cavoukian, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (CBC News, 2009b; Ferguson, 2009), and on civil society advocates for privacy and civil liberties (see figure 4.4). After the first reading of the bill, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario held a Public Information Forum on Ontario’s proposed enhanced drivers’ licences (EDLs) in collaboration with the
Faculty of Information of the University of Toronto on July 16, 2008. As reported by Mathieu in a *Toronto Star* article about the information forum, Cavoukian advised citizens that "if you have problems with this or any aspect of this, let your officials know what you are thinking" (Mathieu, 2008b). Mathieu’s (2008b) article also alerted the public to discussion opportunities that were available through the forum’s website. She stated, “Canadians can find information and add their voice to the debate at Idforum.ca” (2008b).

When he introduced the bill, Bradley emphasized the need to comply with the WHTI following the 9/11 Commission report. To me, this type of rhetoric is indicative that the factors contributing to this policy window were becoming institutionalized. The policy window was mostly a *spillover* from the US political scene. Although policies in Canadian provinces regularly need to be harmonized, the issue of ID documents for crossing the border is a spillover from international and national securitization to Ontario (see table 4.2).³⁴

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³⁴ McPhail, Boa, Ferenbok, Smith and Clement (2009) explore the issue that British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec pursued the EDL policy at approximately the same time to meet WHTI deadlines. Other border provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan decided to forgo EDLs and have their residents use passports. The pattern of multiple provinces addressing the same issue seems to demonstrate that there is a common reason for addressing the issue and hence creating an institutionalized policy window opening.
Minister Bradley’s opening statement about the ID reforms stated:

This is about maintaining a strong economy and secure borders. This is about promoting tourism and working with our neighbours. This is about combating fraud and identity theft. This is about keeping Ontario’s roads among the safest in North America.

Finally, the legislation we are proposing today is about removing barriers and increasing accessibility for people who do not or cannot drive. This creates opportunity for all Canadians. I urge all members of the Legislature to support this bill. (Ontario, 2008b, para. 574)
During the first reading, MPP Frank Klees of the Conservative Party introduced privacy concerns and the need for consultation:

What we are concerned about is that we address the privacy issues. Our privacy commissioner has indicated some concerns regarding the technology, and I’m certain that those consultations are taking place, and that will ensure that this technology will, in fact, protect the private information of our citizens. (Ontario, 2008b, 1530)

General discussions about privacy and about heeding the Privacy Commissioner’s recommendations continued during debates following subsequent readings of the bill.

During the second reading of the bill, there was significant discussion of the cost for citizens in obtaining an enhanced driver’s licence (EDL) or ID card for non-drivers. At this time, the minister introduced the use of photo comparison technology:

We propose to ensure the integrity of our licence and photo card issuing systems through photo comparison technology. This state-of-the-art technology would help us make sure multiple cards are not issued to the same individual under different identities. (Ontario, 2008c, 0900)

The use of photo comparison technologies was discussed as positive in the legislature without significant debate about privacy concerns. The RFID chips that were to be used in EDLs did, however, foster some privacy debates. MPP Gilles Bisson of the NDP raised the possibility that a retailer such as Wal-Mart could track a citizen by reading his or her RFID chip:

Let’s put forward a couple of scenarios. Wal-Mart decides that they’ve figured out how to track people by tapping into this frequency. That’s a lot of information: “How many times do people come back into our stores? What time are they coming in?” — all of that kind of information. (Ontario, 2008c, 1020)

The privacy scenario Bisson sketched is indeed a technical possibility. In the legislature he strongly advocated for the bill to be sent to committee and for the Privacy Commissioner to be consulted. MPP Frank Klees also raised privacy concerns about how the databases associated
with the EDLs and EICs would be handled and where information would be stored (Standing committee on general government, 2008a, 1404)

During debates for the second reading, Bisson strongly advocated for notification to the public of this bill and for the public to have the opportunity to participate. He raised the concern that committee hearings are often too brief and do not allow effective public participation:

So often what ends up happening is that by the time the public hears a bill is coming, and they decide to apply to committee to come and have their say, they end up being barred out because the process has been truncated and sped up. (Ontario, 2008c, 1030)

During the second reading, the government presented issues around an anticipated slow tourist season, clogged lines at the border and sluggish economy as reasons for moving ahead quickly with the legislation (Ontario, 2008c).

There was, in fact, one day of public hearings, which were held as part of the standing committee on general government’s agenda in October of 2008 (Standing committee on general government, 2008b). Seven organizations and individuals made deputations, including the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, the Council of Canadians, Andrew Clement, GS1 Canada, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Steve Mann, and the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (Toronto Chapter). Privacy concerns and basic functionality were significant components of the deputations. The importance of the availability of ID for non-drivers was also emphasized. Ultimately, Bill 85 was passed with no amendments except for a raised tactile component to assist vision-impaired Ontarians.
4.1.3 Bill 126, Road Safety Act (2009)

In the summer of 2008, there was a tragic traffic accident in the Muskoka region of Ontario, resulting in the loss of three young men’s lives (Canadian Press, 2008a). Following this fatal accident, Tim Mulcahy, the father of Tyler Mulcahy, one of the young men who was killed, began a campaign for a change in road safety policy that would place greater alcohol and speed restrictions on young drivers. He took out a full-page advertisement in the Toronto Star, wrote to Premier McGuinty and started a petition (Canadian Press, 2008b). What resulted was the emergence of a policy window, which appears to be discretionary in that the government responded to the media attention of the young men’s deaths as well as to Tim Mulcahy’s prominent campaign that took place through the mass media and the social web.
Mulcahy participated in an interview with the *Toronto Star* to raise awareness of his proposed changes to the policy (Mathieu, 2008a). In the interview with the journalist Mathieu, Mulcahy stated:

I'd like Tyler's accident to make a difference. I really feel there needs to be zero tolerance for alcohol up to the age of 21. Once someone takes one drink, it's easy to take two, three, four or 10 because we stop thinking.

...I want the law changed immediately....People need to take a stand against this with the government. The law has to be changed.

The government responded to Mulcahy and the public concerns about the youths’ deaths by proposing Bill 126, which proposed amendments for the driving privileges of youth. It was introduced by Minister of Transportation James J. Bradley and had first reading on November 2008. Under the act now in force, young drivers under 22 as well as novice drivers must have a blood alcohol level of zero when operating a vehicle. In the early conceptions of the bill, the government also proposed passenger restrictions for young drivers.

After the first reading of the bill, there was great opposition by youth against the passenger restrictions. For example, rural youth were particularly concerned that they would not be able to carpool to school, sporting events or parties. One of the more notable critics was seventeen-year-old Jordan Sterling of Stoney Creek, Ontario, who created a Facebook page (Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws) that mobilized over 150,000 members and who is credited with changing the province’s policy direction for young drivers. Jordan’s activism was widely covered by the *Hamilton Spectator* newspaper (see figure 4.5 and table 4.3) and other news outlets (Campbell, 2008; Canadian Press, 2008c; Geist, 2008a).
Figure 4.5: Hamilton Spectator’s coverage of Jordan Sterling’s Facebook activism

This image shows part of a new story from 2008 that describes Jordan Sterling’s mass mobilization efforts via Facebook to oppose Bill 126. This image was obtained from http://www.thespec.com/news/article/118115--lots-of-angry-traffic. The author of the article was Jackson Hayes (identified by an email address at the bottom of the article) and the photographer was Kaz Novak.

After the second reading, Bill 126 was sent to the Standing Committee on General Government and individuals were invited to participate in this process on March 9, 11 and 23, 2009. The bill was considered in committee in conjunction with “Bill 118, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and hand-held communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles” (Standing committee on general government, 2009a).
During the March committee meetings participants could speak to one or both bills and many raised multiple issues related to drunk driving, eBikes, distracted driving (due to use of mobile devices) and passenger restrictions. On the first day (March 9), the participants included individuals who had lost a loved one due to drunk driving or accidents caused by individuals with suspended licences. Organizations that spoke included the Share the Road Cycling Coalition, Teamsters Canada, MADD Canada, the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving, Canadian Courier and Logistics Association, Student Life Education Co. Inc. and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (Standing committee on general government, 2009a). Wendy Omvlee of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture Executive Committee expressed lingering concerns regarding rural youth and passenger restrictions:

\[
\text{ IMF and small-town teens and beginning drivers will be unable to fully participate in after-school activities, they will be unable to participate in sports and, finally, they will be unable to take on part-time jobs, which for many is crucial to begin post-secondary education through monies earned. (Standing committee on general government, 2009a, 1440) }\]

On the second day (March 11), students from Robert Bateman High School in Burlington, Ontario, attended. One of the students, Chelsea Meehan, spoke against the inability for young drivers to get experience and gain independence:

\[
\text{ Bill 126 limits young adults to make it even more impossible for them to become independent. Ontario students enter their first year of university roughly at the age of 18, when they are expected to become much more independent, yet they are unable to drive legally by themselves. If they have to have a G1 for up to 18 months, as the bill proposes, that means that teenagers are dependent on a parent or guardian for that much longer, which is a full half-year longer than it is now. (Standing committee on general government, 2009b, 1720) }\]

Although the issues of alcohol and passenger restrictions were raised in the committee hearing, Tim Mulcahy and Jordan Sterling did not appear as deputants.
After the committee hearing was concluded, Bill 126 returned to the Legislative Assembly for the third reading. Jordan Sterling’s Facebook group was explicitly referenced during the debate. MPP Cheri DiNovo stated in the legislature:

> It's always a privilege to stand in this place and speak on behalf of constituents. In this case, I just want to pay homage to the 100,000 young people who started a Facebook group and really showed this province and the Minister of Transportation what grassroots organizing, real democracy and a real democratic voice look like. These are students. We often, in this place, decry the fact that our young people are not more involved in the political process. Here was one of those glaring examples of how untrue that is. (Ontario, 2009a, 0940)

Minister Bradley shared his speaking time with the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Transportation, MPP Linda Jeffrey. Jeffrey thanked the deputants who came to the committee hearing as well as “Tim Mulcahy, who overcame personal tragedy and unimaginable grief to stand up and fight for the changes they believe will make our roads safer for young drivers and others” (Ontario, 2009a, 0930). Bill 126 demonstrates a case where multiple issues were coupled into a single bill on road safety. Participants in the policy-making process actively supported and opposed segments of the bill in relation to their own interests.
Table 4.3: Bill 126 policy narrative synthesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of policy window</th>
<th>Event(s) related to the policy window</th>
<th>Government-led participation opportunities</th>
<th>Controversies in framing the issue</th>
<th>Role of the social web in the policy narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary</td>
<td>Tim Mulcahy’s campaign following his son’s death</td>
<td>Committee hearings</td>
<td>Coupling alcohol and passenger restrictions for young drivers</td>
<td>Both Mulcahy and Sterling made extensive use of the social web to mobilize other citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jordan Sterling’s Facebook mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.4 Bill 210, Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (2009)

In 2009, the Toronto Star published a series of articles that documented the exploitation of live-in caregivers in Ontario; these stories are now aggregated in a portal on the topic of nannies on the Star’s website (Cribb, 2009a; The Toronto Star, n.d.). Key issues were recruitment fees charged by agencies and also the confiscation of caregivers’ passports or other employment documents by employers. The issues raised in the series had been on the agendas of labour and migrant worker advocacy organizations for a long time.

In response to the sudden visibility of these issues in the mass media, Minister of Labour Peter Fonseca and Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne held a number of meetings with constituents, community organizations and caregivers to consider the issues (see table 4.4). The Province of Ontario undertook a number of steps to address aspects that contribute to exploitative work (Ramos, 2009). Bill 210, Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregivers and Others), was introduced to the legislature by Minister Fonseca. The bill received royal assent on April 23, 2009. The Star credits itself for this policy change and states...
that “the proposed new legislation was triggered by the Star investigation, which found widespread abuse of the program by unscrupulous recruiters and employers in Ontario” (Cribb, 2009b). A few days after the bill was passed, on April 27, 2009, a “Nanny Hotline” was “set up by Ontario’s Ministry of Labour to inform caregivers of their rights under provincial labour laws, and document alleged cases of abuse” (Brazao, 2009a).

Figure 4.6: The Toronto Star nanny victory

This image shows a caregiver advocate celebrating the strengthening of laws announced in April 2009. The advocate is Pura Velasco, the authors are Rober Cribb and Dale Brazao and the image credit is Dale Brazao / The Star. This image was obtained from http://www.thestar.com/life/health_wellness/2009/04/03/victory_for_our_nannies.html, last accessed June 8, 2013.

In May 2009, shortly after Ontario implemented the Nanny Hotline, caregivers who worked for federal Liberal and Member of Parliament (MP) Ruby Dhalla’s family were reported in the
*Toronto Star* to have endured exploitation and the seizure of their passports (Brazao, 2009b). The caregivers came forward during provincial meetings between caregivers, Fonesca and Wynne. The accusation of abuses by Dhall’s family against the workers employed by their family was framed as a political scandal in the press since the perceived lack of respect for workers was coming from a Liberal Party member. News articles with titles such as “MPPs' shameful failure to act in Dhall nanny scandal” (Coyle, 2009) and “Nannygate sinks Ruby Dhall” (Delacourt & Benzie, 2009) demonstrate how the perception of a scandal took hold and suggest that Wynne and Fonesca did not act appropriately on the caregivers’ concerns. Dhall lost her seat in the federal government in the 2011 election (Baluja, 2011). As a woman of Sikh origin, the accusations of abuse against migrant workers were especially damaging in relation to the Liberal Party’s core espoused values to protect the vulnerable and promote multiculturalism.
Table 4.4: Bill 210 policy narrative synthesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of policy window</th>
<th>Event(s) related to the policy window</th>
<th>Government-led participation opportunities</th>
<th>Controversies in framing the issue</th>
<th>Role of the social web in the policy narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary</td>
<td>Investigative journalism series by <em>The Toronto Star</em></td>
<td>Meetings with MPPs</td>
<td>Failure of the Liberal Party to protect the vulnerable(^{35}) and maintain party values</td>
<td>None observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committee hearings</td>
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</table>

4.2 Some possibilities for policy windows: Mass media and social web usage

In this section, I address what can be learned from the four policy narratives discussed above. Kingdon (2003) suggests that the mass media plays a role in agenda setting. In relation to agenda setting, the press often become involved through “an intensive period of sensational coverage, with the policy community riding serenely above the media storm” (p. 58). In the cases of Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210, I doubt that elected officials felt serene, but I see that the mass media played a role in setting the agenda by bringing the controversies framing each issue to the public’s attention.

\(^{35}\) The Liberal Party of Ontario is in the centre of the political spectrum in the province. To the left is the New Democratic Party, and to the right is the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. On the Liberal Party’s website, the “tradition of working to improve the lives of all Ontarians” is presented as a central value of the party. The party website also refers back to a statement by former Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier on what it means to be a liberal. Laurier stated, “I am a liberal. I am one of those who think that everywhere in human beings, there are abuses to be reformed, new horizons to be opened up, and new forces to be developed.” This information was obtained from [http://www.ontarioliberal.ca/OurTeam/WhatWeStandFor/History.aspx](http://www.ontarioliberal.ca/OurTeam/WhatWeStandFor/History.aspx), last accessed December 9, 2012. The news story by Baluja (2011) provides another example of why this situation might be considered scandalous. In the Canadian political context, immigrants are often assumed to favour the Liberal Party of Canada due to the history of multiculturalism policy.
I found that the narratives for Bills 12, 85, 26 and 210 demonstrated the emergence of different forms of policy windows. Bill 12 exhibited characteristics of a spillover window in response to the Charter Rights challenge against Bill 183, An Adoption Information Disclosure Act (2007). The court case led the Ontario government to reopen adoption disclosure issues. For Bill 85, the Photo Card Act (2008), the policy window was somewhat institutionalized but still a spillover window. In this case, the controversy that the media could latch onto was the lack of protection for individual privacy as the government implemented a security-oriented policy to harmonize border crossings with the United States. In the case of Bill 85, privacy concerns raised by civil society advocates and the Ontario Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ann Cavoukian, were in the major papers (CBC News, 2009b; Ferguson, 2009). For Bill 126, policy entrepreneur Tim Mulcahy played a role that was prominently captured by the mass media and opened a discretionary policy window. For Bill 210, the reporting by the Toronto Star on abuses endured by nannies led to another discretionary policy window opening.

By tracing policy narratives and using Kingdon’s (2003) ideas about policy windows and policy entrepreneurship, I identified some emerging uses of the social web that hold entrepreneurial potential. Figure 4.7 shows the policy-making process timeline for Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210 but with the addition of the social web usage described thus far in my policy narratives. For Bill 12, the social web was described in the Hansard to be used by entrepreneurial citizens to organize interest groups (i.e., non-searching adoptees and birth mothers). In the backdrop of the policy-making context for Bill 12, there is also the constant issue of adoption registration information usage on the social web. As news stories indicate, adoptees and birth families are using the birth registry information to seek out their birth relatives. This practice preceded Bill 12 and continued after the bill was enacted.
The policy narratives for Bills 85 and 126 show more episodic or campaign-oriented uses of the social web in relation to the policy-making process. Websites such as IDforum or the Facebook group Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws indicate that social web usage can be targeted, as policies are being debated and shaped by the politicians who represent their constituents. Citizens may initiate social web projects as policies are being debated in attempts to stop or alter them. With both Bills 85 and 126, the mass media promoted social web endeavours undertaken by citizens. In the case of Jordan Sterling’s Facebook, the level of media
coverage demonstrates that large-scale social web mobilization can intersect with the traditional media as it becomes part of the story. In the case of Bill 210, no social web usage emerged as part of the policy narrative.

Neither the policy narrative presented in this chapter nor the timeline in figure 4.7 tells the whole story of social web usage in relation to the selected policies. To conclude this chapter, I will suggest four speculative strategies that social web savvy policy entrepreneurs may wish to utilize before introducing the experiences of my interviewees in Chapter 5.

Strategy 1: Linkages from traditional media to the social web

The screenshots reproduced in the policy narratives in this chapter were taken from news outlets in Canada, including the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail, CBC News and the Hamilton Spectator. Each of these news providers has a web presence that encourages their readers to “share,” “like,” “tweet” and otherwise move from news sites into their particular social web platform. This level of interface activity encourages users to move from reading about policy in the media to getting actively involved on the issues. The utilization of mass media articles within policy participation initiatives will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

Strategy 2: Establishing policy entrepreneurs via the social web for the mass media

As described previously, controversies in the framing of political issues on the agenda were observed for Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210. When examining the news reporting, it is clear that establishing the conflicts over bills (or sections of the bills) was newsworthy. For example, in relation to Bill 85, the Photo Card Act (2008), Information and Privacy Commissioner Ann Cavoukian was reported to have privacy concerns with the enhanced driver’s licences. With the case of Jordan Sterling’s 150,000 person Facebook group, we see the example of a social web leader who opposed part of a bill, becoming a policy entrepreneur recognized by the media and
who was later recognized by government decision-makers. Policy entrepreneurs using the social web may find it helpful to “take a side” in order to gain news coverage for their cause.

Strategy 3: Networking for the personal and the political

In order to be a policy entrepreneur, Kingdon (2003) suggests that it is important to “have claim to a hearing” (p. 180). He continues that there are only three ways to gain claim to be heard “expertise; an ability to speak for others…; or an authoritative decision-making position” (p. 180). In relation to the social web usage that is apparent from the policy narratives, personal experience with a policy issue appeared to emerge as a kind of expertise. In relation to Bill 12, Karen Lynne reported that she used the internet in the late 1990s to mobilize a network of natural mothers interested in adoption issues who were similar to herself. On a much larger scale, Jordan Sterling mobilized others through his 150,000 person Facebook group in response to Bill 126. What is similar in both Karen’s and Jordan’s stories are that they began from a point of personal experience and turned to a social network to mobilize others. The idea that the personal is political appears to work within a social web context for political participation. Although the personal can become political, successful policy entrepreneurs might be expected to be the individuals who are capable of mobilizing the mass public behind their cause.

Strategy 4: Using government provided information on the social web

In relation to Bill 12, the practices of adoptees and birth parents using information from adoption disclosure registries demonstrates a unique possibility. In this situation, individuals were using information released by the government and posting it on the social web to search for birth relatives. The news stories chronicle that the information released by the government can be centrally important when using the social web to locate biologically related family members. This type of practice was not found in the policy narratives for Bills 85, 126 or 210.
The way individuals are using birth registry information in relation to Bill 12 and adoption registries is potentially significant because it is an unusual example of the principles of open data in practice. In Chapter 1, open data was introduced as a major pillar of Canada’s open government strategy. Open data was described as a process that makes “government data in a more useful format to enable citizens, the private sector and non-government organizations to leverage it in innovative and value-added ways” (Canada, n.d.-c, para. 2). Although open data is often conceptualized as requiring the stripping of personally identifying information (see, for example, “Open Data, Big Data, Yes…Personal Data, No!” (Cavoukian, 2012), this is not necessarily the most desirable data to all citizens.

