Social Media, Red Squares, and Other Tactics: The 2012 Québec Student Protests

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

Recent social uprisings worldwide have evidenced people’s desire for social change. From the Arab Spring, to the Occupy Movement, to the protests in Brazil, Israel, and Greece, resistances worldwide cannot and should not be ignored. Although the Québec student strike of 2012 began as the students’ measured response to a proposed university tuition fee increase by the provincial government, what resulted instead was a social movement that stood against neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice, the criminalization of protest, and the corporatization of the university.

The thesis documents this successful youth-led struggle against their provincial government during what is now referred to as “Maple Spring.” Utilizing free-format semi-structured interviews, textual analysis, and rich media archives, this study allows for a better understanding of the Québec student strike, and the tactics used by the students during the strike, including their use of social media. The thesis draws from political economic theory, and posits that social media lends itself as a political tactic due to the structural foundations of social media (ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital). The research explores techno-optimist versus techno-pessimist arguments regarding social media's abilities for
emancipation and social justice. It also addresses the students' use of social media in their roles as citizen journalists.

This thesis provides empirical evidence of the Québec students’ tactical use of social media. Although it was but one of many tactics utilized by the students, the impact of social media was clearly displayed throughout the strike. For one, social media enabled the students and supporters to organize and demonstrate in the streets of Montreal for over 100 nights in a row. Similarly, organizing approximately 300,000 students to protest in the streets of Montréal in the largest expression of civil disobedience in Canadian history was also made possible because of the use of social media. Moreover, by using the symbol of the red square, the physical act of banging on casserole dishes, and an event such as the well-attended (almost) nude march(es) in May, otherwise known as the “maNUfestation,” the student strike became visible worldwide because of the students’ diverse and creative tactics. My research into the Québec student strike of 2012 provides analysis and results of a successful and unique social struggle, given Québec’s rich history of student strikes. It was a resistance that captivated the imaginations of many around the world.
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Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements.................................................................................................. iv
Table of Contents .................................................................................................... iv
List of Screenshots .................................................................................................. vi
List of Tables and Charts ....................................................................................... ix

Chapter 1 – Introduction ....................................................................................... 1
  Motivation and Purpose of the Study ................................................................. 14
  Operational Definitions ...................................................................................... 17
    Youth ................................................................................................................. 17
    Social Media and Social Networking Sites (SNS) .......................................... 19
    Social Movements ............................................................................................ 20
  Uprising ............................................................................................................... 22
  Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance ..................................................................... 23
  The Structural Foundations of Social Media .................................................... 24
  Significance of the Study .................................................................................... 25
  Structure of the Dissertation ............................................................................. 25

Chapter 2 – Historicizing the Québec Student Strike ........................................ 30
  Québec’s School System .................................................................................... 30
  The Quiet Revolution ......................................................................................... 35
  A History of Resistance ..................................................................................... 36
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 41

Chapter 3 – Neoliberalism, Austerity Measures, and the
  Corporatization of the University ..................................................................... 43
  Neoliberalism ..................................................................................................... 43
  Austerity Measures ............................................................................................. 46
  Corporatization of the University .................................................................... 49
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 55

Chapter 4 – Literature Review ............................................................................. 57
  Social Movement Theory .................................................................................. 57
  The Structural Foundations of Social Media ................................................... 62
    Ownership ........................................................................................................ 63
    Profit Models ................................................................................................... 69
    Production Practices ......................................................................................... 73
    Cultural Capital ................................................................................................. 77
  Youth Activism and Social Media .................................................................... 80
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 86
# Chapter 5 – Conceptual Framework

- The Québec Student Strike of 2012 as a Social Movement ................................................................. 88
- Social Movement Theory .......................................................................................................................... 89
- The Structural Foundations of Social Media ................................................................................................. 95
- Youth Activism and Social Media .................................................................................................................. 96
- Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................. 99

# Chapter 6 – Research Methods

- Ethics......................................................................................................................................................... 102
- Rationalizing the Methods Used .................................................................................................................. 103
- Recruiting the Participants and the Site of Study ......................................................................................... 104
- Interviews .................................................................................................................................................. 107
- Data Collection and Textual Analysis of Data Collected from Facebook and Twitter .................................. 110
  - Facebook ................................................................................................................................................ 111
  - Twitter ...................................................................................................................................................... 113
- Data Collection and Textual Analysis of the Student Strike from a Variety of Media .................................. 114
- Methodological Challenges .......................................................................................................................... 117

# Chapter 7 – Tactics Used by the Québec Students During the Strike of 2012

- The Student Groups ................................................................................................................................... 120
- The United Front ....................................................................................................................................... 125
- Direct Democracy and Horizontal Leadership ............................................................................................. 130
- Diversity and Escalation of Tactics .............................................................................................................. 133
  - The Tactical Use of Corporate-Owned and Independent Media ................................................................. 143
  - Using Canadian Corporate-Owned Media ................................................................................................. 143
  - Press Conferences .................................................................................................................................. 145
  - Challenges in Dealing with the Corporate English-Language Media ......................................................... 146
  - CUTV ...................................................................................................................................................... 148
  - The Red Square ..................................................................................................................................... 150
  - Activism Against Bill 78 ............................................................................................................................ 153
  - The Casseroles ....................................................................................................................................... 156
  - MaNUfestation ....................................................................................................................................... 159
- Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................. 163

# Chapter 8 – Tactical Use of Media, Facebook and Twitter

- A Variety of Ways the Students Utilized Social Media .................................................................................. 166
  - Assisting with Spontaneous Actions .......................................................................................................... 167
  - Assisting in Extending the Student Strike .................................................................................................... 168
  - The Sharing of Media Reports and Responding to Criticism .................................................................... 169
  - Creating a Social Space and Where the Students Were ............................................................................ 170
  - Social Media’s Role According to Bureau-Blouin ....................................................................................... 172
  - Corporate-Owned Mass Media versus Social Media .................................................................................. 174
- CUTV ......................................................................................................................................................... 175
Empirical Evidence of the Students’ Use of Facebook and Twitter ........................................ 176
Social Media Use by the Leadership Groups ................................................................. 178
Social Media Use by Four Student Groups ................................................................. 184
Social Media Use by Four Random Facebook Groups .................................................. 186
Social Media Use through Popular Twitter Hashtags (#) ........................................ 189
#22mai .................................................. 190
#casserole ........................................ 190
#loi78 ............................................... 191
#non1625 ........................................ 193
#ggi .................................................. 194
#manifencours .................................. 195
Media Reporting via Twitter ....................................................................................... 197
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 199

**Chapter 9 – How the Students Were Portrayed by the Media** ...... 202

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Portrayal</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of the Québec Students on Strike</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-Language Corporate-Owned Media</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports by CBC</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Montreal Gazette</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTV Montreal</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studen-Run Media (CUTV Concordia and The McGill Daily)</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabble.ca</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Devoir</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Presse</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Journal de Montréal</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translating the Printemps Érable</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 216

**Chapter 10 – Final Impressions, Contributions, and Future Research** ...................... 219

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Impressions</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Epigraph</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Works Cited** .......................................................................................................... 229
List of Screenshots

Screenshot 1: Challenges with NVivo..........................................................112
Screenshot 2: News from the 2012 Québec Student General Strike.................................187
Screenshot 3: News from the 2012 Québec Student General Strike2 ........................................188
Screenshot 4: Tweets Regarding an Injured Protester........................................................196
Screenshot 5: The Police......................................................................................197
Screenshot 6: #manifencours...............................................................................198
List of Tables and Charts

Table 1: A List of the Student Groups Involved in the Québec Student Strike of 2012 .................. 121
Table 2: A List of the Organizations Whose Facebook and Twitter Pages Were Analyzed ........ 176

Chart 1: Comparing ASSE, FECQ and FEUQ’s Use of Facebook and Twitter ......................... 179
Chart 2: An Analysis of Facebook Posts by Leadership Group .................................................. 180
Chart 3: An Analysis of Twitter Tweets by Leadership Group .................................................. 182
Chart 4: Student Groups’ Use of Social Media ........................................................................ 185
Chart 5: Number of Tweets by Hashtag ..................................................................................... 189
Chapter 1 - Introduction

“We didn’t know it was impossible, so we did it.”
- unidentified Québec student, Roarmag.org, May28, 2012

The above epigraph is attributed to an unidentified student who participated in the Québec student strike of 2012. Also referred to as “le printemps érable” by the French-language media, and “Maple Spring” by their English counterparts, the strike was the students’ response to the proposed university tuition increase by the Jean Charest-led Liberal government. The epigraph’s words underlie a type of naiveté, and, perhaps, even a lack of understanding of the situation. The statement also stakes claim to the fact that the students did indeed “do it”; they willfully organized and took part in what many agree was the largest expression of civil disobedience in Canadian history (Dolphin, 2012a; Gass, 2012a; Kanuga, 2012). For the approximately 300,000 students that were involved in the protests (“Beyond separatism,” 2015), the reasons for the strike quickly escalated from an initial response against the proposed 75 percent tuition fee hike directed towards Québec residents, to a struggle against neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice, the corporatization of the university, and the criminalization of protesting and basic human rights. This was epitomized in Darin Barney’s (2012) article, entitled “The truth of le printemps érables,” where he commends the students for being “politically exceptional”: “Their refusal to accept the government’s proposed 75 percent tuition increase is a refusal to concede post-secondary education to the logic and priorities of neoliberal capitalism, a refusal of the social logic in which it makes sense to finance public education on personal debt and corporate investment, a logic that transforms the colleges and universities into purely economic enterprises.” But contrary to what the epigraph may suggest, the students who partook in the strike were far from naïve and were most certainly quite savvy when it came to organizing and developing creative protest tactics.

The terms “pressure tactics” and “diversity of tactics” were two terms used often by the student organizers who were interviewed for this study. Tactics are explained as “specific means of implementing strategy and comprise the forms of collective action taken by movement actors” (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2008, p. 213). Strategies, then, are the plans and resources from which
social movement political actors “turn what we have into what we need to get what we want” (Ganz, 2004). According to Stone (2011), tactics are chosen from a “tactical repertoire available to social movement actors” (p. 143). These tactical repertoires or “toolkits include a range of possibilities that can be chosen by will by political actors” (Swidler, 1986), “but does not privilege one tactic as better than another” (Stone, 2011, p. 143). A type of tactic, tactical media (TM), is explained by Alessandra Renzi (2008) as “expressions of dissent that rely on artistic practices and ‘do it yourself’ (DIY) media created from readily available, relatively cheap technology and means of communication (e.g., radio, video and Internet)” (p. 71). Tactics are also defined as “modes of action” and “specific forms of creative action, such as a flash mob or an occupation” (Boyd & Mitchell, 2014, p. 4). Influenced by all of the above definitions, in this project, I choose to define the term “tactic” as any and all actions and strategies that were taken or utilized by the students in attempting to achieve their goals. During all the interviews with the student leaders, I used the term “tactic”. It was quite evident from the outset that my interviewees used and understood the term in much the same way that I did and therefore there was no need to define tactic as it was understood by all that partook in my study.

Again, the students’ primary goal was to maintain the status quo and defeat the proposed university tuition fee hike that was introduced by the then in power majority Liberal government. Since various tactics were also implemented and used by the provincial government, the term will also apply to all the actions and strategies that the Liberals used in order to achieve their goals. A prime example of such a strategy used by the government was the introduction of Bill 78, introduced and passed by the Liberals as an emergency law on May 18, 2012, during the height of the strike. Effectively, Bill 78 was intended to end the student strike by criminalizing actions such as congregating, meeting, marching, and protesting without previous approval that was to be obtained from the police (Bill 78, 2012). Simply put, the term ‘tactics’ will be used throughout the thesis to refer to all actions and strategies used by the different groups of stakeholders intended to help achieve their respective objective.

The Québec student strike of 2012 was quickly dubbed by the movement itself as Canada’s “Maple Spring” or, in French, “le printemps érable.” These were sexy monikers that were used to represent the series of events and actions carried out by predominantly young adults in Québec during the spring of 2012. The movement began as an objection to the proposed tuition fee hike for university students residing in Québec by the governing Parti Libéral du
Québec (PLQ) led by Premier Jean Charest in early 2010. The Liberals rationalized the increase as a need for the Quebec students to pay their “fair share” of education costs, a sentiment echoed by Brendan Steven, a student at McGill University at the time of the strike (Steven, 2012). It was the Liberal’s desire to bring Québec’s tuition to similar levels as those found in other Canadian provinces, and what conservative reporter Margaret Wente categorizes as “such moderate tuition hikes, which would still leave them with the lowest tuition in North America” (Wente, 2012). Given ample time to prepare, the students organized through the four main post-secondary student unions in Québec: Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ); Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ); Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ); and Table de concertation étudiant du Québec (TaCEQ). The students’ response to the threat of a tuition increase indicated that they were quite well prepared. In just a few months after the PLQ announced the tuition increase, coordinated actions preceding the strike began to take place. On December 6, 2010, thousands of students comprised of both those who attended Cegeps (Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel) and universities, traveled to Québec City to protest the hike. Just a few days after, on December 9, 2010, a petition that was signed by 30,000 students who were adamantly against raising the tuition was delivered to the National Assembly (“Under pressure,” n.d.). As well, on May 7 and 8 of 2011, “a national meeting of more than 200 delegates of student associations representing over 200,000 students voted unanimously against rising tuition fees” (“Under pressure,” n.d.). One-day strikes attended by thousands of students began to occur across the province: “October was then punctuated with small events in Saguenay, Quebec, Montreal, Rimouski, Trois-Rivières and even in Abitibi. Mobilization [took] an unexpectedly large turn when tens of thousands of students [were] in favor of one-day strike for November 10.” (“Under pressure,” n.d.). These actions were capped by the November 10, 2011 one-day provincial strike as “more than 30,000 students march[ed] in Montreal for the occasion and half the students in Quebec [were] on strike that day” (“Under pressure,” n.d.). These statistics were taken from the website www.stopthehike.ca, a website

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1 Cegeps were “designed as an intermediate step between secondary school and university, though separate and independent of both” (Magnuson, 1980, p. 111). There are both French-language and English-language Cegeps in Québec. Residents of Québec are required to complete a Cegep program prior to applying for university. Also, Cegeps are unique to the province of Québec as no other province in Canada uses Cegeps. There are a total of 48 Cegeps: 43 are French-language and 5 are English-language (Fédération des cégeps, 2014).
created during the strike by ASSÉ to help disseminate information about the strike to not only students, but anyone else who wanted to gather information and become more knowledgeable about the student strike. The opposition to the tuition hike and similar biases from ASSÉ is prevalent throughout. Nevertheless, the website www.stopthehike.com is still a valuable source of information specific to the Québec student strike of 2012.

For many observers and students, the Québec student strike was somewhat predictable and not without precedent. Historically, students in Québec have been involved in their fair share of uprisings. Unlike the other Canadian provinces, Québec has a long history of resistance, both from unionized workers and students; a point that I shall elaborate further in Chapter 2. The strike of 2012 came on the heels of numerous previous Québec student actions beginning in 1967. Robert Favreau (1974) outlines how the Québec students began organizing themselves as far back as 1962 and recounts how the student groups supported and demonstrated with exploited factory workers in February 1967. Similarly, the “October crisis of 1970”2 witnessed a radical movement that proceeded through action a “fundamental questioning of society” as reported by retired Québec journalist Adele Lauzon (1974, p. 104). Yet, despite this rich history of student uprisings in the province, many lessons can yet be learned from the recent strike. As James Cairns argues, “It’s not that the Quebec experience is a perfect blueprint that simply needs to be implemented from place to place to place. But it does provide a useful model for thinking about what genuine solidarity looks like in action, and gives us a sense of what’s possible when masses

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2 The “October crisis of 1970” refers to a time when the War Measures Act (WMA) was invoked, the first time this had been done (in Canada) since the Korean War. The WMA was invoked in response to the actions of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), who have been referred to as both as terrorist organization (Clément, 2008; Crelinsten, 2008) and radical separatists or Québec nationalists who wanted the province to secede from the rest of Canada (Brushett, 2013; May, 2013). On October 5, 1970, members of the FLQ kidnapped James Cross, a member of the British consulate in Montreal (Clément, 2008). The police responded with raids and arrests in one of the most massive manhunts in Canadian history (Clément, 2008). On October 10, another cell of the FLQ kidnapped the provincial minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte (Clément, 2008). The group’s demands included releasing “political” prisoners and providing the kidnappers with transport to Cuba and Algeria as well as “an armload of gold bullion” (Clément, 2008). On October 12, 1970, “the military began patrolling the streets of Ottawa and, three days later, the army returned to Montreal” (Clément, 2008, p. 165). A call from Jean Drapeau, the mayor of Montreal, to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau implored the federal government to intervene (Clément, 2008). Trudeau responded with the imposition of the WMA, and the very next day, “Pierre Laporte was found in the trunk of a car, murdered by the FLQ” (Clément, 2008, p. 166). The situation lasted approximately two months as on December 3, 1970, Cross was released and his kidnappers flown to Cuba (Clément, 2008). Laporte’s killers were captured on December 27 and sent to jail, the army left Québec in January 1971, and the emergency powers lapsed on April 30, 1971 (Clément, 2008).
of people mobilize together to change the world” (quoted in Laferriere, 2013). Certainly, the possibility of learning how to conduct a successful social movement from the Québec students’ struggle was one of the aspects which drew me to this project.

While the Québec student strike of 2012 was a manifestation of the students’ response to the government’s decision to increase tuition fees for university students, there is a history of similar uprisings that have taken place in the province for issues regarding educational funding. Public displays of civil disobedience in Québec are not at all uncommon when it comes to protests against educational fee increases. Unlike the other provinces in Canada, university tuition fees in Québec have remained low for a reason – the students’ willingness to fight for their right to an affordable education (Favreau, 1974; Lauzon, 1974; Sweetman, 2006); although there remains a difference between the lower tuition fees paid by Québec residents and the higher fees paid by out-of-province students studying in university in Québec. As reported by Penhorwood (2012), Roxane Dubois, chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, which is the nationwide organization representing university students, wrote that “the protests in Quebec are warranted given that the fee increases could threaten the province's unique system of post-secondary education, which prides itself on its accessibility to students of all income levels.” Further, Dubois rationalizes that “they are fighting to protect one of the most successful systems of post-secondary education we have in the country. We are lucky enough to have a model that we can point to as something that recognizes that education should be something that should be available to everyone, regardless your social status” (Penhorwood, 2012). Students’ willingness to fight for accessible public education has been a hallmark of Québec. In this case, they also received support from students nationwide.

Maple Spring did not happen overnight. Despite their repeated attempted efforts to meet with government officials in the days leading up to the strike, the Liberals refused. Under these circumstances, on February 13, 2012, the university students in Québec voted in favour of a general unlimited strike. Ingar Solty (2012), a PhD candidate at York University at the time of the strike, indicates that the strike was a lesson in a “successful struggle against austerity policies” as Jean Charest’s PLQ government explains the hike as necessary since “universities were underfinanced and that Quebec’s global competitiveness required increased funding through a tuition increase.” By rejecting a proposed 75 per cent tuition fee increase for Québec residents, from $2168 per year to $3793 per year by 2017, the students also effectively rejected
the implementation of a type of austerity measure. As Solty (2012) insists, this was not the first time that a Liberal government had attempted to increase tuition fees; in 1994, the PLQ increased tuition to $1668 per year for residents of Québec. The province had also subsequently attempted to raise tuition fees in 1996 and 2005 but failed largely due to student protests. But smaller increases in tuition had been made, “most recently by the Charest government in 2007” (Solty, 2012).

Both Nova Scotia and Québec have a two-tiered tuition fee system in place, unlike the other provinces. This means that students from Nova Scotia and Québec who study in their respective province pay a lower tuition than out-of-province students. Since 2008, Nova Scotians studying in-province have continued to receive a Nova Scotia Bursary of $1,263 per year to lower their tuition fees. In comparison, other Canadians studying in a Nova Scotian university have been receiving an out of Province Student Bursary worth $261 per year. As one can see, out-of-province Canadians studying in Nova Scotia pay more in tuition than Nova Scotians studying in their home province. International students in Nova Scotia pay tuition fees that are deregulated and significantly higher than Canadians because their families “have not previously paid taxes in Canada” (“University tuition and other,” n.d.). International students pay significantly higher tuition fees across the country, regardless of province. For example, according to the University of Toronto website, “foreign student tuition fees range from $11,600 to $40,000 per year” (University of Toronto, n.d.). As previously stated, Québec residents’ tuition fees averaged $2,168 per year in 2012.

To further contextualize Québec’s tuition fees, the following corresponding numbers are the average provincial tuition fees charged to undergraduate students during the 2011-2012 school year. Newfoundland’s tuition fees were the second lowest in the country, at an average of $2,649 (Edmiston & Johnson, 2012). Here are the rest in chronological order: Manitoba’s average tuition fees were $3,645, British Columbia’s average tuition fees were $4,852, Prince Edward Island’s average tuition fees were $5,258, Saskatchewan’s average tuition fees were $5,601, Alberta’s average tuition fees were $5,662, Nova Scotia’s average tuition fees were $5,731, New Brunswick’s average tuition fees were $5,853, and Ontario’s average tuition fees were $6,640 (Edmiston & Johnson, 2012). The variation between what Québec citizens paid as undergraduates differed from what other undergraduates paid depending on the province their school was located at. In comparison, while Québec undergraduates paid roughly $481 less than
their counterparts in Newfoundland, the undergraduates who lived and studied in Ontario could expect to pay approximately $4,472 more per year for their education. Tuition fees for graduate schools across the country vary by program, school and province and were not included in these calculations.

Quite tactfully, the Québec students defended their position, arguing that higher tuition diminished accessibility to education and resulted in larger amounts of student debt (Sorochan, 2012). The students even proposed a solution: rather than treat education as an individual consumer investment, they insisted that education should be considered a social good that should be paid for through a progressive tax system (Sorochan, 2012). Notwithstanding the massive support for the students’ demands that was clearly on display, the government continued to refuse to meet with the student leaders. Simultaneously, heavy picketing ensued at some universities and various francophone Cegeps, in an attempt to enforce the strike mandate (Dolphin, 2012b; “Student strikers vow,” 2012).

Cegeps in Québec are divided into French-language Cegeps and English-language Cegeps (Magnuson, 1980; Fournier & Rosenberg, 1997). Students attending Cegeps were mostly affiliated with FECQ and also took part in the strike vote. The results were clearly divided as the majority of French-language Cegeps voted to strike while most English-language Cegeps voted against the strike (Bertolino & Samson, 2013). As a result, French-language Cegeps were heavily impacted with disruptions because of and during the strike as compared to their English-language counterparts.

However, regardless of the number of students who decided to attend class, professors were forced to teach due to court injunctions filed by the institutions as well as students opposed to the strike (Hamilton, 2012a). These moves were opposed by the Québec Federation of Professors, also known as the Fédération québécoise de professeures et professeurs d’université (FQPPU), whose membership is comprised of “15 unions and associations bringing together more than 5,000 professors of Quebec universities” (Fédération québécoise, n.d.). Based on their membership information, it appears that the majority of the 5,000 members in FQPPU are from French-language universities. However, the membership also includes the Association of Teacher(s) and Librarians McGill/McGill Association of University Teachers (APBM-MAUT), the Association of Professors of Bishop’s University (APBU) and the Association of Professors of the University of Concordia/Concordia University Faculty Association (ACUP-CUFA), which
include many English-speaking universities and members. According to Hamilton (2012a), the FQPPU membership “denounced the government and university administrations for ‘forcing professors to teach their courses despite the continuation of the student strike.’”

Strikers and picketers were prohibited from congregating on campus. Despite this, there were many intrusions into classes as striking students sought to enforce the strike. For example, in mid-May 2012, approximately “100 hard-core protesters marched through pavilions at the Université du Québec à Montréal” (UQAM) looking to disrupt classes that were being held (Dolphin, 2012b). In one such class, a contract-law class, striking students began “flicking on and off the lights; they repeatedly yelled, “Scab!” at the stunned group of students seated inside. A few men even grabbed two female students by the arm, telling them to get out. Some of the intruders jumped on desks and tables. The teacher and students shouted at the protesters and told them to leave. But during the 10-minute standoff, most of the students eventually gave up and left the classroom, as did the teacher” (Dolphin, 2012b).

In response to these types of tactics initiated by the students, the universities’ administrators countered by hiring private security companies to intimidate and profile protesting students, allowing them to be identified for disciplinary measures, and in cases where students and teachers refused to acknowledge an injunction, riot police were called onto campuses in order to forcibly disperse students blocking access to buildings (“Quebec university students’”, 2012). Measures taken against the students due to the strike depended on the institution. For example, at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, “after students opposed to the strike won an injunction ordering [the university] to resume classes this week, student strikers defied the injunction and tried to block entry to campus building. Police intervened to try to enforce the injunction” which resulted in 151 arrests (Hamilton, 2012a). At Université de Sherbrooke, the administration simply cancelled courses as students defied a similar injunction (Hamilton, 2012a). At the Université de Montréal, both professors and students banded together and “forced the administration to back down on an injunction it had obtained the previous week” (Hamilton, 2012a). In contrast, at McGill University, there were no disruptions of note: “although some sporadic protests have popped up on campus, exams began Tuesday with no serious disruption and the vast majority of students are focused on studying for them. Comparatively few McGill students are boycotting classes and exams” (“Tuition protest drags,” 2012). To be clear, as the McGill example displays, the student strike impacted each university and Cegep in differing
ways, which was highly dependent on the level of commitment to the strike of the students attending that particular institution.

Just as the students were divided in their support of the strike, as a large number of students had voted not to strike and were adamantly opposed to strike action (Bertolino & Samson, 2013), professors in Québec were equally split in their support of the strike. The support was highly dependent on the university, the faculty, the department, and the individual professors themselves. During the 10th week of the strike, Hamilton (2012a) noted that “its [the strike’s] longevity can be explained in part by the cheerleading from the Quebec left, from trade unions to the opposition Parti Québécois and many of the student’s professors.” Notable examples of professors supporting the strike include Stéphanie Demers of UQO’s education faculty who went on her Twitter account “to decry the “fascist state” and wanted to let her students that were arrested know that “I love them all and that they are changing the history of Quebec” (Hamilton 2012a) and François-Olivier Chené, a college teacher of politics in Saint-Hyacinthe, who introduced the “cacerolazo,” the banging of pots and pans as a form of protest popularized in South America, into the Québec protest (Perreaux, 2012).

In response to the injunctions and pressure tactics used by the universities and the government to undermine their democratic strike mandate, the student leaders opted for economic disruption. Demonstrations were held to purposefully block bridges and major streets. These occurred almost daily, particularly in the month of March (“Student protesters face fines,” 2012). In one instance, bricks were thrown onto the tracks of Montreal’s metro system, disabling the subway system for a number of hours (Forster & Panetta, 2012). Although the demonstrations were designed to be peaceful, riot police were regularly on hand. On May 4, 2012, a Liberal convention in Victoriaville, Québec, was marred by violence; as reported by the Canadian Press, “Multiple injuries, including critical ones, during confrontation between crowd and provincial riot police. A young protester loses an eye. Some people kick and beat a police officer” (The Canadian Press, 2012).

Perhaps the most recognizable symbol of the strike, the red square or “le carré rouge” was popularized throughout the country as countless students and public supporters donned the symbol to show their support. As per the website Free Education Montreal.org, a grass-roots organization comprised of students, researchers, professionals, artists, parents, workers and community members “who believe that education is a societal right and responsibility, not a
business,” the red square is derived from “the French saying ‘carrément dans le rouge,’ which means ‘squarely in the red’ or basically, that students were in debt because of tuition increase and cuts in bursaries” (“So, what does,” 2011). In the same vein, freelance writer Tim McSorley (2012) observes that “carrément dans le rouge,” or “squarely in the red” refers to “the large levels of debt the students are facing.” The red square was adopted as a symbol for the movement and wearing it became a widespread phenomenon to indicate support for the struggles of the students of Québec:

From the start, all those who were opposed to the fee increase and who supported the student strike started wearing the red square, especially teachers and professors, parents and grand-parents, union workers and certain members of opposition parties, artists and intellectuals, in the street, on the media and internet, here and elsewhere, like Xavier Dolan and his actors on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival or Arcade Fire during their performance with Mick Jagger on Saturday Night Live. (Asselin, 2012)

After many attempts to have a meeting were rebuffed by the government, education minister Line Beauchamp finally agreed to meet with the student leaders, including those belonging to Coalition large de l’ASSÉ (CLASSE an offshoot of ASSÉ) on April 25, 2012. Previously, Beauchamp had refused to attend any meetings that had members of CLASSE present. Shortly after the meeting, the Liberals presented a new plan. This new plan did not decrease the amount, but instead elongated the timeframe: “The Quebec government says it will stretch its $1,625 hike in tuition over a longer period of time (7 years) in an attempt to come to an agreement with disgruntled students and end protests that have resulted in clashes with police” (“Quebec offers to stretch,” 2012). As a result of this new development, talks between the student representatives and the government ended once again. A doctoral candidate at McGill University, Cayley Sorochan (2012) observes, “The student strike begins to take on the dimensions of a broader social movement.” As noted by Jennifer Beth Spiegel (2012), “Day after day at 8pm, people of all ages have been out on the streets banging pots in support, often starting spontaneous marches of hundreds or thousands of people from various neighbourhoods” (p. 3). The strike began to gather momentum alongside an increase in regular citizens supporting

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3 This key distinction, the transformation from a student strike against a tuition fee increase into a social movement resisting neoliberalism, austerity, and the corporatization of the university will be explained and examined throughout the thesis.
the students’ cause. From April 25, 2012 onwards, students continued to assemble in Montreal on a nightly basis and demonstrated until the early hours of the morning (Sterne, 2012).

These demonstrations were effective insofar as the striking students and their supporters were able to disrupt the city at will. For instance, on Tuesday, May 22\textsuperscript{nd}, the 100\textsuperscript{th} day of the strike, “more than 400,000 filled the streets of Montreal” and the protests “saw a harsh police response with over 500 people arrested in Montreal and another 100 arrested in Quebec City” ("Maple Spring," 2012). On March 20, 2012, two busloads of students were taken into custody and brought to a police station in Candiac, Québec, charged with demonstrating and blocking an access ramp to the Champlain Bridge which leads into Montreal; “the students were expected to face fines close to $500 for contravening the Highway Safety Act” ("Student protesters face fines," 2012). Riot squads were sent to the Université de Montréal, on Monday, August 27, 2012, as “some classes [were] being disrupted during the return to school of Quebec universities as students disobey[ed] the back-to-school law” (The Canadian Press 2, 2012). On Oct. 4, 2012, a report was published by the CBC which indicated that “the two helicopters that buzzed around over downtown Montreal monitoring the student protests cost taxpayers $1,762 and $445 an hour respectively” (“Police helicopter hovering,” 2012). On multiple days and evenings in Montréal, streets were blocked, traffic disrupted, demonstrations took place, and there were police on the ground and helicopters hovering in the sky; all were visible throughout the city because of the strike.

In May 2012, the provincial government criminalized the strike as students rejected a proposal by the government to create a committee of 19 individuals, including four student representatives, to attempt to resolve the situation (Fidler, 2012a). Despite having stated their desire to continue the conversation with the students, on May 16, the government instead introduced an emergency bill, Law 78, which, effectively, criminalized the strike. Law 78, which was later referenced as Law 12, made the demonstration of fifty or more people who did not provide an itinerary to police officers eight hours prior to assembling a criminal activity. Never before had the Québec provincial government taken such drastic actions as to criminalize the assembly of citizens. The fines were quite hefty, $1,000-$5,000 per offence for an individual, $7,000-$35,000 for a student leader or $25,000-$125,000 for an organization that broke this law. The law also mandated the following:
If the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports notes that a federation of associations has failed to comply with an obligation imposed by this Act and that the failure to comply has resulted in hindering the delivery of instructional services to students having a right to such services, the Minister may, despite any provision to the contrary, order all student associations to cease paying any assessment, contribution or other similar amount to the federation of associations, any successor federation of associations or a third party for the benefit of either. The cessation is effective for a period equal to one term per day or part of a day during which the delivery of instructional services was not possible as a result of the failure to comply. (Québec National Assembly, Bill 78, 2012)

This gave universities the power to cease the collection and payment of student fees to student organizations that were found to be breaking the law, thus severely incapacitating the student groups’ ability to represent their interests. Even more problematic was the fact that the law held the student organizations equally liable when their student members’ actions broke the law: “A student association of an institution or a federation of associations to which such a student association belongs that helps or induces one or more of its members to contravene section 13 or 14 is solidarily liable for any damage caused to a third person by its members who contravene either of those sections with respect to the institution” (Québec National Assembly, Bill 78, 2012). In addition, Law 78 also suspended the Winter 2012 term. Effectively, Law 78 sought to criminalize the strike actions of the students. Clearly, the law was created as a government pressure tactic to, if not destroy, then definitely weaken the resolve of the students. However, it had the opposite effect as evidenced by the response from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d’université (ACPPU). This was the statement released on their website:

La loi spéciale adoptée par le gouvernement du Québec vendredi est injuste et doit être annulée, selon les étudiants et le personnel académique d’un bout à l’autre du pays.

[The special law passed by the Quebec government Friday is unfair and should be revoked, according to students and academic staff from one end of the country to the other.]

La loi 78, adoptée vendredi soir à l’Assemblée nationale, brime sérieusement le droit constitutionnel à la liberté d’expression et d’association. Le gouvernement du Québec l’a déposée dans le but de saper la grève que mènent les étudiants québécois pour contrer la hausse des droits de scolarité par la mobilisation populaire.
[Bill 78, adopted Friday at the National Assembly, severely bullied the constitutional right to freedom of expression and association. The Quebec government tabled it in order to undermine the strike by Quebec students to counter rising tuition by popular mobilization.] (“La loi 78,” 2012)

In the same vein, Roxane Dubois, the president of the Canadian Federation of Students stated that, “members of the academic community across the country are mobilizing in solidarity with the student population of Quebec. The Charest government must repeal the law and commit to reverse its decision to increase tuition fees” (“La loi 78,” 2012). Moreover, James Turk, then Executive Director of the CAUT stated: “The Quebec government must immediately repeal the unconstitutional law 78, eliminating all imposed fines and cancel the arrests made under that law…. The Charest government is sadly mistaken if he believes that the fundamental right to protest against unjust tuition increases will not be defended” (“La loi 78,” 2012). These statements serve as evidence of the support the Québec students were receiving across the country, and the backlash against the Charest government for creating and instituting Bill 78.

On May 18, with individuals organizing through social media, tens of thousands took to the streets of Montréal in what many deemed the largest expression of civil disobedience in Canadian history to protest the passing of Bill 78 into law (Dolphin, 2012a; Gass, 2012a; Kanuga, 2012). Bill 78 was so egregious that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) as well as other civil liberties group were explicitly opposed to it. The bill seemed to have galvanized even more opposition for the government as many Montréal residents became upset with the law, the violent tactics employed by the police, and “the contemptuous way the government has dealt with the students' concerns” (Sorochan, 2012). Citizens began to rally around the students by banging pots and pans in their neighbourhoods in addition to joining the students in the streets in spontaneous marches. At around the same time, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, who had emerged as the spokesperson for CLASSE, encouraged people to “continue to exercise their fundamental right to assembly and free expression” while announcing that the students planned to contest the law in court (Sorochan, 2012). As reported by the CBC, “The clanging of pots and pans sounded throughout Montreal's downtown core Saturday night and into early Sunday morning, as thousands of protesters marched on in peaceful — but loud — defiance of Bill 78” (“Montreal protesters march,” 2012). May 26th witnessed tens of thousands of
Montréalers descending on the streets and marching in several groups across the city, all the while banging their pots and pans and making as much noise as possible (“June 22 recap,” 2012).

The end of May, June and July saw continued marches in the streets by students, despite the waning numbers. Upheld by a lower court in June, Law 78 was nevertheless condemned by the Québec Human Rights Commission in July for “undermining the Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (“Québec Human Rights,” 2012). The provincial election held on September 4, 2012 resulted in “the increasingly unpopular PLQ’s expected defeat. Premier Jean Charest was defeated in his own electoral district and stepped down as party leader as a result. With 32 per cent of the vote and 54 out of 125 seats (an increase of seven), the PQ became the largest party in the National Assembly of Quebec” (Solty, 2012). In the fall of 2012, shortly after they took power as a minority government, the Parti Québécois (PQ) followed up on a campaign promise and halted the proposed university tuition fee increase. The longest student strike in the history of Québec thus officially came to an end shortly after the PQ ousted the Liberal party from power by winning the provincial election (Panetta, 2012).

**Motivation and Purpose of the Study**

Conducting a case study on the Québec student strike of 2012 is a strategic choice as it allows me to investigate two topics which I am interested in: youth activism and social media. This project also permits me to inject myself into the ongoing debate between the techno-optimists and the techno-pessimists who remain engaged in an argument about the capabilities of social media as a democratizing tool that can help actualize meaningful social change. One of the most notable optimists, NYU professor Clay Shirky (2008), posits that the Internet has allowed for individuals to organize, collaborate and form groups in a fashion much easier than in previous years. In his book, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, Shirky (2008) clearly displays enthusiasm regarding the power of social media: “When we change the way we communicate, we change society” (p. 17). On the other side of the debate, scholar, writer, and researcher Evgeny Morozov (2013) argues against “the folly of technological solutionism” and is adamantly opposed to Shirky’s “uncritical” praise of social media. Instead, Morozov (2013) aspires to “try to rid ourselves of Internet-centrism, thereby making certain solutionist schemes harder to advocate and, hopefully, impossible to implement” (355). Firmly situated within this dichotomy, my project is a culmination of various elements, stemming from
my interest in youth activism and social media, in general, and in particular, the political use of social media, what Paolo Gerbaudo (2014a) refers to as “the exploitation of the cracks of these corporate platforms.”

The reasons for choosing the Québec student strike of 2012 as my case study are quite simple: it was a fairly recent local occurrence; the student organizers that participated in the movement were willing to be interviewed; and there was an abundance of newspaper reports, blogs, videos, articles, and general information about the strike were accessible online. As well, there were public discussions of the absence of information about the strikes in any but local news. English-language media reported on the students as if they were merely one large homogeneous group, often failing to differentiate the diverse forms of linguistic, ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual identities of the protesters (Al-Saji, 2012; Clibbon, 2012). Thus, such a study provides an important history and documentation of the protests. Focusing my work on the Québec student strike puts me in a very privileged position as it allows me to contribute my results and findings to the disciplines of Communication Studies, Media Studies, and Social Movement Studies, as well as documenting a recent movement that may help contemporary activists working outside of academia.

Social movements often times become identifiable by the tactics that they employ. For instance, while the Sixties’ U.S. anti-war movement was characterized by the rallies, demonstrations and sit-ins attended by thousands of individuals protesting the war in Vietnam (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1966, 1980), the recent Occupy movement was understood (and both commended and vilified) for its purposeful lack of hierarchy and leaders, ongoing mic checks, strategic occupation of significant locales, and use of social media (Boler, 2012; Boler, MacDonald, Nitsou & Harris, 2014; Graeber, 2013; Milan, 2013; Milkman, Luce & Lewis, 2014). My research project explores the variety of tactics that the students of Québec utilized during the strike. From the red square (Asselin, 2012) to the implementation of “clanging pots and pans in manifs casseroles (manif is short for manifestation en cours, a street protest)” (Sterne, 2012), the students of Québec likewise became known for their use of these tactics. Former FECQ president Léo Bureau-Blouin, former FEUQ organizer Laurent Gauthier, former ASSÉ members, Nadia Lafrenière and Anne-Marie Provost, a former executive member of a
large student association at a Montréal university, Micah Fournier⁴, and student organizers Myriam⁵ and Jolly Roger⁶ provided me with rich data and an unparalleled insight into the strike. By pursuing this project, I aim to tell their story from their perspective and, as much as possible, use their own words to narrate the events that took place in Québec in the spring of 2012. The primary objective of this thesis is to investigate the tactics used by the students throughout the strike. The secondary objective is to focus on and explore the students’ use of social media as one of the aforementioned tactics during the strike.

Because it was a relatively new social movement, only recently has scholarship pertaining to the strike begun to be published (Armstrong, 2014; Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014; Bernston, 2014; Collombat, 2014; Katz, 2015; Kennelly, 2014). As a fairly recent occurrence, studies into the Québec student strike of 2012 are still emerging. However, of the studies that have been published thus far, it is notable that none include extensive interviews with the student organizers. Because of this, detailed accounts of the movement and the students’ interactions and involvement have not yet been fully documented. Further, the amount of information on the tactics used by the students is lacking, and their tactical use of media, and social media in particular, are similarly limited. Thus, my study is unique because not only does it reveal both the tactics and the tactical use of social media by the Québec students, but it also seeks to present the strike from the students’ perspective. Moreover, my project contributes to both academia and beyond. Within the disciplines of Communication Studies, Media Studies, and Social Movement Studies, my thesis provides empirical evidence of the tactics used by the students during the strike. This evidence adds to the existing knowledge within the aforementioned disciplines as well as communication and social movement theory. Outside of academia, my results can be

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⁴ Micah Fournier is a pseudonym used as requested by the participant. Thus, the individual will be referred to as throughout the duration of the project and beyond.

⁵ Participant Myriam consented to share her first name only. Thus, she will be referred to as Myriam throughout the duration of the project and beyond.

⁶ Jolly Roger is a pseudonym used as requested by the participant. Thus, the individual will be referred to as Jolly Roger throughout the duration of the project and beyond.
used in the same way as Beautiful Trouble\textsuperscript{7} helps provide a toolbox for activists. Ultimately, I hope that my project can assist in helping to bring about positive social change.

There are three related objectives for my particular study. Firstly, the primary purpose is to document, through the use of free-format semi-structured interviews, the tactics employed by the student organizers. Secondarily, it is to investigate, through the use of textual analysis, their political use of media, with a particular focus on social media. And thirdly, it is to explore, through the use of textual analysis, how the students were portrayed in a variety of media. Again, all three objectives are meant to provide empirical evidence from the student strike.

The main overarching research question that guides my project is: \textit{What tactics did the Québec students use during the strike of 2012?} The secondary question that addresses my interest in social media is: \textit{How did the students utilize social media in conjunction with and in addition to these other tactics?} Four general questions that guide the study are as follows: How did the organizers decide on which tactics to use? How did the following elements develop and what effect did they have on the movement: the red square; Bill 78; the casseroles; the maNuFestation? How did the organizers decide which media to use? Did the organizers believe that the movement was a success?

\textit{Operational Definitions}

This study draws from a number of theorists and a variety of disciplines in order to formulate the major concepts that were used throughout this project. These include youth, social media and social network sites, social movements, uprising, the structural foundations of social media.

\textbf{Youth}

A category that requires an explicit definition for this particular project is “youth” or “young people.” Youth, much like childhood, is a term that has been contested for centuries; a contestation that occurs to this day. Some, such as Skinner, Biscope, Murray & Korn (2004)

\textsuperscript{7} Beautiful Trouble, is a project that was instigated and co-edited by Andrew Boyd and involves a number of individuals that have compiled the various tools and tactics used by different social movements. They promote their venture with the following: “Beautiful Trouble is a toolbox for the next revolution.” Created to assist activists, the “toolbox” is available in book form and pocket edition, and includes five different categories: tactics, principles, theories, case studies, and practitioners. According to its editors, Boyd & Mitchell (2014): “Beautiful Trouble lays out the core tactics, principles and theoretical concepts that drive creative activism, providing analytical tools for changemakers to learn from their own successes and failures” (p. 4).
perceive youth as those ranging from age 10 to 20 years old; others have defined youth and young adults as being those between 13-30 years of age (Hume & Sullivan Mort, 2011). The understanding of the term is highly dependent on a multitude of factors which could include the state, culture, society, and family, as well as project and discipline. From an activism perspective, Constance A. Flanagan and Amy K. Syvertsen (2006), define youth as such:

Youth is an elastic category: where it begins and ends is subject to interpretation and is sensitive to social and historical context. Typically, this stage or time in the life cycle refers to persons in the adolescent and emerging adult years, people who are no longer children but “not quite” adults in the sense of assuming the independence and responsibilities typically associated with adulthood. Depending on the socioeconomic and sociocultural traditions of a society, youth may be persons as young as thirteen and as old as forty. (p. 11)

Talburt & Lesko (2012) likewise view youth as a complex and “malleable category” wherein young people are “‘transitional subjects,’ neither child nor adult, but ‘in the making.’” (p. 2). Reisinger (2012) further problematizes the understanding of youth, as young people “too often are pigeonholed into specific roles of students, workers, children of parents, future citizens, consumers, delinquents, activists, and the ‘hope of the future’ without recognizing the intersections between these identities or imagining alternative ways to make sense of youthful being” (p. 90). Tait (2012) writes that youth as a category is “constituted by two parallel elements: the first is its existence as a target for an almost endless array of social, educational, legal, and psychological concerns and interventions; the second involves its existence as a habitus, a vocabulary of ways of regulating the self” (p. 108). Eldin Fahmy (2006) even suggests that there exists no universal definition of youth.

Amidst all these various definitions of youth, most helpful is Aaron J. Martin’s (2012) argument that in studies of young people, they are often defined as between 18 and 24 years of age (p. 9). Similar to my own classification of youth in this project, Martin (2012) also classifies young people as being between 18 and 29 years of age and bases his justification on social and cultural norms today: “Young people are often delaying getting married, getting a mortgage and having children into their late 20s and early (or even mid) 30s” (p. 9). Even the Federal Government of Canada likewise illustrate similar claims:

In the case of youth, this life stage has been extended to such a degree that it can now be broken down into two phases: adolescence and early adulthood. Some authors maintain that this extension of youth is likely due to the deferral of adult roles, but also the precociousness of adolescence. For example, we know that
Physiologically, puberty is occurring at a younger age and that certain adult
problems, like depression and mental health problems, are also happening earlier
in life. In short, it appears that social, environmental and biological pressures are
shortening childhood and resulting in an ever-longer waiting period before early
adulthood. (Gaudet, 2007).

Drawing largely from Martin’s (2012) definition, the youth or young people that I will be
referring to in this study consists of individuals strictly between the ages of 18-29. This also
corresponds to the youth that I studied and the participants in this project; the organizers and the
students who took part in the Québec student uprising in 2012.

Social Media and Social Networking Sites (SNS)

The terms “social media” and “social networking sites” (SNS) have seemingly become
interchangeable as both terms now refer to the same online sites and platforms. Andreas M.
Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) postulate that it is with the development and creation of
social networking sites that the term “social media” was coined. They further define social media
as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological
foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”
(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). For my study, the use of the term social media directly
references all of the various forms of “newer” communication technologies such as blogs,
Wikipedia, video sharing sites such as YouTube, picture-sharing sites such as Instagram, and
social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Social networking sites (SNS) are defined by danah boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007), as
web-based services which “allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a
bounded system,” “articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection,” and “view
and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211).
Moreover, José van Dijck (2013) proposes that SNS are sites that “primarily promote
interpersonal contact, whether between individuals or groups; they forge personal, professional,
or geographical connections and encourage weak ties. Examples are Facebook, Twitter,
LinkedIn, Google+, and Foursquare” (p. 8). An even more precise definition is provided by
Michael A. Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader (2014), who consider social media “to
include a variety of internet-based tools that users engage with by maintaining an individual
profile and interacting with others based on a network of connections” (p. 152).
At the crux of my project is how the Québec students utilized what are arguably the two most popular and prominent SNS, Facebook and Twitter, for political gain. In a study entitled “Digital Activism & Non-Violent Conflict,” Edwards, Howard, and Joyce (2013), studied civic engagement in today’s digital era and focused on digital activism. Amongst their findings, they assert that Facebook and Twitter dominate global activism (p. 4). Additionally, they claim that “the most popular applications, tied neck-and-neck for first place, are social networks and microblogs. But the dominance of these tools goes beyond application type. Within each category, one platform dominates, Facebook in the social media category and Twitter in the microblog category” (Edwards et al., 2013, p. 12). Because of their popularity amongst activists, I do focus on the Québec students’ use of Facebook and Twitter in my study.

Initially developed as a tool “to help people connect with and send messages to others” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 214), activists have since made full use of the technology of SNS. boyd and Ellison (2007) remark, “the bulk of SNS research has focused on impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, online/offline connections, and privacy issues (p. 219). My study differs from what boyd and Ellison have outlined as the majority of work on SNS, and instead draws from a network structure analysis (Atton, 2004; Bruns, 2008; Cohen, 2008; Curran, 2012; Fuchs, 2008, 2011, 2012; McChesney, 2013; van Dijck, 2013), featuring what I develop as the structural foundations of social media (I will be discussing and defining the structural foundations of social media later on in this chapter). These structural foundations of social media consist of ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital - elements that are found in each and every form of media. I approach the structural foundations of social media as elements that helped to provide opportunities for the Québec students to purposefully utilize the social media sites, Facebook and Twitter, as a tactic.

Social Movements

An understanding of social movements is key to my project. Not only is my study informed by previous uprisings, but my research itself revolves around an investigation of a recent social movement; the Québec student strike of 2012. Sidney Tarrow (2011) defines social movements as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (p. 9). Collective action is a
fundamental component of social movement, as Alberto Melucci (1980) contends, therefore, it “is always considered to be the result of a strain which disturbs the equilibrium of the social system” (p. 200). More specifically, Melucci (1980) proposes that social movements are collective actions that fulfill two conditions: 1) the existence of a struggle between two actors for the appropriation and orientation of social values and resources, each of the actors being characterized by a specific solidarity; and 2) includes all the types of behaviour which transgress the norms that have been institutionalized in social roles which go beyond the rules of a political system and/or which attack the structure of a society’s class relations (p. 202).

The Québec students opposed a rise in tuition fees and were united by their particular motives, which then led to an explicit challenge to those in power, which satisfies Tarrow’s definition of a social movement. As well, the Québec students were involved in a collective action which was part of a struggle, and certain behaviours that they displayed, such as protesting and demonstrating, were indicative of subversive behaviour – or at least behaviour that attempted to illuminate transgressions against the normative order. Thus, in applying these two definitions to the Québec student uprising, the movement satisfies all the criteria for both Tarrow and Melucci’s definition of a social movement.

Another set of definitions for social movements came from John D. McCarthy and Mayer Nathan Zald. McCarthy and Zald (1977) define social movements as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (p. 1217). Mario Diani (2001) underscores social movements as “networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals and organisations, who share a distinctive collective identity, and mobilise resources on conflictual issues” (p. 117). These two definitions, perhaps, best describe the Québec student uprising. The striking students held steadfast to a set of opinions and beliefs that differed from those in power. It began as a refusal to accept an increase in tuition, but that which encapsulated concerns over neoliberalism, austerity measures, and economic injustice, and metamorphosed into what can be categorized as “a much larger movement against the commodification of education and, more broadly, against the arrogance and authoritarian methods of a conservative government increasingly associated with corruption scandals” (Diani, 2001, p. 140). Very simply, the Québec student strike became a fight against neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice, an unjust law, Bill 78, and even capitalism and greed. The Québec students
sought changes to the system in place – the abolishment of tuition fees altogether. Moreover, the Québec students uprising was also comprised of a number of individuals and organizations (from different universities) who mobilized and whose collective identity was one that challenged the increase in tuition fees. The striking students also satisfy Diani’s criteria for a social movement.

Yet another meaningful definition of social movements came from the late Charles Tilly. Tilly (2003) characterizes social movements as consisting of “a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of these powerholders by means of a repeated public displays of that population’s worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. At a minimum, social movements involve continuous interaction between challengers and powerholders” (p. 23). The Québec students who decided to strike displayed ongoing interaction between themselves and the powerholders that they opposed. All of these definitions are equally important in positioning and defining the Québec student strike as a social movement. Clearly, the strike contained all of the elements and criteria described by each one of these theorists. Effectively, all of these definitions inform my understanding of what constitutes a social movement, which in turn guides this project.

**Uprising**

My use of the term “uprising” refers to a response or struggle against something. Despite being closely tied to a myriad of other interchangeable terms such as civic engagement, civic participation, participatory democracy or even political participation, I use uprising in a context that is directly linked to social movement theory: the act of mobilization – the *doing*. As Leah Lievrouw (2011) contends, mobilization is, essentially, “what makes a movement a movement, the process in which people convert their collective *concerns* into collective *action* to bring about change” (p. 154). Despite the number of different ways “mechanisms of mobilization” are framed, depending on the social movement theory the writer adheres to, the process of mobilization is germane within all social movements. The manner in which I use uprising is consistent with Melucci’s (1996) description of *collective action*:

A set of social practices (i) involving simultaneously a number of individuals or groups, (ii) exhibiting similar morphological characteristics in contiguity of time and space, (iii) implying a social field of relationships and (iv) the capacity of the people involved of making sense of what they are doing. (p. 20)
In addition, as Manuel Castells (2012) observes, “At the individual level, social movements are emotional movements…But the big bang of a social movement starts with the transformation of emotion into action” (p. 13). As it applies to the Québec students, emotion turning into action, as well as emotion in addition to action, was noticeably on display, particularly during the demonstrations and marches. It can thus be argued that the uprisings were the young people’s reactions which were fueled by emotion. In the context of my study, the uprising that my participants partook in was, in the beginning, an emotional response against the university tuition increase proposed by the Québec provincial Liberal government in 2012, which then evolved into a social movement that rejected neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university and became part of the worldwide “anti-globalization” movement.

Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance

Another helpful set of definitions is provided by Eric Selbin (2010), who differentiates between the terms revolution, rebellion, and resistance. Selbin (2010) states that, “the impetus for revolution derives from injustice, impoverishment, the disenfranchisement of people” (p. 16). Further, Selbin (2010) differentiates revolution from resistance, “which presumes a defensive posture” and rebellion “with its focus generally on redressing a specific grievance” (p. 16). Revolution, for Selbin (2010), “is at root driven by dreams and desires; desperation alone is not enough” (p. 16). The Québec student strike most certainly did not adhere to the requirements of a revolution.

Rebellion, meanwhile, is defined as, “an extreme decision usually made under extreme conditions by people who believe their options are few” (Selbin, 2010, p. 13). As well, Selbin (2010) describes rebellion with the following: “Distinct from similar such efforts such as revolt, coup d’état, or political revolution, rebellions are often spontaneous uprisings aimed at changing leaders, policies, or even political institutions, but only rarely involve efforts to affect larger societal structures and norms/values directly” (p. 12). Fundamentally, the Québec student strike did not attempt to change leadership or political institutions. And unless one is dealing in hyperbole, it would be difficult to argue that the students were under extreme conditions with very few options.

The term that most befits the Québec student strike of 2012 is resistance. As Selbin (2010) details, resistance can “refer to a form of insurgency denoted by the refusal of people to
cooperate actively with, or express support for, the current regime or authority figures; even when this may appear passive, it is an activity, an ‘action’” (p. 11). Selbin (2010) adds: “However elusive resistance may seem, it is powerful” (p. 12). The students most definitely refused to cooperate with the provincial government and engaged in a number of actions and activities. Based on Selbin’s three definitions, I identify the Québec student strike as a resistance, but not a rebellion, and most certainly not a revolution.

The Structural Foundations of Social Media

The final term that I define, “the structural foundations of social media,” refers to the ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital found in each and every type of media. My understanding of these structures can be traced back to Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s (2002) “propaganda model” and the “five filters of the media” which includes ownership, funding, sourcing, flak, and anti-communism to help explain how both propaganda and systemic biases function in corporate-owned media. Although useful in its own right, my reasons for not utilizing this particular analytical model in my own analyses were twofold: the five filters are outdated as they do not map on directly to social media; and more importantly, many believe that the model contains bias. For instance, Chris Atton (2008) is outspoken in his criticism of Herman and Chomsky’s model, stating that “Analyses derived from Herman and Chomsky’s model tend to be highly deterministic” (p. 215). For these reasons alone, I instead turn to the following scholars to help articulate the structural foundations of social media: van Dijck (2013), Fuchs (2008, 2011, 2012), Atton (2004), Bruns (2008), and McChesney (2013).

My interest in the structural foundations of social media is tied to how the Québec students’ activism was affected because of their tactical use of SNS. I want to further understand how ownership, profit margins, production practices, and cultural capital have a direct impact on SNS. I also want to know how the tension and contradictions that exist within and between each of these structural foundations then allowed SNS to be used as a tactic by the students. By using van Dijck (2013), Fuchs (2008, 2011, 2012), Atton (2004) Bruns (2008) and McChesney (2013) to critically engage with the structural foundations of social media, I will be able to use their work as a theoretical lens to allow me to better respond to the research question which addresses how Facebook and Twitter were tactically used by the Québec students, and in turn, the resulting transaction.
Significance of the Study

The outcome of this research is a study that highlights a variety of tactics that were used by the Québec students in 2012. It pays particular attention to the political use of social media. The results are presented in a chronological order for an easier understanding of the student strike. I do hope that this research will be of interest to a wider audience outside of academia. My intellectual contribution is directed towards a broad audience; situated within the academic-activist network.