The ability to obtain the data held by government on oneself or others is of potential interest to citizens. In the case of adopted individuals and birth families, they may wish to use information obtained from adoption registries to seek out their birth relatives. Other types of records and documents that identify individuals are of potential interest to citizens to understand the functioning of our democracy. As one example, the six-year struggle of journalist Jim Bronskill to obtain the Royal Canadian Mounted Police’s dossier on former Saskatchewan premier Tommy Douglas stands as an example of the blurry boundary between data and access to information that is politically meaningful for individuals or the citizens of Canada ("Canada (Canadian Heritage) v. Bronskill," 2012).

4.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter I discussed my process for writing policy narratives based on the Hansard and mass media coverage surrounding Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210. In doing so, I considered the possibilities of citizen participation in policy-making via the social web. The four bills were found to demonstrate an array of policy window types and involved mass media coverage that
provided framing of controversies within public political debates. The establishment of policy entrepreneurs, networking for the personal and the political and the use of government information on the social web were identified as key strategies. In the next chapter, I will explore more deeply how citizens participate in policy-making through the social web by presenting my infrastructure analysis and interview results.
5 Social web infrastructures for policy participation and their citizen designers

The next step in my research was to conduct a series of web searches to locate citizens who participated in policy-making by designing infrastructures related to Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act (2008, 39: 1); Bill 85, Photo Card Act (2008, 39: 1); Bill 126, Road Safety Act (2009, 39: 1); or Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others) (2009, 39: 1). My goal was to move beyond the third-party descriptions found in the Hansard and news stories of citizens who were politically engaged through the social web. I sought to analyze for myself the social web infrastructures in use. Additionally, I wanted to speak to the citizen designers of the infrastructures directly about their experiences. To begin, I completed systematic searches of the social web to locate infrastructures which were intended to facilitate citizen participation in policy-making. I was looking for examples of social web use where individual citizens or groups of citizens were involved in providing information, facilitating discussion, mobilizing others or creatively expressing themselves in relation to Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210.

Using Bill 85, The Photocard Act (2008) as an example, let me demonstrate the components of a systematic search to locate citizen-produced social web infrastructures used for participating in policy-making. An array of searches were carried out using terms such as “Bill 85 Ontario,” “Photocard Act Ontario,” “Enhanced driver’s licences Ontario.” These terms were searched across a variety of web platforms, including Google, the Google blog search, Google video search and Facebook. When I located a search result of a citizen-produced social web
infrastructure that fit the criteria, I took note of the details, including the title, platform and content producer’s name (if available). I screened the social web producers against my participant selection criteria (see table 5.1) and contacted them if I believed they would be appropriate participants.

Table 5.1: Participant selection criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian residents and citizens</td>
<td>Infrastructure designers or content producers of social web based materials pertinent to Ontario bills (i.e., Facebook group administrator, bloggers, YouTube videographer, web developers, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Able to communicate in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 18 or over</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using my research notes and web search skills, I obtained contact information for the individuals I felt would be appropriate research participants. To reach out to participants I used “contact me” tabs on personal websites, Facebook messaging and email. In total, I contacted 30 individuals to request interviews. Fifteen potential participants either declined the interview requests or did not send any kind of response to me. Fifteen individuals who were designers of infrastructures for public participation in policy-making took part in semi-structured interviews with me.

5.1 Research conundrums

The infrastructure/content conundrum

Early in the process of this research project I chose to use the term social web infrastructures to refer to the socio-technical systems my participants were involved in. Other terms that may
have been appropriate were social web *artefacts or platforms.*[^36] I wanted to use the term infrastructure because of the critical points raised by Bowker and Star (1999) about infrastructure that were introduced in Chapter 1.

Bowker and Star’s (1999) work on infrastructure as well as related articles (Star, 1999; Star & Ruhleder, 1996) were incredibly helpful in dealing with my infrastructure/content conundrum. In selecting research participants, I was open to including an array of individuals who ranged from those who coded and developed infrastructures of the social web (i.e., wikis, Drupal powered websites) to those who produced content for YouTube videos and blogs.

Readers of this dissertation may find it confusing that I chose to interview individuals possessing a wide array of technical skills as a part of this project. Some of my participants were developers who are proficient in hypertext preprocessor (PHP) language to script dynamic websites. Other participants used social web platforms to create groups and post content without having scripting or programming skills. In using a broad selection of criteria for my research participants in terms of their technical involvements in social web based policy participation, I believe that I have taken up Star’s (1996) idea that there is no firm boundary to define what counts as infrastructure. Outside of a social web example, Star (1996) asks us to consider what the role of the water system means to different professionals:

> So, within a given cultural context, the cook considers the water system as working infrastructure integral to making dinner. For the city planner or the plumber, it is a variable in a complex planning process or a target for repair…. (p. 380)

[^36]: The term *artefact* is a common term in STS. See for example, the article “The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology might Benefit Each Other” by Pinch and Bijker (1984). The term *platform* is commonly used in relation to the backend systems (i.e., social networking sites, video sharing sites) where users contribute content.
Star (1996) makes the point that “one person’s infrastructure is another’s topic, or difficulty” (p. 380) which is central to my broad approach for research participant selection. What is infrastructure on the social web may depend on one’s level of technological literacy or one’s role in a given situation. Designing infrastructures involves an array of social and technical practices.

The social web and research ethics

Given that my research participants could occupy various roles (i.e., activists, authors, lay citizens, employees) in relation to their social web production, the research ethics of the research were complicated. The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) recommendations proved helpful in deciding how to proceed (Ess & AoIR ethics research committee, 2002). The AOIR suggests researchers consider the following questions: “What ethical expectations are established by the venue?” and to consider that “the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality, right to informed consent, etc.” (p. 4–5). The AOIR also suggests it is important to ask the question “Who are the subjects posters / authors / creators of the material and/or inter/actions under study?” and that the researcher should consider the vulnerability of those who create web materials (p. 5).

For this project I determined that I would not write up findings about social web infrastructures for Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210 where I did not locate a citizen designer to speak to me about his or her activities. I submitted my project on analyzing how social web infrastructures were being used as policy-making participation and to interview the citizen designers of these sites for review to the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics. I received clearance to proceed with the project. As a researcher, I felt most comfortable receiving informed consent from those individuals who participated across an array of infrastructures. For contextual background, I was comfortable as a researcher describing general
practices that I observed on non-password protected websites. I also felt ethically comfortable discussing highly prominent cases of social web use covered in the mass media or where the web producers clearly chose to act as authors and put their material in the public domain. For example, if a blog or other social web content was produced by a public figure or licensed under Creative Commons, which would indicate that the material could be reused with attribution, I believed it to be ethically appropriate to utilize such material in my research and to credit the author.

5.2 Introducing the interview participants

Having characterized my research participants as designers and users of social web infrastructures, I will now introduce their other characteristics. The participants recruited for this research ranged from young adults to established professionals. Table 5.2 outlines their names (or pseudonyms), their roles in creating social web infrastructures, their primary social web infrastructures, the related Ontario bills they participated in, the types of participation they carried out or facilitated, and whether they were involved in government-led participation opportunities in conjunction to their social web design and use. For the purposes of categorization, in table 5.2 I have used the term “infrastructure design” to describe participants who design and code social web sites, and I have used the term “infrastructure use” to describe those who produce content for the sites. As per the previous section, I see both infrastructure design and infrastructure use as interrelated elements in the making of social web sites for policy-making participation.
Table 5.2: Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role(s) and organizational affiliations</th>
<th>Primary social web infrastructure(s) for participation</th>
<th>Related Ontario Bill</th>
<th>Types of participation observed</th>
<th>Participant in government-led participation (^{37})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook administrator: &quot;Ontarians Concerned With 'Enhanced' Drivers' Licenses&quot; group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory J. Smith(^{39})</td>
<td>IDforum developer</td>
<td>Drupal</td>
<td>Bill 85: The Photocard Act (2008, 39:1)</td>
<td>Infrastructure design</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan Sterling</td>
<td>Facebook administrator: &quot;Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws&quot; group</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Bill 126, Road Safety Act, (2009, 39:1)</td>
<td>Information provision and mobilizing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Infrastructure use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{37}\) This column indicates whether the participant participated in committee hearings, presented comments or took part in other forms of institutionalized government-led participation in relation to the bills that are a part of this research.

\(^{38}\) Christopher Parsons and I co-authored an article after the interview for this project was conducted.

\(^{39}\) I wish to disclose that Gregory J. Smith is my brother. Originally, I intended to use the interview for pilot purposes only. I decided to include the interview in my data set because it was informative. Smith is highly active as a web developer and designer in Toronto who works on a wide array of projects, some of which are political in nature outside of the IDforum. For example, see his studio site at [http://missionspecialist.net/project/janes-walk](http://missionspecialist.net/project/janes-walk).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role(s) and organizational affiliations</th>
<th>Primary social web infrastructure(s) for participation</th>
<th>Related Ontario Bill</th>
<th>Types of participation observed</th>
<th>Participant in government-led participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Kuznicki</td>
<td>Remarkk Consulting</td>
<td>Multiple infrastructures related to barcamps</td>
<td>Multiple issues</td>
<td>Infrastructure design and use</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>Individual but also a member of open government-technology organization</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Multiple Ontario bills</td>
<td>Infrastructure design</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona MacCool</td>
<td>Project Manager CLEONet – Community Legal Education Ontario[^40]</td>
<td>Drupal, Facebook, Twitter</td>
<td>Multiple Ontario bills</td>
<td>Information provision</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne MacPhail</td>
<td>Emerging Media Director &amp; Board Member, Drupal, podcasting, etc.</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Multiple Ontario Bills</td>
<td>Information provision, platform for</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^40]: At the time the interview was carried out, the website under discussion existed under the name CLEONet. The site has a new name: [http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/](http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/). Information about the rebranding is available at [http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/about-your-legal-rights](http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/about-your-legal-rights). The websites for this footnote were last accessed December 13, 2012.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role(s) and organizational affiliations</th>
<th>Primary social web infrastructure(s) for participation</th>
<th>Related Ontario Bill</th>
<th>Types of participation observed</th>
<th>Participant in government-led participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simon Tonekham</td>
<td>Facebook administrator: “Citizens for a Non-Drivers Identification Card in Ontario” Blogger</td>
<td>Facebook and Blogging</td>
<td>Bill 85: The Photocard Act (2008, 39:1)</td>
<td>Information provision and discussion via comments</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel*</td>
<td>Administrator for a workers’ advocacy organization</td>
<td>WordPress, YouTube</td>
<td>Bill 210: Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act</td>
<td>Information provision, expression mobilization</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Anna Zena ML Theresa</td>
<td>Web team roles related to the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (The primary site discussed was <a href="http://www.settlement.org/">http://www.settlement.org/</a>)</td>
<td>Multiple: Proprietary site, WordPress, Drupal, Twitter, Facebook, a wiki</td>
<td>Bill 85: The Photocard Act (2008, 39:1) and multiple Ontario bills</td>
<td>Information provision</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. This is a pseudonym.

Participants selected whether they wanted to be identified in the research findings or to have their participation anonymized. Fourteen participants wanted to be identified by some version of

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41 This column indicates whether the participant participated in committee hearings, presented comments or took part in other forms of institutionalized government-led participation in relation to the bills that are a part of this research.
their name (full name, first name or initials) and were comfortable with providing identifying
details of their social web project. One participant, whom I will refer to as Rachel, wanted a
pseudonym to be used to protect her identity and requested that her organization be identified in
general terms only.

![Screen capture data collection example](image)

**Figure 5.1: Screen capture data collection example**

This image shows what screen capture video data looks like when a participant was
interviewed with a software program to collect an image of his social web participation
infrastructure and his own video image. This image shows Simon Fodden with the Slaw
blog and is used with permission.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format (see appendix D for the questions).
During roughly half of the interviews, I made use of audiovisual screen capture recordings so
that participants could “talk aloud” about their designs (see figure 5.1). This technique was
inspired by “guerilla” usability methods where observations of people interacting with
technologies have moved out of the lab and into contexts where technology is used (Nielsen,
1994). The screen capture interview format was not feasible for participants who elected to speak
to me over the phone or when multiple participants were taking part in the interview. In these cases, I recorded the interviews using an audio recorder with the participants’ consent.

All participants made use of a constellation of social web infrastructures in their political engagement online. For example, Fiona MacCool, who uses the Drupal content management system (CMS) to run the CLEO website, also posts on Facebook or Twitter. This intertextuality demonstrates how social web use can be interlinked. As identified in table 5.2, participants did however have a major infrastructure (or infrastructures) where I located their participation in policy-making. When determining what qualifies as major infrastructure for participation, I applied the principle of including the infrastructures that I located from my social web searches or that the participants spoke of in-depth with me during the interviews. In the next section I will provide a comprehensive overview of the infrastructures before delving into interview analysis and findings.

5.3 Analysis of social web infrastructures

My first research question asks, What are the motivations, experiences and results of citizen-designers’ efforts to participate politically through the social web in ways that are adjacent to or intersect with official policy-making processes? In order to answer this question, I needed to understand the infrastructures being used by my participants. To explore the social web infrastructures and citizens’ experiences, I developed a series of sub-research questions that nest under my first research question and connect to the democratic values of participation and openness. I present my sub-questions here and then assess the infrastructures in table 5.3. These are infrastructures which I located through my systematic web searches and which participants spoke about in-depth during their interviews.
Sub-questions about the social web infrastructures

1) Who owns the infrastructure?

In a recent article on the status of political economy research in communications, Mosco (2008) identified that one of the recent trends for inquiry has been the “profound integration of the global political economy and its media system” (p. 48). Examining the ownership of the infrastructures where citizens are participating is part of the process for assessing whether the public sphere “become[s] absorbed by…commercial culture” of multinational media corporations” (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 12). I will attempt to identify ownership of the infrastructures where citizens participated in order to consider some of the power dynamics.

2) Is the infrastructure open or closed?

Whether the source code for the participation infrastructures used by my participants was open or closed was a key question for me. The Open Source Initiative (n.d.), a US-based non-profit that “stewards” the definition of open source software, describes open source software as being about more than providing “access to the source code;” there are also distribution criteria to consider. For example, open source software cannot discriminate against particular “fields of endeavor” or contexts of use. Licences are also expected to be “technology-neutral” and not “be predicated on any individual technology or style of interface” (Open Source Initiative, n.d., para. 10). I will examine if the citizen-designed infrastructures in which they participated were open or closed in table 5.3 and apply the findings in the discussion into Chapter 6.

3) What types of participation are possible through the infrastructure?

The idea that online political participation actions such as signing a petition or joining a Facebook group are a slacker’s form of activism was popularized by Clay Shirky (2008). I will
explore what types of participation are made possible through the various social web infrastructures to consider whether a slacker’s participation is possible or whether more intense participation is needed. Although some social web uses are quick, others may be time-consuming and more engaged forms of political participation. Creating a video or coding a complex website is also a possible way to participate.

4) **Is discussion or deliberation of policy issues possible on the platform?**

Wright (2011) observed that “much political discussion on the internet occurs in non-official spaces” (p. 245), and that

researchers have studied political debate on the internet for around 20 years. Right from the earliest days – a time of Usenet and Listservs – claims abounded that the internet would “revolutionize” political conversation and debate because it was thought, amongst other reasons, to have a democratic structure that would facilitate deliberative conversation. (p. 245)

In table 5.3, I draw from this tradition as well as the Habermasian (1989) ideals for the public sphere which were introduced in Chapter 2. This criterion will be used to assess how discussion and deliberation can unfold through the various infrastructures. Alternatively, other forms of participation may be observed in the absence of deliberation.

5) **Are loose networks and peer relations facilitated through the infrastructure?**

As discussed in Chapter 1, Bennett (2008) suggests that citizens may participate politically in “loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies” (p. 14). The platforms used by my participants will be compared in terms of the attributes they offer to facilitate (or not facilitate) peer relations and the formation of loose networks.

6) **Is anonymity encouraged through the use of the platform?**
Anonymity has long been a part of participating in democratic society. In many democratic societies, the secret ballot procedures during an election ensure that ballots cast cannot be tied to particular individuals. Anonymity has also been tied to free speech. In the online context, the Electronic Frontier Foundation extends the importance of anonymity for political speech in the following way: “Many people don't want the things they say online to be connected with their offline identities. They may be concerned about political or economic retribution harassment or even threats to their lives” (Electronic Frontiers Foundation, n.d.-a, para. 1). Anonymity is an attribute of internet communications that may make political participation online appealing for some; however, it is important to keep in mind that the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC) notes that “there is no general right to anonymity in Canada” and that “there is little reported caselaw in Canada on the issue of online anonymity” (Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic, n.d., Is anonymous speech or action a right in Canada?, para. 1 and 3). Whether the platforms used by research participants facilitate or discourage anonymity will be explored in table 5.3.
## Table 5.3: Comparison of social web infrastructures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructures</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Open or closed source</th>
<th>Types of participation possible online</th>
<th>Discussion and deliberative potential</th>
<th>Creation of loose networks and emphasis of peer relations</th>
<th>Anonymity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogger</td>
<td>A blogging service owned by Google Inc. since 2003 but originally created by Pyra Labs. (US)</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Posting a blog entry, commenting on a blog entry, sharing a blog entry.</td>
<td>Yes to a degree through posts and comments.</td>
<td>Bloggers may choose to have a “blogroll” or listing of other blogs. Loose or peer networks may also form around commenting.</td>
<td>Pseudonyms can be used in creating accounts but blogs can also be attributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drupal</td>
<td>An open source content management system that dates back to 1999. (Belgium)</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Contributing to the Drupal code, creating a drupal site, posting content within a site, commenting on or interacting with content, and administering a site.</td>
<td>Yes to a degree through posts and comments or discussion forums.</td>
<td>There are many types of modules that can be used. Peer relations may form through a discussion forum or anywhere users link to their online presences.</td>
<td>Pseudonyms can sometimes be used in creating user accounts but participation can also be attributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructures</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Open or closed source</td>
<td>Types of participation possible online</td>
<td>Discussion and deliberative potential</td>
<td>Creation of loose networks and emphasis of peer relations</td>
<td>Anonymity</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>A social networking service launched in 2004 by Facebook Inc. (US)</td>
<td>Closed (with API)</td>
<td>Creating a group, joining a group, &quot;liking&quot; content, posting on a group's page(s).</td>
<td>Yes, to a degree, on a wall discussion page.</td>
<td>Yes, within a groups peer relations are one's fellow members. Within the broader site, having a list of friends is a key function.</td>
<td>No, Facebook requires the use of &quot;real&quot; identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>A microblogging social networking service that launched in 2006. (US)</td>
<td>Closed (with API)</td>
<td>Creating content or replying to content.</td>
<td>Yes, through short 140 character posts.</td>
<td>Yes, Twitter users follow and are followed by other users.</td>
<td>Accounts can be open or private.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki (Media Wiki)</td>
<td>Open source wiki software (the same software that powers Wikipedia). (US)</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Coding wiki software, creating a wiki, creating content, and administrating the site.</td>
<td>Yes, to a degree, through posts and comments.</td>
<td>Possibly. MediaWiki users sometimes link to their other online presence(s) or may collaborate on the site under pseudonyms.</td>
<td>Pseudonyms can often be used in creating accounts but participation can also be attributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructures</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Open or closed source</td>
<td>Types of participation possible online</td>
<td>Discussion and deliberative potential</td>
<td>Creation of loose networks and emphasis of peer relations</td>
<td>Anonymity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WordPress</td>
<td>WordPress Foundation (US)</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Coding for WordPress, creating a site, creating content, posting content, and administrating a site.</td>
<td>Yes, to a limited degree, through posts and comments.</td>
<td>Bloggers may choose to have a “blogroll” or listing of other blogs. Loose or peer networks may also form around commenting.</td>
<td>Pseudonyms can be used in creating accounts but blogs can also be attributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>A video sharing site owned by Google Inc. (US)</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Posting a video, commenting on a video, like a video, share a video, subscribe to a video producer’s channel</td>
<td>Yes, positions can be taken in videos or comments and responses are possible.</td>
<td>Yes, loose networks may form through commenting or amongst channel subscribers.</td>
<td>Pseudonyms can be used. The site is currently encouraging linkages to one’s Google identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally created infrastructure (Variable)</td>
<td>Individual Open or closed Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 Mapping social web usage of interview participants onto the policy timeline

Above I have described the social web infrastructures in general terms, but to link it to the policy-making process, I need to provide more specific information. I developed figure 5.2 to show how the participants’ social web designs and how they use these sites can be mapped onto the policy timelines introduced in Chapter 4. The large box surrounding figure 5.2 shows that there are a number of organizational or loose network websites that I located as part of this research. The websites of Slaw.ca, CLEONet, Rabble.ca, OCASI (particularly Settlement.org) and the workers’ advocacy organization existed in advance of the bills presented on the timeline. With social web infrastructures in place, particular content could be posted or developed in relation to the bills.