The significance of this particular study is tied to its outcomes. As previously mentioned, I am very interested in providing empirical data that documents and allows one to analyze the various tactics utilized by the Québec students in 2012. I want to introduce new information that came directly from the students that helped organize the movement. Through my results, I want to help create a “template” or a “blueprint” that can be accessed by other individuals who are involved in their own social struggles. Through my examination of the Québec students’ tactics, I aim to provide some information on strategies to other activists and social movement actors. I chronicle the difficulties in using NVivo to mine data from Facebook and Twitter from accounts that contain a multitude of posts and tweets. Methodologically, grappling with the issue of social media data collection and using certain forms of qualitative software certainly requires additional future research. I also want to inspire further research into the tactical use of social media by contemporary young activists.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of ten chapters. This chapter highlights the motivation, objectives and significance of the study. It explains, in detail, what the project is about. It contains a section entitled Operational Definitions which defines relevant terms that are used throughout the study. It also provides the foundation from which the project builds upon.

Prior to conducting my research, I felt that it was extremely important to familiarize myself with the rich history of student strikes in the province of Québec. Chapter 2 historicizes the Québec student strike and places it within the context of the previous student strikes in the province. Beginning with a brief summation of how post-secondary education was created in the province, the chapter explains how the Québec schools were politicized from the outset due to their varying loyalties to either Britain or France, evidenced by the creation of both English-
language and French-language schools. The chapter then outlines how the Quiet Revolution brought about a drastic change to the province’s education system. Moreover, the chapter addresses why most residents of Québec believe that education is an inherent right: education for all residents of Québec is a right afforded them irrespective of financial considerations, as stated in the province’s own Magna Charta. The creation of Cégeps is explained, as the province’s long history of resistance is reviewed. For many, the fact that the Québec student strike took place was not that surprising, and almost expected, because of the province’s rich history of past student strikes. Perhaps what is most important about the strike of 2012 is that it reminded us that everyday people still have the power to affect and change the world.

Chapter 3 explains neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university. By analyzing the student strike of 2012 within a larger global context, it becomes apparent that the strike became a part of a worldwide “anti-austerity” and “anti-globalization” movement. I briefly engage with other movements and explain how the Québec strike metamorphosed from a fight against tuition fees into a much larger struggle against neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university. Further, I explain how academics and students across Canada have been resisting the corporatization of the university, and firmly situate the student strike within this ongoing resistance.

Chapter 4 of the dissertation is focused on the review of the literature. Conducting a review of the literature is necessary and extremely beneficial as reading the various works introduces me to the key theorists in social movement theory, the political economy of social media – which I use to define and explain “the structural foundations of social media,” and youth activism alongside digital media. The literature review is conducted to address the two main research questions: What tactics did the Québec students use during the strike of 2012? How did the students utilize social media in conjunction with and in addition to these other tactics? The literature review is presented in three sections: the structural foundations of social media, social movement theory, and current young activists’ tactical use of social media. Given its breadth, this literature review is firmly situated within the disciplines of Communication, Media Studies, and Social Movement Studies.

In Chapter 5, the conceptual framework of the entire project is explained. It begins by firmly situating the Québec student strike of 2012 as a social movement. I then articulate social movement theory and how I use it as a theoretical lens in this project. In addition, I argue that
what began as a strike against increased tuition fees evolved into a movement that counteracted neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice, and unlawful government decrees (Québec National Assembly, Bill 78, 2012). The chapter then continues with an explanation of the second theoretical lens: the structural foundations of social media (ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital). Youth activism and social media is explained and promoted as the third theoretical lens of the project. Based on the literature review conducted in the previous chapter, social movement theory, the structural foundations of social media, and youth activism and social media were identified as important frameworks in which to make sense of this particular project.

My research methodology is fully explained in Chapter 6. The chapter begins with an explanation of the need for ethics and how ethics was procured for the project. This is followed by a section devoted to rationalizing the methods used for the study. Recruitment of the participants and the site of study are highlighted. The three varying research methods are introduced, justified and explained: these are interviews, textual analysis of data collected from Facebook and Twitter, and content analysis of data collected from a variety of media that reported on the student strike. The chapter concludes with a section detailing the methodological challenges that arose during the project.

Chapter 7 is devoted to explaining the tactics used by the students. For this, I incorporate the interviews conducted with my seven participants who worked as student organizers during the strike along with various media which displayed the tactics that they used. The chapter begins by introducing all of the various student groups that were involved in the strike. It follows by highlighting the importance of a tactic I refer to as “the united front” wherein all of the student associations agreed to work together during the strike. This was a very important move as it strengthened the students’ collective resistance. It was also historical as this was the first time that all student groups had come together as one in the history of student strikes in Québec. The next section outlines the importance of the tactic of direct democracy and horizontal leadership. The students and their respective associations held steadfast to this ideal which helped empower the students, and, in my opinion, strengthened their resolve against any of the government actions against them. The third set of tactics highlighted in this chapter are diversity and escalation of tactics. This section explains why certain tactics were used at the times that they were deployed. This section also investigates the importance and the use of the red square,
the casseroles, and the maNUfestation. It also looks at the students’ tactical use of media. As well, the significance of the introduction of Bill 78 to the student strike was discussed in detail. The interviews undergird virtually all of the tactics used during the strike. This chapter is probably my favourite of all the chapters for two reasons: it contains very rich data pertaining to the strike that makes a contribution to the field; the interviewees were able to articulate, in their own words, their thoughts and feelings about the strike in addition to the struggles and hardships that they encountered as student organizers. In other words, this chapter contains “the messy story.”

In Chapter 8, I focus on the students’ tactical use of social media, Facebook and Twitter. It includes in-depth empirical analysis based on the students’ tactical use of social media, specifically, Facebook and Twitter. I analyze both the student organizations’ use of social media, as well as individual student’s use of social media. I have yet to come across any studies which analyze and document the Québec students’ social media use as I have conducted in this thesis. Because of this, I am confident that my empirical data will help with future studies looking into the students’ tactical use of social media.

Chapter 9 focuses on how the striking students were portrayed by a variety of media. To conduct this part of the study, I collected and analyzed articles from a cross-section of varying sources. Both English-language and French-language media were investigated. Further, both national corporate-owned media as well as localized media were used. I also gathered information from independent news sources. Generally speaking, the French-language media were much more sympathetic to the students’ plight than their English-language counterparts. As well, the independent news sources were also supportive of the students when contrasted with their corporate-owned counterparts.

Chapter 10 includes a summation of my findings and my conclusion. It highlights the contributions that this study makes to social movement theory, youth activism, the tactical use of media, and primarily, studies into the Québec student strike. In particular, the dissertation is situated within critical communication studies with a focus on the political economy of social media and social movement theory, concerned with communication for social change. It will add to the exciting and burgeoning literature on social media and political and civic participation, analyses of the opportunities and constraints of social media as a tool of activism, the
surveillance mechanisms of social media, and the emerging literature around youth and digital media activism.
Chapter 2 – Historicizing the Québec Student Strike

Drawing inspiration from the Quebec student movement, we need to develop ways of bringing people together in order to learn from one another and act collectively to fight against austerity and for greater democracy and social justice. As students in Quebec demonstrated, this involves aligning new movements with the needs of the least advantaged people on campus and throughout society, with a core emphasis on supporting indigenous struggles.

It’s not that the Quebec experience is a perfect blueprint that simply needs to be implemented from place to place to place. But it does provide a useful model for thinking about what genuine solidarity looks like in action, and gives us a sense of what’s possible when masses of people mobilize together to change the world.


Québec’s School System

This chapter explains the uniqueness of Québec’s educational system in comparison to the other provinces in Canada. It historicizes both French-language and English-language education in the province, and highlights the impact each has had in the formation of the current system. This section is important as it clearly delineates what makes Québec educational system so much different than those found in the other provinces. Equally as important, this section explains why most citizens of Québec understand education as a fundamental individual right.

It can be argued that the school system in Québec was politicized from the outset (Magnuson, 1980; Henchey & Burgess, 1987). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, education served but a minority of the population, and when Québec became known as New France, the institutional history of education was specific to religious orders, particularly the Jesuits, Recollects, Sulpicians and Ursulines – which were denominations of the Catholic Church (Magnuson, 1980). Roger P. Magnuson (1980) writes that “the colony’s first schools were part of a campaign to Christianize the Indians. Because the policy of taking the faith to the Indians had not enjoyed great success, the religious orders embarked on a plan to bring the Indians to Christianity” (pp. 2-3). Moreover, education in New France was specifically a “religious enterprise”: “Schools existed chiefly to recruit and train priests and nuns who would carry the Christian message to the Indians and who would minister to the spiritual needs of the colonists. Schools also provided basic instruction for the sons and daughters of settlers, with an aim to making them good Christians and loyal subjects of the king” (p. 7). This remained as the status
quo for quite a number of years until Britain defeated France in 1760. Canada then became a 
British colony, ties between New France and France were weakened, and the province of Québec 
came into being:

The dynamic feature of the new colony was the juxtaposition of two cultures of 
peoples. On one side stood a relatively small number of British administrators, 
soldiers and merchants, who were English-speaking, Protestant and products of 
of the common law tradition; on the other, a numerically superior population of 
Canadians, who were French-speaking, Roman Catholic and products of the 
codified law tradition. In a sense, the colony had a British head and a Canadian 
body. (p. 11)

The Québec school system likewise became subject to change due to the British victory and 
Canada becoming a colony of Britain.

The late Norman Henchey and Donald A. Burgess (1979) posit that “Quebec’s structure 
of colleges and universities represents a break with traditions prior to 1960 and in many ways is 
without parallel in other provinces and states” (p. 99). Prior to 1960, the differentiation between 
English and French post-secondary education was quite distinct. A brief look at that history is 
outlined by Magnuson (1980):

University education came to the English population first. Thanks to James 
McGill, a Scottish fur merchant, who willed the sum of £10, 000 plus properties 
to the Royal Institution, McGill College received a royal charter in 1821. Until 
1852 the college was governed by Anglican clergymen and from 1864 by lay 
Protestants. In spite of its sectarian connections McGill more closely represented 
a nondenominational institution. From its early years its staff and students 
included, in addition to English Protestants, French and English Catholics and 
Jews. A second English college, Bishop’s college, was founded by Anglican 
authorities in 1851. A year later, Laval University, the first French-language 
higher school was established. (pp. 35-36)

Laval was joined by Montreal and Sherbrooke as French universities, while Sir George Williams 
University joined McGill and Bishop’s as the post-secondary institutions in Québec prior to 
1960, the dawn of the “Quiet Revolution.”

Very briefly, the Quiet Revolution was based on “a revolution of ideas” and “a rejection 
declared war on their value system and institutions – a long tradition of autocratic and indifferent 
government, a conservative church, a nineteenth century concept of economics and a 
glorification of the rural life. Central to the new ideology was the recognition of an expanded
state role in all facets of Quebec life” (p. 102). As Spiegel (2012) contends, “Quebec’s Quiet Revolution secured a host of rights and promises. Amongst them, accessible Post-Secondary Education was promised and tuition rates were frozen at a low rate. Indeed, much of Quebec’s distinct identity was founded on its commitment to egalitarian principles and resistance to neoliberal policies.” But prior to the Quiet Revolution, the conflict over education revolved around two distinct issues: who would control education and who would pay for it. Basically, no one wanted to pay for education, yet many seemed to want to control it:

The result was an underfunded education system divided along linguistic, confessional (Protestant and Catholic) and class lines. There were separate Protestant and Catholic schools, French and English schools, and public and private schools, along with various permutations and combinations of each. To a large extent the state stayed out of education, having no ministry of education to oversee the system, and not even initiating compulsory education until 1943. (Fournier and Rosenberg, 1997, pp. 123-124).

The Quiet Revolution signaled a drastic change within Québec, particularly within its education system.

Changes in education, it is said, epitomized the Quiet Revolution. Tradition became an afterthought as sweeping changes in education were implemented. Magnuson (1980) asserts that “education became an instrument of national policy as French Canadians came to believe that the political, economic and social development of society is inextricably linked with the school enterprise. Above all, the period was marked by the emergence of the state as the dominant education authority whose function was to provide for the school needs of all citizens” (p. 105). In an attempt to address the problems with post-secondary education, the Lesage government, in 1961, passed a series of laws referred to as the Grande Charte l’Éducation or Magna Charta of Education, “designed to solve pressing educational problems, to repair rather than reform education.” (p. 106). But chief to the Magna Charta was the following basic principle which was understood to be both permanent and fundamental: “the right of every Quebec youngster to receive an education appropriate to his interests, irrespective of financial considerations” (p. 106). Moreover, as a result of one of the 1961 educational laws, the Parent Commission was created.

The Parent Commission was “charged with the task of examining and reporting on all formal education, public and private, from preschool onward” (p. 106). What the members found, when they turned their attention to post-secondary education, was “a patchwork of
institutions which offered limited access and limited opportunities, which were in many areas strongly elitist in character and traditional in spirit, and which showed dramatic differences between French and English structures” (Henchey & Burgess, 1987, p. 99). A review of the French side revealed the following: classical colleges, affiliated with a university, offering four-year college studies leading to a baccalaureate; normal schools providing Bachelor or Pedagogy degrees and diploma programs for teachers; and institutes of technology, home economic institutes, and specialized institutions giving advanced training and certificates to secondary school leavers in addition to the three French-language universities (Laval, Montreal and Sherbrooke), which offered academic and professional programs that normally required the classical college degree as a condition of admission. The English side, on the other hand, included two teachers colleges, two liberal arts colleges in the American tradition (Loyola, Marianopolis), and three universities (McGill, Bishop’s and Sir George Williams University).

Henchey and Burgess (1987) see the following as an example which perfectly illustrated the differences between the French and English structures: “A French student wishing to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree would normally follow a four-year general arts program in a classical college and a three-year specialized program in university, a total of seven years after grade eleven; an English student would normally go directly from grade eleven to university and receive his B.Sc. in four years” (p. 100). The lack of consistency between the two systems was effectively addressed by the Parent Commission. The Parent Commission was “inspired by the principle of democratic education, which it defined as the right of all citizens to an education consistent with their interests and needs” (Magnuson, 1980, p. 107). The commission also proposed “comprehensive reforms touching on the character, organization and administration of education” (Magnuson, 1980, p. 107). Included in the Parent Commission’s recommendations, which eventually became the blueprint for school reforms in Québec in the 1960s, were the following: the centralization of education in an education ministry; expanded enrolments and an improvement in the schools holding power; greater stress on scientific, technical and practical education; the introduction of more modern teaching techniques and the restructuring of secondary and postsecondary education along comprehensive school lines. Largely due to the recommendations made by the Parent Commission, which were then implemented by the government, education became more standardized and the glaring differences between English and French universities, as well as English and French students, were purposefully lessened.
Instrumental in implementing these changes was the adoption of Bill 60 emanating from a recommendation by the Parent Commission, which, in turn, led to the creation of a Ministry of Education. Included in the changes from Bill 60 were the following: a commitment to accessible French language higher education; the creation of a tuition-free system of preparatory colleges (Cegeps); a shared understanding of the important role of cultural and educational institutions in defending and preserving Quebec culture within a predominantly English-speaking Canada (Sorochan, 2012).

One of the most important changes implemented during this time, which helped standardize post-secondary education in Québec, took place in 1967 with the creation and establishment of the first postsecondary colleges or Cegeps (collèges d’enseignement general et professionnel). The Cegeps “added a rung to the educational ladder which saw public participation at an educational level traditionally dominated by religious authorities” (Magnuson, 1980, p. 111). Cegeps were “designed as an intermediate step between secondary school and university, though separate and independent of both” (p. 111). Moreover, the Parent Commission believed that the establishment of Cegeps or “postsecondary colleges or institutes as it called them would encourage secondary school graduates to continue their schooling and would eliminate the disparate paths to higher education of French and English students” (p. 111). In a very specific and strategic way, the government of Québec, through the Parent Commission, was able to actualize their goal of standardizing post-secondary education in the province:

The rise of the CEGEPs represented in the first instance a radical reshaping of postsecondary education in Quebec…The restructuring of postsecondary education also meant that for the first time English and French students would travel a like road to university. All students would be required to complete thirteen years of school (comprising eleven years of regular and two years of CEGEP) to qualify for university entrance. The fixing of thirteen as the number of years of preuniversity education was a compromise to a traditional disparity. (p. 111)

Additionally, the introduction of Cegeps helped to further reinforce the fundamental belief that each and every student in Québec is entitled to an education, that it “must be accessible to all, must be humanistic, and must be oriented towards the needs of the child” (Fournier & Rosenberg, 1997, p. 126). This is a belief that remained very much at the forefront in the recent student strike of 2012.
The Quiet Revolution

Most indicative of the history of blatant displays of unrest in the province of Québec was the “Quiet Revolution.” The Quiet Revolution was launched in 1960 by the Liberal party who assumed power under the leadership of Jean Lesage (Magnuson, 1980). Prior to that time, “the dress rehearsal for the reforms of the 1960s was staged in the preceding decade despite it being a time when the traditional ideology retained its legitimacy and the province remained in the firm grip of an autocratic government under Maurice Duplessis” (p. 102). Individuals such as Pierre Trudeau, Gérard Pelletier and Pierre Laporte, who would later make their mark in federal and provincial politics were “some of the strongest voices for change in the 1950s” and were vocal in attacking “the cozy alliance between the government and the conservative forces in society – big business, the church and the agrarian interests” (pp. 102-103).

The Union Nationale, who were in power before losing to the Lesage’s Liberals, were also under attack by academics such as Father Georges-Henri Lévesque, who was the dean of Université Laval’s Faculty of Social Sciences. As well, “newspapers like Le Devoir under André Laurendeau and periodicals like Cité Libre under Trudeau and Pelletier, and the Jesuits’ Relations, anticipated the Quiet Revolution by attacking, often unmercifully, the existing social and political order” (p. 103). But perhaps one of the most catalyzing works during that time period, Les Insolences du Frère Untel, was written by an anonymous teaching brother. Magnuson (1980) describes it as “Rabelaisian in tone, the popular work accused the school and the church of inculcating in the public mind notions of conformity, security and blind obedience to authority” (p. 103). The Quiet Revolution ushered in an enlarged state apparatus which meant “occupational opportunities for a rising generation of well-educated French Canadians and a strengthening of the already dominant position of the Francophone in the public administration” (p. 104). Even more important was that the Quiet Revolution “also witnessed a government more prepared to intervene in social and welfare matters, which until then had been the province of the church” (p. 104). Under Cardinal Léger of Montreal, the Catholic Church was led by a new type of clergy “and inspired by the reformist tendencies of Rome” the church then “expressed a willingness to share with the laity many of its traditional functions, particularly those of social welfare and education” (p. 104). Without a doubt, the Quiet Revolution ushered in a new era and new set of cultural and social realities in the province of Québec.
One of the main changes resulting from the Quiet Revolution was the rise of the new middle class. This became evident in two particular sites: the political arena and within the ranks of the state bureaucracy. Liliane Cotnoir, Louis Maheu, and Jean-Guy Vaillancourt reported the following in 1997:

In calling for a progressive type of nationalism, which was more open to the needs of the economy and the need for modernizing both state and civil society, and in making their political, cultural and linguistic demands (Guindon, 1988), the agents of these new middle classes played leading roles in the social and political arenas. The nationalist and student movements, and especially trade-unionism, supported the rise of the middle classes through the state and the political field because it promoted social development and technical expertise. (p. 219)

New members of the middle class began to directly affect and shape the province in a very particular way; through the promotion of both social development and technical expertise. Even moreso than before, individuals and groups began showing their displeasure and opposition to certain things in a very public manner.

A History of Resistance

During the era of the Quiet Revolution, the number of public displays where groups organized and demanded various forms of change were surfeit. As such, Québec became a site for an “astonishing wave of labour militancy” between 1964 to 1966, as alluded to by John F. Conway (2004, p. 63). During this time, “strikes by taxi drivers, police, postal workers, engineers at Hydro-Québec, teachers, hospital workers and civil servants rocked the province” (p. 63). As Conway rightfully summarizes, in 1966, “almost two million person days, five times the 1964 figure, were lost as a result of the strikes. Everywhere the demand was the same – income parity with English-speaking equivalents in Canada (usually in Ontario)” (p. 63). Individual workers had formed groups that were united in their displeasure, and who were both vocal and willing to strike over the perceived wrongs. Two such strikes included the general hospital strike which took place in the summer of 1966, which was followed by the teachers’ strike, which began in the earlier part of 1967, as told by the late Evelyn Dumas (1974), who was a senior reporter at a number of Montreal-based newspapers, as well as being policy advisor to René Lévesque. Workers strikes in Québec became commonplace during the Quiet Revolution. However, striking was not a tactic that was reserved for workers, as students similarly engaged in the practice; and sometimes, even in support of certain workers.
In November 1964, L’Union Général des Étudiants du Québec (UGEQ) was founded. Several organizations were instrumental in its creation, including l’Association Générale des Étudiants de l’Université Laval (AGEL); l’Association Générale des Étudiants de l’Université de Montréal (AGEUM); l’Association Générale des Étudiants de l’Université de Sherbrooke (AGEUS); la Fédération des Normaliens du Québec (FNQ) and FAGECCQ (Favreau, 1974, p. 83). During their annual meeting in November 1965, UGEQ decided to “decentralize or regionalize the organization” in addition to denouncing the educational system as one that was discriminatory (p. 84). Simultaneously, they also affirmed that “the student has the duty to fight against all forms of exploitation, intolerance, and discrimination” (p. 84). These decisions were manifestations of the students’ desire to “work through UGEQ for the social and political transformation of their country” (p. 84). In conjunction with these affirmations and decisions, two courses of action were also decided:

The first was the use of social animation (community organizing using group dynamics) to bring about changes within a community in order to increase the participation of each community member. (The organization of a global strategy of social animation to be implemented in the student milieu constituted the principle point in the selection of the Nelson team.) The second course of action was to organize around demands like: ‘the means to secure student rights, to balance their needs with those of the nation, and to express demands through their grievances committees.’ (p. 84)

Shortly beforehand, in March 1965, the students of the École des Beaux Arts went on strike. Their main demand was “the setting up of a Royal Commission to enquire into the state of the teaching of the Arts in Québec, with a view to the reorganization of the whole post-secondary system of education in Québec” (p. 86). UGEQ held a special congress two weeks into the strike and decided to support the Beaux Arts students while the executive was empowered to “declare a general strike of all students across the province if the government maintained its negative attitude to the problem” (p. 87). This was the first time that the government in Québec found itself pressured by a student body, and three days later, the demands of the students were met by the province.

The Cégep general strike in 1968 likewise displayed public displays of discontent, in general, and student resistance in particular, within the province. Lauzon (1974) argued that the Cégep crisis was the first time that “a radical movement proceed through action to a fundamental questioning of society” in Québec” (p. 104). Prior to that, “we had seen either reformist leftists
working within the system to correct its defects and improve its functioning, or far left movements which identified ‘action’ with a mere verbal expression of their radical opinions” (p. 104). The Cegep resistance was different because physical action was undertaken by the students, in the form of occupying the Cegep buildings as a way to demonstrate their frustrations with the system. Lauzon (1974) lauds the actions undertaken by the students: “Taken as a whole, the movement consists of a total affirmation, which goes almost immediately from intuition to action, leaving to its opponents the tangle of ambiguous verbiage. This movement was not proclaimed, it was lived” (p. 104). For Lauzon, the Cegep resistance was not only important because it was the first time that such actions had taken place in Québec, but also because “through direct action the new values were realized concretely: the revolt against submissiveness, activity and imagination replaced passiveness, the reintegration of the self replaced the feeling of alienation, the love of others overcame the fear of authority, joie de vivre replaced blind ‘duty’, responsibility replaced dependence” (p. 110). Also, Lauzon felt that the actions undertaken by the students were both unavoidable and necessary:

The occupiers were told by their elders, ‘Go back to your business, let the machine function; you can protest in your spare time.’ In other words, accept the realities of society, even though you can denounce them verbally. This gem of advice sums up the history of our impotence….To recognize, as has been done, that society can be criticized, and to allow the protesters to speak out if they stay in line otherwise, is to demonstrate our own alienation, our own insensitivity, since it is speech that has made up the principal instrument of our alienation. (p. 105)

Students partaking in the event were a necessity. Their actions were required much more so than merely “speaking out while staying in line.” Otherwise, the status quo would have been maintained with no significant changes actualized (LeBlanc, 1971).

One would be remiss if, when speaking of radicalism and resistance in Québec, one neglected to mention the “General Strike of 1972.” As Arnold Bennett (1974), a former councilor and award-winning translator tells us, “the General Strike was the first large-scale general strike anywhere in Canada since the famous Winnipeg General Strike of 1919” (p. 125). One of the largest working class rebellions in history, over 300,000 workers participated as “radio stations were seized, factories were occupied, and entire towns were brought under workers’ control” said George Sweetman (2006), an active member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty’s labour group. It was on April 11, 1972 that in excess of 210,000 public sector
workers joined in solidarity and struck against the government, effectively shutting down the entire province. The government responded by targeting hospital workers and placing injunctions on 61 hospitals. The hospital workers defied the injunctions and as result, the government decided on a heavy-handed tactic and “on April 19, nine days into the general strike, 13 low-paid hospital workers were jailed 6 months and fined $5000 (about a year's pay) for ignoring the injunctions. Their union was fined $70,600. A total 103 workers would be sentenced a total of 24 years and fined $500,000 in the course of a few days” (Sweetman, 2006). On April 21, Bill 19 was passed into law, which forced the unionized workers back to work in addition to banning fundamental trade union rights for two years. Initially, the trade union leadership recommended that the workers return to work and claimed the general strike to be over. However, the strike was far from over. In response to the jailing of the leaders of the three unions that joined together in the strike, Louis Labarge, Marcel Pepin, and Yvon Charbonneau, the workers quickly took action by “spontaneously downing their tools and organising their fellow workers in what became a full-fledged revolt by the working class” (Sweetman, 2006). As Sweetman (2006) recounts, the chronology of events were as follows:

1) The longshore workers were the first to walk off the job in Montreal, Quebec City and Trois-Rivieres, joined an hour later by 5000 teachers in Joliette, the Gaspe, Chicoutimi, l'Estrie, Sorel, Mont Laurier and the Mille Iles. CUPE maintenance workers set up picket lines, nurses and other hospital workers joined them on the picket lines.

2) Mass meetings were held late in the night and early in the morning, the workers' of Sept-Iles called a general strike idling all industry in the iron-ore port, taking control of the town, and seizing the local radio station.

3) In St. Jerome, an industrial area north of Montreal, 400 textile workers walked off the job and soon found themselves joined by bus drivers, metal plant workers, teachers, and white-collar workers. At the request of workers at the CKJL radio station, the strike committee seized the airwaves and broadcast union statements and revolutionary music.

4) By the next day 80,000 building trades workers were on strike; Mines at Thetford Mines, Asbestos, and Black Lake were struck; Workers shut down factories all across the province, including 23 at the St. Jerome Industrial Park alone.

The strike lasted for an entire week, and an estimated 300,000 workers participated in the event. They had “self-organised the largest general strike in North American history” (Sweetman,
The strike eventually ended when the government released the three jailed union leaders, who then, in turn, asked their members to return to work. As Bennett (1974) has shown, one of the strategies employed by the provincial government to minimize the chances of another general strike occurring is by frantically trying to “perpetuate the myth that labour militancy is on the decline in Quebec” (p. 123). While this argument may or may not be factual, what have been chronicled are that many more gatherings and demonstrations have taken place in Québec since the General Strike of 1972. Included in these was the mobilization of over 15,000 people in Québec City in 1995 for the “Bread and Roses” demonstration which involved 40 different organizations against issues such as poverty and for rights such as intergenerational justice (Cotnoir et al., 1997).

One of the most important acts of civil disobedience in Québec’s fairly recent history also took place in Québec City on April 20-22, 2001 – the Summit of the Americas. The third such summit of its kind, the protests presented a real threat to organizers, the State and police alike as evidenced by their preparedness and the tactics that they employed:

Much like the General Strike, many different factions and groups joined forces in denouncing the plans to “extend the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the entire Western hemisphere, further widening inequality between and within countries” as reported by protest participants and editors of the book, Resist!: A Grassroots Collections of Stories, Poetry, Photos and Analyses form the Québec City FTAA Protests and Beyond (Chang et al., 2001). The protest turned somewhat violent as alluded to by the following description: “The various police forces unleashed 5192 tear gas canisters on people in the streets, residents of the city and, to some extent, delegates themselves. Along with that, they fired 903 rubber or plastic bullets into crowds or directly at individuals, often at close range” (Chang et al., 2001). The most important aspect of this uprising related to this project is the clear display of the political involvement by many university students in Québec.
**Conclusion**

As alluded to in Cairns’ epigraph, lessons can and must be learned from the Québec student movement. From a political standpoint, Solty (2012) declared the students as winners in their fight against austerity policies. Further, he claimed that resistance to austerity policies “can be quite successful when it is based on the protection of essential social-welfare achievements from which a large majority of the population benefits” (Solty, 2012). This is indeed the case in Québec as countless students undoubtedly benefited from tuition costs not increasing. In addition, the students were not fighting for something new, but rather, a traditional concept that was written in their Magna Charta and stemming from the development of Québec education as a whole: the right of every Québec citizen to receive an education appropriate to their interests, irrespective of financial considerations. The students fought for and won a battle to uphold this right and maintained the status quo.

On September 20, 2012, CLASSE issued a release responding to the cancellation of the tuition fee hike by the Parti Québécois:

> Following the announcement of the cancelling of the tuition fee increase and the abrogation of the Law 12 (formerly Bill 78), the CLASSE (the Coalition large de l’Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante / Broad Coalition of the Association for Student Union Solidarity) wishes to salute the courage and determination of all those who were active over the last few months. The organisation wishes, at the same time, to recall that this victory is not the end of the struggle, and that the student and popular mobilization must continue. (“La CLASSE réagit,” 2012)

Also in the release, CLASSE is adamant about remaining “opposed to any increase in tuition fees, including indexing to inflation” (“La CLASSE réagit,” 2012). Jeanne Reynolds co-spokesperson of the organization, adds: “Education is a public service, which must remain accessible; not a commodity, with a price that varies with the market” (“La CLASSE réagit,” 2012). CLASSE’s press release, released on behalf of the students, indicate that they are claiming a form of victory. While acknowledging the Parti Québécois’ decision to eliminate the tuition fee hike, the students remain defiant. CLASSE takes full credit: they held onto their principles and defended them with an approach that was combative, yet unifying. Further, they warn the incoming government that their approach will defeat any future regressive measures, and even forewarn of future battles regarding free education (“La CLASSE réagit,” 2012).
Moreover, although the focus of the student movement began as a stand against tuition fee increase, as Cairns pointed out, the students also demanded an end to racism, sexism, and homophobia within the education system; aboriginal justice; environmental justice; greater protections and better wages for workers throughout the province; and an end to poverty (Laferriere, 2013). All of these demands suggest a move away from a simple student strike to something much greater – a social movement. Through their resistance, they illustrated “the various ways in which these struggles are connected” (Laferriere, 2013).

It is also important to note that there were those who opposed the strike from the outset, as indicated by the “green square movement”; students who opposed the strike and were in favour of the tuition fee hike wore green squares to combat the striking students’ red squares (Grenier, 2012). Upset at not being able to continue with their studies, on August 30, 2012, “students filed a class action suit against 25 educational institutions and against Quebec’s Attorney General,” claiming damages for “the failure of educational institutions and the state to deliver classes” (Grenier, 2012). As well, not everyone was convinced of the students being victorious and “coming out on top.” For one, Geoffrey Kelley, a Liberal politician for the Jacques-Cartier riding on the West Island, still defends his government’s decision to raise tuition fees and, “says the issue is far from gone,” and that universities need the money: “Over time, the issues raised last summer will have to be raised again if we want our universities to provide the best education possible for our young people” (Michael, 2013). In Kelley’s mind, a sentiment shared by countless other individuals, the student strike of 2012 only delayed the inevitable - that tuition fees would have to be increased at a later date in order for Québec’s universities to maintain their level of excellence.

Nevertheless, the Québec students that did engage in strike actions made it clear that “the broad impact of austerity compels us to fight together or see the conditions of life worsen for everyone except the super rich” (Laferriere, 2013). But perhaps most importantly, as articulated by Cairns, the student movement in Québec explicitly displayed “that when people organize collectively and democratically, they have the power to change the world” (Laferriere, 2013). Despite the obstacles and challenges that they encountered, the Québec students should be commended for their resolve in their fight for what they believed was just. And in many people’s minds, the Québec students were successful in their fight (Laferriere, 2013; Giroux, 2013; Collombat, 2014; Smeltzer & Hearn, 2014).
Chapter 3 – Neoliberalism, Austerity Measures, and the Corporatization of the University

“For years, public scholars such as David Harvey (2007a) and Henry Giroux (2014) have lamented the valorization of neoliberalism and its corresponding ideology by a number of governments worldwide. Some blame neoliberalism for helping to create economic policies that result in increasingly difficult living conditions for the poor (Houtart, 2005; Khalidi, 2012). Others criticize the removal of barriers to private ownership, including the privatization of social services and the commodification of natural resources such as land and water, and the willful destruction of ecologies and natural resources for profit (Harvey, 2007b; Giroux, 2013, 2014). Many others gesture towards the turn to neoliberalism as being the main reason for the ongoing corporatization of universities around the world (McGettigan, 2013; Smeltzer & Hearn, 2014; Foskett, 2015; Barnett, 2015). All of these reasons serve to highlight the highly problematic neoliberal logic. Make no mistake, neoliberalism is a global quandary. This chapter explains neoliberalism, austerity measures and the corporatization of the university. Simultaneously, it also positions the Québec student strike of 2012 alongside other student uprisings worldwide. As many have argued, the Québec student strike of 2012 may have begun as a strike against tuition fee increase, but it quickly escalated into a student uprising that likewise challenged neoliberalism, austerity measures and the corporatization of the university (Giroux, 2013; Collombat, 2014; Smeltzer & Hearn, 2014). Or as Shawn Katz posits, “Born as a student strike like so many others the province has known, it transformed into a historic mobilization that signaled the arrival of the social media century to Québec and the emergence of a new generation, and a new world, waiting impatiently in the wings” (p. 10).

Neoliberalism

Terry Flew’s (2014) study reveals that the discourse featuring “neoliberalism” became notable in the 1990s and was a substitute for the equally popular “monetarism”, which was a widely used term from the 1970s and 1980s. Monetarism was a word “particularly associated with critiques
of the policies of the Thatcher government in the UK and the Reagan administration in the US” (Flew, 2014, p. 50). The use of monetarism declined in the 1990s, which “coincided with the rise of neoliberalism as a common term” (Flew, 2014, p. 50). Flew (2014) suggests that the term “neoliberalism” functions mostly as a rhetorical trope and is used by those who already know what it means. For a simple explanation of the term, I turn to Henry Giroux (2010), who claims the following:

> With the advent of neoliberalism, or what some call free-market fundamentalism, we have witnessed the production and widespread adoption within educational theory and practice of what I want to call the politics of economic Darwinism. As a theater of cruelty and mode of public pedagogy, economic Darwinism undermines most forms of solidarity while promoting the logic of unchecked competition and unbridled individualism. As the welfare state is dismantled, it is increasingly replaced by the harsh realities of the punishing state as social problems are increasingly criminalized and social protections are either eliminated or fatally weakened. (p. 1)

Giroux (2010) articulates that it is the promotion of “the logic of unchecked competition and unbridled individualism” that drives neoliberal logic. In each of these scenarios, profit is privileged over all other forms of excellence. The State eviscerates the welfare state while simultaneously criminalizing social problems such as being poor, which, in simple terms, makes life much more difficult for the working class.

More recently, Giroux (2014) has expounded on his definition of neoliberalism. He states:

> Neoliberalism is a new form of hybrid global financial authoritarianism. It is connected to the Deep State and marked by its savage willingness in the name of accumulation, privatization, deregulation, dispossession and power to make disposable a wide range of groups extending from low income youth and poor minorities to elements of the middle class that have lost jobs, social protections and hope. (Giroux, 2014)

What is most interesting about Giroux’s recent claim is the inclusion of the middle class as equally affected by neoliberalism as the poor. What he once called “free-market fundamentalism”, he now refers to as a “hybrid global financial authoritarianism.” For Giroux (2014), the effects of neoliberalism include an increase of power for the rich over the poor and the middle-class. More importantly, those in positions of power continue to make decisions that negatively impact the poor and the middle-class while remaining relatively unscathed, socially and economically. Giroux (2014) believes that countless neoliberal policies which have been
implemented “works well, but in the interest of very privileged and powerful elite economic and political interests that are aggressively waging a war on democracy itself.”

David Harvey (2007b) explains neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (p. 22). It has been a boon for the upper classes as “it has either restored class position to ruling elites, as in the United States and Britain, or created forms for capitalist class formation, as in China, India, Russia, and elsewhere (Harvey, 2007b, p. 34). Taylor Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse (2009) state that neoliberalism “has come to signify a radical form of market fundamentalism with which no one wants to be associated” (p. 138). George Monbiot (2014) claims that neoliberalism promises that “the market can resolve almost all social, economic and political problems. The less the state regulates and taxes us, the better off we will be. Public services should be privatised, public spending should be cut, and business should be freed from social control.” In their study on the effects of neoliberalism on immigrant families in Canada, Root, Gates-Gasse, Shields and Bauder (2014) conclude that self-sufficiency, traditional hard-working “family values”, a law-and-order orientation, and the embracing of a liberal-democratic value system that is focused on individual rights and western values are neoliberal ideas that are “constructed in Canada by the Federal Conservative government” (p. 3). Providing perhaps the clearest and most concise definition of the term, Jeffrey Juris (2008) specifies that neoliberalism “refers to a set of free market policies commonly referred to as the Washington Consensus, which are imposed through trade agreements and multilateral institutions including the World Bank, [International Monetary Fund] IMF, and [World Trade Organization] WTO” (p. 7).

The common theme behind all these various definitions is that neoliberalism privileges profitability and individualism and attempts to solve all of society’s problems through privatization. Further, the market fundamentalism associated with neoliberalism is being enacted in many Western countries around the world by their respective governments. Although the Québec students voted to strike to oppose an increase in their tuition fees, their uprising quickly escalated into a battle against neoliberalism, and this turn firmly situated them as part of an ongoing worldwide resistance against neoliberalism and the austerity measures that come with it (Solty, 2012; McLaren, 2012).
**Austerity Measures**

Austerity measures can best be explained as the most common policies and actions taken that accompany neoliberal logic, and examples of austerity measures worldwide are surfeit. Juris (2008) posits that fiscal austerity measures include reductions in social expenditures and basic subsidies, privatization, trade liberalization, devaluation, deregulation, and export-oriented production. Additionally, “neoliberal projects have facilitated the penetration of corporate capitalism across space, bringing new areas into global production, consumption, and labor circuits while commodifying healthcare, education, the environment, and even life itself” (Juris, 2008, p. 8). More alarming is writer Patrick L. Smith’s (2015), *Salon* headline which reads, “Big banks run everything: Austerity, the IMF and the real story about world economy that the media won’t tell you.” In his article, Smith (2015) asserts that those in positions of power do not allow any alternative to the orthodoxy, as an increase in austerity measures are implemented in countries such as Greece and the Ukraine. But just as quickly as they are implemented, austerity measures are rejected by a great number of people, particularly the vulnerable, poor and the oppressed.

A pertinent example of this type of resistance is from the Zapatistas. A group consisting of mostly indigenous farmers from Chiapas, Mexico, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation’s (EZLN) struggle against neoliberalism includes having had their lands and resources stolen from them by the Mexican state in addition to “the people themselves exploited under some of the worst labor conditions in Mexico” (Cleaver, 1998, p. 623). The Zapatistas live in “geographically bounded communities in southeast Chiapas called caracoles. Caracoles (“snail” in Spanish) are the community-based structures for the EZLN. There are five caracoles across the state of Chiapas” (Wolfson, 2014, p. 41). The Zapatistas reside in these autonomous zones outside of “the Mexican governance structure” where they “house, educate, and care for all members within these communities” (Wolfson, 2014, p. 41).

As a way to attract more foreign investment and to secure that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would come to fruition, Mexican President Salinas “abrogated the last meaningful guarantees of community integrity in Chiapas by altering Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution to allow for the privatization of communal land” (Cleaver, 1998, p. 625). In response to the President’s decision to take away their land, “the Zapatista communities ordered their citizen army to take action as a last ditch effort to stave off what seemed like
imminent annihilation” (Cleaver, 1998, p. 625). After many years of suffering, the Zapatistas decided to act on the day the NAFTA went into effect: “On 1 January 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation began its armed rebellion against the Mexican federal executive and elements of the state that supported and defended it by seizing several towns and hundreds of ranches in Chiapas… At the time of the uprising, the Zapatistas’ rebellion appeared almost anachronistic – a throwback to an earlier era of revolution ill suited to a world in which neoliberal capitalism appeared globally ascendant” (Khasnabish, 2010, pp. 52-53). Although the Zapatistas’ fight against their government was local, their struggle was clearly against a form of global neoliberal capitalism, which Khasnabish (2010) points out.

Insofar as the Zapatistas were armed and militant, they also “awakened the political imaginations of activists around the world, replacing the dry manifesto and the sectarian vanguard with fable, poetry, theater and a democratic movement of movements against global capitalism” (Boyd & Mitchell, 2014, p. 2). Joss Hands (2011) describes the Zapatistas as being “the first information guerrilla movement” and credits their rise to “global prominence because of their innovative use of the Internet” (p. 45). Hands (2011) also notes that the Zapatistas’ fight was against neoliberalism. Juris (2008) echoes this sentiment and believes that “many radicals trace the origins of anti-corporate globalization activism to the Zapatistas, who introduced what was widely perceived as a new kind of revolution based on grassroots participation from below as opposed to capturing state power” (pp. 44-45). However, the Zapatistas’ armed response to neoliberalism and austerity measures are not indicative of all uprisings. Most of the visible challenges to austerity measures have been peaceful protests that are relatively devoid of protester violence; the opposite of police and state response, which has been quite violent at times.

Worldwide actions against neoliberalism and austerity are known under many different names. They are referred to as the “anti-globalization movement”, “anti-corporate globalization movements”, the “alter-globalisation movement” and also the “global justice movement” (Bennett, 2004; Hands, 2011; Hess, 2013; Juris, 2008; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2004). Despite the different titles, all of the groups involved in these resistances uphold very similar, if not the exact same values. These protests are not specifically against globalization: rather, they contest the way neoliberalism and austerity measures shape globalization, as well as the corresponding negative effects the enactment of these policies and actions impart on human beings and the
environment (Ayres, 2001). Hess (2013) notes that “antiglobalization movements embody both a politics of opposition – to a corporate-led, neoliberal vision of globalization – and a politics of alternatives in favor of more just and sustainable economies and policies” (p. 155). della Porta (2015) supports these assertions and states, “In Spain, the indignados called for dignity, against the deterioration of the society brought about by neoliberalism. In Spain, Portugal, Greece or Italy, there has been a strong mobilization in defence of the declining welfare state. In the Occupy Wall Street, demands emerged for debt cancellations, a social wage or guaranteed income, universal care centres, paid sick leaves, and higher taxation for the rich” (p. 97). What all of these examples highlight are working peoples’ demands for better living conditions.

A list of well-known and largely attended peaceful anti-globalization protests since the late 1990s include the anti-WTO protests that took place in Seattle in 1999 (50,000 protesters), protests against the World Bank and IMF in Prague in September 2000 (15,000 protesters), the protest against the European Union (EU) in Nice, France in December 2000 (75,000 protesters), the largest anti-corporate globalization action in North America which was a protest against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Summit in Quebec City in April 2001 (80,000 protesters), the protest against the (EU) in Barcelona in March 2002 (500,000 protesters), the protest against the G8 in Evian, Switzerland in June 2003 (hundreds of thousands of protesters), and the protest against the European Social Forum in Athens, Greece in May 2006 (35,000 participants; more than 100,000 join final antiwar march) (Juris, 2008). Despite the fact that there were earlier anti-neoliberal demonstrations, Harden (2013) argues that the 1999 protest against the WTO in Seattle distinguished itself because of four major traits: it heralded an international anti-neoliberal movement, “where participants got a sense of their global support”; it encouraged different forms of protest that featured decentralized modes of affinity groups, clusters, and “spokescouncils”, which privileged direct democracy and horizontal leadership; alliances were formed between unions and other social movements; and it demonstrated a constant tendency towards inclusiveness (pp. 29-37). Thus, many gesture towards the 1999 anti-WTO protest in Seattle as being the first successful large-scale international anti-globalization protest (Juris, 2008; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2004) and Bennett (2004) goes so far as to refer to the protest as “a punctuating moment in the evolution of global activism” (p. 123).

Locally, Toronto also witnessed the counter movement against globalization as thousands protested the G20 meeting in June 2010. Certainly, one could realistically argue that Occupy
Wall Street (Costanza-Chock, 2012a), Spain’s indignados movement (Gerbaudo, 2012), the Turkish protests manifest at Taksim Square (Simsek & Fraser, 2013), and even Brazil’s “vinegar uprising”, which was triggered by a “9-cent increase in the city’s public transport fares” (Barbara, 2013) were uprisings that were similarly against varying types of austerity measures imposed by each country’s respective government.

**Corporatization of the University**

Austerity measures as an accompaniment to neoliberalism is likewise manifest in the struggle against the corporatization of the university. In addition to the protests which I have just outlined, global student uprisings against neoliberal logic being applied to academia and the corporatization of the university is on the rise. *The Guardian* chronicled recent student resistance to austerity measures including funding cuts to courses, privatisation, precarious working conditions, and increasing tuition, which are all benchmarks of the neoliberal corporate university. Universities cited in the article included students at the University of the Arts, London, who protested against cuts to foundation courses, programmes that are required to prepare for “university-level art and design education” (“Students worldwide fight back,” 2015). At the University of Amsterdam, students began to occupy buildings in protest of “the management of its university” which included a decision to sell humanities buildings for conversion to a luxury hotel and spa complex (ibid). Students at the University of Tirana in Albania protested against government reforms which they feared would lead to an erosion of academic freedoms, divert public funds to private universities, and increase tuition fees (ibid). Protesters at the University of Helsinki, in Finland, complained about increased control, university ranking lists, efficiency demands, and the commercial branding of science (ibid). Students at the London School of Economics have demanded from their university fairer pay and conditions for the university staff, a pledge not to invest in fossil fuels, and a pledge not to raise tuition fees (ibid). Spotted at Utrecht University in the Netherlands was a red square drawn on one of the cobblestone streets indicating solidarity with all the ongoing student movements worldwide (ibid).

After several months of unsuccessful negotiations with the university’s administration for a new contract with increased wages, the graduate students’ contract with the University of Toronto expired. On March 2, 2015, after previously having overwhelmingly voted to undertake
strike action, the graduate students at the University of Toronto officially went on strike. Several media sources quickly reduced the strike to a fight for an increase in the funding packages graduate students receive from the university, an increase from $15,000 per year to an amount closer to the poverty level of $23,000 (Brown & Khandaker, 2015; Peake, 2015). A few journalists attempted to understand the situation fully prior to reporting in order to provide a more balanced story (Chiose, 2015; Dehaas, 2015; Westwood, 2015). The Guardian’s caption beside the picture of University of Toronto graduate students on strike read: “For four long weeks, students at that University of Toronto were on strike against the growing neoliberalisation of post-secondary education in the city and the deplorable funding package offered by the university” (“Students worldwide fight back,” 2015). An opinion piece written by an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto in The Globe and Mail was indicative of what most of the students were saying:

What’s happening at U of T and York is symptomatic of a larger problem across Canada. Underpaid part-time staff teach a majority of undergraduates in Canada. For example, at U of T contract faculty and teaching assistants do 60 per cent of the teaching but make up 3.5 per cent of the budget. This is not an isolated problem. According to one study, the number of contract faculty in Ontario increased 87 per cent in between 2000 and 2014. (Schwartz, 2015)

On a similar note, six doctoral students and one contract faculty from the U of T’s Faculty of Social Work claimed that their fight included the following:

Professors are teaching less and less. Administrators are being paid more and more. The slack, pedagogical and financial, is being left to us -- those standing in the middle. And so here we stand. We stand together. We stand for education. We stand for justice and equity. We cannot and will not let the income gap in universities grow any larger under our watch. We cannot and will not let working conditions become any more exploitative under our watch. We stand resolute in the face of these growing threats to the quality of your education; threats to your access to education, and your children’s education. (Wilson et al., 2015)

Precarious labour, an increase in salary for administrators while tenure-track professorial jobs are cut and an increased reliance on graduate students as underpaid teaching assistants and contractual workers are symptoms of the neoliberal agenda in the postsecondary sector. The statement from the students at the Faculty of Social Work clearly expresses their understanding of their struggle as one against the neoliberalism, austerity measures, and corporatization of the university. York University’s graduate students similarly engaged in a strike action for many of
the same reasons as their University of Toronto counterparts. York’s strike ended a few days after the U of T strike had ended, and many considered York administration’s acceptance of several demands as a victory for the students (Bedard, 2015; Brown, 2015).

In *The Great University Gamble*, Andrew McGettigan (2013) found that the UK government was taking a “huge gamble with England’s universities, introducing uncertainty into a stable and productive system” (p. 6). He cites “created dangers and entirely avoidable short-term challenges for universities” that, in some cases, are losing up to £40 million per year in public funding from the government (McGettigan, 2013, p. 6). As a response to this deficit, universities in the UK have had to adopt different processes, policy considerations and initiatives. This has led to such programs as “internal privatisation” wherein changes to revenue streams include direct funding from the government replaced by private tuition fee income, such that the sole responsibility for the paying of educating oneself becomes the student’s and their immediate family (McGettigan, 2013). Other results include “the outsourcing of jobs and activities to the private sector and management consultants, which has become widespread in England”, “changes to the corporate form and governance of universities”, and the “entry of private capital and investment into the sector through buyout and joint ventures with established institutions (McGettigan, 2013, p. 9). Judging by the language used, universities are indeed becoming increasingly corporatized. Whereas undergraduate students in England were charged a maximum tuition amount of £9,000 in September 2012, one only needs to look back a few years to the introduction of a “co-payment” of £1,000 per student in 1998, and before then, free education, to further display the corporatization of the universities in the UK (McGettigan, 2013).

As evidenced by the recent number of student struggles that are challenging the corporatization of the university, this phenomenon of students rising up and fighting the system is shown in *The Guardian* article as a worldwide manifestation (“Students worldwide fight back,” 2015). Canadian scholars Smeltzer & Hearn (2014) note that the transition to a corporatized university is quite apparent in the West as institutions of higher learning continue to seek “private investment and higher tuition fees to replace declining public funding” (p. 353). As they argue, the implications of a corporate university result in much more than an increase in tuition fees, and instead include the following symptoms and results:
Demands to produce research with monetizable results, the unceasing mantra of innovation, the preoccupation with techno-science, the administrative use of information and communication technologies for the integration of faculty into client self-service systems, the casualization and increased tiering of academic labour, the erosion of faculty self-governance, the growth of branch plan campuses overseas and the overt courting of international students and their lucrative international fees. (Smeltzer & Hearn, 2014, p. 354)

In *We All Want to Change the World*, cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg (2015) shares his opinions regarding the corporatization of the university in the United States:

> Under a variety of pressures, universities have come under many of the same managerial and corporatist strategies that have redefined both governmental social service apparatuses and private enterprises. These impose new and increasing constraints on the labor conditions and practices that are solicited, rewarded and even allowed in universities; they have redefined the relations of the practical and pure sciences, and between the sciences and the liberal arts; they have redefined the relations of research and education; and they have meant that the sources of income and support have had to adjust to the changing political debates, policies and pressures of the various "stake-holders" of the academy. (pp. 76-77)

For Grossberg (2015), the effects of neoliberalism and the corporatization of the university have brought real changes to the structure of the university, even amongst and within the different disciplines, including the redefinition of research and education to profit-oriented pursuits.

In Québec, the strike was no longer only about an increase in tuition fees, but also included “a much larger ideological battle…pitting the humanist ideal of education nourished by the youth against the ruthless advance of a cold and exploitative ‘model of human capital’ carried forward by the economic and political élites” (Katz, 2015, p. 35). A number of the striking students in Québec were convinced that their universities had become “factories designed to churn out productive workers and consumers,” instead of educational institutions primarily concerned with education and the public good (Katz, 2015, 35). The students on strike were very much aware of and resisted the corporatization of the university.

Perhaps an even more serious problem, Cary Nelson (2009), former President of the American Association of University Professors considers the fate and the future of academics as being directly intertwined with the corporatization of university. As neoliberal ideologues continually eschew the importance of tenure, Nelson (2009) combats this ideal and instead advocates for the tenure process, and explains that “Academic freedom serves as my assurance that I can do as I choose in my teaching and research” (p. 690). Nelson further argues that
without tenure, not only are academics open to attack and discipline from those who do not agree with their research, findings, or political leanings, but academics also become tied to the economies of the market as well. In this scenario, only academics who can monetize their research will be highly sought after and privileged over those who cannot translate their research into real dollars by the corporate universities. Recently, two states have experienced an increase in austerity measures in their respective universities.

In Wisconsin, universities have faced cutbacks in government funding since Republican Scott Walker became governor of the state. In 2012, Walker cut “$1.6 billion from public education, the fourth largest cut to K-12 schools in the country and the largest cut to education in Wisconsin’s history” (Flaherty, 2013). In his 2015 budget proposal for the state, “Governor Walker moved to cut $300 million in state funding from the University of Wisconsin. He also proposed changes to the university’s mission statement, replacing the emphasis on public service and the search for truth with a pledge to ‘meet the state’s work-force needs’” (Dash, 2015). Walker has also suggested that the university professors “could be teaching more classes and doing more work” (Dash, 2015). Further, many pundits see Walker’s antagonism of the University of Wisconsin as “an establishment of a staunchly anti-academic political positioning, a stance that appeals to the voters who worry that their tax dollars fund the intellectual pursuits of a liberal elite” (Dash, 2015). More recently, Walker has drawn the ire of many professors as his assault on higher education included attacking the existing tenure system: “Gov. Scott Walker’s move to eliminate tenure at the University of Wisconsin (UW), one of the world’s finest universities, strikes at the heart of the excellent education delivered to Wisconsin students in its public university classrooms and laboratories” (Flannery, 2015). By a vote of 12-4, the state Legislature’s powerful Joint Finance Committee approved “the elimination of tenure from state statute” (Flaherty, 2015). The budget cuts are representative of austerity measures and the elimination of tenure is an attempt to wrest more power away from the workers – an aspect of neoliberalism. As a result of Walker’s attacks, “already world-respected faculty are leaving Wisconsin for institutions where they see the potential for more support” claims UW-Madison professor David Vanness (quoted in Flannery, 2015).

North Carolina is also experiencing its own set of problems pertaining to higher education including budget cuts to the university and community college systems as outlined by yet another Republican, Governor Pat McRory. In the Governor’s recommended budget for
2015-2017, he wants to cut public funding to universities by $26 million despite the fact that
enrollment is forecasted to increase by 1.7% the next year and 1.5% the following year (“The
Governor’s Recommended Budget,” 2015). In addition, despite a planned raise in tuition fees of
4.3% and 3.7% for the next two years, the recommended budget will not provide any additional
increase in financial aid for university students (ibid). McRory has also asked for a decrease of
funding of almost $14 million for the state’s community colleges while ordering a 5.5% increase
in tuition fees at these community colleges (ibid). These austerity measures, the decrease in local
expenditures and basic subsidies in the form of decreased help in funding for university students,
is yet another example of the neoliberal program being enacted across America.

In Canada, universities are undergoing similar changes to those taking place worldwide.
Dr. James Turk, former executive director of the Canadian Association of University
Teachers (CAUT), blames “declining government support for universities” as one of many
negative changes to the Canadian university system (Spencer, 2014). Turk states, “Twenty years
ago, over 80 percent of the university operating revenue came from government sources. Now in
Ontario it is less than 46 percent. Students have been forced to make up for lost revenue with
dramatically higher tuition fees, and large numbers graduating with substantial debts. The
prospect of incurring substantial debt deters lots of people from poorer families-especially
professional programs” (quoted in Spencer, 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, Turk cites the
“corporatization” of the university as the second most problematic change:

We are now moving to a hierarchical corporate model. University presidents used
to think of themselves as the lead academic in their institution, but their reference
group now is less their faculty colleagues than corporate CEOs. In fact, some of
them call themselves CEOs and are receiving salaries that would be respectable
for CEOs in the business world. They come to see committees and university
senates-the collegial governance system-as inefficient because “that’s not how
you run a corporation.” Boards of governance are losing interest in choosing first-rate academics to be presidents, preferring managers in tune with a narrower
economic vision of the university’s role. We’re now seeing several university
presidents with no academic background. (quoted in Spencer, 2014, pp. 9-10)

As more universities hire non-academics as their presidents, the mandate shifts from educating
individuals to maintaining a profit. For Turk, other factors which display the move towards the
corporatization of the university include the decrease in tenure-track and tenured professors,
positioning students as customers and professors as service providers, and the donations accepted
by the universities from private companies (Spencer, 2014). Effectively, for Turk,
corporatization is “applying the human resources policies of Walmart to the university” (quoted in Spencer, p. 11). In applying market fundamentalism on education, Turk believes that we are losing “the focus of university” as producing educated people (Spencer, 2014).