In the case of Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act, both Slaw.ca and Rabble.ca had posts following the enactment of the legislation. Slaw.ca’s post was dated July 13, 2008, and announced that adoption records were now open in Ontario. A discussion in the form of comments by readers searching for information about their birth families followed that post. Rabble.ca had a discussion in their Babble.ca forum on the issue of birth registries being made available that did not contain information about birth fathers.
Figure 5.2: Policy timeline and social web usage connected to bills and infrastructures

This figure provides the stages of policy-making mapped against time for each of the four bills.

For Bill 85, The Photocard Act, there were both pre-existing and new social web infrastructures used by participants that were linked to the content of the bill. One notable pre-existing social web infrastructure is the Settlement.org discussion board of the OCASI organization, which has a long history of answering queries from newcomers who have had difficulty in obtaining identification (ID), particularly if they did not have a driver’s licence or if they had problems with their foundational documents. Before Bill 85 was under development, Slaw.ca also had some relevant content in the form of a post about radio frequency identification technologies and privacy risks.
I also located a number of social web infrastructures that were developed more directly in response to Bill 85. The IDforum website, which I was involved in, was launched slightly before the first reading of the bill, and at about the same time, a Facebook group was launched for concerned Ontarians. After Bill 85 was enacted, another Facebook group was started when there was a delay in non-drivers being able to obtain and receive ID cards. OCASI was involved in promoting the availability of ID cards for non-drivers and particularly newcomers after the enactment of the bill through Settlement.org.

The creation of social web infrastructures surrounding Bill 126, Road Safety Act, were particularly interesting because of the prominence of Jordan Sterling’s “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” Facebook group. Other social web infrastructures, including Slaw.ca and Rabble’s Babble forum, housed posts or discussions that celebrated the engaged participation that was underway in Ontario.

My description of social web participation around Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act, is more vague than the other descriptions largely because of my participant Rachel’s desire that I keep her organization anonymous in my dissertation. The website for her organization was in existence before the bill. Similarly, OCASI’s Settlement.org website was in existence before Bill 210 and it would have been a suitable place for a live-in caregiver to seek information if she was subject to abuse. A post on Babble.ca noted the Toronto Star’s investigative series but commented that news of the abuse was nothing new. CLEONet also announced the policy developments for Bill 126. The situation that emerged in relation to Ruby Dhalla’s family’s employees was also discussed on Babble. Nanny-related news stories were also shared on CLEONet.
It is important to acknowledge that the infrastructures of some of my participants are not fully represented on the timeline in figure 5.2. The first of these is the CLEONet website discussed by Fiona MacCool. In addition to the CLEONet posts listed above, Fiona MacCool was involved with social media training for legal aid clinics in order to share information with larger audiences. Although this included information about Ontario policies, these activities did not map tidily onto the timeline. The other infrastructure that did not map well was that belonging to Jonathan, which was created to allow citizens to vote on particular bills from their homes. The website was taken down before I interviewed him and hence I have not included it. As described previously in table 5.2, Mark Kuznicki created a number of barcamp style events and social web infrastructures. While Fiona, Jonathan and Mark’s infrastructures do not connect to specific policy timelines directly, they do connect to the broader context of my research and will emerge in the discussion.

5.5 Analysis of interviews and citizen experiences

As I developed an understanding of the high-level attributes of the social web infrastructures and how they fit into the policy timelines, I also conducted interviews with the participants to gain more nuanced understandings of their social web production and use. As discussed in the introductory section of this chapter, I recruited 15 participants to talk about their social web production with me. To analyze the interviews and develop an understanding of citizen experiences, the audio (or audiovisual) files were transcribed verbatim and coded in a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software program, HyperResearch. In terms of the research data collected, there were 588 minutes of audio recording (approximately 10 hours in total or one hour per interview). I developed a coding schema by reading and rereading the transcripts and identifying common themes. Five major themes emerged from the interviews through iterative rounds of coding and recoding. The five themes were project, interaction, participation, information issues
and policies. A diagram of the coding schema is shown in figure 5.3. The codes are mapped against the three research questions.

To review, my three research questions were:

1. What are the motivations, experiences and results of citizen-designers’ efforts to participate politically through the social web in ways that are adjacent to or intersect with official policy-making processes?

2. Are citizens’ web based participation activities in policy-making shaping the operationalization of democratic values such as participation and openness in Ontario politics through the social web?

3. What socio-technical interventions might be necessary to create an infrastructure where the social web can be effectively used to facilitate the involvement of citizens in policy-making in Ontario?
Figure 5.3: Coding schema for interviews mapped against the research questions

This image shows the coding trees that were developed. Five major codes with numerous sub-codes were developed. I have included the codes for which salient findings emerged on this diagram in association with the research questions.

In this chapter, I will present findings from the project, interaction and participation themes. In Chapter 6, I will return to reporting the in-depth findings from the interviews that focus on the information issues raised by participants, with a particular focus on openness. Chapter 7 examines a number of outstanding challenges to emerge from this research that point towards socio-technical interventions (or solutions). The policy theme was not the most salient in my coding, but I will share results from this theme where possible in the remaining chapters.
5.5.1 Contextualizing the experiences of citizen designers

In engaging in Ontario policy, participants noted a variety of motivations. The participants in this research were situated in four categories that describe their primary role in relation to their social web production. Participants were employed by non-profit charitable organizations (n=6), worked with advocacy organizations (n=2), were individuals in loose networks (n=5) or worked in consultant or contractor roles (n=2) (see figure 5.4). In the illustration of the participants’ roles in figure 5.4, workers from charitable organizations, advocacy organizations and consulting/freelance businesses overlap extensively with the loose networks. The individuals working as consultants or freelancers also overlapped with non-profit and advocacy organizations through collaboration or project work.

Figure 5.4: Participants’ organizational roles

This diagram shows how the participants were situated in relation to organizational structures, including charitable non-profits, advocacy organizations, loose networks or independent contracting businesses.

Participants’ motivations

The participants had varied motivations to create social web infrastructures that connected to their situated roles as citizens, employees or volunteers. Jonathan, who created a website where...
citizens could vote on Ontario policies, expressed an explicit attempt to enact participatory
democracy or engage politically in a broad sense. He stated that “[it] was just sort of an idea…I
had…around…participatory democracy.” Similarly, Wayne MacPhail of Rabble.ca, stated that
“very early on they were really trying to figure out what the relationship or the nexus was
between the content that Rabble was producing and the community that Rabble hoped to build,”
and he was interested in experimenting and participating in this exploration through the use of
new media.

Simon Fodden, a retired law professor and founder of Slaw.ca, explained the idea just struck
him: “Frankly, at some point…I thought it would be a good idea to have a [law] blog and the
notion of a co-operative one struck me and I had the whole thing up and running in five to six
weeks.” He noted that focusing on substantive law or policy was an obvious category of posts
for the legally engaged contributors to Slaw.ca.

Other motivations, more explicitly personal and episodic, emerged for other participants. For
example, Jordan Sterling noted that he started the “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws”
Facebook group because the proposed changes to the Highway Act would affect him personally
as a high school student:

We were sitting at the dinner table, I think it was a Tuesday night, there was a
news story that came up about this new proposed legislation that was going to
cause G2 drivers to only be able to drive with one passenger. This was a problem
for me, I was a G2 driver and so were all my buddies…we were just sort of in that
age group where this law affected us specifically…so just on a whim after dinner
I popped on to Facebook and decided to make a Facebook group. (Jordan
Sterling)

Christopher Parsons also created his Facebook group to express concern with Bill 85, The
Photocard Act, on a whim: “…[it] came out of a conference call or…something like that….it
just struck me that there was no Facebook group. There was no social media presence
whatsoever [opposing enhanced drivers’ licences in Ontario].” Gregory J. Smith is a freelance web developer who created the IDforum website to oppose Bill 85. He described that although he built the site for a client, it’s the kind of work he enjoys: “The neat thing that comes with these kinds of [politically engaged web] initiatives is, well, ethics and…interesting technical problems or requirements and, as a developer, I just like those challenges.”

Participants from non-profit charitable organizations tended to describe the mandates of their organization in relation to their motivations. Dave from OCASI stated in relation to the Settlement.org website that “we do information and referral here.” Dave’s co-worker ML said, “We try to stick to the facts about what is changing…as opposed to a judgment about the law that is coming.” Fiona MacCool linked the motivations of CLEONet to her organization’s mandate:

We’re the organization, only organization in Ontario that’s mandate is exclusively to do legal education work. But, we decided, we knew we weren’t the only game in town and we wanted to also support all the other organizations that do that. So six years ago we launched CLEONet to be a clearinghouse of legal educational resources, information resources from hundreds of organizations.

Some participants had motivations that relate more directly to opposing proposed policies or current policies. Rachel, who does work related to workers rights, spoke extensively about her organization’s commitment to policy change to improve the conditions for workers:

We are all about change. We don’t want to just service and help people, [pauses] I mean that’s very important!… We’re not out there to… help…mend up the cracks that exist in the system we want them to change. We are all about organizing for change…. Under current legislation [and] rules, that is considered advocacy. It is considered political…. We can have debates on whether we think that is fair or right but unfortunately the way the laws work now, charities are limited in how much political work they can do.

The different experiences of individuals working in non-profit versus advocacy organizations will be explored in the next section.
Roles and organizational constraints

In comparing the motivations of social web infrastructure designers and users, some important distinctions emerged that distinguished individuals working in non-profit registered charities from all the others. According to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), registered charities are expected as a general rule to devote “no more than 10% of its total resources a year to political activities” (Canada, 2003, section 9). Advocacy organizations in contrast, are organizations that are dedicated to the promotion of policy change.

Registered charities have certain advantages as organizations. Registered charities pay no income tax in Canada and can “issue tax receipts to donors that are then used for non-refundable tax credits or deductions” (Canada, 2003, section 3). To help regulate this sector, the CRA has developed specific guidelines of what it considers to be political activity:

We [the CRA] presume an activity to be political if a charity:

1) explicitly communicates a call to political action (i.e., encourages the public to contact an elected representative or public official and urges them to retain, oppose, or change the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country);

2) explicitly communicates to the public that the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country should be retained (if the retention of the law, policy or decision is being reconsidered by a government), opposed, or changed; or

3) explicitly indicates in its materials (whether internal or external) that the intention of the activity is to incite, or organize to put pressure on, an elected representative or public official to retain, oppose, or change the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country. (Canada, 2003, section 6.2).

Within the constraint of keeping a charitable organization’s political activity to consuming less than 10% of its overall resources, the Government of Canada encourages charities to participate in policy-making processes. In 2002, in a Joint Accord with the Voluntary Sector, the Government of Canada officially recognized “the need to engage the voluntary sector in open,
informed and sustained dialogue in order that the sector may contribute its experience, expertise, knowledge, and ideas in developing better public policies and in the design and delivery of programs” (Joint Accord Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2002, section 1.1).

Participating in policy-making processes while keeping political activities below the 10% threshold could be challenging for many staff members affiliated with charitable organizations.

A lawyer and blogger, active in the charitable law sector, outline the seriousness of this challenge:

Some subjects, such as reducing impaired driving, are almost impossible to tackle without political changes. The conversations that take place in the political space are important and it is vital that charities participate in those discussions. It would be ineffective and inefficient for charities to be working on improving society without being involved with the political process. (Blumberg, 2012, p. 2)

Rachel detailed that her organization has to be careful what it sends to the email inboxes of others. She stated, “[Some service providers] don’t really want to be involved in the advocacy or political work because unfortunately there is quite a chill out there amongst the NGO community and they’re afraid…they have to be very careful.” Similarly, Dave from OCASI was very clear that the information and referral mandate of his organization could not be strayed from. He explained that the web team at OCASI “all know that we do information and referral here. I make that really clear all the time because we have gotten in trouble before when we’ve strayed over. It can be as simple as posting a link [to an event or protest for example].” Dave continued to explain that you can get a phone call “literally within an hour” from a funder who “says ‘hey you should take that down’” if you are a charity producing web content. Therefore, the constraints of participants operating from within charitable organizations must be recognized within this research as experiences distinct from individual citizens and those in advocacy organizations who are able to engage politically without similar organizational constraints.
Some of these differences will emerge in the next section in the actual practices of participation that were described to me.

5.6 Interactions and practices of participation

This section reports on the practices that participants reported on from their personal experiences and considers an array of interactions and social web mediated behaviours associated with policy-making participation. Mark Kuznicki explained what he sees as one possibility of political engagement through the social web:

> For some people...just the act of joining is actually a statement of awareness and identity for themselves, and it is a declaration to their, to their networks about the things that they believe in. And I think that that has also an effect, in terms of signaling to others. (Mark Kuznicki)

While most of the participants in this project act as leaders and facilitators to varying degrees, there are also those who work behind the scenes. In fact, my analysis in this section is inspired by the words of Mark who put it this way:

> [There is] a spectrum of interactions that are possible for people [on and offline]. And when the protest is the right thing to do, then people figure that out, and they said it’s time to do a protest. And, when it’s not time to protest, if it’s time to work behind the scenes, fine we can work behind the scenes.

Taking this idea a bit further, it is possible that some participants provide information as a first step towards facilitating political engagement.

Networking and being in contact with other citizens

The participants I interviewed for this project have taken part as leaders in various organizations or have initiated action within their organizations. Some facilitators saw their role as being a way to make others aware of the challenges many citizens face in society. With YouTube videos posted on her organization’s labour advocacy website, Rachel commented that these videos could help to raise the consciousness of the broader public about challenges workers
in precarious situations are facing. Rachel thought for example that her organization’s shared videos might encourage audiences to step back and ask, “This happens to people, really? …[Because people] can be really removed from some of the realities of people who are stuck in work which is incredibly precarious.”

Other participants drew upon best practices that they observed elsewhere or that they learned from those with similar experiences. For example, Jonathan stated, “I kind of talked for a while with this guy who has a similar site in the States that allows people to vote.” Simon T. noted that he used social media and particularly Twitter to communicate with others who experience the same challenges as himself: “Well,…I tend to communicate…with the people who are…suffering on a similar path as me [by not having a driver’s licence as an ID document].”

In the case of legal and legal education websites (i.e., CLEONet and Slaw.ca), the readership and contributor base might be expected to be primarily policy elites. Lawyers and individuals with high education levels may be the assumed readers. To some extent this was true for Slaw.ca. Simon Fodden stated:

I’ve found that when you have a law blog, sometimes, well this one at least, some people are shy…about contributing. We…hear lots, and we have thousands of readers…that they enjoy reading it and they read it regularly. And I will say to them, well please comment. And they don’t. Because I think…people have this notion that law can be right or wrong, and if they make a mistake they’ll be embarrassed

He continued to explain, “I’ve looked recently and…the people who comment the most frequently are…in fact, the people who write for us.” Fodden also stated, “Frankly, we don’t aim Slaw at lay readers…. Although, from time to time when someone does an entry on something that catches the…public’s attention, we’ll get a flurry of…comments.”
For Slaw.ca and CLEONet, Simon Fodden and Fiona MacCool noted that regular (non-lawyer) citizens were finding their website just by using search engines. Fiona described this phenomenon in the following terms: “Although our initial audience…were service providers…because of search engine traffic…people [are] coming back to the site.” The phenomenon of an “elite” conversation was described by Simon Fodden: “Because we have a large group of contributors, we tend to have a large…conversation happening all the time. It’s a very big cocktail party.”

Aggregating and interpreting information for others

The actions of aggregating and interpreting government information about laws and policies were noted as significant activities by some of the participants. Simon T., who is the administrator of the Facebook group “Citizens for a Non-Drivers Identification Card of Ontario,” said, “I tend to post some news articles in relation to the … non-drivers photo card.” Rachel described the process of the video team she works with: “They [our video team] try to pick an issue and keep it very clear…and to the point. Otherwise, I think you lose it in too much information. Too much information can be very confusing.”

The OCASI web teams for Settlement.org had very robust and developed processes for watching for changes to policy. Theresa explained that she uses a web service called Watch That Page to help keep her abreast of changes:42

Watch That Page is a website where you can register and essentially bookmark pages but it scans them however often you set it up to scan them, and it sends you a newsfeed, much like RSS…

Anytime that the website is updated…it might not just be the news articles, it could be in the backend where there is a procedural manual, there is a change in

42 Watch That Page is available at http://www.watchthatpage.com/
that, or notifications to the different areas of government that the public might not
normally know that that page is there but we know through each other and we
read those updates and through word of mouth. I mean we hear things from other
service providers sometimes and then go and find the information. (Theresa)

At a different point in the interview, Theresa stressed that she and her team “read what is out
there and we make it make sense.”

Jordan Sterling explained that he had to interpret the proposed changes to the laws and
regulations for young drivers as a part of his initiative:

A couple of the things that I started with was making sure that the information on
the site was accurate because a lot of people when they first came to the law they
didn't really understand it precisely…there [were] discrepancies between G1
drivers, G2 drivers, who was allowed to do what. So I made it very clear in the
information section basically what we were up against, what the laws were
proposing. (Jordan Sterling)

In terms of information about laws and policies, Fiona MacCool noted the need for
interpretation:

So sometimes I find information on…legal blogs…and it’s intended for lawyers
and so it’s very, very hard…for me as a layperson, I’m not a lawyer, to
understand it. So in those cases I’ll try and…summarize…to make it more
accessible. (Fiona MacCool)

Fiona also noted that service providers (in her field, legal aid clinics) that deal with lay citizens
are “used to getting the information…interpreting it, summarizing it, rolling it back out.”

In terms of making sure information that is aggregated is accessible, Rachel noted that from a
workers’ rights issue standpoint there is still a digital divide which must be acknowledged:

We still can’t ignore sending out a newsletter. A lot of people don’t have access
to a computer, don’t know how to use a computer so to rely on just the electronic
type media to get the word out is not for our membership. (Rachel)

Rachel’s comments are consistent with research by Felczak, Smith and Glass (2009) who note
the continued importance of offline activities for citizen participation in policy-making. Rachel,
however, also noted that it is “important that we do it all” and she suggested that the social and participatory web cannot be ignored.

Moderating or facilitating discussion

Facilitating or moderating discussions were described by participants in various ways. In the Facebook group “Ontarians Concerned With 'Enhanced' Drivers’ Licences,” Parsons found that there were some “active participants” who “have strong interest” in the topic. Wayne MacPhail from Rabble.ca, who has a long history of designing engaging online systems stated that sometimes it is best not to try to direct how participation unfolds: “What we learned [early] was keep your topics completely broad to begin with because the community itself will dictate how it falls in line.”

In the “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” Facebook group, Jordan Sterling noted that youth were engaged in important deliberation. For example, “We had people [engaging about] Charter of Rights violation[s], that's a discussion thread. We had nine posts within it. People were talking about whether or not this is actually a violation of our Charter of Rights…based on age.” To characterize the discussion that happened, Jordan Sterling stated:

Everybody was basically discussing…options and the best way to approach certain things like for the protest for example…. So, it was basically, it was almost like the war room if you will…this was us in here discussing. (Jordan Sterling)

In Jordan’s case he was actively involved in moderating the discussion. Through discussion, strategies and tactics were developed, and facilitation duties can also be shared or passed along.

Gregory J. Smith, developer of the IDforum website, reflected on designing a discussion forum that he turned over for me to moderate:
If I…jump to [the] discussion, I know you guys have been pretty rigorous in maintaining this. You’ve been [posting] media item by media item, or news update by news update to make threads whenever news has emerged….

I guess you’ve attracted a very specific kind of niche of researchers or concerned citizens to…be in orbit around this resource. The discussion forum is pretty straight forward but I can see that some of these threads…have…[many] replies so that is quite a bit of sustained interest over the last while. (Gregory J. Smith)

Participants also spoke of the unintentional nature of discussions and times when they purposely avoided conversation. In relation to Slaw.ca, Simon Fodden noted, “Although we’re providing a vehicle for people to have these…exchange[s]…it’s just an incidental function for us.” Christopher Parsons stated that sometimes on his blog when “news articles in particular were posted…discussion was sparked. I tend not to get involved in those. I think that if you're writing something in a public space, you write it, you give it to people and then they can talk amongst themselves.” ML from OCASI spoke of the constraints she and her co-workers face:

We try to stick to the facts about what is changing [through policy]…as opposed to a judgment about the law that is coming. For instance, we were talking about one this morning about a new law that is proposed to remove foreign criminals faster, so instead of posting it now when it is still a proposed law and there is going to be debate around it, I mean there are already a bunch of news articles about it, we’ll wait until it has been passed to post information on it and so we will stick to the facts. (ML)

Discussion and deliberation is a component of engaged political participation in policy-making but one that not every individual or type of organization wants to participate in.

Engaging government (or not)

The relationships with government that participants referenced through their social media usage were varied. Simon T. noted that he “…barely follow[s] one of the politicians [on Twitter]” but he does follow the transportation minister’s “press secretary” to stay abreast of news releases. Other relationships with government were much more active.
As one part of the engagement in relation to CLEONet, Fiona MacCool stated, “We certainly try to promote…any of those consultations when we hear about them. So like the Ontario Human Rights Commission we’re…linked to them…through our joint Facebook pages…and they often do consultations that are really targeted to…mental health consumers and newcomers.” In attempting to get government to demonstrate more of an interest in citizen-led activities, Christopher Parsons noted a different kind of dynamic where the onus is on the citizen to get the attention of the government: “Government…it does what it can, but you really have to direct stuff to them.”

For workers’ rights issues and within the context of her advocacy organization, Rachel noted that social media use is part of an array of practices that include tangible artefacts and face-to-face meetings. During our interview, I asked her, “How do you get the ear of the politicians when you are seeking policy change? I’ve seen tweets that are directly referencing members of provincial parliament, I imagine you might email them from your organization...” She responded by stating:

We just try to keep them in the loop in different ways [laughs]…. last year we had postcards [for a campaign]…. Using physical things…. it is a really important talking point for our members [who are workers]. Getting them [our members] used to going to their local MPPs, so we do a lot of MPP visits taking our members and maybe one staff person and talking [with MPPs]. (Rachel)

In the Facebook group “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws,” Jordan Sterling describes how he guided youth’s interaction with their members of the legislature:

So within a discussion page, I threw up all the MPP's emails and I basically gave them some loose instructions as to how to start…[to] structure their email. Because if we had a bunch of 18 year-old kids sending these politicians [inappropriate] emails…then we're not going to be heard and we're not going to be taken seriously…. So, I basically just gave some rough guidelines about…how to talk to them, be polite, be curt but let them know what you want…. (Jordan Sterling)
Jordan suggested to the Facebook group members, "If you're feeling ambitious, feel free to send your MPP an email voicing your opinion. Be respectful or your email will be ignored, but stand strong on your point."

Christopher Parsons raised the idea that government is beginning to monitor social media and its creators may be contacted in “informal” ways. He stated, “I know various individuals who…have been contacted by members of the government. It's…through a phone conversation. It is through…a private email.” These relationships can be very difficult to foster, however, as Parsons points out: “The average citizen…you either spend years building up a reputation in …an online environment. …[Or] you get fortunate enough that you can sort of strike a match on some very particular issue and…you get brought to the table.” Parsons also raised the point that some individuals just never get contacted by government or invited to the table.

Rachel describes how important it is for the senior staff to talk to bureaucrats when working to bring about policy change on workers’ rights issues:

Our senior staff…talk to some of the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Labour, having conversations with them and being able to sit down and say “We really think these are the issues” and “Here are some recommendations we think you could do.” Having some of those conversations with bureaucrats behind the scenes who write the policy [is important]. (Rachel)

Working with government was also an experience for OCASI in the context of a non-profit charitable organization. OCASI staff referenced that they occasionally work with government partners to create content for the website. In relation to new photo cards for non-drivers made possible under Bill 85, Theresa stated that when they introduced the “new Ontario photo ID card they contacted us to make sure that we [would] help promote some of [the changes]. From…our partnerships, we were able to develop an article specifically about it and get a photo of it for their launch day, for when they launched across the province.”
Involvement with mass media

Participants seldom reported major interactions with the mass media. Fiona MacCool provided some observations about why CLEO does not attract much media attention:

CLEO doesn’t generally attract huge amount of press because we’re not directly dealing with the public. So, the work we do isn’t as exciting…to the media as when you’re dealing directly with people who are facing the problems directly. (Fiona McCool)

Christopher Parsons stated that he had some minimal contact with the press in relation to his social web usage and enhanced drivers licences: “There was private email communication sent back and forth between myself and some journalists because they were interested in what was going on.” Parsons did not recall being quoted in any pieces but noted that he “didn't get contacted by a single Canadian journalist. They were all American,…along the border.”

During the interview with Gregory J. Smith in relation to the IDforum, the issue of chronicling news stories on a discussion board was raised which linked the interview to interactions with the mass media. Gregory stated, “You’ve been [posting] media item by media item, or news update by news update to make threads whenever news has emerged.” In the case of enhanced drivers’ licences, the team involved with the IDforum website also convened events such as the “National Public Forum on ‘Enhanced’ Drivers’ Licences, Privacy and State Surveillance Under the New Canada–U.S. Border Regime” that was held on March 24, 2009 in Ottawa. The discussion board was therefore used to chronicle the news stories that were informed by the critique of Bill 85 and related policies in other provinces. The concerns regarding EDLs that were raised at the national public forum event were consistent with the critiques presented by the IDforum website. The discussion board on the IDforum was used in one instance to chronicle the 10 news stories and
editorials that came out shortly after the national public forum and were informed by the speakers who presented at the forum.43

In terms of the research participants, Jordan Sterling had the most engagement with the mass media. Jordan explained that the story of the Young Drivers Facebook group was first taken up by the *Hamilton Spectator*. There was a journalist who “would call me for like the three- or four-week period [when] this went on. He would call me every morning and get a statement from me and then do the article….” Jordan explained that dealing with the media became incredibly time consuming:

> You know, honestly it was…almost hard to organize at times. This, honest to God, became a full-time job. I would come home from school at like 4:00 o'clock. I would spend two hours responding to emails, maybe another hour making, returning phone calls to the newspapers who wanted…phone interviews….Like I said, the guy from the *Spectator*…he would often speak to a politician and then he would call me. (Jordan Sterling)

Jordan also explained that he continues to be someone the media looks to for a sound bite, “And to this day,…[government] just recently…passed that zero tolerance in regards to alcohol if you're under 21…[and] I got called for interviews. They said: ‘You're the Young Drivers guy, what do you think about this?’”

Co-producing content for individual empowerment

The idea of creating social web content for the empowerment of individual citizens is a theme that might be expected, but one which my interview participants did not discuss extensively. In Rachel’s advocacy organization there is an emphasis on changing policies to improve the

43 For a listing of news stories, please see the IDforum website post at [http://www.idforum.ischool.utoronto.ca/node/213](http://www.idforum.ischool.utoronto.ca/node/213)
working conditions of workers. She described using YouTube or videos shared on the web for this purpose:

> We did four [web] videos last year….the process is so critical. It is such a confidence builder for the people involved to sort of have this, to [conceptualize] how they are going to fight back, not be afraid, stand up and the benefits of going through that process with someone to get them past being a victim and afraid…and standing up on behalf a group of workers [and] saying “This is not right, it’s not just me.” I think we are going to keep doing more, it is a great vehicle. (Rachel)

The ethos of this type of video production connects to earlier participatory filmmaking projects such as the Challenge for Change program at The National Film Board of Canada and the Fogo process for film making (Low, 1968).

### 5.7 Linking together analysis of infrastructures and experiences

The participants from this project expressed an array of views on the infrastructures they used to facilitate political participation for themselves or others that link back to the attributes I used to analyze the infrastructures in table 5.3. The attributes were: ownership, openness, types of participation, deliberative potential, the emphasis of peer relations and anonymity.

In terms of ownership, sometimes, corporately run platforms are preferred because they are where the citizens are already gathered. Jonathan stated, “Facebook and YouTube [and] what have you, [have] I think the advantage…[that] people are already on those platforms and comfortable with them.” Through my conversations with my research participants, no threads of discussion emerged concerning the implications of Canadians participating politically through US-based social web infrastructures, where their data gets stored on US servers. In future research, I may include further discussion prompts to probe in this direction. Concern over Canadian data being stored on US servers has emerged in relation to the substantive content of at least one of the Ontario bills being examined here. With Bill 85 there was a privacy concern that
enhanced drivers’ licences (EDLs) would contain more information than traditional licences. EDL usage to cross the border would potentially lead to the usage of Canadian’s personal information by the US government for purposes other than border crossings (McPhail et al., 2009).

In terms of ownership, the point that was raised by my participants were the trade-offs between corporate and community stewardship. Gregory J. Smith reflected on this theme:

I guess the desire would be to have more community-ish platforms built with open source parts so that they are more of the commons. But, I don’t think they are good because they are [of the commons]. If you can leverage a Facebook group to get 1,000 people out to a rally or something then that is amazing.

(Gregory J. Smith)

The complex meaning of openness will be explored in Chapter 6. For now let us consider the issues of mobilization. Mobilization of far more than 1,000 people was exemplified by Jordan Sterling who explained that, as a Facebook user, he could create a group “just on a whim after dinner.” Facebook was a place where he connected digitally with his friends easily and without hindrances.

The mobilization of a large group of supporters was not the only type of participation that my participants spoke of concerning their uses of the social web. The interaction practices of the research participants described in this chapter included:(1) networking and being in contact with other citizens, (2) aggregating and interpreting information for others, (3) moderating or facilitating discussion, (4) engaging government (or not) and involvement with mass media and (5) co-producing content for individual empowerment.

The participants’ use of multiple forms of social web infrastructures also point to the value in utilizing a media ecology perspective in this type of project. Political participation does not
unfold in a singular social web infrastructure but rather across multiple infrastructures. As introduced by McLuhan in an 1977 interview, media ecology means that you “buttress one medium with another” (McLuhan, 2003, p. 271). The tactics of my research participants involved all kinds of blending or buttressing of social web and offline practices. Rachel described how video production could help build confidence for other kinds of advocacy that could include visiting Members of Parliament’s constituency offices. Mark Kuznicki referenced the need to use proprietary and open web technologies in integrated ways. He stated, “Google Groups…for me was kind of like this interesting…meeting place where people that were really used to email as their primary interaction and were used to the idea of being on a email list…could interact with the open web.” Both of these examples also tie to the types of connections or relations that are fostered through participation.

Although I was interested in the emergence of peer relations and loose networks, I found that the interviews encouraged me to question if anything new was happening in terms of the organizational (or loose) structures formed by my participants. Though Jordan Sterling seemed to make successful use of the loose peer networks of connection through the social web infrastructures, perhaps the networks were not so loose in all cases. In the examples of the Slaw.ca blog, CLEONet and OCASI.org, the participants had sustained ongoing relations with contributors and service providers who were users and contributors. There is also the possibility that loose networks can never really grow. Simon T. referenced the point that his Facebook group never grew as he expected. What I think notable about my participants is that many of them (i.e., Smith, Kuznicki, Sterling, Fodden) referenced the agility of being able to create social web infrastructures quickly.
The quality of the deliberation that emerges via quickly designed social web infrastructures or sustained initiatives remains a question for further inquiry. The openness of the infrastructures may also vary in importance for different individuals. Simon T. commented, “I just don’t care whether…the source is a closed, hybrid or open source. I want to make sure that people are aware about the…political views that surround…them.” Christopher Parsons expressed a preference for open source environments but felt they are not the only option:

Ideally, citizens will be able to engage in open source environments…but…I don’t think that closed source environments somehow delegitimize what goes on…. What’s really important is the discourse, and what open source in theory provides is a way of minimizing external control over that. (Christopher Parsons)

The openness of infrastructures is sometimes a value preference that citizen participation facilitators may select when designing an infrastructure for participation. However, citizens are engaging in many other types of spaces as well. It becomes difficult to avoid commercial platforms when completing certain tasks such as embedding video or when attempting to engage with an array of individuals through platforms that are a part of their daily lives.

In the case of my interview participants, most are attributed in this research and are highly identifiable through their social web participation infrastructure projects. Different research results may have emerged with research participants who participated politically in anonymous ways online.

A factor that emerged from my interviews that I did not account for in table 5.3 was the ongoing nature of social web based participation. When I began this research, my implicit and incorrect assumption was that much of the online participation I would locate would occur before and during the development of provincial bills. From this research, I have seen that the participation that unfolds is much more continuous. Citizens are often motivated to participate online through the social web when they identify problems and challenges in their lives. This
pattern was observed for each of the bills examined as a part of this research. The ongoing form of political participation enacted by citizens is something that governments may need to consider as they envision a more open government. I will continue my exploration of openness as a political value that pertains to citizen participation in the next chapter.

5.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I examined the characteristics of the social web infrastructures my participants designed and used in relation to bills 12, 85, 126 and 210 in Ontario. I also introduced my research participants and their experiences of participation. The experiences of my participants make apparent that the internet does not automatically construct a Habermesian public sphere setting suitable for deliberative democracy. Although citizens engage in dialogue and deliberate online, there are many other activities that they engage in. Citizens may design, code, network, blog or create content that extends beyond deliberative discourse.

Through the experiences of my participants, I have also gleaned the sense that they grapple with the issue of how to instantiate democratic communication online. Citizen designers who create social web infrastructures for policy participation grapple with the meanings of contested values such as openness. Through everyday web design and usage contestations occur. I take this exploration forward in the next chapter.
6 Contested concepts of openness

The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216)

Open...what that means is kind of open for debate. (Mark Kuznicki)

The Arnstein (1969) quote about no one being against participation triggers for me the need to interrogate democratic values that we agree are “good” for us. My interviewee Mark Kuznicki suggested that openness can be defined and operationalized in many ways. These quotes demonstrate to me the possibilities for ambiguity of openness in relation to citizen participation in policy-making. In an influential essay, Gaillie (1956) introduced the idea that “there are concepts [such as democracy] which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users” (p. 169).

Connolly extends Gaillie’s thinking and argues that democracy is a contested concept where the “rules of application are relatively open” in new situations (Connolly, 1974, p. 10). Democracy has no-fixed definition in the physical world, and remains even more ambiguous in cyberspace where there is an attempt to enact a democratic value such as openness in policy-making and broader political life.

In this chapter, my goal is to interrogate openness as an essentially contested concept of burgeoning importance for democracy. This chapter responds directly to my second research question, Are citizens’ web based participation activities in policy-making shaping the operationalization of democratic values such as participation and openness in Ontario politics
through the social web? Like Mouffe (1999) I do not believe that democracy always unfolds harmoniously and that one must look for the conflicts.

To answer my research question about how openness gets enacted, I see importance in considering value conflict and contestations of meaning. In their book titled Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society, Hajer and Wagenaar (2003) assert that “value conflict [has] been under acknowledged as a regular feature of policy-making” (p. 22). Openness is a value that can be examined in policy-making or that can constitute a wicked design problem to challenge. For readers who are more technically oriented, the idea of wicked problems may be familiar. The term wicked problem is widely used in the computer science literature to refer to issues for which solutions are difficult to find. Interestingly, this term originates in the policy realm. Rittel and Webber (1973) coined the term wicked problems to define social planning problems with contradictory and thereby difficult solutions.

Some work from science and technology studies (STS) has explored the challenging context of democracy and design. In their exhibition and book on Making Things Public, Latour and Weibel (Latour & Weibel, 2005) take up the ambiguity of the public in relation to democratic society and design with reference to digital culture. In the introductory chapter, Latour states:

A few years ago, computer scientists invented the marvelous expression of “object oriented” software to describe a new way to program their computers. We wish to use the metaphor to ask the question: What would “object-oriented democracy” look like?...

It’s clear that each object – each issue – generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements….

In other words objects – taken as so many issues – bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of “the political.” (p. 14-15)
Latour’s (2008) keynote talk on design continues to emphasize that design is about “drawing things together,” which include humans and technologies. He encourages that designers, activists and others use their historical “vocabulary” of the past and restyle it for “matters of concern” in the present (p. 13).

At present, openness is a concept within democratic states that is contested and ambiguous and can serve as a matter of concern. As discussed in Chapter 5, the participants in this research project utilized an array of infrastructures to participate in the discussion of the four bills in the Ontario legislature. Some of the social web infrastructures were corporately owned and some were open source. I expect the enactments of open government in the Canadian context will include both corporately owned and open source technologies. Ownership of the infrastructures, however, is not the only factor that shapes citizens’ experiences of openness. Laws, norms and social practices are also components of open government.

My objective in this chapter is to introduce some of the plans for openness drawn from the Open Government Partnership (OGP) action plans. I will use these plans to consider how openness is conceptualized and experienced from the grassroots positions of my research participants in relation to Ontario policy-making. My analysis is broadly informed by Suchman’s (1987) idea of there being plans and situated actions in relation to human–machine communication. In the introduction to her book, Suchman states that if we are “interested in situated action itself, we need to look at how it is that actors use the resources that a particular occasion provides – including, but crucially not reducible to, formulations such as plans – to construct their action’s developing purpose and intelligibility” (p. 3).

In this chapter, I argue that open government cannot be instantiated or evaluated as a solely top-down policy action. Openness is something that is situated in the daily lives of internet users
and infrastructure designers. Jonathan, an enthusiastic open data proponent, made an important assertion to me during our interview. He identified that beyond the technological aspects, there is “the democratic aspect of open data.” By following this avenue of exploration into the value-oriented understandings and instantiations of openness, I consider what might be missing from the current Canadian action plan for open government, at least as reflected in the Ontario experience.

My interviewees are individuals who have all demonstrated some interest in the goals of open government from outside of governmental roles. Their interest emerged as (or before) open government was becoming an explicit federal and provincial objective in Canada. Their roles as civic participants, therefore, are important to consider as openness becomes an expectation of government at various levels in Canada. In this chapter, I draw extensively upon Bennett’s (2008) call that we “expand our conception of politics and the political” because citizens are “wittingly and unwittingly, push[ing] those bounds through their applications of digital technologies” (p. 12).

My participants’ roles within policy-making processes and in open government are not without complication. As van Dijk (2009) suggests in relation to user-generated content platforms, “user agency is…complex…we need to account for the multifarious roles of users in a media environment where the boundaries between commerce, content and information are currently being redrawn” (p. 42). My interviewees’ participation online is cultural in ways that extend beyond the issues of the “capital ‘P’ politics” they engaged with substantively and include the value of openness. In this chapter, I explore both the policy and experiential aspects of open government as discussed by my participants. In the conclusion of the chapter, I return to STS
theory to reflect on what the actors who assemble around openness as a controversy have taught me.

6.1 Policy issues from the OGP

As introduced in Chapter 1, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) declaration encourages nations that sign on to

- “Increase the availability of information about governmental activities…”
- “Support civic participation…”
- “Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations…”
- “Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability…” (Open Government Partnership, 2011, para. 7-10)

In addition to these general principles, each nation that joins the OGP creates a country-specific action plan. I read and analyzed the action plans of the eight founding members of the OGP (Brazil, n.d.; Indonesia, n.d.; Mexico, 2011; Norway, 2011; South Africa, n.d.; The Philippines, 2012; United Kingdom, n.d.; United States, 2011) as well as Canada’s (2012) to distill the ways in which openness is defined. The first countries to join the OGP represent high income nations (the US, UK and Norway), upper middle income nations (Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico) and low middle income nations (Indonesia and The Philippines). Financial transparency and efficiency were common goals. Many of the mid and lower income democracies stated their intentions were to reduce corruption through open government (Indonesia, n.d.; South Africa, n.d.; The Philippines, 2012).

Canada’s Open Government Action Plan contained 12 commitments. Figure 6.1 was reproduced from the action plan to show how the commitments fit with the three priority areas of

44 These income categorizations were taken from the 2012 World Bank country classification table accessed from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/CLASS.XLS
open information, open data and open dialogue. The first commitments to produce an open
government directive and open licence are at the centre of the diagram and cross-cut each of the
priority areas.

![Diagram of Open Government Action Plan Commitments of Canada]

**Figure 6.1: Open Government Action Plan Commitments of Canada**

This diagram shows the 12 commitments that Canada made in its action plan. This diagram is reproduced with permission and was taken from page 5 of *Canada’s Action Plan on Open Government* (2012).

Creating an Open Government Licence follows the leadership of the UK government. The UK developed an Open Government Licence that

facilitates the use and re-use of a broad range of public sector information…. It is intended to be interoperable, with widely-used models such as Creative Commons and Open Data Commons. It supports the inclusion of machine-readable descriptions and semantic web properties. (p. 2)
Canada declared its intention to “align…with international best practices” and essentially to follow the UK lead with the Open Government Licence commitment item (p. 6).

The additional 10 commitments for open government by Canada are listed at the edges of the diagram. I will discuss the portal data.gc.ca and the modernization of Access to Information (ATI) processes in relation to other OGP action plans as they are two items that lead into the themes that emerged during interviews with my participants. The open government commitments and interview themes also relate to my second research question concerning how openness and participation are being operationalized.

Open data portals such as data.gc.ca are components of numerous national action plans (Brazil, n.d.; Mexico, 2011; Norway, 2011; United Kingdom, n.d.; United States, 2011). The ethos of the open data portals varies significantly, however. In the Canadian action plan, the government states that it plans on “making raw data available in machine-readable formats to citizens, governments, not-for-profit and private sector organizations to leverage it in innovative and value-added ways” (p. 8). The government explains that it will make special efforts to “support entrepreneurs eager to make use of Government of Canada data” (p. 8). In contrast, Brazil has different intentions for its transparency portal that is to include open data. Brazil states in their action plan that it will work with the transparency hacker movement to “support the development of application software to process, interpret and present public information from distinct perspectives” (section 1.3). Brazil is known for being a “heavy user and promoter of open source software” (Horst, 2011), and Gilberto Gil, former Minister of Culture, is renowned for bringing Creative Commons into state-sponsored cultural production (p. 477). The types of users the Brazilian versus Canadian open data portals seek to engage seem somewhat different.
In the Canadian federal context, many of the commitments associated with open government are fraught. Canada’s Open Government Action Plan was developed under the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. When Harper was first elected, one of his initial policies was the Federal Accountability Act (2006). The Accountability Act was intended to create a more transparent political system through specific measures, including reform of political party financing, enhancement of the Auditor General’s ability to trace government expenditures and the definition of new rules for public opinion research (Canada, 2006). Due to the rhetoric of the Accountability Act and previous communicative strategies that connect citizens and the state via information communication technologies (ICTs), Harper has faced questions surrounding his government’s practices of transparency.