Jamie Brownlee (2014) posits that “the intrusion of business ideals and methods upon the true and professed values of the university” dates as far back as Thorstein Veblen’s time in the early 1900s (p. 1). Veblen was critical of this intrusion and wrote about it, as did other academics such as Harold Innis in 1946 and E.P. Thompson in 1970. The point is that the corporatization of the university has been occurring, in varying degrees, for well over a century. Key indicators of the corporatization of the university, according to Brownlee (2014) include the enhanced institutional integration between universities and corporate institutions (e.g., the expansion of public-private “partnerships” and donor agreements; the acceptance of corporate control over university curriculum and infrastructure development), and “business-like” practices and objectives that are increasingly employed by universities themselves (e.g., an expanded profit motive; a redefinition of public space on campuses; new policies and incentives that direct research missions toward commercialization and private gain; the casualization of academic labour; new restrictions on academic freedom in both teaching and research; challenges to collegial self-governance and the adoption of corporate management models) (pp. 5-6). Equally complex are the outcomes and consequences of corporatization, which include the more general transformation of higher education from a public to a private good (e.g., a growing reliance on student tuition fees and a redefinition of students as educational consumers; a shift in the university’s mission away from the provision of liberal arts education; and growing inequality and stratification within and between universities) (Brownlee, 2014, p. 6). Just as others have alluded to, Brownlee (2014) similarly posits that the corporatization of the university “is based in efforts to transform the university’s mission and modify its operations to better serve the private marketplace” (p. 7).

**Conclusion**

The Québec student strike of 2012 followed in the footsteps of previous student strikes and became a movement against neoliberalism and austerity measures. Smeltzer & Hearn (2014) posit that similar types of student protest have occurred worldwide since 2008: “Montreal, California, Wisconsin, Great Britain, Spain, Greece, Chile, Mexico and Egypt are only a
sampling of the sites where students have taken to the streets to demand affordable, quality higher education and to protest against austerity measures and neoliberal governmental policies writ large” (p. 355). Students rising up to challenge the corporatization of the university in Québec is not new either. However, what is different between the strike of 2012 with the previous provincial student strikes are some of the tactics utilized by the students in 2012. Smeltzer & Hearn (2014) state, “In an effort to address the broader neoliberal developments taking place in higher education, one of the central rallying cries was ‘la grève est étudiante, la lutte est populaire’: the strike might be about the students, but the struggle involves us all” (p. 354). Through various tactics that they employed alongside the introduction of the highly unpopular Bill 78, the Québec students were able to transform a simple student strike into a larger fight against neoliberalism and the corporatization of the university. By involving and garnering the support of a countless number of ordinary Québec citizens, the struggle became much more than a simple increase in tuition fees.
Chapter 4 – Literature Review

The casseroles are quiet, but the student movement continues to try and build alliances with other organizations, reminding us that objections to an increase in tuition fees and the strike have never been only about “money” but a debate about where we are going as a society.

-Kim Sawchuk, La grève est étudiant/e, la lutte est populaire: The Québec student strike, 2012

This chapter reviews the literature that addresses my two main research questions: What tactics did the Québec students use during the strike of 2012? How did the students utilize social media in conjunction with and in addition to these other tactics? The literature review is presented in three parts: the first, Social Movement Theory, examines existing theories and research specific to social movements and how they relate to the Québec student strike of 2012. The second section focuses on The Structural Foundations of Social Media, which is a political economic theory that includes dimensions of ownership, profit motives, production practices and cultural capital of social media organizations. This section investigates the tensions between ownership, profit motives, production practices and cultural capital found in contemporary social media that helps to explain why both Facebook and Twitter were used as a tactic by Québec students during the strike. I investigate these structural foundations as a way to explain and identify the factors that allowed social media to be used by the Québec students as an effective tactic. The third section explores Youth Activism and Social Media. This section looks at various tactical ways in which current young activists use social media. In particular, I elaborate on how various theorists conceptualize the effective use of social media by young activists. Additionally, recent writings on the political economy of social media, social movements, and young activists’ use of social media, in conjunction with my research findings, allow me to situate my study within the current and relevant discussions of social media and youth activism.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory is based on the premise that actions taken by citizens, which include revolts, uprisings, resistance and strikes, can be considered social movements. Through the years, a multitude of scholars have defined social movements in a variety of ways, from “a set of opinions and beliefs” within a population interested in “changing some elements of the social structure” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), to collective actions (Melucci, 1980), to “a sustained
challenge to powerholders” (Tilly, 2003). More recently, Tarrow (2011) claims that social movements are “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (p. 9). Given the commonality between the definitions that I have gathered, my functional definition of social movements is as follows: a collective response by a group of citizens enacting social unrest as a form of resistance toward those in positions of power.

Selbin (1999, 2008, 2010) is particularly helpful in defining many actions that fall under the umbrella of social movements. He defines resistance as “a form of insurgency denoted by the refusal of people to cooperate actively with, or express support for, the current regime or authority figures; even when this may appear passive, it is an activity, an ‘action’” (Selbin, 2010, p. 11). Selbin also reminds us that, “however elusive resistance may seem, it is powerful” (p. 12). Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner’s (2004) conception of resistance is much more succinct: two “core elements” are required: action and opposition (pp. 538, 547). Selbin (2010) differentiates rebellion as “an extreme decision usually made under extreme conditions by people who believe their options are few” (p. 13). Rebellions are also “often spontaneous uprisings aimed at changing leaders, policies, or even political institutions, but only rarely involve efforts to affect larger societal structures and norms/values directly” (p. 12). Similarly, Diana E. H. Russell (1974) states, “Rebellion is defined as a form of violent power struggle in which overthrow of the regime is threatened by means that include violence” (p. 6). Selbin (2010) further differentiates revolution from resistance and rebellion: “In contrast to resistance, which presumes a defensive posture, or rebellion, with its focus generally on redressing a specific grievance, revolution is at root driven by dreams and desires; desperation alone is not enough” (p. 16). Further, he tells us that, “revolutions are created by people, led by people, fought and died for by people, consciously and intentionally constructed by people” (Selbin, 2008, p. 130). Of these definitions, the Québec student strike was most certainly a resistance.

Equally important, if not more so, to defining the student strike as a resistance is Karl Dieter Opp’s (2009) work in defining a protest. Opp (2009) reflects, “All definitions agree that ‘protest’ refers to a behavior….Sit-ins, street blockades, and occupying sites are other examples that are in general classified as protest actions” (p. 33). Furthermore, he makes the following claim: “Protest is defined as joint (i.e. collective) action of individuals aimed at achieving their goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target” (p. 38). Additionally, protest
groups are defined as “a collectivity of actors who want to achieve their shared goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target” (p. 41). Most definitively, the actions the Québec students partook in were that of a protest group demonstrating against what they felt were unjust decisions made by the provincial government. Moreover, Opp (2009) asserts that the following four factors are inclusive of protest behaviour: protest is an *action* or behaviour; the actors *object to one or more decisions of a target* (or several targets); the actors *are unable to achieve their goals by their own efforts*; instead, they put pressure on third parties or antagonists, i.e. targets; the behaviour is *not regular*. Clearly, all four elements that Opp describes as essential protest behaviour were on display during the student strike of 2012.

Two of the most important terms associated with social movement theory are “mobilization” and “activism.” According to Richard Flacks, mobilization can be described as “the key word in the mainstream study of movements…. It refers to all of the processes by which people commit themselves to support a movement” (2004, p. 142). Applied to more recent circumstances, Sasha Costanza-Chock (2010) postulates that *transmedia mobilization* “involves engaging the social base of the movement in participatory media making practices across multiple platforms” (p. 113). In simple terms, a growing trend by protesters is to use both low-tech (posters, flyers, word-of-mouth, etc.) and high-tech (social media, blogs, YouTube, etc.) media. Transmedia mobilization was most definitely utilized by the students of Québec during the 2012 strike as the tactics effectively employed by the students included both low-tech and high-tech media. I will expand on Costanza’s theory of transmedia mobilization later in this chapter.

*Activism*, on the other hand, is a term used to “refer to movement participation that entails leadership activity, organizing, conscious concern about the direction of the movement, and conscious long-term commitment of time and resources and energy to the movement” (Flacks, 2004, p. 143). Geoffrey Pleysers (2013) maintains that “alter-activists” are individuals involved with transnational organized networks that predominantly use new and emerging technologies to carry out their brand of activism. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport (2011) suggest that activism on the web is transformative, simplified and enhanced by minimal costs required to create, organize and participate in protest, and that physically being together when engaging in action together is no longer necessary. María Elena Martínez-Torres (2001) considers the irony of how “the same technology that has taken world capitalism to a new stage of development – corporate
globalization – has also provided a significant boost for anti-corporate and anti-global movements” (p. 347). In other words, a paradox has emerged as the result of the creation and use of new technologies. The same tools that help promote corporate globalization also allow for reactions against it.

Similarly, many students and scholars such as Cullum (2010), Kavada (2010), Glaysier (2010), Neilsen (2010), Scholz (2010), and Schultz & Jungherr (2010) are all invested in the idea of “digital activism.” Digital activism is a form of online activism that Joyce (2010) refers to as “based on the digital network – an interconnected group of devices that use digital code to transmit information” (p. 2). Activism and the new forms of activism are key concepts to my study as they definitively explain some of the actions that the Québec students engaged in. Schultz and Jungherr’s (2010) work most closely resembles my own as the two authors provide a guide to strategies which activists may consider when deciding which digital tools to use.

Among the many types of social movements throughout the years, youth movements have been quite popular. Joseph Huber (1989), gives the example of the bourgeois youth movement in Germany which “formed up a movement of democratic-national student protest” that occurred as far back as 1834 (p. 367). Huber (1989) admits that “the movement of youth protest had many personal and programmatic ties to romanticism, which determined the entire epoch’s zeitgeist” (p. 367), in addition to a criticism of civilization, in general. But in terms of my project, one that seeks to explore the tactical use of social media by a contemporary youth-led social movement, many scholars gesture to the Zapatistas of Mexico as pioneers who incorporated the use of digital technology, particularly the Internet, as a tactic of resistance (Cleaver, 1998; Garrido & Halavais, 2003; Juris, 2008; Khasnabish 2008, 2010, 2013; Martinez-Torres, 2001; Wray, 1999). For instance, Todd Wolfson (2014) posits that in 1996, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation ( EZLN) “made a widespread call to activists, revolutionaries, and media makers to forge ‘a collective network of resistance against neoliberalism’ and ‘a network of communication among all our struggles’” (p. 5). Wolfson (2014) continues: “The core of their vision was that communications, and particularly new media tools, should play a central role in connecting points of struggles across the world, cultivating a global social movement” (p. 37). The result of the Zapatistas’ call to other activists worldwide include the creation of IndyMedia, People’s Global Action, the World Social Forum process, “and many other networks and institutions that mark the initial stage of this period of struggle” (Wolfson, 2014, p. 5). As Alex
Khasnabish (2010) details, the Zapatistas originated from “the jungles and canyons of the south-eastern Mexican state of Chiapas” (p. 1). Locally referred to as Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, or the Zapatista Army of National Liberation) the rebel group is comprised of mostly indigenous Mayans who are opposed to the Mexican federal government, the Mexican federal army, and, “most importantly, against a trajectory of racism, neglect, genocide and exploitation that began with the conquest of the Americas more than five hundred years ago” (p. 1). Acknowledgement of the Zapatistas’ struggle against neoliberalism and globalization is important for a number of reasons. Many scholars credit them for being the first group to use the Internet and social media aimed to mobilize global support (Khasnabish, 2008, 2013; Selbin, 1999, 2010; Stringer, 2013, Wolfson, 2014). Moreover, their work has inspired many other activists as well as stimulating “a wide variety of grassroots efforts in dozens of countries” (Cleaver, 1998).

Scholz (2010) further argues that part of social media’s allure for activists is its potential reach and audience:

Today, the Web is a highly centralized, commercial, winner-takes-all environment. Activists have realized that they can’t just dream a better future into existence, they have to be present in the places where they can reach large numbers of people. New social media add to the activist repertoire and, while they are not by any means a magical solution to the complex problems facing today’s activists, they can help to loosen the grip of repressive regimes, in fact, that’s where they are most effective. (p. 30)

Scholz (2010) echoes what most contemporary activists already know: the ubiquity of social media belies its power to assist radical social movements.

Other scholars whose work explores the tactical use of media in social movements include Charles Tilly (1977, 1978, 1998, 2003), Donatella della Porta (2003, 2015), Jeffrey Juris (2008, 2012), and David Graeber (2013). Tilly for his work in defining social movements, Della Porta for her work in exploring the relationship between media and social movements, Juris for his work with emerging digital media and social movements, and Graeber for advancing the theories of neoliberalism and austerity cuts within the context of social movements, were all equally helpful to my project. Despite the many differences between each social movement, what they do have in common, Juris (2008) argues, is that “various protest tactics all produce highly visible, theatrical images for mass-mediated consumption” (p. 58). In a similar fashion, despite
the differences in each scholar’s interest and scholarship, they all produce work that is crucial to projects that engage with contemporary social movements.

One of the most relevant works that was most helpful to my project comes from “the logic of connective action,” a theory posited by W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012). In looking back at the student strike of 2012, many of the aspects of the strike fall within the purview of Bennett and Segerberg’s theory. For instance, many of the tactics and horizontal leadership displayed during the 2011 15M mobilization in Spain mirrored those of the Québec students: “the 15M mobilization surprised many observers by sustaining and even building strength over time, using a mix of online media and offline activities that included face-to-face organizing, encampments in city centers, and marches across the country. Throughout, the participants communicated a collective identity of being leaderless, signaling that labor unions, parties, and more radical movement groups should stay at the margins” (p. 741). Moreover, Bennett and Segerberg indicate that the use of social media by today’s social movements is of utmost importance, thereby supporting the techno-optimist position. They state, “We note surprising success in communicating simple political messages directly to outside publics using common digital technologies such as Facebook and Twitter” (p. 742). Transformed into “media feeds” by journalists, Facebook posts and Twitter tweets are then often used by conventional journalism organizations (p. 742). Additionally, they claim that large-scale connective action is made possible by “various sorts of digital technologies that are by no means value neutral in enabling quite different kinds of communities to form and diverse actions to be organized, from auctions on eBay to protests in different cultural and social settings” (p. 744). As will be revealed throughout this study, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) are extremely useful in helping to understand contemporary social movement theory and current political uprisings.

**The Structural Foundations of Social Media**

Facebook and Twitter are two of the most popular and widely-used social networking sites in the world today (“Top 15 most popular,” 2015). While Facebook is agreed upon as being the largest social network site in the United States and in Europe, with an astounding 900 million unique monthly visitors (users) worldwide as of January 1, 2015, Twitter is reported to have 310 million unique monthly visitors (users) worldwide as of January 1, 2015 (“Top 15 most popular,” 2015), and is considered the world’s leading microblogging service (van Dijck, 2013). For these
reasons alone, I chose to focus on the two SNS, Facebook and Twitter, in my project. I examine the tensions and contradictions between and within the structural foundations (ownership, profit models, production practices, cultural capital) of Facebook and Twitter, similar to those revealed by the review of both U.S. corporate-owned media and the American underground press in the Sixties, to analyze how the Québec students tactically used these tensions for political gain. Moreover, I also want to assuage my desire to find out how these tensions and contradictions mediated the Québec students’ activism; that is, how their tactics, messages, and overall radicalism were affected (if at all) because of their use of Facebook and Twitter.

Ownership

Most successful social media platforms are now owned and operated by multi-billion dollar corporations (McChesney, 2013; van Dijck, 2013), and the amounts involved are quite staggering. While some operations may have begun as non-commercial ventures, their ownership structure have “changed over time from non-profit, collectively owned, user-centred organizations to for-profit, corporate owner-centered enterprises” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 36). Both Facebook and Twitter have clearly followed this path.

At the time of its initial public offering (IPO) in May 2012, Facebook’s net worth was estimated at 100 billion dollars. The company had 15 offices worldwide and employed 2,000 individuals. van Dijck (2013) asserts that this IPO signaled a significant change in the company’s ownership status: “The company’s leaders now have to yield power to investors, likely at the expense of users who loathe the growing pressure to increase the site’s profitable prospects” (p. 36). This change was indeed significant as it ensured that profitability became Facebook’s primary motive for operating, that is, if it was not before.

Despite this, Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and CEO of Facebook remains the primary owner and largest stockholder of the social network. Although Facebook is now a publicly traded company and shares are owned by investors such as Accel Partners and Digital Sky Technologies, in addition to individuals such as Dustin Moskovitz, Eduardo Saverin, and Sean Parker, who helped develop and implement the social network, Zuckerberg is often referred to as the “face” of the company; the one who remains involved and oversees its day-to-day operation. And Zuckerberg himself alluded to one of the tensions within the ownership structure of the company: Facebook “was not originally created to be a company” but instead, “it was built to
accomplish a social mission – to make the world more open and connected” (McChesney, 2013, p. 109). Yet, this tension within the structural foundation of ownership, which is also linked to its profit model, should not be understated as Facebook is on the precipice of becoming one of the most important, if not the most valuable Internet entity in the world: “So, unless they are impervious to learning how to monetize that data, they should be the most valuable property on the Internet, eventually” (Eavis & Rusli, 2012). What may have been originally conceived as a utopian social mission has nevertheless metamorphosed into a profit-driven corporation, albeit promoted as a socially enhancing one. But the tensions and contradictions within Facebook’s ownership structure extend further than the conflation with its original purpose.

Just as McChesney (1997, 2013) problematizes the existence of an oligopolistic market in U.S. corporate-owned mass media, wherein very few organizations and individuals control the production of news, Christian Fuchs (2008) likewise asserts that similar ownership problems are found in social media, but relates this to the existing monopolies in the computer and software industries which, in turn, directly affects social media. Fuchs argues that dominant ideology can be created and promoted due to these monopolies: “Corporations that produce or organize digital content (like the Microsoft Encarta or Google’s page-rank algorithm) have the power to define what people consider as correct and valuable views of reality and as truth” (Fuchs, 2008, p. 168). In a similar vein, Facebook “has played an important role in spreading (American) social norms into other national user communities worldwide,” as van Dijck (2013) points out (p. 57).

Dominant ideologies of major corporations are said to be dispersed through their holdings, but Facebook has also been credited with helping spread (dominant) American ideology to other parts of the world. This may or may not be problematic, but Zuckerberg’s corporate ideology of “making everything social” is quite worrisome:

Facebook also pushed for global acceptance of its narrative form: enforcing Timeline’s architecture not just on individual members but also on companies and advertisers, Facebook drives them to sell brands through stories, for instance via personal tales of a product experience. By joining the ecosystem’s bandwagon, many platforms attuned their corporate strategies to Facebook’s normative definitions of sharing and openness. (van Dijck, 2013, p. 58)

Moreover, since 2011, Facebook has begun accumulating other web-based companies and solidifying many partnerships, what van Dijck (2013) calls “the ecosystem of connective media”:

In June 2011, Facebook announced a deal with Skype….One month earlier, Microsoft, which owns a small stake in Facebook, purchased Skype for a reported
$8.5 billion….In April 2012, a month before its IPO on Nasdaq, Facebook took over Instagram to secure its expansion in mobile image sharing. Over the past few years, Facebook has closed partnerships with Zynga, Netflix, Spotify, Rhapsody, and Ticketmaster, thus creating a chain of vertically integrated services, both offline and online. (p. 163)

At its initial public offering (IPO) in May of 2012, Facebook was valued at $104 billion (Rusli & Eavis, 2012). On July 31, 2013, assistant editor for Reuter’s Breakingviews, Richard Beales (2013), asserted that Facebook’s shares “finally broke above the $38 price set in the company’s messy initial public offering 14 months ago.” Beales (2013) underscores this event: “The recent pop in its stock means Facebook has easily outperformed Microsoft, Google, Apple and the tech-heavy Nasdaq market as a whole over any period from a month to a year. In 2013, for instance, its stock is up more than 40 percent, and the company’s market value is again approaching $100 billion” (Beales, 2013). Even more recently, writer David Gelles (2014) reports that Instagram, which Facebook purchased for $1 billion in 2012, is currently worth $35 billion. Gelles (2014) posits, “According to Citigroup analysts, Instagram, which now has 300 million users, accounts for about 16 percent of Facebook’s roughly $221 billion market value… Though they don’t state it explicitly, the analysts are saying that Instagram is worth more than another high-flying social media company, Twitter, which is valued at about $23.5 billion after a year as a public company.” Given these staggering figures, Facebook appears to be one of the most lucrative companies in the world, and Zuckerberg one of the wealthiest individuals on the planet.

Wired’s Marcus Wohlsen (2014) speculates that Facebook could potentially “end up controlling everything you watch and read online.” As Wohlsen (2014) reports, “Time spent on Facebook is money for Facebook”:

Any company that commands outsize audience attention online probably is within Facebook’s sights. For instance, the company no doubt would love to monetize the hours you spend binge-watching on Netflix.

Enter Facebook’s deal with Hollywood studio Lionsgate, which is set to release five short films based on the blockbuster Twilight franchise exclusively on Facebook next year. Facebook may have built its empire on content generated by users. But that empire has become so effective at commanding attention online

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8 Wired Magazine is an American news site and magazine that covers technology, culture, business and politics (www.wired.com.). It is the preferred magazine for many who are interested in new/digital technology.
that Facebook has no reason not to try its hand at original and exclusive professional-grade content... If an online shopping site can start making TV shows people will watch, Facebook could, too. (Wohlsen, 2014)

Additionally, Wohlsen (2014) suggests that Facebook already owns the future of content as it owns a company called Oculus, who specializes in the manufacturing of virtual headsets. Wohlsen (2014) states, “The company’s $2 billion purchase of virtual-reality headset maker Oculus might seem to be an extravagance in the context of Facebook as it looks and functions today. No one needs to friend you in 3-D. But as Facebook catches up to the web as a content platform, a mature, consumer-ready version of Oculus could catapult the company ahead.” If Zuckerberg had his way, Facebook would be enmeshed into the fabric of all of our (social) lives, making it nearly impossible for anyone to disengage from Facebook in all of its various forms. Thus, an implicit tension within the structural foundation of ownership can be summed up with the following: Facebook, which is in the process of becoming one of the most powerful corporations in the world, seeks to profit from making “everything social” in a “truly open and connected space” while continuing to promote itself as an altruistic social project.

Twitter’s ownership was structured somewhat differently than Facebook’s in the beginning as it promoted itself as “an independent company, having conquered a dominant position in a niche of online sociality it has itself coded and branded” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 86). On December 15, 2010, despite remaining an independent company, Business Insider’s Dan Frommer (2010) observed that Twitter’s new financing round gave “the company a $3.7 billion valuation” which was almost twice as much as The New York Times. Finally, on November 6, 2013, Twitter followed Facebook’s lead and similarly became a publicly traded company: “On Wednesday, Twitter set the price of its initial public offering at $26 a share, valuing the company at $18.1 billion. Twitter shares are set to begin trading on Thursday on the New York Stock Exchange” (Goel, 2013). A reported 70 million shares were sold in the offering as Twitter raised $1.8 billion: “The I.P.O.’s price, the subject of debate between the board and its underwriters until late on Wednesday afternoon, was above an already heightened price range, reflecting the strong demand for the company’s stock” (Goel, 2013). As all of these staggering figures highlight, Twitter is now definitely one of the most powerful social media companies in the world notwithstanding Martin Hirst’s (2013) observation that “it produces no tangible products” and, at the time, had yet “to make a profit.”
Its co-founder, Jack Dorsey, remains involved with its day-to-day operation, in addition to serving as the company’s Executive Chairman. As Vindu Goel (2015) remarked, “The job requirements for the next chief executive of Twitter are forbidding.” On June 19, 2015, Goel (2015) reported that “The board of the social media company is looking for a savvy business strategist and product genius with experience running a public company.” In addition, the incoming candidate had to “enjoy communicating with the world through Twitter’s signature 140-character messages, with bonus points for using other products like its live-streaming app, Periscope, or short-video app, Vine,” “win over skeptical investors and inspire employees weary of the management chaos of the last year and a half,” and needed to be “comfortable operating under the scrutiny of a board that includes all three previous chief executives of the company, each of whom was removed from the job before he really wanted to go” (Goel, 2015). Indicative of Twitter’s growth, however, Hollywood media executive, Peter Chernin, formerly of News Corp., was hired as a member of the company’s Board of Directors. Similar to Facebook, Twitter has also begun developing partnerships with other large and powerful companies. A writer for TechCrunch, an online news source delivering “the latest technology news and information,” Sarah Perez (2014) reports that “Twitter has partnered with IBM to bring social data to the enterprise.” In Perez’s (2014) words, what this partnership entails includes “Twitter sharing its data with IBM for integration into IBM’s enterprise solutions, including the Watson cloud platform. The deal means IBM will gain access to the Twitter ‘firehose,’ allowing businesses to incorporate insights gained from the social network into their decision-making processes.” In other words, other businesses, through the use of IBM’s enterprise solutions, will have access to data gathered from Twitter. Undoubtedly, the selling of data gathered from and about its users will only help to generate even more revenue for Twitter and the owners of the company. Prior to this partnership with IBM, Twitter also purchased advertising agency, MoPub for $350 million in September 2013 in an effort to “boost mobile advertising revenues” (Hirst, 2013).

Similar to Facebook’s adoption of the “making everything social” mantra, since 2011, Twitter has been promoted as an “information network” by its first CEO, Dick Costello, strategically differentiating the company from a “social networking service” in order to “signal the company’s move toward the connectivity approach” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 79). From its creation, a tension found within its structural foundation of ownership is also entangled with profit models. As van Dijck (2013) contends, “for the first couple of years, Twitter also resisted
the business model of paid advertisements showing up next to the Twitter dialogue box. It was not until the implementation of Twitter’s trending topics and geospatial features that the company started to exploit data for targeted, personalized advertising” (p. 81). In Jack Dorsey’s terms, what began as a multipurpose tool upon which apps could be built had transformed into one of the largest social media companies in the world. The notion of “shying away from Jack Dorsey’s earlier ‘utility’ ambitions and attaching a new generic label to the platform” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 79) has coincided with the implementation of its trending topics and geospatial features which allowed the company to exploit the data “for targeted, personal advertising” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 81). In the words of Twitter’s founding CEO, “Twitter presents itself as an echo chamber of random chatter,” but one of the prevailing tensions that reverberated throughout the platform can be best explained with the following: “The paradox of enabling connectedness while engineering connectivity, of propagating neutrality while securing profitability, is played out in every aspect of the platform” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 69). What began as a “user-centered site” has transformed into a profit-driven entity, in much the same way Facebook has, and Twitter’s owners have been cognizant of maintaining their “pro-user” reputation despite the stark increase in revenue that it has enjoyed.

Yet another tension within the ownership structure of both Facebook and Twitter is related to the idea that “the internet would generate a surge of innovation and growth” (Curran, 2012, p. 7). Many believe that the Internet would somehow allow for a “level playing field” between small and large enterprises (Curran, 2012). Instead, what has transpired is a microcosm of capitalism itself. Because of their respective successes, both Facebook and Twitter now fall into the category of large companies with bigger budgets and greater access to capital, consequently placing them in a much better position than the smaller companies, despite continually promoting themselves as “for the people” (van Dijck, 2013). James Curran (2012), postulates that in addition to “exploiting their marketing and promotional advantage” over smaller firms, larger companies can “try to ‘buy success’ by acquiring promising young companies – the standard strategy of conglomerates” (p. 7). As mentioned previously, Facebook had already displayed this type of behaviour as illustrated by their purchase of both Skype and Instagram, and foretelling the future, in 2013, van Dijck opined that Twitter may not be far behind. Twitter’s recent relationship with IBM as well as its acquisition of CardSpring do signal the company’s plan to increase its revenue. Very briefly, CardSpring is a company that “links
coupons to a user’s credit or debit card, and automatically redeems the deal when a customer uses the card to buy an item... So, for example, if a user sees a Twitter Offer for an ice cream shop in their stream, they can link that deal to the credit card they have on file with their Twitter account. Later, if the user decides to visit the shop and buy a cone of rocky road using the same credit card, the Twitter Offer will automatically be applied to the purchase” (Isaac, 2014).