In 2007–2008, the Canadian government’s commitment to transparency was repeatedly called into question by the media, especially when journalists encountered or anticipated new roadblocks to accessing information (i.e., Brennan, 2007; CBC News, 2007; Munro, 2008). The situation intensified when Harper’s government decided to shut down the Co-ordination of Access to Information Requests System (CAIRS) (CBC News, 2008). Until its closure, the CAIRS database was internally maintained by the government and contained reports of all ATI requests received by federal departments. Although the internal database facilitated a definition of government transparency, it was never the best exemplar. Upon the request of a citizen-activist, the federal information commissioner recommended that the CAIRS database should be made directly available to the public (Information Commissioner of Canada, 2009); however, this was never fulfilled and the shutdown was carried out when the “requirement to update CAIRS” was ceased under Harper’s leadership (CBC News, 2008). The transparency and CAIRS controversy in Canada relate more generally to the freedom of information (FOI) aspects of the OGP action plans.
Policy concerning freedom of information is an area that many of the OGP nations have agreed to take action on. The Philippines plans to put forward a Freedom of Information Act for the first time, whereas the United States aims to “harness the power of technology” to gain greater efficiency in processing FOI requests (p. 7). In Canada, FOI law is known as the Access to Information Act (1983) at the federal level. Canada notes in its action plan that it has already improved FOI by having all departments publish “summaries of completed ATI [Access to Information] requests on a monthly basis” (p. 3). As noted above, Canada also intends to modernize access to information. In the first year of this upgrade, the government plans to pilot online ATI requests and payments. Subsequently, the ATI summaries will be made searchable through the web and the government will create a “modern, ATI solution to be used by all federal departments and agencies” (p. 6). The quality of this plan in relation to the CAIRS shutdown and the information commissioner’s recommendations cast question on the values at play in Canada’s action plan. The policy issues of licences (or copyright), open data portal and FOI provide background information that relates to the experiences of my participants. I will interweave the commitment topics from Canada’s Open Government Action Plan with the codes I developed from the interview transcripts.

6.2 Grounded experiences of openness in Ontario

6.2.1 Information access

As introduced previously, increasing the availability of information about governmental activities is a key element that nations must endorse when they sign onto the OGP (Open Government Partnership, 2011). More broadly than open government, eParticipation is premised on the idea that governments have to provide information to their citizens to facilitate their participation (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006). Participants in this project frequently commented that it is their baseline expectation that the Ontario government will provide information for their
participation (i.e., contact information, documents or updates about policy developments).

Participants spoke both favourably and less favourably about the information that has been made available to them.

Jordan Sterling spoke of generally positive experiences in terms of having access to the information necessary to facilitate his “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” Facebook page. He stated,

> We needed to know exact details on this…I was watching, because…getting legislation passed is a number of steps and I needed access and I had access to see the Bill every step of the way as it was progressing through…the process. (Jordan Sterling)

Some other participants were less complimentary about the level of information available.

Simon Fodden, for example, stated that “you can’t participate if you don’t have the information…. I’m one who believes that there’s just far too much secrecy and lack of transparency, and it just doesn’t make any sense to me.”

The expectation of the quantity of information that government should make available, as well as preferred formats in which the information is given, are changing. Jonathan stated,

> Probably [for] 95% of government operations there's no reason why it can't be clearly open and accessible to the public…. [A] lot of government…will say… “Well people aren't interested in…how bills get formulated and how, the intricacies of bureaucracy work.” And that's true in a lot…of circumstances. But it's very hard to predict what the benefits of opening up the processes to the public are… So in that sense, I advocate for a much more accessible, open government…which is why we push for Open Data. (Jonathan)

Jonathan also noted that sometimes there are format issues in terms of how information is released. For example, a Hansard in extensible markup language (XML) would be more usable than Hansard in a portable document format (PDF).
Another theme to emerge in the interviews were the challenges experienced when interacting with government information because it was always in flux. Anna from OCASI stated, “Some of our users sometimes [alert us to policy issues through] the types of questions they ask. Through the process of doing research for that we will find more information, maybe something has changed, a document has been updated.”

Jordan Sterling had a different kind of challenge when using government information. He indicated that when he began the Facebook group, he “outlined the laws, the proposed legislation.” When the group started to snowball in size, he felt the need to make it more comprehensive by connecting group members to their Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs):

One of the first things I did was put up the information of the MPPs for everyone [Facebook group members] within their area, so they were all emailing their MPPs so it [the group] started getting attention at that point. (Jordan Sterling)

This attention was both positive and negative. Jordan’s group garnered major media attention in Canada, but he also notes that “the politicians were absolutely flooded with emails and then they were emailing me, asking if the emails could be taken down.” Making available the contact information of elected officials is a baseline or foundational type of information that should be available to citizens. Negative reactions to having their professional contact information made available on Facebook or the internet more broadly demonstrates a problem in achieving the goals of open government and effective citizen engagement.

### 6.2.2 Freedom of information (FOI)

Participants referenced Freedom of Information (FOI) law as a mechanism that could make government information more readily available to citizens. Gregory J. Smith, developer of the IDForum, stated that the documents section of the website acted as an archive:
You guys have posted…information, I can see your Privacy Impact Assessment, briefing notes…you guys have actually tried to bring all of these obscure and not necessarily directly accessible documents under one umbrella and said “Here it is….” If anybody is interested, they can readily access all this information. (Gregory J. Smith)

In the case of the IDForum website, the broad selection of documents included Privacy Impact Assessments, which were obtained through FOI requests in Ontario. Although FOI can be a useful process, the government’s reluctance to share democratically significant information without an FOI was also raised.

The reluctance of government to release information without a freedom of information request was described by Simon Fodden as problematic for his blogging:

You may remember, five years ago…there was an experiment about using cameras in the Court of Appeal and then the experiment was over. And so a year later, I wrote to the court asking, what was the result of the experiment?… They said they’d look into it, nothing happened. … I read in the paper recently a woman at Canadian Press had followed up, in fact, and done a freedom of information request and got the report which was perfectly neutral…and yet it wasn’t released to the public for no reason whatsoever…. So I asked the reporter to give it to me and she did of course and we put it on Slaw. (Simon Fodden)

From this quote it is clear that sometimes information that social web producers want is not easily accessible or released upon request.

Christopher Parsons expressed similar frustrations with FOI processes. He noted that in Canada there is nothing like the Sunlight Foundation. The Sunlight Foundation is a US-based non-governmental organization that advocates for openness and transparency. In Canada, the closest we have maybe is, you know, CIPPIC [Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic] or PIAC [Public Interest Advocacy Centre] or a few of the other advocacy coalitions and they just don't have the same funding…so [they’re] not able to mount the same level of freedom of information requests. And even then, [when requests are mounted]…in Canada…they take forever.

Although there was frustration with the FOI process, some participants like Dave and ML from OCASI commented that they had used such processes successfully and would do so again.
From my interviewees, it is clear that citizens may face challenges in facilitating participation through their own initiatives. Citizen participation in policy-making may need to make use of information provided proactively by government. In other instances, the information desired by citizens about the issues that matter to them will be obscured and difficult to access. It is perhaps noteworthy that the provision of email addresses for policy-makers and the freedom of information requests are rather old informational expectations of citizens. Gregory J. Smith expressed the idea that freedom of information and access to information are blending with open data. He stated,

Well, access to information is now open data, right? It’s not just can I file this form and can get this report. It’s can I have this in a CSV file related to some organization or their spending and such. Open data is interesting because people can do things with it, they can compare, they can scour it…. (Gregory J. Smith)

That citizens are experiencing difficulties with current FOI processes raises potential shortcomings of open data portals. Information that is disclosed on open data portals will be curated by government. The mechanisms to ensure that citizens receive the information that is democratically significant to them is not necessarily strengthened by the creation of open data portals.

6.2.3 Copyright and sharing

Recombining, reusing and sharing web content were issues frequently discussed by my participants regarding their online activity and open participation in policy-making. Simon T. spoke descriptively about how he not only grapples with copyright but also how he combines elements from the web within a blog post or on a social web site. To respect the copyright of materials that he is presenting on his site, he explained his writing process, which may seem familiar. He stated that when blogging, “I have to, to reword each of the contents being presented, and then I have to cite that resource.” Additionally, he explained that he likes to
combine elements such as music videos with his textual posts. He explained, “I tend to post a music video on my blog posting...[when] I want to explain...the true meaning of...what that music video is and how it correlates to my issue.” This kind of reuse and recombination of web content is a characteristic of the social web. The critical and insightful perspectives of openness that also emerged from the interviews connect to the literature on openness and copyright.

On the topic of copyright, Rachel noted that she occasionally faces dilemmas about posting materials:

Sometimes I wonder about it [copyright] a little bit. I’m not really sure. Sometimes I’m not sure if I know enough and I wonder if I should know a little bit more. It’s one of those issues you never quite get to.... From our perspective, we try to make everything we have free and very accessible and hope people are kind enough to credit us with stuff if they use our stuff...it’s all there on the website and people just grab it and take it down [for use]...and that’s what it is there for. (Rachel)

The idea of allowing web content producers to licence their work so that it can be shared and reused on the internet by other producers was an idea pioneered by Lawrence Lessig, (2004). Lessig drew inspiration from Richard Stallman and the free software movement when he began to advocate for Creative Commons. Today, a charitable organization exists in the United States to advance Creative Commons’ licences as an option for web content producers. The Creative Commons describes its mandate in the following terms:

Our tools give everyone from individual creators to large companies and institutions a simple, standardized way to keep their copyright while allowing certain uses of their work – a “some rights reserved” approach to copyright – which makes their creative, educational, and scientific content instantly more compatible with the full potential of the internet. The combination of our tools and our users is a vast and growing digital commons, a pool of content that can be copied, distributed, edited, remixed, and built upon, all within the boundaries of copyright law. We’ve worked with copyright experts around the world to make sure our licenses are legally solid, globally applicable, and responsive to our users’ needs. (Creative Commons, n.d., What we provide, para. 2)
Some popular social web platforms such as YouTube and Facebook have built in interface options for users to license their content as Creative Commons. For Facebook, a citizen developer created such an application that offers users this option (Benenson, 2009).

In its web content production, Creative Commons was more than a licence for many of my participants, however; it is an ethos they are committed to. Mark Kuznicki describes the spirit of what he attempted to achieve online within web sites to engage political participation of citizens:

By encouraging content to be made Creative…Commons…freely available…for re-use, what we are hoping is to leave lots of different seeds out there in the world that people might discover in different contexts. And if they pursue them they might find, you know, the source of where those things came from and discover those ideas and then go, “Oh that’s really interesting maybe I could do that in my community.” (Mark Kuznicki)

Wayne MacPhail was also strongly opposed to creating locked down, copyrighted content:

I’m on the opposite end of it [copyright] in the sense that I’m very interested in making sure that what I produce, and what Rabble produces, and what…my students produce, is all Creative Commons. (Wayne MacPhail)

Similarly, Christopher Parsons expressed a commitment to giving back through Creative Commons:

So I'm using a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Share-Alike, and that's because…part of what I think is really critical is giving back to the public sphere in every way possible. (Christopher Parsons)

There were also copyright challenges that were experienced by the participants. One such challenge was the lack of sharing by government to ensure that its content could be reused by citizens, as described by Jonathan:

You know, you're not allowed to actually reuse the Hansard. You're not allowed to reuse bills and acts…. [T]hey're all copyrighted by governments. So…that's a big problem. Whereas in contrast to the States where there's no crown copyright, …that's all public domain which makes your life a lot easier…. (Jonathan)
The issue that copyright can be used to bring content down off a citizen’s website was also raised by one participant. Christopher Parsons shared a story of using a photograph that was labelled as Creative Commons on his blog and then being hit with a Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DCMA) takedown order. In this case, the original photographer of the photo had not known the meaning of the Creative Commons licence he/she had assigned to the work and had then asserted copyright over his/her material with a DCMA request.

The development of an Open Government Licence at the federal level in Canada will be an important step towards making government-produced content shareable and reusable for citizen designers. The provinces, territories and municipalities will need to take similar actions to allow broad-based engagement with government web content. Citizens, however, also interact with copyright for materials that are not created by government. Developing a copyright policy that allows citizens to create content that falls under fair dealing and respects their roles as digital producers remains an ongoing challenge.

6.2.4 Collaboration and transparency

For participants using open source software platforms to facilitate participation, the potential of a community of developers or users collaborating on the transparency of code was noted as a beneficial aspect. Dave from OCASI explained that he likes “extendibility of the [open source] platforms.” Rachel, interested in workers’ rights, explained the benefits of a WordPress site in the following terms: “I guess it’s a good platform to use because it has the ability to be very changeable, all the modules and things.” Wayne MacPhail stated that Rabble.ca is built in Drupal and “we’re very much…in the open source camp.”

Other participants revealed in greater depth what the benefits are to being situated within the open source community. Jonathan stated that as a developer he can add on to coding work that is
already underway, pointing out that “it's easier…because you can add, you can hack and go to the source code and modify it.” Fiona cited the benefits of using Drupal, an open source software project, for her organization because of the collaborative community:

I…think [open source]…it’s just a good idea,…sort of an ethical idea. But I also like Drupal because so many people are working on it.…I’ve worked on different Open Source projects in the past, and they get abandoned by the development community, and that one [Drupal] seems to be, you know, continuously being worked on. And every time I want to do something, I can find some weird module that people smarter than me invented, and I can just stick it in there. (Fiona MacCool)

Gregory J. Smith described not needing to use too much PHP, a scripting language for web development:

[Drupal is] just very expandable. What’s amazing with it is that I’ve been working with it for six years and I can count on two hands the number of times I’ve really needed to work with PHP. So the bar is very low technically for moderately capable individuals to build very complex workflows. Whether that is custom publishing or archiving or geolocative stuff or social networks, [they] are very easy to build. (Gregory J. Smith)

Simon Foddren stated there are similar benefits with the WordPress community. “WordPress is pretty flexible and by the time you…use plug-ins or you learn a little PHP…you can actually do pretty much anything you want.”

Another important aspect in the collaboration of the open source community was transparency. Christopher Parsons said,

It does matter if you can look in and if you are technically savvy enough to look under the hood and make sure that nothing strange is going on…. In the case of WordPress, there is a fair level of transparency, Facebook not so much…you have access to the developer APIs, but you don’t really see the backend of what Facebook is doing…. (Christopher Parsons)
The participants seemed to find a range of pragmatic and value-oriented reasons for choosing open source platforms.

Looking forward, the experiences of the research participants point towards an emerging interest in collaboration. Some countries make explicit commitments to sharing software in their open government action plans, which Canada does not. The United States government, for example, plans to “Contribute Data.gov as a Platform” (United States, 2011, p. 7), and it plans on collaborating with India in providing both the American data portal and the Indian document portal for other countries or governments to reuse and adapt.

6.2.5 Free software

The idea of open software as a free or inexpensive way to mobilize participation was referenced by some participants. Richard Stallman has adamantly asserted that free software is about the freedoms afforded to developers and users, not the price tag of the software (GNU Operating System, n.d.; Stallman & Free Software Foundation, 2002). Still, the no cost (or lower cost) of free an open source software was referenced by my participants.

Gregory J. Smith explained his perspective on the power of Drupal as an open source content management system:

The power of Drupal is…that you can have an NGO with a part-timer build a pretty complex web service…to address the needs of a specific community which is pretty incredible. It is the kind of thing in the 90s you would of needed a staff of developers and some enterprise software and now it can be maintained in house part-time possibly. (Gregory J. Smith)

Some of the participants situated within non-profit organizations echoed these sentiments. Rachel noted that she receives the invoices for her organization and she never paid a bill for the website platform, only for coding labour. She revealed, however, that she forgot about the “free” aspect of open source: “I really forgot about that, it’s really a great bonus that it’s open
Fiona cited the benefits of using Drupal as an open source software project from a cost perspective: “It lets me add new functionality to my site without paying a programmer every single time.” She continued, “I’m not tying my organization to, um, you know, proprietary hosting fees, or licensing fees, forever and ever.” Dave from OCASI expressed that, with open source, “you can do so much with them for a relatively low cost and you can do it in house.”

6.2.6 Autonomy of expression

Participants stated some polarized views about the ownership of the sites where political participation was unfolding and the resultant individual autonomy that was experienced. Jordan Sterling felt that the platform ownership did not influence his activism while others were more cautious. Jordan stated:

On a site like Facebook, you're basically given free rein with what you want to do, ...the only thing about my group that had anything to do with Facebook was the fact that it was a Facebook group...It really didn't matter who owned it or who ran it or anything...it was a medium that I was able to take and use....If this happened back in the age of My Space, which was right before Facebook, I probably would have been able to do the same thing if there was a group function. (Jordan Sterling)

In contrast, the autonomy experienced by creating and owning one’s website was cited as a benefit by Simon Fodden:

I also like having...WordPress running on an independent site, our site, so that I’m in control of the whole thing and I don’t have to...depend on, or make...it vulnerable in any way to [a corporate platform]. (Simon Fodden)

While Jordan and Simon were at the opposite ends of the spectrum in some ways, they did agree that there were potential vulnerabilities in participating politically on a corporately run platform. Jordan acknowledged that the powers that be at Facebook “could pull the plug on my group” but felt optimistically that as an administrator he had much agency.
While none of my participants had their freedom of expression thwarted by infrastructure owners that they discussed with me, Gregory J. Smith acknowledged the potential downsides of mobilizing on a corporate site. He stated, “There are problems with relying on those [corporate] platforms if for whatever reason you don’t fall within their acceptable discourse, what they deem to be acceptable discourse…” Gregory identified that in the case of Facebook “there have been issues…even the way they handle gender and stuff with the[ir] users.” In relation to gender, Facebook has constrained discourses around women and breastfeeding. For example, the company has often removed photos depicting women breastfeeding their children. This serves as a highly prominent example of a form of content restrictions that limits “acceptable” political discourse and women’s rights (Blight et al., 2012). To resist the widespread Facebook practice of taking breastfeeding images off its site, Emma Kwasnica, an expert in breastfeeding, is credited for inspiring nurse-in protests at Facebook headquarters in numerous cities around the world (Conley, 2012).

6.2.7 Future critique via archives
The issue of saving and archiving the records of political participation that happens online were discussed by the participants. Wayne MacPhail of Rabble.ca stated, “…there’s an old rule of thumb that if…data doesn’t exist in two places, it doesn’t exist.” Many of the participants discussed their archiving practices with me as well as their strategies to minimize their risk of losing important information.

Fiona MacCool described some steps she has taken to limit dependency on third-party sites, which can go out of business, which means losing your data:

On Twitter…and Facebook, we’re dependent on those services to not just go out of business or vanish in the night. But we certainly do statistical details on the insights and re-tweets….
When I’m using those third-party tools, we don’t post anything on Facebook or Twitter that we don’t also…have on CLEONet. (Fiona MacCool)

Participants also discussed what kind of opportunities and constraints they faced with various infrastructures. Jordan Sterling of the Young Drivers Facebook group reported that “the only reason I haven't taken this down is just because it's cool to pick up every once in awhile and look at.” When he reviewed the group page during our interview, he noted “…the numbers [of group members] are down to 116,000. The wall is filled with spam but we did what we needed to do….” The Facebook group is not a static document, such as a petition that gets submitted to government; rather, it changes over time. Many questions exist about how to capture the participative legacy of the members who were involved.

In relation to the Slaw.ca blog, Simon Fodden was able to find an external organization willing to archive the blog. He explained that the Library of Congress in the United States contacted him about archiving a blog he previously ran on the Supreme Court of Canada:

> So I, I wrote them and said…but if you’re going to do this one [on Supreme Court rulings], you really have to do this one [Slaw.ca] because…[Slaw.ca]…more closely represents what’s going on in Canada and the Canadian law. (Simon Fodden)

In this case the task of archiving was something which could be offloaded as a responsibility. Mark Kuznicki raised the concern that, in relation to community-run web initiatives, “there’s no organization, whose job it is to archive, to maintain, to ensure stability, to ensure those things continue into the future. So…I think there…is…a problem there.” He and I did agree that government-run participation processes have an upside in the form of institutional archiving.

The interoperability of government and community-run participation initiatives on commercial sites was raised by Jonathan:
Corporate, private companies like Facebook and YouTube, [and] what have you, I think the advantage there is that people are already on those platforms and comfortable with them…. Obviously the downside is that the information is stored on a corporate server you don't have access to…in terms of archives and all that.

I think the most likely and most successful thing will be some sort of combination of government initiatives that allows plug-ins…[to] third parties…systems like Facebook…or Twitter…I think that's probably the most likely success. And as long as you can…archive the information, then I think it's…good enough for the purpose of…government…. (Jonathan)

Jonathan’s comments seem to foreshadow some elements of Canada’s Open Government Action Plan, specifically its plans for Web 2.0 platforms. Through its Open Government Action plan, Canada has committed to

the development of a new Web 2.0 citizen engagement platform that federal organizations can use to conduct public consultations…. [W]e will develop a standard approach to the use of social media and Web 2.0 by federal departments to augment their engagement activities with citizens and businesses. (Canada, 2012, p. 8)

Canada also plans to increase access to the material held by Library and Archives Canada using Web 2.0 technologies. How engagement activities and archiving using Web 2.0 technologies will intersect remains to be seen.

6.3 Chapter summary

To conclude this chapter and transition to the next, I want to acknowledge that there can be clashes between those values that are being enacted through citizens’ and governments’ political practices online to promote openness. As experienced by my research participants, utilizing information as simple as an email address or as benign as a report is not without problems. Uses of such information should not be controversial in the Canadian context. The tensions here, however, introduce the operational and value expectations that could lead to conflicts. Such a scenario of clashing expectations was experienced in the case of the Howard Dean
campaign, where Drupal and social networks were used to organize “within the notoriously centralized war room communication model of election campaigns” (Bennett, 2008, p. 10). It remains my belief that there are many opportunities for bridging or mitigating this clash of government- versus citizen-defined open government ideals at the provincial level in Ontario. Opportunities that could achieve what might be described as successful participation for citizens in policy-making. The everyday practices of citizens who use the social web, as shared by the participants through their quotes in this dissertation, help to define many of the areas in which governments can intervene to make changes. Chapter 7 continues this discussion and provides concrete recommendations for changes that could be made in order to minimize the tensions between government and citizen-centric understandings of open government.
7 Conclusion: Future directions for policy participation through the social web

I began this dissertation with the ideal that citizen participation in policy-making is a valuable social contribution that should be facilitated. My research was motivated by the realization that citizen participation in policy-making has broadened out from government run eConsultation sites to include the social web. My research process involved my own design explorations and ongoing immersion and engagement with citizen designers who create infrastructures for policy participation. In many ways, citizen design work in this domain demonstrates the discourses that bestselling authors such as Shirky (2008) and Tapscott and Williams (2008) have popularized. Shirky and Tapscott and Williams assert the idea that immense social benefits can be derived by using the social web. For example, society has greater access to knowledge via Wikipedia, the open encyclopedia, where there is crowdsourced authorship. Beyond the encyclopedia, however, it remains to be seen whether institutions as vast as governments can be transformed through the social web to become more participatory. Numerous scholars have considered whether digital technologies will enhance democracy (Barney, 2005; Jenkins et al., 2003; Sclove, 1995) without coming to any firm conclusions about the role of the social web. Open government, which includes open dialogue, is merely the most recent political trend to encapsulate the desire to instantiate robust citizen participation in policy-making. In the Canadian context, deliberative democracy and facilitating a public sphere remain on the governmental agenda, but other kinds of democracy where citizens use the social web to collaborate, network and contest policies are also significant.
My main contribution with this dissertation is to demonstrate how political social web usage is a regular component of policy-making in Ontario, where citizens are frequently promoting the value of openness. In other words, *the citizens who design and use the social web for policy participation are policy entrepreneurs for openness*. While completing the analysis and write-up of my dissertation, I have returned to Kingdon (2003) and I have also benefited from the emerging literature on open government (Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Meijer, Curtin, & Hillebrandt, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). The open government literature was largely unavailable when I started my project. In reflecting on the significance of my work, I found a literature review paper by Meijer, Curtin and Hillebrandt (2012) exploring the meaning of open government to be very helpful. Meijer *et al.* state that “open government is not only about openness in informational terms (vision) but also about openness in interactive terms (voice)” (p. 10). Meijer *et al.* describe that merely providing information is not enough to achieve open government, greater participation must also be enacted. They argue that research that connects the vision and voice aspects of openness is so far limited and that more work is needed in this area. My dissertation contributes directly to bridging this gap by describing and analyzing the experiences of citizen designers in relation to open participation in policy-making.

In this concluding chapter, I retrace the arc of my argument through the six previous chapters. I begin by reviewing and expanding upon Kingdon’s model of agenda setting and apply his ideas to the open government context. Next, I respond to my three research questions by summarizing the findings of my research. I will also synthesize the four key findings gleaned from my

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45 Meijer, Curtin and Hillebrandt reviewed 103 papers pertaining to openness, transparency and participation from 50 scholarly journals.
research. I will relate them to the Ontario bills I have discussed, and to the democratic ideals of
participation and openness, with a scope that includes and goes beyond informational visions for
open government. My discussion then turns to review the major contributions, acknowledge the
limitations of this research and to identify possible directions for future work.

7.1 Reviewing and extending Kingdon

The argument I present in this dissertation relies heavily on Kingdon’s model of agenda setting
within the policy-making process. Chapter 2 introduced Kingdon’s (1984) seminal book
*Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* as a reference that provides an explanation of the
policy-making process. Kingdon (2003) describes the policy window as an opportunity where a
problem stream, policy stream and political stream converge and where interested actors can
push their issue(s) onto the decision-making agenda. In the context of open government and the
desire to create more opportunities for citizen involvement in policy-making via the social web,
Kingdon’s (2003) three streams can be defined in more detail. Reviewing the three streams in
relation to open government will allow me to demonstrate how individual citizen designers can
get involved as policy entrepreneurs.

Kingdon (2003) defines the problem stream as being the first strand in a policy window. The
problem stream is influenced by “prominent events” or a “crisis” (p. 16). Although facilitating
robust opportunities for citizen participation in policy-making is an old ideal, the revitalization of
interest in using the social web to facilitate open government can be positioned in relation to a
crisis. Obama’s (2009) Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government was published
following the 2008 financial crash, which many economists consider to be the worst financial
disaster since the Great Depression.
Some nation states and other levels of government responded to the required austerity measures following the financial crash with openness policies (Hintz & Milan, 2012; International Modern Media Institute, n.d.). In the Canadian and Ontario context, the implications of the financial crash in the daily lives of citizens have been less serious than elsewhere. The level of “openness” that has been pursued in Canada is also more tempered as I explored in Chapter 6. The moderate government pace towards planning and implementing open government in Canada and Ontario has facilitated citizen involvement via the social web in an ongoing manner.

The second strand in a policy window is the policy stream. The policy stream of open government is comprised of the growing social and technical knowledge that enables government to become more open and participatory. Kingdon (2003) defined the policy stream as consisting of “gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among the specialists in a given policy area, and the generation of policy proposals by such specialists” (p. 17). In relation to open government, it is important to highlight that Kingdon identified the possibility that the design of new technologies may be part of the knowledge base that triggers an issue making it onto the decision-making agenda. Kingdon (2003) stated that “the development of a new technology, such as a shunt making renal dialysis possible or a markedly more efficient storage battery for electric automobiles, might create considerable pressure for policy change” (p. 17).

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46 As an international comparison, consider the case of Iceland. The financial collapse in Iceland occurred after the three major banks went bankrupt and this was used as an opening to give rise to the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative (IMMI) (see Hintz & Milan, 2012). Hintz and Milan (2012) explain that the secrecy that contributed to the financial collapse led to a broad support to “turn Iceland...into a transparency haven and a favorable environment for media and investigative journalism” (p. 327). After numerous policy updates in Iceland, the IMMI is expected to change the governance of all information published in Iceland or routed through the country via the internet (International Modern Media Institute, n.d.). Some outcomes of the policy changes will include “ultra-modern” freedom of information law and protection for internet service providers as intermediaries who make information available to the public (International Modern Media Institute, n.d.).
In relation to open government, it is important to consider that the social web technologies that are available—such as microblogging sites, wikis, social networking platforms and open source content management systems, as well as the skills required to design, use and maintain them—are part of the knowledge base that policy specialists draw from in generating policy proposals.

The manner in which Kingdon (2003) describes the coupling of problems and policy proposals (including the use of ICTs) is somewhat haphazard, and is potentially an example of technological determinism. Kingdon (2003) describes that sometimes policy proposals are “solutions [that] float around in and near government, searching for problems to which to become attached” (p. 172). In relation to open government, is important to keep in mind that the technologies a government selects for use are not necessarily the optimal ways of enacting political openness. The revolutionary “impacts” of the social web on democracy may be overstated. For example, the emergence of the federal level policy window for the development of Canada’s (2012) Open Government Action Plan did allow a federal open data portal to get positioned as the informational “vision” solution to enhance transparency (Meijer et al., 2012, p. 10). Social web tools such as Twitter and Facebook that can be leveraged for dialogue have been positioned as the solution to provide citizens with interaction opportunities or to give them a “voice” (Meijer et al., 2012, p. 10). An open data portal and use of social web tools for dialogue will however, not be sufficient to enact open government.

The third strand present in a policy window is the political stream. In my research context, this stream helps to illustrate how individual citizen designers have become involved as policy entrepreneurs. Drawing upon Kingdon (2003), the political stream of open government is comprised of the “political processes [that] affect the agenda” (p. 17). He describes how “swings of national mood, vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration” (p. 17)
and other factors can influence what makes it onto the decision-making agenda. In relation to social web usage for participation in political life, there are clear international and social web dimensions that Kingdon (2003) does not account for. Obama’s (2009) Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government demonstrates how election results and a change in administration can be linked to openness, but the ideal has been taken up more broadly than in just American politics. Kingdon’s (2003) research is based on 247 interviews with individuals involved in American policy-making and his explanation of the political stream and particularly the idea of spillover windows helps to explain how a trend gets taken up internationally or, in the context of my research, in Ontario, Canada. The international cultures of social web usage including multi-national corporations and open source communities are unaccounted for however.

To consider how open government has been taken up in Ontario, I believe it is necessary to situate the activities of citizen designers who facilitate policy participation as policy entrepreneurship. Kingdon (2003) suggests it is policy entrepreneurs who promote policy change. He states that “entrepreneurs attempt to ‘soften up’ both policy communities, which tend to be inertia-bound and resistant to major changes, and larger publics, getting them used to new ideas and building acceptance for their proposals” (p. 128).

Within the context of open government, the idea of the policy entrepreneur needs to be expanded. Kingdon (2003) defines policy entrepreneurs as individuals who “are willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favour” (p. 204). Kingdon states that policy entrepreneurs can be individuals in various roles: civil servants, journalists or academics. He describes how policy entrepreneurs undertake varied activities to build support for their ideas, and how they “write papers, give testimony, hold hearings, try to get press coverage and meet
endlessly with important and not-so-important people” (p. 205). Kingdon’s description of policy entrepreneurs aligns with many of the activities of the individuals who were interviewed for this research; however, their practices of using the social web expand upon this repertoire of strategies to include their everyday uses of the internet. I will continue this discussion as I respond to my research questions more directly.

7.2 Citizen designers as policy entrepreneurs for openness and participation

In this section, I will review the major findings from my research in relation to my research questions and interweave my additions into Kingdon’s (2003) model of the agenda setting process in policy-making. When I began this research, I was aware of Kingdon’s model. My research questions did not explicitly reference Kingdon’s ideas because I was uncertain if his model would be helpful to describe the experiences of my participants or to describe the policy-making process for the four Ontario bills I explored through this work. In reviewing my findings, the usefulness of Kingdon’s model will be highlighted along with other key ideas from STS, information studies, communication studies and policy-making literatures.

**Research Question 1:** What are the motivations, experiences and results of citizen-designers’ efforts to participate politically through the social web in ways that are adjacent to or intersect with official policy-making processes?

**Motivations**

The motivations of my research participants as citizen-designers represent a spectrum of elements expected amongst policy entrepreneurship and alternative media makers. Kingdon (2003) suggests that the motivations of policy entrepreneurs can be varied. Policy entrepreneurs may have “straightforward concern[s] about certain problems, their pursuit of…self-serving
benefits,…promotion of their policy values, and their simple pleasure in participating” (p. 204).

In my research I found a similar range of motivations, but my participants were situated somewhat differently than the professionals Kingdon suggests as possible roles for policy entrepreneurs. As discussed in Chapter 5, the participants in my research were situated as employees in a non-profit charitable organization (n=6), worked with an advocacy organization (n=2), were individuals in loose networks (n=5) or employed in consultant or contractor roles (n=2). My research participants demonstrated that there is some emergence of do-it-yourself media making in relation to policy participation in Ontario but that non-profit organizations continue to play a role.

Some participants in my research had explicit interest in informing the policy direction of government in relation to the selected bills. Participants also had somewhat different motivations for creating infrastructures or social web content that ranged from informing fellow citizens to exploring the electronic interfaces for democratic participation. The participants’ varied roles and their differing experiences point to the importance of studying people, information and technologies in social contexts as scholars such as Suchman (1987, 1991, 1995) and Kling (1978, 1984, 2007) have long called for.

The social backdrop of my research was a setting where “cheap ‘do it yourself’ media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution…” were available to my interviewees (Garcia & Lovink, 1997, para. 1). Throughout this dissertation, I have referred to my interviewees as both citizen designers and policy entrepreneurs. In chapter 1, I outlined how the citizen designer term references the ideals that underpin citizen science and citizen journalism, where lay individuals become involved in what were previously professional pursuits. In describing the motivations of my research participants, I heard echoes of tactical
media and alternative media. In the vein of tactical media traditions, some of my participants representing youth, worker and privacy-concerned communities made wide use of “the cheap ‘do it yourself’ media” as “groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture” (Garcia & Lovink, 1997, para. 1). Other participants from my project sought to make information available to newcomers, or to provide information on the inaccessible topic of the law.

Through my research, I observed to some extent interwoven and “sustained efforts for more democratic media and society” which are characteristics of alternative media (Konzolanka, Mazepa & Skinner, 2012, p. 2). In describing the activities of my participants as policy entrepreneurship and alternative media design, it is important to keep in mind that the participants from the charitable sector were limited in their advocacy activities in relation to the substantive policy domains of the bills. For example, in Chapter 4, I presented the constraints faced by registered charities in becoming involved in policy debates online. Although the Voluntary Sector Initiative’s *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* suggests that non-profit organizations can be involved in policy-making that can involve the public, there are limitations for registered charities in practice (Joint Accord Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2002). For example, a charitable organization that runs an information and referral discussion board for newcomers could not, under current tax law, begin to spend the necessary time compiling and posting a daily summary of protests and petitions that were either for or against immigration policy changes. Despite the limitations that restrict political advocacy, policy entrepreneurship for a value-oriented shift to open government is embedded in social web

47 With this example I assume that compiling and posting such a summary would be time consuming and would exceed the allowable 10% of a charitable organization’s resources being devoted to advocacy work.
design and usage that links to an array of substantive policy domains. I will explore this as I review and expand upon my answers to my other research questions.

Experiences

I began to chronicle the experience of citizen designers as policy entrepreneurs in relation to Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act (2008, 39: 1); Bill 85, The Photocard Act (2008, 39: 1); Bill 126, Road Safety Act (2009, 39:1); and Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others) (2009, 39: 1) in Chapter 4. I analyzed press coverage and Hansard records as data at this stage in the research. In relation to the substantive content of the bills, I found that differing types of policy windows were emerging. I drew on Howlett’s model (1998) of spillover windows, discretionary windows and random windows to describe what I observed.

Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act, and Bill 85, The Photocard Act, were discussed as policies developed through spillover windows. Bill 126, Road Safety Act, and Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act, were developed through discretionary policy windows. The social web usage in relation to each of these bills differed in terms of its description in the press and Hansard. In relation to adoption records, social web usage was largely described as a way for individuals involved in adoption to find biological family members. This widespread practice and the lack of privacy was closely connected to the court challenge that triggered the policy window for Bill 12. Mobilizing groups of citizens in response to a policy window was evident for Bills 12, 85 and 126. Jordan Sterling’s “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” Facebook group was most successful in garnering media attention and influencing policy change. For Bill 210, social web usage was not detected in the press coverage of the Hansard discussions of the bill.
In Chapter 5, I extended my research further to share interview results from the social web designers I was able to locate who produced infrastructures or content pertinent to the four bills. My main findings from Chapter 5 about the practices of the citizen designers are summarized in table 7.1. Citizen designers who are acting as policy entrepreneurs stay in contact with other citizens (i.e., networking via electronic communication channels), aggregate and interpret information for others, moderate discussions, attempt to engage with government officials, interact with the traditional media and co-produce content such as YouTube videos for distribution (see table 7.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.1: Practices of citizen designers as policy entrepreneurs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form networks and stay in contact with other citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate and interpret information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage government (or attempt to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with the traditional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-produce social web content for empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After completing my coding, I considered my work in relation to Kingdon (2003). At this time, I located McKenna’s (2007) article on policy bloggers as policy entrepreneurs where I found many parallels to my findings. McKenna’s (2007) research was concerned with “single-issue [political] bloggers” in the US who focused on one domestic policy topic such as transportation (p. 211). From nine interviews with policy bloggers, McKenna (2007) identified that her participants filter information, provide expertise, form networks, gain attention, frame arguments and use windows of opportunities (p. 216) (see table 7.2). I categorized the practices of the citizen designers from my project somewhat differently than McKenna’s (2007) work on
policy bloggers as policy entrepreneurs. In comparing my categories to McKenna’s (2007), I found that there are many similarities but some key differences, which are likely attributable to the wider array of social web tools with which my participants engaged. McKenna (2007) described that her political blogger participants filter information by becoming “a central hub for certain policy issues” (p. 216). Participants I interviewed spoke of similar activities but I chose the label of aggregating and interpreting information because of the extra step of making issues understandable for the broader public. Moderating discussions and designing content such as videos were also activities undertaken by my participants that McKenna does not describe. Similarly, some of my participants co-produced web content to empower individuals.

McKenna’s focus on sole bloggers rather than co-operative social web design and use accounts for the differences.

McKenna (2007) also applied two thematic codes, that bloggers framed arguments and used windows of opportunity, which were implicit in my research and did not emerge as findings (see table 7.2). For example, in terms of framing arguments, Facebook administrators in my research took stances on aspects of provincial policies and attempted to mobilize supporters for or against the policies. This was an issue that emerged from the titles of the social web posts in my research and I did not code in my transcripts. My research participants were also more diverse in their roles, and those participants involved with charities were restricted from framing arguments explicitly. In terms of using policy windows, McKenna’s main point was that political bloggers may create posts when bills are discussed. The idea that social web usage forms in response to or around the discussion of a bill was already implicit in my research design and the search process I undertook to locate interviewees.
Table 7.2: Comparison of practices of policy entrepreneurs using the social web

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form networks</td>
<td>Form networks and stay in contact with other citizens</td>
<td>Similar practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filter information</td>
<td>Aggregate and interpret information</td>
<td>Similar practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate discussions</td>
<td>Discussed in Smith (2013) only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain attention</td>
<td>Engage government (or attempt to)</td>
<td>Discussed more extensively in Smith (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interact with the traditional media</td>
<td>Similar practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-produce social web content for empowerment</td>
<td>Discussed in Smith (2013) only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame arguments</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussed in McKenna (2007) only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use windows of opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussed in McKenna (2007)</td>
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Results

The final aspect of my first research question was to explore the “results” of citizens’ use of the social web to create infrastructures for participating in Ontario policy-making. In considering the influence of the citizen designers from my project in shaping the direction of Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210, I found that success was limited. In my research, Jordan Sterling’s Facebook group for “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” stands out as a prominent and
hopeful case of successful policy entrepreneurship in its aim to change a major aspect of Bill 126, the Road Safety Act. The other 14 participants in my research, however, were not as successful in demonstrating how their social web use shaped the development of Bills 12, 85 or 210.

It is important to recall, however, that the participants’ motivations ranged from providing information to advocacy. Influencing policy change in relation to a particular bill need not be the only result of participation. The possibility of a more diverse set of results is suggested by Kingdon (2003) when he explains that policy entrepreneurs may be motivated to participate for the “promotion of their policy values, and their simple pleasure in participating” (p. 204). For this reason, I believe that the lack of a causal relation between social web usage by policy entrepreneurs and the policy directions taken with Ontario bills should not be read as a failure. From the research I completed, it is also important to highlight that the social web design activities undertaken by my participants were geared towards facilitating public participation across a spectrum of stages of the policy-making process. For example, I observed that some participants created social web infrastructures to mobilize just as bills were being considered in the Legislative Assembly. I also observed that others used social media to discuss the implications of policy after it was enacted. Regardless of the timing of the intervention, the strongest commonality amongst my research participants was their social web usage and their associated commitment to openness and participation as policy values. This brings me to review the findings from the second research question.