Ownership of companies such as CardSpring highlight Twitter’s revenue potential and its potential as an autonomous brand: “Twitter steered its technological design to favor ubiquitous integrated use of its basic architectural elements; in order to interlink with as many social networks as possible, the microblogging service gradually adapted its hardware and tweaked its software to fit other services’ standards” (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 70-71). Thus, it would be relatively simple to integrate any and all companies and services that it acquires in the future.

Both Facebook and Twitter, having developed into large corporations themselves, can now be considered multi-national media conglomerates. The structural foundations of ownership for both Facebook and Twitter now resemble that of corporate-owned media, and their respective I.P.O’s solidify their staggering net worth. Having begun to purchase web-based companies as a way to help grow their own respective companies, both Facebook and Twitter now have the appearance of a multi-national conglomerates. The tensions that I highlight deal with both Facebook and Twitter’s desire to be considered as “tools for the people,” yet nonetheless function as profit-driven entities. I further explore how these tensions function within Facebook and Twitter, and how they may have had an effect on the Québec student uprising.

Profit Models

The tensions found within the structural foundation of social media profit models are explicit. Ganaele Langlois and Greg Elmer (2013) observe that while Facebook and Twitter “have simplified the communication process and expanded potential communicative opportunities, they have also harnessed communications in an effort to monetize it” (p. 2). It is said that one of the primary goals of social media is to make a profit through the selling of advertising space (Fuchs, 2008; Marshall & Shipman, 2011; Strommen-Bakhtiar, 2012), and possibly even more importantly, profiting from selling the “users” and their data as commodities to advertisers (Fuchs, 2011; McChesney, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). The companies who acquire this information can then strategically target individuals as potential customers. But these
transactions are monitored closely, as these social media profit models “are a delicate harmonizing act between users’ trust and owners’ monetizing intentions” (van Dijck, 2013 p. 40). Those in charge of running social media sites have to deftly balance between appeasing the users and profiting from them. Failure to appease the users, the platform’s most important asset, or worse, having them feel manipulated or exploited, could result in these individuals simply leaving or quitting the site (van Dijck, 2013).

van Dijck (2013) argues that the commodification of relationships have benefitted social media companies in ways that they may not necessarily have considered. For example, “commoditizing relationships – turning connectedness into connectivity by means of coding technologies” has resulted in two things: the generation of content found on the sites; behavioral and profiling data (van Dijck, 2013, p. 16). In other words, through their initial venture of commoditizing relationships, the resultant compiled behavioral and profiling data have become the most important asset owned by social media companies; what van Dijck refers to as “the golden egg their geese produced” (p. 16). Or put more succinctly, “Under the guise of connectedness they produce a precious resource: connectivity” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 16); a connectivity that advertisers pay handsomely for. And as McChesney (2013) notes, “Gathering as much information as possible on Internet users and knowing where to reach them online is the key to securing ad dollars” (p. 149).

Despite this seemingly unstable profit model which is based on the tenuous relationship between social media sites and their users, digital media companies are continually developing new and inventive marketing strategies (van Dijck, 2013). One of these strategies revolves around personal recommendations by friends:

More insidious were personal recommendations by contacts and ‘friends’: having a product recommended by a friend, after all, is more effective than a product promoted by advertising. Seeking out ‘influencers’ – people with a large network of connected followers and friends – to promote products online is now a common marketing strategy. Ad culture is gradually turning into a recommendation culture, as new tactics still appear every day. (van Dijck, 2013, p. 40)

Another strategy exploits the data and metadata derived from its users, as “sophisticated mathematical models for analyzing aggregated data and predicting social trends are turning the incessant flow of data into a potentially lucrative connective resource” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 40). But once again, social media companies are mindful of not upsetting their users, their primary
source of revenue. Thus, monetizing strategies are positioned creatively: “Not as static models of exploitation, but as dynamic mediators in the process of shaping sociality and creativity” (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 40-41). This tension is not social media’s alone, as most users are cognizant of a social media site’s commercial motives, yet still participate based on their own calculated decisions on how they actually benefit from their use of the platform (van Dijck, 2013).

Facebook, the most popular social media site in the western world, adheres to a very similar profit model as that which is outlined above. First and foremost, providing a service that benefits the users is the ideology that is championed. In addition, Facebook continually positions itself as a utilitarian company: “Facebook’s top managers and CEO, along with two of the platform’s biggest advertisers (Ben & Jerry’s and American Express), explain their business strategies in an almost evangelical way, professing the company’s ‘social’ mission as an economic boon” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 64). What Facebook would like everyone to believe is that their only goal is to socialize everyone, and that the resultant earnings from this socialization is nothing more than an unforeseen reward.

Facebook’s profit model is based on “a contentious balancing act between stimulating users’ activity and exploiting it; its success ultimately depends on customers’ willingness to contribute data and to allow maximum data mining” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 64). The above tension, which is situated within the structural foundation of profit models, can also be found between the structural foundation of production practices and even cultural capital. Fuchs (2012) similarly makes the case that the profitability of a social media company is directly related to its users being offered for sale to advertisers. However, the online “traffic commodity” created by unpaid work or “immaterial labour” is the labour performed by exploited users (Fuchs, 2012), wherein immaterial labour is defined as “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity” (Lazzarato, 1996) and users “enthusiastically respond in the affirmative to the call, ‘become subjects’” to be exploited, as explained by Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus (Coté & Pybus, 2007). In addition to allowing for maximum data mining of their data, users contributing to Facebook are ultimately participating in immaterial labour.

This tension is doubly problematic as not only are users subjecting themselves to commodification (as the product sold to the advertisers), but Facebook also profits from the immaterial labour that the users engage in. Nicole Cohen (2008) adds to the discussion: “Like other Web 2.0 businesses, Facebook is engaged in the commodification of what can be
understood as free labour, or what has been called immaterial labour. What distinguishes this particular social network is the way in which surveillance is fundamental to this process” (p. 8).

Surveillance, in this sense, for Cohen (2008) refers to the machinations within Facebook that allow the company to identify and track a range of personal information such as education and employment histories, relationship status, and even political views and religion for any given member at any given time. These are the types of information that a Facebook user willingly surrenders as a way to form their online identity. To further illustrate this problem, which also reflects a problem within the structural foundation of production practices, Cohen (2008) reviews Facebook’s production of content: “It is perhaps at this point in Facebook’s productive process that we can conceive of a form of exploitation. As a publisher, Facebook does not pay a wage for the labour that produces content, and while it ‘does not assert any ownership’ over members’ content, it demands a range of rights to that content, no matter how personal” (p. 14). What Cohen (2008) and many others object to are the many demands that Facebook places on individuals for using its website.

Currently, Twitter’s profit model is similar to Facebook’s in that they both profit from selling their users’ information, despite the differences in how the two companies envision themselves. Whereas Facebook is intent on socializing individuals, Twitter instead promotes itself as a pro-user information network. In other words, despite being a social media platform, Twitter does not focus specifically on socialization and allows its users to determine its utility. And much like Facebook, the tension that exists within its profit model is directly linked to its users, their desire to connect, and Twitter profiting from providing this connection. van Dijck (2013) believes that this tension is unavoidable:

As Twitter develops its business models in close relation to coding technologies, user routines, and content, we see that the company’s transforming ambitions result in a double paradox. Twitter-the-ambient-utility promoting user connectedness finds itself at odds with Twitter-the-information-network exploiting connectivity to help businesses promote their brands among users. Platform owners, users, and third parties are engaged in a precarious choreography that surfaces most poignantly at the level of governance. (p. 83)

This dimension of Twitter should not be understated. On the one hand, it provides its users with a free tool that allows them to connect, and on the other, in return for using this free tool, the users and their data are then sold to advertisers; all done without upsetting the users as the
company is “completely dependent on users’ willingness to transmit content” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 83).

As I outline in this section, the delicate balance of appeasing their users and profiting from these same users is a tension that poses a challenge to both Facebook and Twitter. Both, and probably all, social media platforms deal with this tension continually. As van Dijck (2013) postulates, social media platforms desire to maintain an equilibrium between attracting and exploiting communities, and between entertaining users and making them participate. As it relates to my project, it is conceivable that it was largely due to these tensions found within the structural foundation of profit models that the Québec students were able to utilize both Facebook and Twitter for political gain, as both social media platforms needed users in order to function. I believe that it is just as important to understand how young activists negotiate the tensions that relate to using and creating content for the sites, the monetization of this user-generated content, and the eventual commodification of the user and their data, as it is to learn about how Facebook and Twitter negotiate the tension between providing a social media platform for its users and to then turn around and profit from these very same individuals.

Production Practices

Social media platforms are dynamic systems used by “human beings who make use of Internet technologies for interacting” (Fuchs, 2008, p. 16). Social media exists primarily to connect individuals. While Facebook does not hide the fact that it is determined to make everything social, and Twitter prides itself as being an information company that provides a useful tool to connect, the similarity between all social media platforms can be explained with the following: they are in the business of connecting their users while simultaneously exploiting these very same individuals and their data for profit. As well, social media is dependent on these individuals to provide content through immaterial labour and ultimately monetizing that content. For this section of the paper, I draw heavily from Bruns (2008) who helps explain the production practices in social media and the tension found within this structural foundation. Although his study specifically investigates blogs, Wikipedia, and Second Life, his findings are nevertheless relevant and can be applied to an analysis of social media.

Bruns (2008) observes that the roles of “consumer” and “end user” are things of the past and no longer exist, replaced by a new hybrid, the produser. In addition to the end of the
consumer and end user, as Bruns (2008) says, in many new spaces, including social media
platforms, “users are always already necessarily also producers of the shared knowledge base,
regardless of whether they are aware of this role – they have become a new, hybrid, produser”
(p. 2). Bruns (2008) continues:

What emerges is that in the online, networked, information economy, participants
are not simply passive consumers, but active users, with some of them
participating more strongly with a focus only on their own personal use, some of
them participating more strongly in ways which are inherently constructive and
productive of social networks and communal content. These latter users occupy a
hybrid position of being both users and what in traditional terms would have to be
described loosely as producers: they are productive users, or produsers, engaged
in the act of produsage. (p. 23)

To be precise, a produser is one who produces, uses and consumes information as today’s
consumers are thought to be “much more actively involved in shaping their own media and
network usage” (Bruns, 2008, p. 15). He defines produsage as existing “within a wider context
of new and emerging concepts for describing the social, technological, and economic
environment of user-led content creation” (Bruns, 2008, p. 2). In effect, produsage is likened to
what I refer to previously as immaterial labour. Bruns (2008) promotes a complete re-thinking of
traditional production practices and argues that these new products, these folksonomies which
contain content, ideas, and knowledge do not bear similarities to previous iterations of
manufactured items and should not be considered as such.

Both Facebook and Twitter produce very little content as they rely heavily on their users
to provide content for the sites (Fuchs, 2008; van Dijck, 2013). Produsers using Facebook and
Twitter are engaged in the type of produsage that Burns (2008) describes: “the artefacts of their
work are not products existing as discrete, complete packages, as we will see; and their activities
are not a form of production because they proceed based on a set of preconditions and
principles that are markedly at odds with the conventional industrial model” (p. 21). Anna
Reading (2014) explains that both Facebook and Twitter are social networking platforms that are
“primarily datamining companies which channel users to register and develop one identity that
can then be tracked, traced and commodified” (p. 753). I argue that the tension within the
structural foundation of both Facebook and Twitter’s production practices is based on the fact
that they produce very little to no content themselves and are completely reliant on their users
and supporters for content, although they do provide the space where produsage does occur.
A quick investigation of Facebook shows these facts to be true. Firstly, the website, albeit a conduit of unending information and content, nonetheless creates very little of this content. The games you find on the page are developed for Facebook by outside companies. As I look at my homepage, I notice that the majority of the information pertaining to my “friends” are mostly created by those individuals. The pictures found are uploaded by the individuals, and the status updates are their own creations. The assorted news stories, memes, links, likes, photos, videos and comments are all uploaded and shared by individuals or individuals belonging to groups and not Facebook employees. The advertisements on the side of the page all link to a variety of companies – none of them Facebook. And a quick scan of my own profile page reveals that all the pictures on it were either uploaded by myself or one of my friends, and all the information listed under my name were my creations. I “check-in” and reveal my location when somewhere worth mentioning. In other words, I myself provide the immaterial labour necessary to construct my own personal Facebook profile. Facebook is dependent on me and the millions of other produsers for providing the content found on the site, although it does facilitate the sharing of this content.

Twitter functions in a similar fashion; it provides a tool to remain connected without having to create the content. On my homepage, all the “tweets” and “re-tweets” are from individuals that I follow. People create these tweets. And similar to Facebook, all the links, messages, videos, tweets and re-tweets on the “discover” page were not created by Twitter. Instead, Twitter allows for the dissemination of information. Without a doubt, Twitter is equally reliant on its produsers’ produsage and free immaterial labour in order to succeed.

To further this argument, Hirst (2013) makes a case that Twitter benefits greatly from free labour. As Hirst (2013) puts it, up to 80 percent of social media commentary “is in response to mainstream journalism and that a large proportion of social media news items are re-posts from the dominant news sources in each market.” If these numbers are to apply to Twitter accordingly, then 80 percent of the traffic on Twitter is based on and generated from previous work created by journalists that Twitter does not have to pay. Even more scathing is Sam Kinsley’s (2014) critique of Twitter. Researchers working with Twitter data may do so for free. However, having to access data on the site that is not easily accessible, either old or archived, can become quite pricey:
If one pays for access to data, to avoid the uncertainty of access (how much data and for how long), then expect to pay handsomely. Both main ‘certified partners’ that sell access to Twitter data, Datasift and Gnip (recently bought by Twitter), render access a commodity – you not only pay for the data but also for the processing power/time it takes to extract it and the ‘enrichments’ they add, by resolving shortened URLs for you, attributing sentiment to a given tweet (positive, neutral, negative) and so on. (Kinsley, 2014)

To further this point, Fortune magazine reporter Erika Fry (2014) warns that “while Twitter is a public platform, only a fraction of its data, or 1% of the Twitter stream—Twitter calls it the ‘spritzer’—is free and accessible to the public through Twitter’s application programming interface (API)... Complete access, via the Twitter firehose or even unlimited access to particular search queries, is costly and can be obtained only through a handful of vendors.” These examples display what Tiziana Terranova (2000, 2013) refers to as user-generated content that are part of an exploitative labor process. Terranova’s work is part of an upsurge in research pertaining to digital labour, highlighting the importance of this form of inquiry within contemporary scholarship (Burston et al., 2010; Cardon & Casilli, 2015; Frayssé & O’Neill, 2015; Fuchs, 2015; Scholz, 2013).

The tension found within the structural foundation of production practices highlights the symbiotic relationship between Facebook and Twitter and its countless users. For all intents and purposes, Facebook and Twitter are simple providers of sociality. Thus, they are at the mercy of their users, yet still wield power over them. For as soon as content is uploaded onto their platforms, this material effectively becomes the property of the corresponding SNS. And although there are a variety of alternatives available (phone, text, e-mail, letters, etc.) to remain connected, and many users choose to relinquish their memberships to these social media platforms, other connections are heavily reliant on social media. Individuals have become very reliant on SNS themselves, so leaving and cancelling one’s account is often not an easy decision to make, which, in a roundabout way, illustrates the power that social media has over its users. van Dijck (2013) indicates that Facebook has become a part of many people’s lives: “Once a member, the social push to stay connected is insidious, especially for young people, because not being on Facebook means not being invited to parties, not getting updated on important events, in short, being disconnected from a presumably appealing dynamic of public life” (p. 51). And because of people’s dependence on them, both Facebook and Twitter undoubtedly benefit from the immaterial labour provided by their many able and willing produsers. McChesney (2013)
proposes that “Facebook’s genius is building a realm that is proprietary and a new essential layer for engaging with other websites” (p. 135). While this sentiment is probably true, I would also add that part of Facebook’s, and Twitter’s brilliance, is their ability to provide a space where individuals willingly sign up to participate in, essentially, their own exploitation.

Cultural Capital

A number of scholars have gone on record to state that social media has the ability to empower individuals (Shirky, 2008; Dahlgren, 2010; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). While users may feel empowered within social media websites, Fuchs (2011) argues that their actual political power is relatively insignificant. Moreover, for Fuchs, the users’ actual impact on society is minimal at best. Fuchs (2011) believes that cultural capital is held firmly by “dominant actors” due to the power that they possess:

Visibility is a central resource on the Internet. Dominant actors such as corporations, political parties or governments control a vast amount of resources (money, influence, reputation, power, etc.) which allows them to gain and accumulate visibility on the Internet. Although everyone can produce and diffuse information in principle easily with the help of the Internet because it is a global decentralized many-to-many and one-to-many communication system, not all information is visible to the same degree. (p. 276)

For Fuchs (2011), both cultural capital and power remain fully entrenched within those institutions that control and have access to resources: they maintain the power and not the users. van Dijck (2013) seems to support this assertion with the following: “Even though the term ‘connectivity’ originated in technology, where it denotes computer transmissions, in the context of social media it quickly assumed the connotation of users accumulating social capital, while this term increasingly referred to owners amassing economic capital” (p. 16). Power, in this sense, is in line with Foucault’s (1995) conception of power as domination that is manifest within structures of inequality. Melucci (1996) is even more succinct: those who control information have the power. On one hand, one could side with the likes of Fuchs and argue that social media platforms have all the power since the users’ data and even the content produced by these users becomes the company’s property once uploaded onto the site. On the other, one could take the opposite stance and argue that produsers ultimately control their own content and have the ability to walk away if unhappy with the social media provider. The basis of this debate
Mark Andrejevic builds on these arguments regarding ownership, power, and control in the digital realm. Andrejevic (2013) supports the belief that the ownership class, which includes the founders of Facebook and Twitter, belong to a group of very few individuals who control “the productive resources used by the many and allows economic advantages to accrue from this control” (p. 155). Moreover, he puts forth the idea that the owners are profiting from this exchange simply by controlling the resources that individuals access when engaging in a particular activity: “Bluntly put, the ability to exploit this activity for commercial purposes for the economic benefit of the few would disappear if these resources were commonly owned and controlled” (p. 156). This type of exclusive media ownership is nothing new: “One of the few things that is not at all new about digital media is the way in which it reproduces the logic of private ownership of productive resources. Even as it fosters new forms of creativity and participation, it does so on privately owned and controlled commercial platforms such as Facebook and YouTube” (Andrejevic, 2013, pp. 154-155). Likewise, Sean Cubitt (2013) agrees with Andrejevic; only a small group of people control the entire Internet. In a much similar vein, Jodi Dean (2013) characterizes the online economy as being very lucrative for a select few, while most get very little monetary reward, if anything at all. To sum up, power, control, and economic prosperity in the online world and social media remain the purview of a few fortunate individuals; primarily, if not all, white Western males.

On Facebook, another way to determine one’s power is through popularity, which is directly linked to how many friends one has connected to on the website. The more friends one has added, the more popular they are. In social terms, it speaks to their popularity and desirability, but in economic terms, this popularity translates to the potential influence that they may have on these friends to gently prod them into spending. These are factors that help determine one’s online cultural capital – their social “realities” and economic potential. As van Dijck (2013) rightly insists, “Virtually all multinationals, from Coca-Cola to BMW, are using Facebook for marketing and so-called ‘mouth-to-mouth at scale’ promotion. They pay influential Facebook connectors – people with many friends – to promote their brand through the many intersecting groups and networks they are involved in” (p. 63). In other words, those who have accumulated a large number of friends on Facebook can monetize their popularity through the
promotion of products to these friends. And although this may appear to be problematic at the outset, van Dijck (2013) suggests otherwise: “Indeed, even if users are aware of the fact that Facebook actively steers their online experience of friendship and converts their social capital into economic capital, they may still enjoy it” (p. 52).

The cultural capital of Twitter users is similarly based on an individual’s popularity and their influence. Twitter’s filters are constantly tinkered with and altered, in an attempt to better organize search results and gauge the influence of its users (van Dijck, 2013). All Twitter users are not equally influential, and despite boasting of its “capability to resonate ‘the roar of the crowd,’” Twitter does show evidence of favouring “the stardom of influential twitterers, especially of stars, politicians, and celebrities” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 75). As an example, “Twitterers like CNNs Christiane Amanpour or some Middle East specialists are automatically assigned more weight in the twitterverse than just anyone who offers an opinion” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 75). One’s cultural capital and power on Twitter is reflected by the number of followers they have. Although gaining followers was initially praised as a way to interact and exchange ideas, it has since transformed into a way in which Twitter users can monetize their popularity: “Companies and advertisers are keen to pay powerful twitterers – both celebrities and ordinary users – to distribute their brand name” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 76). Thus, following this rationale, a user’s power on Facebook and Twitter can be measured in terms of their popularity and influence, which can be monetized.

As opposed to having very little to no power or having their power directly tied to their commercial potential, some critics instead believe that social media does allow for users to gain power through the development and exercising of agency (Livingstone, 2008). Bruns (2008) agrees with these sentiments because for him, power has shifted to individuals – the produsers:

Cultural participation is no longer limited to exchanges between producers and audiences because all participants are at least equipotential nodes in the network, produsers themselves are able to form interest, enthusiast, and creative communities among themselves with far greater efficiency than in the pre-network age, and to communicate among themselves and with conventional media producers from this position of collective strength. (Bruns, 2008, p. 260)

Bruns (2008) sees that the Internet (and social media) have given individuals the opportunity to fully participate in produsage, as well as allowing like-minded individuals to connect with increasing regularity. This has resulted in the formation of stronger communities, wherein
individuals earn “merit, reputation, and trust” based on other participants “rating and commenting on one another’s actions” (Bruns, 2008, p. 321). In basic terms, individuals increase their cultural capital based on the reputation that they develop from the positive responses that they receive from members of the same community. In this scenario, power is tied to their social standing and legitimacy within one’s respective communities as well as their ability to engage with information. In referencing tactical media and media activism, Geert Lovink (2002) posits that “the potential power of mass media has successfully been crippled. Today, reproduction alone is meaningless” (p. 261). And a few years later, he similarly championed the possibilities of social media and the Internet: “Whereas traditional media ‘push’ content in a top-down fashion, the internet has a vitalist image of an ever-changing yet equal social space” (Lovink, 2011, p. 51). Lovink’s sentiments clearly support Bruns’ produsage theory, and the two, along with many others, believe that power has shifted from media companies to the produsers. To reiterate, the tension within the structural foundation of cultural capital of social media revolved around power and the different conceptions of power and the questions regarding who actually wields the power within these frameworks.

**Youth Activism and Social Media**

Quite similar to the upsurge in digital labour research, studies focusing on youth activism and social media have also increased. This new scholarship has, arguably, emanated from the popularity and impact of the “Arab Spring.” Since 2013, research into youth activism and social media have included Valenzuela et al. (2014) examining changes in the association between social media use and protest behaviour in the context of growing social unrest among the younger population, Velasquez & LaRose (2015) attempting to explain youth’s online collective political activism, and Xenos et al. (2014) whose investigation suggests a strong positive relationship between social media use and political engagement among young people. Soep (2014), Loader et al. (2014), and Boler et al. (2014) all explore young activists’ tactical use of

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9 Some individuals, such as columnist Rami G. Kouri (2011), have taken exception to and challenged the use of the term “Arab Spring.” They claim that the use of the term, by Western media predominantly, displays signs of “Orientalism.” Orientalism is highly problematic as it often stereotypes the Arab culture as being uncivilized, barbaric, dangerous, and exotic. Moreover, Orientalism is based on the European Western experience alone (Said, 1979).
social media in interesting and different ways. Moreover, work by Curtis (2015), Hermida et al. (2014), and Markham (2014), are studies specific to Arab Spring and the use of social media during the uprisings, providing additional evidence to the popularity of research into youth activism and social media.

The potential of social media is due to, in large part, the way that it is structured, as acknowledged by Sonia Livingstone (2007). Bruns’ produsers appear to, for the most part, be uncensored and express themselves freely, just as the journalists of the American underground press were free to write as they pleased. And through what Bruns (2005, 2008) refers to as “gatewatching,” young people are also provided with the opportunity to perform as “citizen journalists,” a process in which important and interesting news stories are shared within a community through citizen journalism sites or news blogs; a form of collaborative online news production wherein community members publicize and highlight existing news stories, rather than actually creating or publishing information. Additionally, a recent study by Xenos et al. (2014), indicates that “a strong, positive relationship between social media use and political engagement among young people across all three countries (Australia, the U.S., and the U.K.)” exists (p. 151). Xenos et al. (2014) are excited by the results: “Our results also provide reasons to be optimistic concerning the overall influence of this popular new form of digital media on longstanding patterns of political inequality” (p. 151).

The fact that the ideas expressed on social media sites do not appear to be constrained by dominant forces is encouraging. Its architecture, coupled with young people’s “informal, peer-oriented, anti-authority approach” makes it an appealing environment for young people to interact and further their causes (Livingstone, 2007, p. 167). Gitlin (2006) states this in a different way:

The rise of the Internet makes the anarchist spirit even more efficacious, for massive lobbies and fund-raising apparatuses (like MoveOn.org) and giant demonstrations (like that in Seattle at the World Trade Organization meetings in 1999 and in New York at the Republican Convention in 2004) can be cobbled together without need of a central office or much formal structure. (p. 5)

As Livingstone (2007) points out, it also “contrasts with the traditional, linear, hierarchical, logical, rule-governed conventions often used in official communications with youth” (p. 166). Atton (2004), whose work focuses on alternative media, finds that alternative media, of which social media is arguably a part of, “have been powerfully characterised by their potential for
participation…Rather than media production being the province of the elite, centralised organisations and institutions, alternative media offer possibilities for individuals and groups to create their own media ‘from the periphery’” (p. 9). An SNS such as Facebook, despite its many problems, allows anyone to voice their opinion in a public forum. According to Randi Zuckerberg, former Director of Market Development and Spokeswoman of Facebook, and sister of co-founder and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, “Facebook is a free tool that allows people to express themselves however they choose, and it requires little technical expertise. It has allowed those who would otherwise be unheard have a voice” (Vericat, 2010, p. 178).

Undoubtedly, having the ability to freely express one’s political views is a very powerful motivator for politicized youth to use social media.

Yet, there remain many individuals who are skeptical of the ability of social media or SNS to precipitate meaningful social change (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009; Grossman, 2004; Dean, 2009, 2010). Some scholars have posited that the effect of SNS on civic participation is highly dependent on the individuals themselves, although the opportunities for engagement are present (Zhang et al., 2010). Others, such as Dean (2009, 2010) and Evgeny Morozov (2013), gesture towards the limitations of the web and SNS in actualizing additional participation. There are many who doubt that social media can facilitate meaningful activism, let alone social change. Chief among the doubters are Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris (2009) who, despite their skepticism, acknowledge certain successes in youth activism that are mainly attributed to work done on SNS. In particular, despite citing Barack Obama’s successful 2008 Presidential campaign as an example of the effectiveness of online youth activism, they nonetheless “find little evidence to suggest that SN Web sites have facilitated significantly greater political knowledge, engagement, or participation” (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009, p. 25). Their findings give credence to their assertion that “The contention that SN Web sites will spur a democratic revolution may be overstated” (p. 38).

Further, journalist and blogger, Wendy M. Grossman (2004) and Dean’s (2009, 2010) arguments are in line with Baumgartner and Morris’ rationale. Grossman states, “The notion that the Net is going to change the world in a way that no other technology ever has is pervasive, even though we generally have the same hopes for it that we’ve had for every other technology” (p. 188). There appears to be enough documented work, as Grossman (2004) says, that positions SNS as just another technology. Dean (2009, 2010) is just as blunt, positing that technology
fetishism merely feeds into “communicative capitalism” – a term she deploys to explain the political and economic formation of technologies. She further contends that there is no evidence to suggest that social media, or other forms of communication technologies, can facilitate meaningful social change. Many others are equally skeptical of social media’s ability to help foster democracy. Indicative of his skepticism of social media’s potential to help cure society’s ills, Morozov (2013), uses the term “the folly of technological solutionism” as the subtitle of his book, To Save Everything Click Here. In the book, the gist of his argument is that social movements should avoid using social media because social media does not always help social movements achieve their goals (Morozov, 2013). Additionally, Morozov (2011), in Orwellian fashion, warns us to be wary of those that have power over the Internet because “the most effective system of Internet control is not the one that has the most sophisticated and draconian system of censorship, but the one that has no need for censorship whatsoever” (p. 58).