**Research Question 2:** Are citizens’ web based participation activities in policy-making shaping the operationalization of democratic values such as participation and openness in Ontario politics through the social web?
From the outset of this dissertation, I established that robust participation opportunities for citizens are considered to be an element of a “good” democratic society. Government-run consultations, the Fogo process for participatory filmmaking and eGovernment interfaces to facilitate discussion between government and citizens each exemplify this trend throughout Canadian history. At present, the hopeful possibilities for robust citizen participation in policy-making are intertwined with open government agendas that will make use of the social web. Kingdon (2003) discusses that policy entrepreneurs may carry out “promotion of their policy values,” but he does not discuss what such activities may entail or the contradictions of a value such as openness that may emerge for policy entrepreneurs when designing information and communication infrastructures (p. 204). My research provides extensive insights into how citizens experience and promote the policy values of openness and participation.

Against the backdrop of open government discourse there were a number of issues and challenges encountered by my interviewees. The results from Chapter 6 and the high-level information policy themes presented in table 7.3 demonstrate both the successes and challenges participants experience in relation to research question 2, concerning the operationalization of democratic values of participation and openness in Ontario politics through the social web.
Table 7.3: Issues of openness and participation as experienced by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information access</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of Information (FOI) law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copyright (and copyleft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free software usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy of expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future critique via archives</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

One of the first and most fundamental research findings to emerge from this line of inquiry was that the citizen designers I interviewed were aware of the competing and sometimes contradictory aspects of openness in a sense that is consistent with Gaillie’s (1956) idea of essentially contested concepts. The participants in my research have moved beyond the public sphere models of democracy in their everyday practices. The ambiguity and contestations of openness was part of the lived experience of citizen designers.

The citizens I interviewed realize that if they create a Facebook group to oppose a bill, it is hosted on a proprietary platform that may limit their discourse, but simultaneously it may be their best hope to mobilize a large group. The challenges of my research participants demonstrate the importance of interrogating instantiations of social values in relation to democracy and technology. My research participants were highly aware of the value trade-offs they were making as part of the design process. Scholars who are interested in values in design have explored value trade-offs in a variety of contexts (see for example Flanagan, Howe, &
Nissenbaum, 2005; Friedman et al., 2008; Johri & Nair, 2011). Research surrounding the design of infrastructures for participation in policy making via the social web needs to recognize Mouffe’s (1999) concept of “agonistic pluralisms” in democracy as called for by design scholars who grapple with user participation (Clement, McPhail, Smith, & Ferenbok, 2012; DiSalvo, 2012).

The short duration of policy windows influences the trade-offs that the policy entrepreneurs using the social web must make. Citizen designers as policy entrepreneurs must be “prepared” for a policy window “lest the opportunity pass them by” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 165). Although most of the participants spoke of using corporate platforms out of convenience and to gain access to a broader public, there was also an interest in open source software to develop infrastructures to facilitate public participation in relation to policy. The participants in this project made numerous mentions of the advantages of crowdsourcing open development through platforms such as Drupal and WordPress. Their use of open source technologies is consistent with the open government literature that calls for the use of technology to facilitate greater collaboration (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Mergel, 2011; Noveck, 2009). Pragmatically, policy entrepreneurs for openness may need to make use of a range of proprietary social media tools to work towards their goals.

Although citizens are building impressive social web based infrastructures for participation in policy-making, there are a number of challenges that my research participants experienced in relation to openness. Jordan Sterling received a negative reaction from an elected official for posting the email addresses of Members of Provincial Parliament on his Facebook page to encourage citizens to write their elected representatives. Simon Fodden experienced a challenge in gaining access to reports without filing a freedom of information request. Jonathan expressed
frustration over the unsuitable formats that government used to release information. Future open government programs need to take citizens lived experiences into account.

In the next section, I expand upon the significance of the six themes pertaining to openness and participation that I discussed in Chapter 6 and highlight in table 7.3. The six themes were information access, Freedom of Information (FOI) law, copyright (and copyleft), collaboration and transparency, free software usage, autonomy of expression and future critique via the archives. In my discussion, I outline what governments, civil society organizations and individuals might learn from the citizen designers’ challenges that were described in this research. I also draw on broader literatures and contemporary examples in my discussion. The examples I present here should be read as responses to both research question 2 and research question 3. My responses to these questions are blended because for question 2, I have outlined the experiences of participants, and with question 3, I look to socio-technical interventions, or solutions, to enhance participation. For clarity, I review research question 2 and provide research question 3.

**Research Question 2:** Are citizens’ web based participation activities in policy-making shaping the operationalization of democratic values such as participation and openness in Ontario politics through the social web?

**Research Question 3:** What socio-technical interventions might be necessary to create an infrastructure where the social web can be effectively used to facilitate the involvement of citizens in policy-making in Ontario?

- **Information access**

  Open information is an explicit commitment in Canada’s Action Plan on Open Government (2012) and it connects to citizens’ access to information. Although the commitment makes important strides such as modernizing the administration of the access to information system, no
set of government commitments can be seen as a complete enactment of open information access. Governments should expect that citizens and civil society will use the information they make available. Governments should also acknowledge that any actions that inhibit citizens’ use of information for their democratic participation diminishes the strength of open government values. An increased development of advocacy organizations committed to examining issues such as citizens experiences with government consultations, interactions with government via the social web, freedom of information/access processes and open government evaluation are areas in need of attention in the Canadian context.

• **Freedom of Information Law**

Governments should expect that citizens and civil society organizations will want information that governments do not proactively disclose. Filing a freedom of information (FOI) or access to information (ATI) request should not be a confrontational or difficult experience.

In this research, one participant linked the FOI process with open data by suggesting one could request information be provided in comma-separated value (CSV) format. The issue that citizens can have very different experiences when obtaining information through the FOI system versus an open data portal is noteworthy. Governments, civil society and citizens should consider that the practices that are established through the creation of open data portals may be expected by FOI and ATI requesters in the spirit of openness. For example, with open data, the provision of information in electronic format is the de facto standard, yet it is also while it is something that requestors often need to specify in their requests to government. As one example of this practice, the *McGilliLeaked* website in Montreal, Canada instructs residents of Quebec how to write an ATI letter and provides the wording for requestors to “respectfully request as much of this information as possible be available in electronic format” (*McGilliLeaked*, n.d.).
In addition to information in electronic format, the curating or tidying up of data that is released through open data portals may also be desirable to FOI / ATI requesters. Janssen, Charalabidis and Zuiderwijk (2012) establish that it is a myth that open data involves simply publishing the data and outline that governments often need to take steps to modify data to make it usable. At present, similar efforts to ensure that information is useful to the user is not typical for FOI or ATI data.

- Copyright (and copyleft)

Citizens and non-profit organizations expressed a range of views on copyright in this research. Some citizens are making use of Creative Commons licences and other measures to share the content they produce on the social web. Governments need to create licences that allow citizens and civil society organizations to mashup government information so that they feel free to pursue their projects. Citizen designers in my research expressed a range of views, including feeling unsure about what they could use in their social web production and frustration with the restrictiveness of government licences when using major information sources such as the Hansard. In the Canadian context, the Action Plan on Open Government (2012) and the commitment to create a universal Open Government Licence provide a good first step at the federal level. Other levels of government and civil society organizations need to create a similar licence to facilitate participation. Simultaneously, the government needs to ensure that fair dealing or fair use provisions are available under copyright law so that citizens can make use of materials for purposes such as parody, satire, criticism, review or reporting.
• **Collaboration and transparency**

For participants in my project, making use of open source software platforms was motivated by the benefits achieved from crowdsourcing development amongst a community of coders. The fact that the code was transparent, in that it could be accessed and tweaked, was also referenced as a benefit. My participants’ positive experiences of collaboration may be relevant to governments or civil society organizations that are planning to involve or engage the public. Collaboration is an approach governments and civil society may look to.

Noveck (2009) identifies that collaborative approaches to democracy were less prevalent than deliberative democracy in guiding early eGovernment visions. With early eGovernment, there were many pilots of interfaces for discussion. Noveck explains that one of the weaknesses of deliberative democracy is that it “assumes[s] that people are generally powerless and incapable of doing more than talking with neighbours to develop opinions or criticizing government” (p. 37). Noveck continues to state that “in a Web 2.0 world ordinary people can collaborate with one another to do extraordinary things” (p. 37). As a scholar-practitioner, Noveck is well known for crowdsourcing the patent research process and creating the Peer to Patent (http://peertopatent.org/) system where lay citizens with expertise can contribute their knowledge. The kinds of social web projects that my participants launched indicate that citizens want to discuss issues as well as code them, express their views, produce videos and take part in other collaborative activities with their governments.

• **Free software usage**

The value of free software to non-profit organizations and individuals was a minor discussion theme to emerge in my research. As discussed in Chapter 6, avoiding licence fees by choosing
open source was an obvious choice for citizens and civil society organizations involved in designing infrastructures for participation. In my opinion, my interviewees did not dwell on discussing the benefits of free software because the positive aspects for budget conscious individuals or organizations seemed obvious. Governments, civil society organizations or individuals that are not using free software such as Drupal or WordPress may wish to rethink their decision. It is also notable that in the Canadian context, there is at least one organization devoted to trying to increase the use of open source software in government. “GOSLING (Getting Open Source Logic Into Governments) is a voluntary, informal learning and knowledge-sharing community of practice, involving civil servants and other citizens who actively assist the engagement of free/libre open source methods and software solutions in government operations” (GOSLING, n.d.).

- **Autonomy of expression**

  Citizen designers involved in this research were “in the know” about the types of limitations that various social web infrastructures and other systems could put on the autonomy of their expression and political voices. For example, in Chapter 6, I discussed the example that Facebook had constrained discourses around women and breastfeeding by taking down photos of women breastfeeding their babies (Blight et al., 2012). The action of inhibiting citizens’ abilities to express themselves can emerge through both social and technical practices. As a social practice, citizens’ expressions can be limited when they encounter resistance or slow service upon requesting information from a government whose sources they wish to use as part of their social web production activities. As a technical example, the character limit for tweets on Twitter serves to limit discourse in a particular way. Governments, civil society organizations
and citizens need to continue to monitor where citizens experience limitations in their attempts to express themselves politically.

When citizens feel limited in their expressions,\(^48\) it can be expected that autonomous media forms (or partially autonomous media) will take root. In completing my research, I observed that citizens are readily mobilizing via the social web when they feel their voices are not being heard by policy-makers through more traditional means. Mobilization and communications to express dissent connect to the alternative media traditions described in chapter 1 (Boler, 2008; Kidd, 2003; Kozolanka et al., 2012), but also autonomous media. Uzelman (2005) describes autonomous media activists as individuals who are enmeshed in many social causes and are “those who seek to bypass mainstream media by fostering new forms of participatory and democratic communication” (p. 17). Uzelman (2005) characterizes mainstream media as “privileging unidirectional communicative relationships,” but remains skeptical about the internet’s capacity to allow citizens to create content due to the strong corporate influences on the web (p. 20).

Through my research, I have come to see that the social web can sometimes be positioned as autonomous media relative to government. While Uzelman (2005) argues that an important characteristic of autonomous media is that they are “relatively independent from corporate and government power” (p. 23), this form of media are also “channels through which dissident perspectives can flow” and they “often seek to foster new, more democratic and participatory ways of communicating” (p. 23). During my research I observed that, when citizens are

\(^{48}\)Citizens may feel limited for various reasons. As one example, they may have been limited to a 15-minute deputation slot in a legislature public hearing. They may also have been unable to participate in an online consultation because it contained no questions that allowed them to express their concerns.
dissenting against particular policies, sometimes corporately owned and more “open” social web infrastructures may still facilitate enough distance from government power. For example, three of my research participants created Facebook groups to oppose their dissatisfaction with various Ontario bills. Ultimately my research suggests that in order to facilitate effective citizen participation in policy-making, we need opportunities that allow for autonomy of expression, which may include autonomous media.

In addition to my research cases, the activities of Anonymous, a loose collective of hacktivists, are helpful to demonstrate how the corporate social web can be helpful for autonomous expression in a hybrid strategy that uses both corporate social web infrastructures and autonomous media. Anonymous often uses YouTube videos to publicize operations (ops) related to amplifying citizens’ voices to support freedom of expression and citizen participation. Operation Tunisia used Twitter (#OpTunisia) against censorship and oppression and aimed to support the uprisings in Tunisia that initiated the Arab Spring (Anonymousworldwar3, 2011). While the corporate social web is a part of Anonymous’ communications, many of the strategies and tactics are said to have emerged on the 4chan.org, an image-based discussion board which is autonomous in many ways.49

In the Canadian context in 2013, Anonymous used YouTube to announce support for the #IdleNoMore movement that was launched by Indigenous Canadians (AnonymousNewsCanada,

49 The ownership of 4chan.org is not described on the website’s about page. The site, however, is an .org not .com initiative. Because the website contains adult content and has been used by Anonymous hacktivists to organize pranks and projects, I consider it to be autonomous and distinct from corporately controlled social web sites. See the Wikipedia entry for further contextual information on 4chan at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4chan
In brief, #IdleNoMore was initiated as a conversation on Twitter by Jessica Gordon who was concerned along with Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdams and Nina Wilsonfeld about the federal omnibus Bill C-45 (CBC News, 2013). Bill C-45, titled “A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament …,” was over 400 pages in length and was perceived to open the door to environmental degradation and the erosion of treaty rights (Canada, 2013, n.d.-b; Gordon, 2013). #IdleNoMore began in December 2012 before the bill received royal assent and included events where individuals stood up against the bill through creative resistance strategies such as round dances held in shopping malls and blockades of major roadways across the country.

The prevalence of Anonymous operations that support broader social justice movements, which are publicized on YouTube and circulated via Twitter, demonstrates how embedded the corporate social web is in what might still be considered autonomous expression but not autonomous media infrastructures.

- Future critique via archives

The importance of saving and archiving the records of political participation that happens online via the social web was discussed by my research participants. Participants noted the measures they took to back up their infrastructures but also noted the shortcomings of this process when they used social web platforms on which they did not control their data. The theme of the importance of archiving connects back to the exemplary traditions of citizen

50 The cited Anonymous video stating support for First Nations and the Indigenous-led #IdleNoMore movement also includes a statement against enhanced driver’s licences as a means of tracking citizens. This video’s content is also in opposition to Bill 85, but it was published much after the bill passed and was not one of the social web infrastructures I located to include in my sample.

51 The social web was used extensively to organize and share photos and videos from such mobilization events. Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat First Nation was also on a hunger strike when many round dances took place, but I do not describe her connection to #IdleNoMore in this work.
participation in Canada. In the Canadian context, there is a strong tradition of the archiving of government-run consultations so that the evidence used by the government in reaching important decisions remains available. For example, Library and Archives Canada maintains a database with materials from over 200 royal commissions. The database includes “7000 items…that includes commission reports, briefs, submissions, evidence, working papers and other documents” (Library and Archives Canada, n.d.).

How social web based participation in policy-making will be archived so that future generations of citizens have an audit trail to understand public opinion and the decision-making processes remains to be seen. As one example of the complexity of this task, let us consider Twitter data. Currently, the Library of Congress in the United States has acquired all tweets from the microblogging service Twitter that were published publicly since the company formed in 2006 up until 2010. The 2006–2010 data set consists of 21 billion tweets or 2.3 terabytes of data, and the library will also acquire and archive all future tweets moving forward (Library of Congress, 2013; Raymond, 2010). The Library of Congress described the importance of the collection as follows:

Twitter is a new kind of collection for the Library of Congress, but an important one to its mission of serving both Congress and the public. As society turns to social media as a primary method of communication and creative expression, social media is supplementing and in some cases supplanting letters, journals, serial publications and other sources routinely collected by research libraries.

Archiving and preserving outlets such as Twitter will enable future researchers access to a fuller picture of today’s cultural norms, dialogue, trends and events to inform scholarship, the legislative process, new works of authorship, education and other purposes. (Library of Congress, 2013)

52 The database for federal royal commissions is located at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/indexcommissions/index-e.html and was last accessed January 25, 2013.
The rationale for undertaking the substantial work of archiving the data is that social web content is culturally significant. One of the examples they provide is President Obama’s tweet after winning the 2008 presidential election (Raymond, 2010).

The motivations behind archiving all publicly available Twitter data by the Library of Congress is not limited to the US context or participation in US politics. Library and Archives Canada is currently examining a “pan-Canadian and whole of society approach” for access to documentary heritage (Library and Archives Canada, 2012, p. 9). I briefly touched upon the importance of this approach in Chapter 1 in relation to OpenMedia.ca’s campaign against usage-based billing in Canada. Charney (2011), a Library and Archives Canada employee presented a case study on the possible acquisition steps necessary to capture the usage-based billing protests.

Having shared the experiences of my research participants, it now becomes apparent how the record of public participation in policy-making in Canada could be lost if steps are not taken to archive both mass mobilizations and everyday political participation via the social web.

Archiving public participation in policy-making in Canada is a worthy pursuit that requires attention to developing a strategy for data collection. In planning what to collect, it is inevitable that some information and records of citizen participation will also be lost or forgotten. In arguing that a collections strategy in necessary, I do not presume that all political web activity could or should be gathered. From tactical media practitioners Garcia and Lovink (1997) we know the importance of media can be “…provisional. What counts are the temporary connections you are able to make” (para. 11). I fully expect that some forms of social web based policy participation will be fleeting and impermanent.
Synthesis

Conducting interviews for my dissertation and considering citizens’ challenges with openness, established for me that citizen participation in policy-making should not be conceptualized as an “exceptional” activity. Citizen participation in policy-making sometimes takes the form of mass mobilizations that are easy to recognize as large, loud or otherwise noteworthy. Citizen participation in policy-making also occurs through everyday internet use and can remain largely unnoticed. The culture of everyday political internet use needs to be taken up in conceptualizing the way forward. My response to my third research question also involves discussing the characteristics of socio-technical interventions.

The development of socio-technical interventions to facilitate more effective citizen participation in policy-making is complicated and requires the cooperation of various professionals and citizens who rely on an array of disciplinary traditions and knowledge bases. Within my dissertation, some of the diverse literatures that have provided inspiration for interventions include thinkers about democracy and politics (Habermas, 1989; Latour & Weibel, 2005; Mouffe, 1999; Noveck, 2009), individuals who provide insights about policy-making processes (Kingdon, 2003; Phillips & Orsini, 2002) and activists and alternative media scholars (Adbusters, 2011; Boler, 2008; Kozolanka et al., 2012; Uzelman, 2005). My participants who were involved with the design and use of social web infrastructures were of course also major contributors to my thinking.

In considering the roles of my participants, I have reflected on the concern of Meijer, Curtin and Hillebrandt (2012) that the “‘techies’ are taking the lead” of open government (p. 11). The participants in my research might be characterized as “techies” and this could privilege the epistemological foundations of engineering or science in my response to my third research
question. I believe, however, that my research process and the experiences of my participants broadened my inquiry to move beyond just the technical aspects of open government. In Chapter 5, I described how all of the participants in this research were involved in the design of social web infrastructures for citizen participation. I outlined the differences amongst the participants in terms of their roles as infrastructure designers versus infrastructure users of the social web. I also drew upon Star (1999) to problematize drawing firm boundaries between designers and users. My research approach in this project is very much reflective of the current shifts taking place in the research fields that concern people, information and technologies.

Sellen (2008) argues that “the field of HCI [human computer interaction] needs to take into account the broader context within which human values are expressed” (p. 64). The fact that the “social” context of technologies is important is much older than Sellen’s (2008) piece, of course. Given the importance of values and social context for open government, I next outline how I see Kingdon’s (2003) model of the policy window operating in this domain. For the citizen designers who were involved in creating social web content related to Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210, the issue of openness can be conceptualized as an extra, or unintended, aspect of the bills discussed in the Legislative Assembly. Figure 7.1 shows the model of the policy window presented in Chapter 2 but with the addition of elements of openness that cause it to expand. Major integrative learnings concerning openness, participation and social web usage in relation to the policy windows for Bills 12, 85, 126 and 210 will be described next.
Bill 12: The social context of information

Bill 12, Access to Adoption Records Act, is a case where the importance of the social context of information emerged. Recall that Bill 12 was the case where a disclosure veto option needed to be added to open adoption records in order to respond to the Charter challenge raised in the Ontario Superior Court against a 2007 Ontario open adoption records bill. Individuals who were involved in adoption and wanted to maintain their privacy were concerned about the lack of protection for their personal information when the Ontario government opened adoption records. Compounding the privacy concerns of individuals was the trend of birth families and adoptees making use of social networking sites to post information obtained from opened adoption registries to track down biological family members.

If we consider the metaphor illustrated in figure 7.1 in relation to Bill 12, the ongoing controversies over openness, while respecting privacy rights, were at stake. Within the policy
deliberations, it was clear some individuals wished to protect their privacy and this needed to be accommodated within the legislation. My research also outlined that individuals who were searching for birth relatives were frustrated by the slow pace of the bureaucracy to provide information. Once individuals obtained the desired information, they were able to use the social web to seek out biological relatives and to make the information useful in their own lives. A slow bureaucracy in relation to open adoption records, freedom of information requests or other forms of information release are and will continue to be problematic for citizens. As governments attempt to become more open, they will need to negotiate whose needs are being met as they decide to release various types of information and data.

Bill 85: Citizens’ social web usage is part of a broader media ecology for participation

The metaphor of a policy window that is opening up more widely functions somewhat differently for social web infrastructures in relation to Bill 85, The Photocard Act. In relation to Bill 85, it was significant that some level of protest in civil society was emerging in Canada surrounding identification issues and that a media ecology approach helped to promote openness. As a participant in the IDforum website in relation to this bill, I believe that the fact that citizens took on the responsibility for posting documents from the committee hearings (deputant statements) and released documents obtained through FOI (not released on the Ontario government website) demonstrates citizens’ contributions to enacting openness.

In chapter 4, I introduced McLuhan’s (1977) definition of media ecology which involves “buttress[ing] one medium with another” (p. 271). McLuhan also stated that “you can do some things on some media that you cannot do on others” (p. 271). The participation activities undertaken in relation to social web infrastructures developed for Bill 85 point to usage of a broad media ecology for participation in policy-making that includes government, civil society
and citizen actors. Although the campaign to oppose enhanced drivers licences was not fully successful, I gained exposure to the aspects of a campaign that utilized the broadest possible media ecology. Finding ways to bring the privacy concerns surrounding enhanced drivers licences to make it into the major news outlets, using an array of social web infrastructures, holding in-person public education events and developing a platform for information provision and a petition were key attributes of opposing the policy direction the Ontario government was taking. Additionally, in the case of Bill 85, I was able to see how policy entrepreneurs may need to use freedom of information to gain the information necessary to participate in policy debates. Governments, civil society organizations and others should expect that citizens will need a broad toolkit to advocate for openness and participation. Openness can only be enacted from multiple directions, activities and perspectives.

Bill 126: Openness and participation can overtake the agenda

Bill 126, Road Safety Act, is perhaps the easiest bill to describe in relation to figure 7.1. Jordan Sterling’s “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” Facebook group demonstrates that calls for greater participation can expand the issue, but they can also take over or usurp the policy issue on the government’s agenda. Jordan’s Facebook group grew to be so large that the group itself was of political interest. The way his Facebook group grabbed the focus in the press and forced politicians to respond to issues of participation and openness in policy-making appears to be a rarity.

In describing Jordan’s rise to prominence in the policy-making process, it is important to note that it was unexpected. His Facebook group was launched into prominence practically overnight. This type of success in having a say in a government’s policy-making process may be possible, but it’s unlikely to be successful for very many policy entrepreneurs. Since the success
of Jordan’s Facebook group and associated activities such as emails to MPPs in halting the proposed passenger restrictions, there has not been a similarly strong Facebook group to emerge in the Ontario political context with a lay citizen designer as its administrator. Individuals or organizations that are looking to locate the next policy entrepreneur for openness or participation may need to stay abreast of novel social web based organizations and collaboration strategies. Open government will need to be responsive to emerging infrastructures over time.

Bill 210: Broadening participation

Bill 210, Employment for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregiver and Others), demonstrated a different aspect of the meaning of a broadening policy window. In relation to figure 7.1, Bill 210 demonstrates that inequalities persist in society and that there are individuals who require policies and programs to address their vulnerabilities. Much of the social web usage that was described surrounding Bill 210 discussed the problematic aspects of nanny abuse and exploitation. It is important to recall, however, that Rachel also described the possibility of using videos to empower individuals to tell their stories and to challenge the system. This is a more hopeful possibility where the social web can be used as a form of alternative media that aspires towards a better democracy.

Although metaphors are seldom perfect to explain things, I find that figure 7.1 and the idea of an expanding policy window to include advocacy for greater openness and participation is successful in describing many social web usage cases. At present, I have observed that social web design and the use of the social web by citizens are recurring elements within the policy-making process. For most bills discussed in Canada and Ontario, I would expect to see some
level of social web activity used to discuss, debate or inform the public about the issue. In this manner, the social web as a tool for expression, dialogue and openness becomes embedded within other policy development processes on a regular basis, across a wide array of policy domains. In the future, I expect that a spillover policy window might emerge as the calls for increased openness and participation persist, or after a focusing event occurs. I also expect that citizen designers will continue to act individually and perhaps also collaboratively to call for increased political openness.

7.3 Contributions and limitations of citizen designer research

In this section, I highlight the contributions and limitations of my work in relation to the citizen designer concept. In chapter 1, I introduced a basic definition of citizen designers from Heller (2003) who calls for designers to demonstrate “responsibility to oneself and society” (p. xi). I also drew upon STS, PD and CSCW to argue that lay citizens can be brought into design. Like the terms citizen journalist and citizen scientist suggest, expertise need not be siloed amongst professionals. Design (including use) of social web content or infrastructures is an activity that a wide array of citizens can become engaged in to participate in policy-making. Conducting research on and with citizen designers leads to me to empirical and theoretical as well as methodological contributions.

Empirical and theoretical contributions

In chapter 1, I introduced some of the evidence from Samara that Canadians are dissatisfied with their democracy. Similarly, Bennett (2008) states that, “a casual look at world democracies suggests that many of the most established one are showing signs of wear” (p. 1). Studying

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53 Some bills such as Private Bills in Ontario may not trigger any citizen participation online as they may only affect particular individuals or companies. Private Bills are not generally of public interest.
citizen designers forces a shift away from the paradigms of civic engagement which focus on the failures of citizens to vote or join political parties to become engaged in democracy. Focusing on the design practices of citizens in relation to Ontario bills has allowed me to gain access to what citizens are doing proactively to engage. My research process explored contexts for political participation such as barcamps that are not typically considered as political. Bennett (2008) describes research that emphasizes participation that is occurring as utilizing an engaged citizen paradigm. Utilizing an engaged citizen paradigm allowed me to gain insights into the content/infrastructure issue, the democratic models at play in the everyday lives of citizens, and insights concerning the varied roles of citizen designers.

In selecting my research site, I veered away from the studies of fandom and popular culture that sometimes characterize the research by Jenkins and colleagues (i.e., Jenkins, 2006, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2006) under the banner of participatory culture. I explicitly chose to study social web production that connected to bills discussed in the Ontario legislature with hopes of seeing connections to policy-making processes. Drawing on the infrastructure studies literature (Star, 1999; Star & Ruhleder, 1996), I found that there is a disconnect between the infrastructures that are installed for citizen participation in policy-making (i.e., petitions, committee hearings, regulation commenting) in Ontario and social web usage.

Through review of the social web sites and interviews, I attempted to find connections between the government-run infrastructures for participation and the citizen ones. In this manner, infrastructure was conceptualized as socio-technical. My empirical research demonstrates that citizens design both content and infrastructure to support open participation in

54 Bennett (2008) focuses on comparing the disengaged and engaged youth paradigms for citizenship.
Ontario policy. Choices about what to build or use can be tactical in terms of value-orientation, or reflect a pressing time constraint of the policy-making process. Citizen designers who create social web artefacts such as Jordan Sterling’s “Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws” Facebook groups must also do bridging work, such as media interviews, to gain presence in the government-run infrastructures for citizen participation in policy-making.

Examining the practices and lived experiences of citizen designers who engage with the social web is an understudied area. My research makes a contribution to describing the models of democracy that are enacted through the everyday activities of citizen designers. Thus far, the Habermesian public sphere model of the internet has dominated conceptions of eGovernment. Building upon other research that pushes against the limitations of the public sphere and deliberative models of democracy (Loader & Mercea, 2011; Mouffe, 1999; Noveck, 2009; Ratto & Boler, In press), my research demonstrates that citizens’ design practices need to be taken into account when defining and instantiating open government. Citizen designers exemplify the case of engaged individuals who do more than just deliberate.

The findings that I have reported on in this dissertation points to the need for more research that explores the cultures of making and designing, particularly in relation to the politics of everyday life (Ratto, 2011b; Ratto & Boler, In press; Smith et al., 2011). Within my work, I discovered that the roles of citizen designers are not without constraints. I discovered that citizens sometimes design to facilitate participation from roles in charitable non-profits where their political advocacy activities are restricted. Citizen designers also encounter restrictions that corporate owners of social web platforms place on site users, through regulation of design limitations. Citizens’ involvement in co-constructing open government facilitates a variety of
entry points, including points from which citizens as workers or consumers are restricted in their activities.

Methodological contributions

To conduct this research on citizen designers, I needed to innovate methodologically. To inform my research approach, I used three traditions in actor-network theory (ANT): ethnographic description, creative work and politically engaged scholarship. The descriptive component of my research approach was inspired by scholars who engage ethnographically with developers and technical experts for extended periods of time (see for example E. G. Coleman, 2012; Ratto, 2005; Suchman, 1987) but also the extension of ethnography to study end-users (Clement et al., 2004; Ito et al., 2009; Miller & Slater, 2000). The politically engaged component of my work involved articulating positions and conducting organizing tasks related to greater Toronto and Hamilton transportation issues, the federal government’s 2010 Digital Economy Strategy consultation and Bill 85: The Photocard Act in Ontario. The creative or designerly component of my work involved using the social web to engage politically as well as to report back some of my research findings.

The methodological contribution with this dissertation was to find ways to participate and contribute to the open government community culture through volunteer tasks and presentations while simultaneously researching it. As part of my project, I developed protocols to produce data that could be shared back with the barcamp community. For example, the interviews I conducted used screen capture software (when possible) so that I could produce video clips, place them under Creative Commons Licenses and share them to disseminate my work. The need to conduct some interview remotely and software failure, prevented me from fully
executing this plan and produce clips for all of my interviewees. Three video clips were produced and shared at the early analysis stage at GovCamp 2011 in Toronto.

Scholars who are engaging in similar work in the future may wish to continue to iterate upon my protocols and methods to prioritize openness. Interviewees with an interest in participation and openness may respond best to a researcher who strives to conduct their work governed by a similar value set. Operationalizing the value of openness was a challenge I faced in preparing in disseminating my work. My interest in open political participation and the media also contributes to the theoretical issues at stake in this work.

Limitations

In describing the contributions of my research, it is important to also acknowledge its limitations of sample size, duration, and the ongoing tension of valuing design knowledge. My research involved only a small number of interview participants (n=15) and hence the sample size is too small to be considered generalizable in a statistical sense. The finding that citizens design and use the social web to attempt to enact greater openness in policy-making may however, resonate in a wide array of other countries or contexts where there is resistance or discomfort with the social web by politicians or by government departments.

The duration of my research is another limitation. Research that draws upon Kingdon’s (2003) concept of the policy window for agenda settings has often taken place over long periods. My research draws upon the history of eGovernment programs to provide the background context for citizens acting as citizen designers and policy entrepreneurs through the social web. Although this research draws upon history, it was conducted over a relatively short time period. Pralle (2006) cautions that “policy processes unfold over decades or more, therefore, to understand patterns of agenda and policy change we must use long time frames for our analyses” (p. 1000).
The research reported in this dissertation is limited in that it provides background history within a snapshot of recent events concerning government openness and opportunities for robust citizen participation in policy-making. In the future, I would like to continue to carry out research on social web usage on social web usage in relation to the bills discussed in this dissertation as well as the value of political openness. Continuing the research is expected to provide further nuanced insights.

A final limitation, or ongoing tension that emerges from my research is the role of design in knowledge production. As discussed by Cross (1999, 2006) there are designerly ways of knowing. Because my research drew upon the design knowledge of citizens through interviews, it may be critiqued for its lack of objectivity and scientific rationality. I believe that the culture of devaluing knowledge obtained through design in social science disciplines as well as policy-making needs to continue to be challenged. In this dissertation, I used research methods that were largely based in social science but I respected the knowledge my participants gained through their own design projects. Although I have presented my use of design knowledge as a potential limitation of my work, it is also where the strength lies.

Directions for future work

There remains much research to be conducted in the areas of citizen participation in policy-making in Canada within the context of open government. In the upcoming years, it is expected that the existence of the Open Government Partnership and national action plans will make it easier to conduct comparative analyses. Open government is also expected to be enacted in an increasing number of Canadian provinces, territories and municipalities. The values that underpin the various open government action plans are similar, but they can be interpreted and
operationalized in a multitude of ways across different contexts. Future work should engage with varied stakeholders in diverse locations.

In the Ontario context and more broadly, I foresee that the following issues will prove important factors in the development of future research in this area:

1) **New leadership and the next provincial election**

Most of the participation and open government programs in Ontario that were referenced in this dissertation occurred under the leadership of Premier McGuinty. McGuinty served as Premier for nine years and the Liberal Party of Ontario elected Kathleen Wynne as its new leader in January 2013. The next general election in the province is expected to be held in the fall of 2015. Both the election of a new Liberal leader and the general election could lead to the development of a more explicit open government agenda for the Province of Ontario. The policy directions the province takes may inform future research questions.

2) **Competitiveness: International, federal, provincial and municipal comparisons**

In the Canadian context, “keeping up” with the leaders in open government will likely emerge as a political imperative. Open data portals were pioneered in Canada by municipal governments, with the federal government following suit (European Public Sector Information Platform, 2010). It is expected that Ontario will feel pressure from its citizens to enact open government legislation because of the other levels of government that are developing programs. International pressure is also expected as Canadians and Ontarians continue to have easy access to online materials produced by other nations and governments and expectations escalate.

3) **Open data as the priority?**
At present, the provision of open data aligns with policy goals to fuel economic development. It is widely believed that economic entrepreneurs can make use of open data to drive economic innovation. Explicit attention may need to be paid by researchers to question if the “democratic” aspects of open government such as dialogue opportunities and the provision of information receive sufficient government resources to flourish.

4) Citizen-centric research

In this dissertation I have demonstrated a citizen-centric approach for studying open government. I hope that future research in this area will prioritize citizens’ experiences as integral to the process of understanding participation and openness in political life. The interviewees in this project identified a number of shortcomings in their experiences of open political participation in Ontario. Providing usable file formats, allowing citizens to reproduce government officials’ contact information and increasing citizens’ access to information that is meaningful for their democratic participation were each identified as areas for potential improvement.

5) Collaborative design practice

Many open government projects involve the implementation of software or new technologies to align with policy goals. Future research contributions in this area are expected to include the involvement of researchers in designing technologies to be deployed either inside or outside of government, through collaboration with citizens, civil society and public service stakeholders. In designing new systems, the current practices of end-users, including citizens, should be brought to bear to the design process so that open government is a collaborative co-construction.
7.4 Final thoughts

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to make clear my belief that meaningful citizen participation in policy-making can be augmented with the use of information communication technologies but that it is possible even without their use. Historically in Canada, citizen participation in policy-making has been attempted with the radio, film and the internet. The use of the social web to try to instantiate meaningful citizen involvement is part of a much longer tradition, which we must remember and acknowledge as new programs and practices are developed.

In the future, we may see citizen dialogue and participation opportunities grouped with other kinds of initiatives. It remains important to continue to critically question the quality of participation that is achieved with these various iterations of participation. Often, opportunities for robust citizen participation are more difficult to implement than other policy objectives they are grouped with. Opportunities for participation can be weakened when sufficient resources are not allocated to process, facilitate, respond to and archive citizen contributions to policy conversations. Citizen participation programs may also over-emphasize particular modes of participation (i.e., deliberation, or application building) that may not be of interest to the broad public. As social web based policy participation becomes the norm, government staff will require an increasingly broad set of skills to interact with and engage the public. Governments also need to look beyond the traditional participants in policy-making when they are engaging the public to ensure that they include dissenting and disenfranchised voices. Building open government requires incorporating the insights and perspectives of individuals who contest its implementation.
## Appendices

### Appendix A: List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANT</td>
<td>Actor-network theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>API</td>
<td>Application programming interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATI</td>
<td>Access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4C</td>
<td>Challenge for Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>Canadian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Creative Commons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCW</td>
<td>Computer supported cooperative work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIY</td>
<td>Do-it-yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDL</td>
<td>Enhanced driver’s license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>Enhanced identification card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOI</td>
<td>Freedom of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOL</td>
<td>Government on-line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCI</td>
<td>Human-computer interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information communication technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMC</td>
<td>Independent media center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPP</td>
<td>Member of Provincial Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFRF</td>
<td>National Farm Radio Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OGP</td>
<td>Open Government Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPS</td>
<td>Ontario public service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWS</td>
<td>Occupy Wall Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Participatory design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFID</td>
<td>Radio frequency identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSS</td>
<td>Really simple syndication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOT</td>
<td>Social construction of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSK</td>
<td>Sociology of scientific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUFA</td>
<td>Social Union Framework Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHTI</td>
<td>Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Glossary of terms

Blog
A blog is a web log. It is a website where posts are organized, typically in reverse chronological order.

Drupal
As defined on its own website “Drupal is open source software maintained and developed by a community of 630,000+ users and developers. It's distributed under the terms of the GNU General Public License (or "GPL"), which means anyone is free to download it and share it with others.”\(^5\)

Facebook
Facebook is a social networking site where users create profiles and link to their friends. Facebook allows users to perform numerous tasks including forming groups of topical interest, to message other users, and to share photographs.

Social Networking Sites
Social networking sites are social web services where users connect to others. Connections may include acquaintances, or those who share one’s interests. Social networking sites typically allow a user to share content with others in their network.

Twitter
Twitter is a microblogging website and social network. End-users can create profiles and send short messages of 140 characters or less, known as tweets.

YouTube
YouTube is a video sharing website and social networking site.

Wiki
A wiki is a website where end-users can revise the content and add or delete pages.

WordPress
WordPress is an open source content management system. It is widely used for blogging and to house websites.

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\(^5\) See [http://drupal.org/about](http://drupal.org/about). This definition was collected from the site on 08 Dec 2012.
## Appendix C: Events attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metronauts barcamp, Toronto</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metronauts barcamp, Hamilton</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web 2.0 Summit, City of Toronto</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChangeCamp, Toronto</td>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://changecamp.ca/">http://changecamp.ca/</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GovCamp, Toronto</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Net Townhall</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showcase, Toronto</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIREDCamp, Toronto</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>Adhoc session facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpenTO</td>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Volunteer facilitator to discuss datasets that were released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GovCamp</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Developers Townhall</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media for Social Causes</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Seminar, York</td>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>Attendee / Presenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GovCamp, Toronto</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Presenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GovLoop Webinar</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Clement Talk</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
<td>Attendee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Data Day</td>
<td>February 2013</td>
<td>Presenter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Semi-structured interview questions

Introduction

- Please tell me, how did you become involved in the policy participation processes?
- Can you tell me the story of [x] initiative in Ontario?
  - How did you get involved?
  - What was your role?
- How do citizens participate in policy in Ontario? [Prompts]
  - Online
  - Offline
- Who are the stakeholders in policy participation, what can you tell me about them?

Designer/content creator specific questions:

- Can you take me on a tour of the policy participation technology you have been involved in?
- Is it okay if we turn on screen recording software (webcam, screen capture and audio)
- What is your project as it relates to participation?
- What were the challenges in creating your application/content?
- What was easy about your project?
- Can you tell me about [something on the screen]?
- If we click [something on the screen] what happens?
- Were there any points where there was sustained interest or feedback on your initiative?
- Have people ‘joined’ or offered support in any ways?
  - Other citizens?
  - Government officials?
  - Others?
- Did your project get any press or outside attention?
• What do you like best about your initiative? What does it contribute?
• You participated in [X] event in relation to your initiative, can you tell me about it.
• Have you thought about your project and citizenship? How do they relate?
• Ok, now participation in policy issues is something that can happen inside government (such as through a government hosted meeting) or outside government (such as through citizen created Facebook group). Do you have any thoughts on this inside/outside distinction? How would you situate your own work? Are there linkages between the inside (government) and outside (society)
• Your project uses a commercial or privately developed platform [or insert appropriate description]. Does it matter who develops and owns the platform for participation? Please explain.

Technology background questions
• Can you tell me a little bit about your background in technology?
• What are your skills and challenges?
• What kinds of web technologies do you use on a regular basis? (Email, blogs, twitter, internal government technologies, Facebook, etc.)
• Can you program or code?

Demographics questions
• [Observe gender]
• What is your age?
• What was your main activity over the last year [Prompt if needed]
• What is your highest level of education?
• What language do you speak in at home?
• What are your ethnic or cultural origins?
Reflective questions

• There are some tensions inherent in citizen participation in policy? I.e. citizens might take over some of the roles of elected officials. How are some of these tensions handled?

• What is the problem that citizen participation in policy tries to solve?

• What are the political trends which contribute or encourage this? (Federal Canadian, provincial, Obama in the US?)

• Are there any particular policies that inhibit or promote policy participation?

• Are there any particular people who are key to policy participation or citizen engagement in Ontario. Who are they, what did they do?

• Participation is sometimes conceptualized as something which is either top-down or bottom-up (grassroots).
  - What is top-down about citizen participation in policy?
  - What is bottom up about citizen participation in policy?

Wrap-up questions

• Thanks for answering these questions, this interview was intended to cover information on issues related technology and political engagement or participation. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

• Do you have any questions for me?

• Would you be willing to provide an email or phone number for any further follow up I may do?

• Is there anyone else that you would recommend that I speak to on these topics?
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