In Malcolm Gladwell’s seminal piece written in the The New Yorker, penned long before the “Arab Spring,” the writer argues that social media does not support the creation of “strong-ties” [or what can be termed close interpersonal relationships] that are required of activists who engage in “activism that challenges the status quo” (2010). He uses the “Greensboro Four’s” example, as an act that is representative of meaningful activism. On Monday, Feb. 1, 1960, four African American freshmen from North Carolina A & T College sat down at a lunch counter at the Woolworth’s in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina and demanded to be served. At the time, the diner only served Caucasians, making the Greensboro Four’s act one of civil disobedience. Gladwell (2010) claims that two of the main reasons for the Greensboro Four’s success were that they were personally connected to the civil-rights movement, and that they shared “strong-ties” with one another. In other words, they were close friends united for a cause. Gladwell (2010) states, “The evangelists of social media don’t understand this distinction; they seem to think that a Facebook friend is the same as a real friend and that signing up for a donor registry in Silicon Valley today is activism in the same sense as sitting in a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro in 1970.” Of all the studies of other social movements included in the article, one aspect that all the movements shared was the existence of the “strong-tie” phenomenon amongst their members. Gladwell (2010) postulates that the “weak-ties” that social media fosters “seldom lead to high-risk activism.” Another reason for Gladwell’s (2010) skepticism regarding the power of social media as a democratizing tool are the inconsistencies
associated with the stories highlighting the importance of social media during the Moldovan protest in the spring of 2009, dubbed the “Twitter revolution,” to the student protests in Tehran, Iran. In both cases, the role of social media in the uprisings was greatly exaggerated. Finally, Gladwell (2010) points out that social media “are tools for building networks, which are the opposite, in structure and character, of hierarchies. Unlike hierarchies, with their rules and procedures, networks aren’t controlled by a single central authority. Decisions are made through consensus, and the ties that bind people to the group are loose.” In Gladwell’s (2010) estimation, high-risk strategies and radical actions work best when individuals follow their specific roles and functions: “Boycotts and sit-ins and nonviolent confrontations—which were the weapons of choice for the civil-rights movement—are high-risk strategies. They leave little room for conflict and error. The moment even one protester deviates from the script and responds to provocation, the moral legitimacy of the entire protest is compromised.” So despite the “organizing power of the Internet” which he does concede, Gladwell (2010) argues that “future waves of digital protesters” who belong to a networked weak-tie world are highly ineffective in terms of changing the world for the better, and instead, “what happens next is more of the same.”

Despite these uncertainties, there are others who are quick to laud the potential of new forms of media (Bachen et al., 2008; Delli Carpini, 2000; Harris & Wyn, 2009; Juris & Pleyers, 2009). These critics subscribe to non-traditional contemporary forms of youth activism and firmly believe in the potential of the web and social media to help bring about meaningful social change. As Lievrouw (2011) rightly insists, social media and other ICTs are more than just tools for activists: “New social movements are also distinguished by their extensive and sophisticated uses of media and information technologies, not just as tools of channels for relaying information to participants or the wider public, but as the actual field of action where movement concerns are articulated and struggles played out” (pp. 53-54). On a similar note, Ronald D. Deibert (2008), while disagreeing with “the mechanical thinking that suggests technology leads to more democracy or that technology will be the cause of revolution” (p. 126), nevertheless cautions against discounting the potential of new media and exalts it for providing “opportunities to open up new spaces of possibility” (p. 134). But as Deibert (2008) has shown, “Civic networking and advocacy, like any civil rights movement, can take years to come to fruition and are a constant struggle” (p. 157). In a previous incarnation, McChesney (2007) likewise championed the potential of online platforms such as Facebook. However, to be precise, in his more recent...
works, McChesney (2013) instead gestures towards a “capitalist-driven Internet” (p. 130) as having “capitalized on the digital revolution” (p. 131) and subsuming new media’s possibilities of democratizing society.

In *Digital Rebellion*, Wolfson (2014), challenges the naysayers and uses IndyMedia as a case study to argue for the efficacy of cyberactivism versus the more material and physical forms of activism. Wolfson (2014) explains that “the aim of the first Independent Media Center was to report on the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings and counter meetings in Seattle” as it was founded as a “direct challenge to the corporate media” (P. 10). Wolfson (2014) asserts that, “the mission of the Seattle Independent Media Center was to offer multiple media-based platforms (Internet, print, radio, video) for independent journalists, activists, and the general public to report on the WTO meetings and the ensuing counter-demonsarations that engulfed the city” (p. 14). As the years have passed and IndyMedia has become further developed, “it has become more than a conventional alternative media outlet, at times playing the role of think tank, organizing arm, activist laboratory, and mobilizing tool for the Global Justice Movement” (p. 10).

As it relates to the Zapatistas, Wolfson (2014) credits them with helping to create an NGO network which “successfully interceded in the Mexican government’s ability to exercise its right to use physical force against the EZLN” (p. 41). This NGO network was able to achieve two things: 1) broadcast a message sympathetic to the Zapatistas across mass media (through *La Jornada* and other newspapers), and 2) used communications to inspire direct action in real space by mobilizing thousands of activists to converge on Mexico City and Chiapas, creating what some have called a swarm or cyberswarm (Wolfson, 2014, pp. 41-42). Wolfson (2014) credits the Internet and social networks with helping amplify the Zapatistas’ struggle in Chiapas, “where the base of resistance came from an organized community that was in struggle because of a set of social and economic conditions” (p. 46). Although Wolfson (2014) acknowledges the importance of these new communication technologies to social movements, being “one of the key factors for building networks of struggle, becoming a seminal conduit that links otherwise disparate elements of the contemporary working class” (p. 46), he also warns against overstating and overestimating their importance as some “cyber-optimists” have done, “who see in new-media tools and communicative networks the unmuddied reflection of an egalitarian, democratic future” (p. 46). Despite the help they provided to the Zapatistas, new technologies are still
merely tools for social movements to use, and their effectiveness is highly dependent on their
users and how they are being utilized. Or, as Wolfson (2014) articulates, “While there is clearly a
link between new digital technologies and the practices of contemporary activists, it is critical to
disaggregate technology from political logic” (p. 103).

A closer look at IndyMedia’s network has revealed a complex structure in place. Wolfson
(2014) states, “It is intricate and defies the analytic box that scholars of the network have
developed. IndyMedia is not simply democratic or egalitarian; it is a combination of vertical and
hierarchical structures at the multiple levels of operation” (p. 79). Perhaps, in this sense,
IndyMedia’s network structure is analogous to that of the network of individuals who protested
during Maple Spring. They were not simply democratic or egalitarian. Cegep students, university
students, English-language students, French-language students, professors, lawyers, and
countless other groups of individuals came together to protest. Québecs protesters most certainly
created a combination of vertical and hierarchical structures despite being united by a common
goal and a common foe.

In reflecting on IndyMedia and the WTO protests in Seattle, Wolfson (2014) highlights
three important outcomes and practices: 1) the technological innovation of IndyMedia led to true
participatory media; 2) the resulting media practices and platforms led to new possibilities in the
structure, strategy, and governance of political resistance; and 3) the inability to connect with
communities of struggle on the ground in Seattle was a problem rooted in the foundation of the
movement and has plagued the network since. Further, Wolfson (2014) concludes that
IndyMedia’s strength, the strength of the network, a decentralized structure, is also its main
weakness. Wolfson (2014) claims, “In this sense, the strength of the network, a decentralized
structure, is also its weakness, as without a centralized body, it is difficult to coordinate over a
long period of time” (p. 179). Once again, Wolfson alludes to the fact that although it clearly has
its strengths and can most definitely be used as a tool to support social movements, even
IndyMedia, a complex network of new technologies that is heralded by many, still has its
shortcomings.

**Conclusion**

Three important themes emerged from the literature review. First was social movement
theory. In reviewing social movement theory, it became apparent that through collective action,
mobilization, resistance, activism, and protest, the 2012 Québec student strike fit all of the criteria necessary for it to be considered a social movement. The structural foundations of social media was the second theme that emerged. These structural foundations (ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital), which exist in all media forms, are likewise present in social media and help explain why social media can be used as a tool and its capabilities exploited by all contemporary activists, including youth. The final theme identified was youth activism and social media. The emergent literature pertaining to this topic, engaging with such examples as the Zapatistas, IndyMedia, Occupy Wall Street, and “Arab Spring,” clearly indicate that young activists are effectively incorporating social media into their arsenal of tactics. The three main themes identified in the literature review form the basis of my conceptual framework. Additionally, the literature review likewise revealed the tensions between the techno-optimists and the techno-pessimists; the ongoing debate between two “essentialist vision[s] of social media being automatically either suitable or unsuitable as means of mobilization” (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 5). This tension reverberates throughout the study and informs the work as some of the theorists that I draw from identify as belonging to one of the opposing sides.
Chapter 5 – Conceptual Framework

“Social movements are about ‘important’ issues.”
-J. Earl & K. Kimport, Digitally enabled social change, 2011

To effectively discuss the case of the Québec student strike of 2012, three particular disciplinary bodies of literature and conceptual frameworks are selectively chosen, reviewed and contextualized. Based on the literature review conducted in the previous chapter, social movement theory, the structural foundations of social media, and youth activism and social media are identified as important frameworks in which to make sense of this particular project. In this chapter, the conceptual framework is further developed for the research project, which provides an analytical lens to critique the Québec student strike of 2012.

Firstly, the Québec student strike of 2012 is argued, positioned, and framed as a social movement. It is also included as one of the many uprisings against neoliberalism worldwide, more generally. Moreover, it is positioned within the context of worldwide student actions against the corporatization of the university. The inclusion of the structural foundations of media, ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital, as a theoretical lens is also explained.

The Québec Student Strike of 2012 as a Social Movement

For many of those involved in the strike, as well as outside onlookers, scholars and those working in media, Maple Spring represented a successful social movement (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014; Fidler, 2012b; Solty, 2012). For academics such as Jacqueline Kennelly (2014), the student strike against the planned tuition fee increase instituted by Québec’s Liberal government was considered successful because the proposed increase never came to fruition: “On 5 September 2012, premier-designate, Pauline Marois, declared that her party would cancel the tuition hikes that had set off the student protests, and repeal Bill 78” (p. 136). This sentiment is mirrored by Daniel Weinstock who agrees that “the students won a partial victory when the planned tuition increase was cancelled” as reported in the CBC News (quoted in Michael, 2013). Furthermore, while some scholars such as Henry Giroux (2013) lauds the students’ victory as a win over “neoliberal terror,” other scholars, such as James Cairns, herald the lessons that we can
learn from the Québec student movement; powerful lessons such as building the organizations and networks that are necessary to combat the austerity agenda, and “when people organize collectively and democratically, they have the power to change the world” (quoted in Laferriere, 2013). Regardless of how one perceives the Québec student strike of 2012, it was, without a doubt, an effective social movement that captivated not just those in Canada, but also a worldwide audience (Bertolino et al., 2013; The Canadian Press, 2012; Kanuga, 2012).

Social Movement Theory

As previously articulated in the Operational Definitions section of Chapter 1, there are a number of different ways to define a social movement. Equally important to social movement theory is Richard Flack’s definition of mobilization. Flacks (2004) maintains that “the key word in the mainstream study of movements is ‘mobilization.’ It refers to all of the processes by which people commit themselves to support a movement” (p. 142). In other words, mobilization takes on many different forms that all nonetheless function to support a movement. According to Doug McAdam and W. Richard Scott (2005), what all these social movement theorists have in common is that they shift the earlier focus of social movement theory from “‘collective behavior’ to one on ‘collective action’” (p. 6). McAdam and Scott (2005) observe that collective action becomes another indicator of a social movement. Thus, all of these definitions of social movements are equally important in positioning and defining the Québec student strike as a social movement. As was shown by the empirical evidence gathered and to be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, the Québec student strike contained all of the elements and criteria described by each one of these theorists. These definitions were likewise explained in the Operational Definitions section found in Chapter 1.

More than a social movement that was invested in fighting against an increase in tuition fees, the Québec student strike metamorphosed into a part of a larger global project – one which rejected globalization and neoliberalism in the form of austerity measures (Armstrong, 2014; Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014; Berntson, 2014; Sawchuk, 2012). The Québec students, among many other groups, used “their voices and bodies to redefine the boundaries of the possible and to protest against the crushing currents of neoliberal regimes that ruthlessly assert their power and policies through appeals to destiny, political theology and the unabashed certainty bred of fundamentalist faith” (Giroux, 2013, p. 515). Giroux (2013) continues: “From Tunis, Cairo,
Paris, Athens and London to Montreal and New York City, youth are challenging the current repressive historical conjuncture by rejecting its dominant premises and practices” (p. 515). In order to properly explain the term “neoliberalism,” I turn to a few different scholars.

Graeber (2013) explains neoliberalism as the philosophy that we are, first and foremost, economic beings. Graeber, as an active anarchist and activist, is involved in a number of social movements including being one of the more notable figures in Occupy Wall Street. Having theorized neoliberalism and austerity, Graeber (2013) holds that “democracy is the market, freedom is the right to participate in the market, the creation of an ever-growing world of consumer abundance is the only measure of national success” (p. 110). For most of the world, particularly in the West, neoliberalism has dominated for the past thirty years as free markets became equated with human freedom (Graeber, 2013, p. 279). Moreover, politics became nothing more than a vehicle that created the conditions “for growing the economy,” as “the primary goal of economic productivity” took precedence over equality and security (Graeber, 2013, p. 279).

Another leading scholar on neoliberalism, David Harvey, in a lecture given at the University of Windsor in 2006, tells us that “all of us have absorbed the ethos of neoliberalization, and, as a result, we relate to each other in very different ways” (2007a, p. 6). As one example of neoliberalism, Harvey (2007b) discusses Margaret Thatcher’s defeat of the British miners in 1984: “the assault upon institutions, such as trade unions and welfare rights organizations, that sought to protect and further working-class interests was as broad as it was deep. The savage cutbacks in social expenditures and the welfare state, and the passing of all responsibility for their well-being to individuals and their families proceeded apace” (p. 32).

Max Haiven (2014) explains that the reasons for embracing neoliberalism may not even appear to be the slightest bit nefarious from the outset:

These utopian dreamers, whose thinking has become associated with the term ‘neoliberalism’, believe that by mobilizing people’s competition and inherently acquisitive human nature, capitalism is, ultimately, value-neutral – markets are simply egalitarian arenas of exchange. The truth, of course, is quite different. The value of the market itself has become the overarching and unquestionable arbiter of almost every aspect of human existence today. All social, moral, ethical, and personal values are subordinate to the value of money. The result is a system where, in almost every case, the perceived needs of the market trump any other considerations. (p. 3)
At the most basic level, neoliberalism can be understood as an attempt to solve financial woes by reducing or taking from social programs and from the lower and middle-classes instead of mandating assistance from the wealthy and/or banks and corporations.

Another contemporary scholar who writes on neoliberalism is Juris (2008) who identifies neoliberalism and globalization as one and the same phenomenon:

Corporate globalization or neoliberalism refers to a set of free market policies commonly referred to as the Washington Consensus, which are imposed through trade agreements and multilateral institutions including the World Bank, IMF, and WTO. These include privatization, trade liberalization, devaluation, deregulation, export-oriented production, and fiscal austerity measures, such as reductions in social expenditures and basic subsidies. Neoliberal projects have facilitated the penetration of corporate capitalism across space, bringing new areas into global production, consumption, and labor circuits while commodifying healthcare, education, the environment and life itself. The results have been disastrous: growing poverty, inequality, social dislocation, and ecological destruction within and across developing industrialized worlds. (pp. 7-8)

In response to the rise of neoliberalism and globalization, social movements arose and mobilized to counter these phenomena.

More recently, Wolfson (2014) discusses how the stock market crash of 2008 resulted in tangible hardships for many of the working class due to the implementation of austerity measures:

The world watched with fear and awe as the collapse of the speculative markets quickly exposed the entire financial system, and foundational institutions – imbued with all the power and majesty of global capital – crumbled before our eyes. The price of the hubris, however, went beyond the boardrooms of Lehman Brothers, and in a few short months the grim realities of the crisis took a vicious toll on working people. Families lost their houses to foreclosure, elderly couples lost their life savings to the rapacious market, and working people lost their jobs and livelihood to the aggressive greed of an unchecked financial system. (p. 1)

While the poor, the working class and the middle class suffered, banks that were deemed “too big to fail” received help in the form of massive bailouts from the government. As Wolfson (2014) surmises, punishment was “unjustly meted out” to the most precarious as “the very people who created the crisis” were saved from negative repercussions:

These same political leaders fixed their gaze on the meager support system of the poor and working class, demanding austerity budgets and calling for shared sacrifice. The sacrifice, however, was not shared, as the market rebounded for the
few, while the growing legion of poor and working people were left to shoulder the burden of the twenty-first century’s first economic and human crisis. (p. 2)

Many members of the working and middle-class were negatively affected by the stock market crash, yet, were forced to carry the brunt of “the shared sacrifice,” which was not shared at all (Wolfson, 2014). Meanwhile, the wealthy remain seemingly unscathed by the austerity measures. It appears as though the wealthy are exempt from sharing in the rebuilding of the economy and shared sacrifices; hardships that are left for the poor, the working and the middle classes to bear alone (Wolfson, 2014).

Even more relevant to my study, austerity cuts to education brought about by neoliberalism have made a quantifiable and real impact on young people in many countries. In the UK, thousands of students took to the streets to protest austerity measures. On one day in November 2014, approximately 10,000 protesters in London “joined Wednesday's anti-tuition-fee march, the largest mobilisation of students since mass protests in 2010. The demonstration was mostly peaceful until its end-point at Parliament Square, when a breakaway group attacked symbolic targets including the Department for Business, the Conservative party campaign headquarters and the NUS,” (“Student protests in London,” 2014). The students protested against increased tuition fees and cuts to funding for university education (“Students protest against fees,” 2014). According to one article from The Guardian, “paired with the introduction of £9,000 university tuition fees for 2012’s student intake, the slashing of benefits and key services for students and young people is having a devastating impact” (Gil, 2014). As this particular example illustrates, austerity cuts to education is a neoliberal strategy that is being implemented in many areas of the world. And more often than not, these cuts are then followed by protests from students who are directly affected.

Neoliberalism, globalization, austerity cuts and economic injustice are related and intertwined. Neoliberal reforms, which are, effectively, austerity cuts, are government cutbacks to social programs and social welfare, implemented for a number of reasons. One of the main arguments against neoliberalism is that it targets the poor, the working class and the middle class, the wrong sector of the population. While public services are cut or reduced, large corporations and banks are increasingly supported by the government or state (Wood, 2012). Many scholars gesture towards the November 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle as one of the defining moments when activists began to utilize the World Wide Web
and the Internet to fight against neoliberalism and globalization (Casas-Cortés et al., 2013; Rucht, 2003; Wood, 2012). Others credit the Zapatistas of Mexico as their inspiration for developing alternative forms of struggle against capitalism, as well as being the first identifiable group to utilize the Internet as a tool for mobilization (Khasnabish, 2008, 2013; Selbin, 1999, 2010; Stringer, 2013; Wolfson, 2014). Irrespective of the narrative one chooses to believe, it has become apparent that along with the ubiquity of the Internet and social media today, contemporary young activists are utilizing the tools available to them in their fight against capitalism, neoliberalism, globalism, austerity measures, and economic injustice in all of their various manifestations, having been shown the way by the Zapatistas.

Studies into many of the recent worldwide uprisings illustrate an organizing principle that similarly reflects the case of the Québec students – democratic governance and horizontal leadership. In his study of the Occupy movement, Costanza-Chock (2012a) remarks on their insistence on a leaderless movement and consensus decision-making. Bernard E. Harcourt (2013) uses the terms “horizontal, non-hierarchical, and rhizomic quality” when describing Occupy’s leadership structure. In a similar vein, Marina A. Sitrin (2012), a self-described “writer, lawyer, teacher, organizer, militant and dreamer” makes reference to the concept of horizontalidad, as “a form of direct decision making that rejects hierarchy and works as an ongoing process” (p. 3), as well as defining it as “processes in which attempts are made so that everyone is heard and new relationships are created…It is a break with these sorts of vertical ways of organizing and relating, and a break that is an opening” (pp. 8-9). Alongside a leaderless movement, a large faction of the Québec students, and especially those belonging to CLASSE, likewise privileged horizontalism as well as decentralized forms of organizing and networking (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). This form of governance mimicked Occupy’s strategy of having a leaderless movement (Agarwal et al., 2014; Boler et al., 2014; Juris, 2012). Zeynep Tufecki (2013) raises a similar point in relation to contemporary networked activism: “Mass media can no longer unilaterally decide to ‘appoint’ who gets to act as a movement’s spokespersons” (p. 868). But perhaps the most important aspect of these studies, as they relate to my own work, is their treatment and investigation of how these respective movements engaged with and used both mass media and social media.

Costanza-Chock’s work concerning social movements and their use of social media is helpful in developing a lens to analyze the Québec students’ use of social media. From his
research, he found that social media, “especially Facebook and Twitter, were widely used by activists to document and circulate their stories of social struggle” (Costanza-Chock, 2011, p. 29). Echoing Bruns’ (2005, 2008) theories of produsage, or user-led content creation particularly in social media, and Atton’s (2004, 2008) notion of citizen journalist, wherein regular citizens create and share news stories, Costanza-Chock (2011) similarly reports that “some of the most innovative uses of ICTs for civic engagement and social change come not from professionals in the digital media industry or in government but from social movement participants, organizations, and networks” (p. 34). Additionally, Costanza-Chock’s (2010) theory of transmedia mobilization, media practices that incorporate extensive offline actions in conjunction with “cutting-edge technology,” a tactic used by activists, is particularly useful in explaining some of the tactics used by the Québec students.

In their study of Occupy, DeLuca et al. (2012) propose that the movement utilized panmediation throughout. Panmediation was defined as the “ever-changing combination of myriad media” (DeLuca et al., 2012, p. 487). The process of panmediation refers to the use and creation of different forms of media, the “writing and print and photography to television and radio and cinema to the Internet and laptops and smartphones” coexisting and interacting with one another (DeLuca et al., 2012, p. 487). Finally, while his explanation did not specifically reference the Québec students, Scholz’s reasoning is reflective of why social media was so important during Maple Spring. Scholz (2010) states:

> Commercial platforms play an important role in most activist campaigns that make use of the Internet. As new social media are developed and begin to permeate the lives of those belonging to the global middle class, personal blogs and services such as Twitter and Facebook have become part of their daily routine and also their route into digital activism. (p. 29)

Similar to Scholz’s statement, almost all of the interviewees made a similar claim as to why they chose to use social media during the strike; the organizers of the Québec students purposefully used Facebook and Twitter because that was where the students could be found (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, Jan. 20, 2014; M. Fournier, personal communication, Jan. 31, 2014; A-M. Provost, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2014).
The Structural Foundations of Social Media

The structural foundations of social media refers to ownership, profit models, production practices, and cultural capital. At times, these structures function as separate entities, but at other times, they function in conjunction and in relation to one another. The Québec students purposefully included the use of social media as one of their primary tactics. In this thesis, I investigate the structural foundations of social media as a way to inform my research for the possible reasons that allowed these media to be used for tactical gain by the students during Maple Spring. Since these structural foundations of social media are not always in agreement with one another, the tensions and contradictions found within and between them is what made them rife for exploitation. For instance, even though Facebook is a corporate and commercial entity whose primary objective is to provide an avenue for individuals to socialize, its basic infrastructure lent itself to be utilized by the Québec students to organize, share information and socialize. Even though a large number of activists may only look at the benefits of using media, the second element of my conceptual framework, the structural foundations of media, reveal the mechanisms within social media that allowed it to be used by the Québec students.

As with most successful media platforms, Facebook and Twitter are owned by multi-billion dollar corporations (McChesney, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). As such, both companies are primarily profit-driven. In an article dated January 3, 2014, Maureen Farrell reported that Twitter could be worth between $38 and $48 billion dollars, with the discrepancy of $10 billion “mostly due to whether or not investors or analysts choose to take into account the options that Twitter offered to its employees” (Farrell, 2014). Not to be outdone, on September 9, 2014, it was reported that “Facebook shares rose 0.8 percent to $77.89 at yesterday’s close in New York, valuing the company at $201.6 billion” (Harrison & Frier, 2014). Similar to some other corporate-owned media entities Facebook and Twitter rely exclusively on advertisers for profit. In other words, despite promoting themselves as utilitarian entities, Facebook and Twitter’s profit model is based on selling their users and their users’ accumulated data to their advertisers (Fuchs, 2011; van Dijck, 2013). In terms of their production practices, both Facebook and Twitter rely heavily on produsage (Bruns, 2008) as well as an incredible amount of data-mined content and targeted ads in increasingly sophisticated ways. As for cultural capital, both Fuchs (2011) and van Dijck (2013) suggest that cultural capital and power remain in the hands of ownership, while individuals such as Bruns (2008), Livingstone (2008), and Baumgartner &
Morris (2009) remain of the opinion that power has shifted to the individuals – the users who create the information required by social media sites – signaling a definitive tension within the structural foundation of cultural capital.

The theoretical framework based on the structural foundations of social media clearly displays tensions and contradictions that exist within and between each structural foundation. This helps to explain why social media was available to be used as a tactic by the students in Québec. Most definitely, the tensions and contradictions found in the structural foundations of social media were susceptible for exploitation by the young activists. In my opinion, whether or not the activists were cognizant of the structural foundations of social media is not the point. Rather, what is important is that the activists recognized social media’s availability and were able to utilize it as one of the many tactics during the strike.

**Youth Activism and Social Media**

Multiple studies have been conducted which explain how young activists have used social media. In her study for the MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics, Cathy J. Cohen et al., (2012) use the term “participatory politics” to explain youth political action and the different ways they use new media: operating with greater independence and circumventing traditional gatekeepers of information influence, such as newspaper editors, political parties, and interest groups; renegotiating political power and control with traditional political entities that are now searching for ways to engage participants; participating online to provide for greater creativity and voice, as participants produce original content using video, images and text; and affording individuals the capability to reach a sizeable audience and mobilize others through their social networks in an easy and inexpensive manner. Many agree that young people and their use of social media contributed to Barack Obama’s presidential win in 2008 (Bakker and deVreese 2011; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vazques 2011; McKinney and Rill 2009). Yusery Ahmed Ezbawy’s article (2011) detailing the January 25th uprising in Egypt, which was spurred by young people’s use of social networks in organizing the protest movement, clearly illustrates a “snowball effect” and the youths’ abilities to take “their activism from the virtual world to the real” (p. 26). Jeffrey Juris and Geoffrey Pleysers (2009) identify “alter-activism” as an emphasis on lived experience and process; a commitment to horizontal, networked organization; creative direct action; the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs); and the
organization of physical spaces and action camps as laboratories for developing alternative values and practices (p. 57).

“Hacktivism” is another term used to describe some young activists’ use of social media. David J. Gunkel (2005) denotes “hacktivism” as drawing on “the creative use of computer technology for the purposes of facilitating online protests, performing civil disobedience in cyberspace and disrupting the flow of information by deliberately intervening in the networks of global capital” (p. 595). For Peter Krapp (2005), “hacktivism” can represent many things: [it is] a politically constructive form of civil disobedience or an anarchic gesture; it can signal anticapitalist protest or commercial protectionism; it can denote spammers or antiabortion activists, countersurveillance experts or open source–code advocates” (p. 74). “Clicktivism” is another current form of online activism used by young activists. It is said that Micah White (2010) first coined the term “clicktivism” in an article that appeared in The Guardian. In the article, White (2010) denounces “clicktivism” as uncritically embracing “the ideology of marketing” and conflating the same tactics used by advertising and market research “to sell toilet paper” with building social movements. White (2010) continues, “This manifests itself in an inordinate faith in the power of metrics to quantify success. Thus, everything digital activists do is meticulously monitored and analysed. The obsession with tracking clicks turns digital activism into clicktivism…The exclusive emphasis on metrics results in a race to the bottom of political engagement.” Moreover, White (2010) warns that when “the novelty of online activism wears off, formally socially engaged individuals who trusted digital organisations are coming away believing in the impotence of all forms of activism.” In other words, White believes that clicktivism has become “a danger” to individuals seeking meaningful social change, as well as “genuinely radical movements” interested in the betterment of society. Unlike White, David Karpf (2010) instead highlights the positive aspects of “clicantivism,” which he also interchangeably refers to as “slacktivism”. For example, Karpf (2010) purposefully counters Evgeny Morozov’s (2009) critique of “slacktivism,” which the latter refers to as “the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation” and instead proposes that the lowered transaction costs of digital activism enables “new norms for participation within advocacy organizations” and that “the rise of email and web-based communication allows for the creation of new groups, utilizing novel organizational structures” (p. 31). Explanations such as these, which pertain to youth activism and social media are surfeit. Irrespective of whether one agrees with techno-optimists
such as Clay Shirky (2008) or Karpf (2010), or instead sides with the techno-pessimists such as Morozov (2009) and Malcolm Gladwell (2010), what is most apparent is that young activists are turning to and using social media. Although all of the aforementioned are legitimate studies into youth activism and social media, for this project, I purposefully chose Sasha Costanza-Chock (2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2014), Todd Wolfson (2014) and Paolo Gerbaudo’s (2012, 2014, 2014b) work as the basis and the foundation of my conceptual framework. I would describe the three scholars as being “techno-realists”; those that acknowledge the importance of social media as a tool and a tactic to be used to help bring about meaningful social change, but without fetishizing social media as transformative and a creator of social change. In this sense, techno-pessimists, techno-optimists, and techno-realists have vastly different understandings and opinions regarding social media.

Costanza-Chock (2010) theorizes that within social movements, there are particular media practices that incorporate extensive offline actions in conjunction with “cutting-edge technology,” a tactic he refers to as “transmedia mobilization.” Costanza-Chock explains “transmedia mobilization” as “engaging the social base of the movement in participatory media making practices across multiple platforms” (p. 113). In short, “transmedia mobilization” includes both the use of low-tech (posters, flyers, word-of-mouth, etc.) and high-tech (social media, blogs, YouTube, etc.) media alongside offline actions. This theory is particularly useful as it helps to explain many of the tactics used by the Québec students. The maNUfestation, which took place on May 3, 2012, is an excellent example of the students’ use of transmedia mobilization. The term “maNufestation” is a wordplay which highlights the playfulness of the protests. It refers to the word “nude,” which is translated to “nu” in French, and “manifestation” which refers to a “demonstration” in French. On this day, in addition to using social media to coordinate, share information, and document the event, students also used their bodies in addition to carrying signs and wearing the red square while demonstrating through the streets of Montreal; a perfect display of both high-tech and low-tech media utilized alongside the offline action of protesting (Bernstein, 2012; The Canadian Press 3; The Canadian Press 4). Moreover, Costanza-Chock’s (2014) use of “horizontalism” (or horizontalidad in the Latin American context), through his work with immigrant rights groups and Occupy Wall Street is very helpful, as the students of Québec likewise used and privileged both horizontalism and direct democracy during the strike.
I draw from Wolfson’s book, *Digital Rebellion*, in many ways. Firstly, his work with and explanation of the Zapatistas and their movement is quite relevant, as the Zapatistas are well known for being one of the first to use social media as a political tactic (Wolfson, 2014). Moreover, Wolfson (2014) posits that most current social movements struggle against neoliberalism, austerity budgets which call for a shared sacrifice, and globalization. Also, through his analysis of IndyMedia, Wolfson (2014) highlights the efficacy of cyberactivism versus the more material and physical forms of activism. One could certainly argue that the Québec students in 2012 were quite effective in their use of both online and offline forms of activism. As well, Wolfson’s (2014) articulation of IndyMedia includes an analysis of the tension over the network’s decentralized structure; he believes it to be a great strength as it allows for true participatory media, but the lack of a centralized body also makes it extremely challenging to coordinate over an extended period of time. Wolfson (2014) identifies “technological practice as a site of contested struggle,” which suggests that technological tools such as social media can be used in the struggle to bring about meaningful social change.

Although Gerbaudo (2014b) disagrees with the premise of a “leaderless movement” and horizontalism more broadly, and instead insists on the existence of a “charismatic leader,” his work in *Tweets and the Streets* is very helpful to this project. Through his ethnographic work which deals with the protests in Tahrir Square, the ‘indignados’ in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street, Gerbaudo (2012) was at hand, documenting the reclaiming and retaking of public spaces through mass mobilizations. Gerbaudo (2012) argues that social media “has been chiefly responsible for a choreography of assembly,” which is “the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualized constituency” at highly symbolic public spaces (p. 5). Perhaps most importantly, Gerbaudo (2012) claims that a movement’s ability to maintain a presence with the physical occupation of strategic sites and social media is key to its success. Without a doubt, the students of Québec were able to satisfy these requirements. They occupied public spaces through their marches, demonstrations, and protests, as well as utilizing social media to assist in capturing the imagination of networked publics.

**Conclusion**

The way in which social movements were reported on was once the purview of corporate-owned mass media. DeLuca et al. (2012) indicates the power and stability of corporate media for
activists:

Although media power dynamics have changed with the emergence of the Internet and social media, traditional mass media organizations remain consequential in determining the presence and the reception of activist groups. Not surprisingly, they have a vested interest in preserving the world as it is, in perpetuating the status quo. (p. 488)

By shaping the narrative, De Luca et al. (2012) believe that corporate media have the power to depict activists in whatever way they choose: “Such organizations use two predominant strategies to marginalize activist groups. The first is ignoring them, dooming them to invisibility and nonexistence. The second is to frame them negatively” (p. 488). These actions taken by corporate media rang true for those in the Sixties, and more recently, Occupy and the Québec students. But largely due to social media and independently run media alternatives, today’s young activists have found new ways to tell their stories and get their message out without necessarily having to rely on corporate media (Jeppesen, 2012; Thorburn, 2014). De Luca et al. (2012) state: “Where once The New York Times and CBS News could decide the boundaries of the world and the narratives of history, now social media make possible the proliferation of places that can be decentered knots of world-making” (p. 487).

In several informal talks that I have had with young people, many indicate that they prefer to get their news online rather than through traditional venues such as the television, radio or newspapers. They are more attuned to the Internet and social media than even cable television. There are a number of possible factors that could contribute to this growing trend. Perhaps it is because they can access the Internet from any location today via smart phones, unlike television, radio or newspapers. Or being away from home, perhaps they are less likely to have television and cable subscriptions. In a 2013 article, Jane Weaver reported that young people now spend more time online than watching television, based on a study from Yahoo! and ad agency Carat Interactive: “Young people, ages 13-24, spend an average of 16.7 hours a week online, excluding e-mail, compared to 13.6 hours watching TV. After TV viewing, they listened to radio for 12 hours, talked on the phone for 7.7 hours and spent six hours reading books and magazines for personal entertainment” (Weaver, 2013). Clearly, information such as this is important to the media industry. If this trend continues, then perhaps citizen journalism, through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, will succeed news organizations such as The New York Times and CBS News. During the strike, one could certainly argue that CUTV were more thorough with their
coverage. Currently, at the very least, social media provides an alternative narrative when used by young activists (Jeppesen, 2012; Thorburn, 2014).

The three frameworks that I rely on throughout this project are social movement theory, the structural foundations of social media, and youth activism and social media. In utilizing these frameworks, I am able to engage in a more comprehensive analysis of the Québec student strike of 2012 and the tactics that they employed; in particular, their tactical use of social media. Largely due to these frameworks, I can better comprehend the students and their tactics within the context of their social movement. And because of this increased understanding, I am more capable of telling the story of the events that took place in Québec in the spring of 2012.
Chapter 6 – Research Methods

It was easy for us to mobilize because there was a clear issue at hand – the tuition fee increase. The government made a mistake. They told us what they were going to do. So we had a year and a half of time to prepare and organize.

-Guillaume Legault (former ASSÉ member), Montréal Student Movement Convention, June 21, 2014

This research project explores the tactics used by the Québec students during the strike of 2012, with a particular focus on their tactical use of social media. The goal of the study is to gather qualitative data that provides detailed evidence of a variety of tactics that were used by the students. Additionally, qualitative data is also collected and analyzed to determine how various media characterized and portrayed the students in different ways.

According to Robert K. Yin (2004), it is important to differentiate between the case and the case study. The case that I chose was the Québec student strike of 2012. The case study was specific to the tactics used by the students during the strike. In thinking through my case study, I draw heavily from Yin. This chapter discusses the methodology of the project, which includes the research design, the research setting, the data collection process and the methods used.

Ethics

Prior to initiating the research, ethics clearance from the Office of the Vice President, Research at the University of Toronto was required. Since the project involved human subjects, the study needed to gain ethics approval, which was granted on January 8, 2014 (Protocol Reference #25777) (Appendix 1). The ethics protocol approved my recruitment of individuals who served as student organizers during the strike; seven student organizers were eventually recruited and interviewed for the project. The ethics approval permitted me to conduct my research using participants that were between the ages of 18 and 29. As stated in the protocol, individuals that were recruited were those who displayed explicit interest in civic and political participation. I sought to interview the primary student organizers that were involved in the strike. I was explicit in stating that their participation in this study was purely voluntary. Moreover, the interviewees were made aware that they were allowed to “opt out” if they changed their minds about participating, even at a later date.
Rationalizing the Methods Used

I use a case study method to investigate a specific phenomenon pertaining to the tactics used by the Québec students during the strike of 2012. As Yin (2004) states, the use of the case study method “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2). The Québec student strike of 2012 was a particular event that occurred in an identifiable place during a specific time period. Thus, using a case study to examine this event allows me to gain a more nuanced understanding of the strike through the gathering of empirical evidence. Moreover, a qualitative approach allows me to obtain more depth and nuance in the data collected and in its subsequent analysis (Creswell, 1994, 2003, 2009). I incorporate a triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2004) and use three distinct methods (interviews, textual analysis of social media, and textual analysis of a variety of media) in my study. The data triangulation strategy “involves using different sources of information to increase the validity of a study” (Guion et al., 2011, p. 1). Perhaps the most cogent way to explain triangulation is as “a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives” (p. 1).

I begin by interviewing seven individuals who were all involved in helping to organize the strike. My goal is to purposefully target those students who had either leadership or organizational roles within the movement. My reason for choosing these individuals is fairly straightforward: they possessed the information and data that I required to fully satisfy my research questions. I am quite fortunate because all seven participants were bilingual. This was very beneficial for me as there was no language barrier to overcome, and thus, no need to hire a translator.

I strategically target the “public spokespersons” of the movement, those who effectively took up leadership roles and engaged with both the public and the media through their interviews. Individuals such as Martine Desjardins, who was the president of the student union Fédération Etudiante Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), Eliane Laberge, president of Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), former FECQ president Léo Bureau-Blouin, and Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) members Jeanne Reynolds and Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, were all contacted to participate in the study. Out of the five organizers contacted, only Bureau-Blouin willingly volunteered to be interviewed. However, one of my pseudonymous informants, Micah Fournier, was another visible figure as they took on a role as a
prominent-English speaking spokesperson during the strike. Bureau-Blouin along with the six other student organizers who participated were invaluable to the completion of this project.

The second method that I utilize is the textual analysis of Facebook posts and Twitter tweets. I engage in a qualitative exploration of the text, not “necessarily concentrating on the written word but also bringing into the analysis the associated multimedia images that are becoming common” (Mitra & Cohen, 1999). Through the Facebook postings and Twitter tweets, I am able to find and analyze concrete examples of the tactical use of social media by the Québec students.

The third method that I use is textual analysis of the various media reports on the strike. For this section, I purposefully target both English and French-language newspapers, alternative and independent media sources, as well as student-run media. This section of the study allowed for an interesting comparison of different accounts of a relatively successful youth-led social movement. For this part of the study, I use analytical semantics, which Knut Bjorn Lindkvist (1981) defines as denying “the idea of a ‘correct’ interpretation of a text.” (p. 29) Instead, it is possible for the researcher “to make reasonable interpretations of the text” (p. 29). I strategically use this form of analysis as the method allowed for a bit of latitude and my own personal reading of the texts without straying too far (if at all) from the producers’ intended meanings. For instance, in a Huffington Post article detailing the use of nudity as one of the students’ tactics, the unknown author states: “the student protesters didn't just lose clothes Thursday” (The Canadian Press 3, 2012). Although the word “lose” could have meant misplaced, within the context of the story, I interpreted “lose” to mean having disrobed. So while both definitions could have been equally applicable to the story, choosing the second definition did not diminish nor alter the overall message of the story.

**Recruiting the Participants and the Site of Study**

Recruiting the participants for this study became a bit more difficult than I had initially anticipated. From the outset, I was able to contact individuals through their published public information. For example, as a then member of the Québec government, I was able to collect Léo Bureau-Blouin’s contact information directly from the Québec provincial government’s website. In a similar fashion, I was able to contact several members of FECQ, FEUQ and ASSÉ through information provided through their organizational websites, Facebook pages and Twitter
accounts. Since I personally knew only a handful of individuals attending school in Québec, I solicited possible contacts through the help of colleagues, friends and acquaintances who provided me with names and contact information of some individuals who were actively involved in the uprising. I also utilized Facebook and Twitter to send out general calls to participate in the study as a way to contact possible participants.

However, as per the ethics protocol, I was strictly prohibited from asking an existing participant to provide me with information about other prospective individuals who may have also been interested in participating in the study. The reason given for this was that I would be gathering information about other individuals without their knowledge and consent. Instead, what I was allowed to do was to ask the existing participant to give my information to other prospective individuals. I then had to wait for those individuals to contact me directly. This additional step proved to be somewhat challenging; in relying on this method, I lost control of the actual recruitment practice and had no input as to which individuals would be targeted.

A non-random purposive sampling (Deacon et al., 1999) was utilized to select the participants in the first portion of the study. A random sample is explained by Glenn G. Sparks (2013) as “one that permits every member of the population to have an equal chance of being selected in the sample” (p. 27). In contrast, characteristics of the type of non-random purposive (or judgmental) sampling that I undertook included the following: the researcher purposively selected sample units; selection-chance was unknown; and it could not be guaranteed that every unit of a population had an equal chance of being selected (equality of selection) (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 41). Since my study focused on a particular phenomenon that was carried out by a specific demographic of Québécois, a non-random purposive sampling technique allowed me to target a specific population: young student activists from Montreal that were involved in a leadership or organizational role in the uprising against the introduction of post-secondary tuition fee hikes in Québec. As the purpose of the case study was to gain an even deeper understanding of the tactical use of social media by the student activists in Québec, utilizing theoretical sampling which “seek out respondents who are most likely to aid theoretical development by extending and even confounding emerging hypothesis” (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 52) was beneficial to the project. As well, not only are these students representative of a social movement that organized as a response to a specific governmental act, but, as organizers, they also possess intimate knowledge of the events that occurred during what has since been coined Maple Spring
or “le printemps érable” in French. As such, the responses to the interviews administered provided rich data that allowed for a meaningful analysis.

Participation in the research was open to both English and French-speaking students. I was willing to hire a translator if necessary due to my rudimentary ability to converse and read French fluently. The interview questions were available in both French and English. However, because all of the participants were bilingual, a translator was unnecessary. Furthermore, translating some of the French text (which I was unfamiliar with) in Google Translate proved to be more than a satisfactory translation method. I was able to fully understand all of the data that was collected and analyzed. As well, much of the media coverage and information about the strike was translated from French to English on the website called Quebec protest: Translating the printemps érable, located at http://translatingtheprintempserable.tumblr.com. On the website itself, it is explained that the translating printemps érables was the work of a volunteer collective that purposefully translated French media into English “in an attempt to balance the English media’s extremely poor coverage of the student conflict in Québec” (Quebec protest, 2012).

Initially, I chose Montreal as my field site for a variety of reasons: accessibility and minimal personal funding; the high number of post-secondary institutions in Montreal (including Cegeps); and, my rudimentary ability to speak, read and write French fluently coupled with the high number of bilingual students in Montreal. But perhaps more importantly, as indicated by the media coverage of the uprising, a significant number of the marches/protests/demonstrations took place in Montreal. All of these reasons led me to believe that the likelihood of successfully recruiting participants for my study would be much greater in Montreal than in other regions of the province. Thus, my sampling frame for this study, “a list that should contain all (or most) of the ‘elements’ of the population you wish to sample” (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 45) included the following: youth (as previously defined); students who were studying in a post-secondary institution in Montreal during the strike; and those involved as leaders or organizers in the Québec student uprising against tuition fee hikes. Despite my preparation, all of my formal interviews were conducted from my home in Brampton, Ontario and the interviewees’ respective locations in Montreal via Skype. The only individual that I spoke with in person in Montreal was Guillaume Legault, who I met at the Montréal Student Movement Convention in June 2014. However, our conversation was very informal and was not counted as one of the seven interviews. Nevertheless, I was ecstatic with the final results of the interviews that were
administered. Not only did my interviewees provide me with rich data, but they also appeared to be genuinely engaged, happy to participate in the research, and quite generous with their time and their answers.

**Interviews**

Interviews are the first method used for this case study. I interviewed seven individuals selected based on their leadership and organizational roles in the Québec student strike of 2012. The interviews took the form of free-format semi-structured interviews (Deacon et al., 1999). Using this method promoted “an active open-ended dialogue” (p. 65). This is evident in the transcribed interviews. John W. Creswell (2009) explains and describes these types of qualitative interviews as being “unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 181). Deacon et al. (1999) further argue that this style of interviewing generates richer data, which then allows interviewees to “articulate their thoughts and opinions on their own terms rather than in relation to preordained response structures, which means there is more opportunity to explore complex and sensitive social and personal issues” (p. 68). Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin (2005) posit that qualitative interviews allow the researcher to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which “you did not participate…You can extend your intellectual reach across age, occupation, class, race, sex, and geographical boundaries” (p. 3). Effectively, the use of open-ended questions in a free-format semi-structured interview provided me with rich empirical data that was obtained from individuals who actively participated in the Québec uprising – unique data from a perspective that was unavailable from other sources.

All of the interviews were conducted via Skype. A translator was not required because all of the interviewees were bilingual and spoke good English. Although the open-ended questions were translated from English to French, there was no need for the French version as all of the interviews were conducted in English.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews are described by Rubin and Rubin (2005) as “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (p. 4). Following this rationale, the questions (Appendix 2) themselves were meant to guide the participant in a conversation. For example, one of the main questions that I posed was based on how Facebook and/or Twitter were used by the student organizers during the
strike. I asked: “Do you have a personal Facebook or Twitter account? What did you do on these accounts that was related to the strike?” Since participant responses could not be predicted in advance, the follow-up questions were improvised and dependent on the responses to the original question (Wengraf, 2001). Since depth, “a solid, deep understanding of what is being studied” was the goal of my semi-structured interview, I needed to be responsive to “dealing with the complexity of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting themes,” which was accomplished by being cognizant of and “paying attention to the specifics of meanings, situations, and history” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35). In addition to the main questions, follow-up questions and probing questions were also utilized to provide “elicit depth, detail, vividness, nuance and richness” in the responses given (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 134).

Some of the key elements of a responsive interview, as outlined by Rubin & Rubin (2005), include the following: maintain continuity; clarify meaning and indicate understanding; ask for narratives and stories; and ending the conversation. Of these elements, I needed to be especially mindful of asking for narratives instead of stories. Narratives are explained as “the speakers put together what they believe actually occurred, recognizing that what they say might be incomplete because they only saw part of what happened or only remember a piece of what went on” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 109). On the other hand, stories are defined as being “told to make a point or present a theme, either stated or implicit, irrespective of the accuracy of the details” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 109). This distinction, the accuracy of the details, was very important to the study. Thus, the information gathered had to be as accurate as possible in order to make sensible inferences. I strove to gather facts instead of mere conjecture.

With the participants’ consent, I recorded all interviews with a digital audio recorder in addition to writing down the main ideas during our conversations. Rubin and Rubin (2005) believed that taking notes in addition to recording electronically forces the interviewer to “listen carefully enough to get down the main points, and also provides backup in case a machine fails” (p. 111). One key point that Tom Wengraf (2001) makes is that the interviewer needs to make sure that the interview “ends well.” Wengraf (2001) writes, “You should always invite the informant to say anything else that he or she thinks might be relevant to the topic or the interview process that has not yet been mentioned: if you give enough time to this, you may find a whole new area of information emerging quite at the end” (p. 205). I incorporated this strategy in my interviews as it fell in line with allowing concepts to emerge from the data. Near the end of each
interview, I asked the following: “Is there anything else that you would like to tell me? Something that we haven’t discussed yet that you feel is important…” In each case, this was an effective way to end the interview. As an example, this line of questioning led to the following statement:

Maybe the way ASSÉ, FECQ and FEUQ were organizing each other together. Because we never saw this before in the history of student movements. FECQ and FEUQ were here since 1992, and ASSÉ has been around since 2001-2002. And these organizations hate each other a lot.

But in 2012, we managed to do things together and it was really a game changer in the events because the unions of the three created a powerful movement that was more powerful than the 2005 strike or the strike in 1996 or the strike in 1989. I think its….so you were talking about tactic and strategy….the fact that FEUQ wouldn’t negotiate without CLASSE was a huge game changer in the events because the government was trying to divide. And it didn’t work, mostly because of CLASSE and FEUQ who wanted to work a little bit together, and FECQ….I don’t like FECQ. Yeah, I think that it was a big game changer in the course of the strike. (Anne-Marie Provost, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2014)

By asking this particular question, I allowed my participant, in this case Provost, to further clarify her opinions on a topic that she believed was not discussed fully. In her response, Provost expands on the cooperation that existed between CLASSE, FEUQ and FECQ. By engaging in this type of questioning, I was able to gain even further insights into the strike.

Adhering to Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) suggestion, I transcribed each interview shortly after it was conducted. Additionally, transcribing the interviews myself forced me to “pay attention to what interviewees said and helps you prepare for the next interview” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 204). This tactic allowed me to refine and modify the questions, as needed, between each interview. As well, Wengraf (2001) suggests making notes and memos while transcribing, especially noting ideas that are stimulated by the re-hearing of the audio (p. 209). Transcribing is described as “an instrumentation practice, examining sound-data from an audiotape to create visual-data for printing out on paper” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 221). Wengraf (2001) indicates that the “subjective experience of the interview encounter” is often left out during the interview. Thus, to remedy the loss of this type of data, he stressed the importance of creating session de-briefing notes after each interview, meticulous journal-keeping and “instantly memorizing notes while doing the transcription” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 222). As a way to ensure
that the loss of data was kept to a minimum, I meticulously incorporated the three aforementioned strategies proposed by Wengraf.

Once the interviews were completed, data analysis of the transcriptions was necessary. This was done through “coding.” Coding is explained as “systematically labelling concepts, themes, events, and topical markers so that you can readily retrieve and examine all of the data units that refer to the same subject” across all the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p., 207). I looked for possible patterns that emerged from the various responses, using “grounded theory” to help inform my coding process. Grounded theory, which was first developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, “is the attempt to derive theory from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in observational data” (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002, p. 315). In other words, grounded theory allowed me to draw from and incorporate concepts and codes that emerged from the data. For instance, almost all of the interviewees recounted the students’ use of “escalation of tactics” during the strike. Through the use of grounded theory, I was able to identify this particular theme and purposefully focused on it during the coding process as it was one of the more important categories that emerged from the data.

In addition, all interviews and conversations were imported onto NVivo, a qualitative data analysis and research software. Aside from “escalation of tactics,” the other themes that I coded included the following: tactics; red square; Bill 78; casseroles; the manUfestation; Facebook use; Twitter use; social media; other media used by the movement; and personal experience with the movement. The data collected directly responded to my research questions. They also revealed how social media was utilized by the Québec students during the strike of 2012.

Data Collection and Textual Analysis of Data Collected from Facebook and Twitter

The second part of my data collection consisted of Facebook postings and Twitter tweets that pertained to the Québec student uprising of 2012. Data from student groups as well as the interviewees themselves were collected. Initially, I wanted to locate and analyze various posts before during and after the uprising took place. However, due to the massive amount of information this entailed, I redefined my time frame to be more specific. I attempted to gather data as far back as March 2011 up to December 2012. In March 2011, the Liberal government
had announced their plan to increase university tuition fees (The Canadian Press, 2012), and by December 2012, the Parti Québécois had been in power for two months and had repealed Bill 78 and cancelled the tuition fee increase (Lambert, 2014). I also focused my analysis on a seven-day period, between May 17 to May 23. This was, arguably, the busiest time of the strike and included both the introduction and the response to Bill 78 as well as the celebration of the 100th day of the strike (May 22). Effectively, this data provided empirical evidence of the students’ use of Facebook and Twitter during the strike.

Facebook

I began by collecting data from Facebook. From their public Facebook pages, I gathered data from the following student organizations: ASSÉ; FECQ; FEUQ. I also collected data from the following student groups: Association facultaire étudiante des arts de l’UQAM (AFÉA UQAM); Association facultaire étudiante des langues et communication de l’UQAM (AFELC-UQAM); L’Association facultaire étudiante des sciences humaines de l’UQAM (AFESH UQAM); Concordia Student Union. Other Facebook groups that I collected data from included Greve etudiante, Manif En Cours, Printemps Erable, and Solidarity with the Quebec Student Strike. Additionally, I also collected data from the following interviewees who agreed to have data collected from their personal Facebook pages: Anne-Marie Provost; Laurent Gauthier; Myriam; Jolly Roger.

I used NVivo’s NCapture software to collect the data using purposeful sampling from the aforementioned Facebook pages. Available for use with the Internet Explorer and Google Chrome browsers, NVivo’s NCapture allowed me to download data from each of these Facebook pages. However, using NCapture alongside both Internet Explorer and Google Chrome was not without its limitations, which proved to be somewhat of a challenge; a challenge echoed by other researchers working with social media. More specifically, many have found harvesting data to be somewhat difficult and a laborious process. With the help of Deen Freelon, an Assistant Professor in Communication at American University, who has compiled a list of various data collecting software which includes “F-Grab” and DiscoverText, I now have a list of other software to try and to compare NCapture with in terms of functionality and ease of use for future projects.
When using NCapture, the amount of information found on a particular Facebook page determined how much information I was able to extract. The greater amount of information there was on a page, the more difficult it was for me to load previous postings. For instance, because there was a relatively modest amount of information found in AFELC UQAM’s Facebook page, I was able to retrieve information from May 7, 2014 to as far back as March 29, 2011 inclusively. On the other hand, due to the tremendous amount of information contained on ASSÉ’s Facebook page, I was only able to retrieve information beginning from January 30, 2012 up to May 19, 2014. The reason for the discrepancy between the two pages was due to the fact that the information posted on Facebook is placed in chronological order, beginning with the most recent information posted, to the earliest posting and when the page was initially created. For ASSÉ, I had to filter through hundreds of posts prior to reaching those posted on January 30, 2012. The website also made it impossible to go any further (past that date) without the browser crashing. Below is an example of my browser crashing (Screenshot 1, Challenges with NVivo).

![Screenshot 1: Challenges with NVivo](image)

In contrast, because of relatively few postings, one can access all of AFELC UQAM’s pages, dating back to when the group first joined Facebook. These difficulties became even more
pronounced when I attempted to access information from some Twitter pages.

From the groups analyzed on Facebook, depending on how the page was created, I made note of either how many members belonged to a particular group or how many “likes” a page had received. I also counted the number of posts on each group’s page between May 17, 2012 to May 23, 2012. Further, I differentiated between posts made by the group and posts made by individuals. From these, I also tracked the number of original created posts versus the number of posts that contained shared information such as memes, news stories, links, pictures, etc. Using a targeted sampling method on the posts collected, I was able to ascertain that the majority of posts were in support of the strike. But there were a few posts from individuals that were negatively provocative in nature, and were clearly against the strike. Through the use of this targeted sampling method, I was able to determine that the students’ tactical use of Facebook was quite evident during the strike.

From the individuals analyzed on Facebook, the focus was on the activity between May 17, 2012 to May 23, 2012. Unlike the groups, there were only a few posts noted during this time period. Aside from counting the number of posts made during that time, I also differentiated between posts made by the individual versus those made by friends. In addition, I counted the number of posts that fell into the original category versus the number of posts that contained shared information such as memes, news stories, links, pictures, etc. It was fairly simple to determine that all of the posts found in these pages were indicative of the individuals’ support of the strike.

Twitter

As with the Facebook analysis, I likewise used the NVivo NCapture software to collect the data from Twitter. I began by gathering data from the same student organizations: ASSÉ; FECQ; FEUQ. As well, data from the same student groups was collected: AFÉA UQAM; AFELC-UQAM; AFESH UQAM; Concordia Student Union. Despite the limited amount of usage between May 17th to May 23rd of 2012, I nevertheless gathered data from the three participants who have Twitter accounts: Anne-Marie Provost; Micah Fournier; Léo Bureau-Blouin. But the majority of my data collection from Twitter came from the following hashtags:
Using NCapture on the Twitter pages, I also encountered some difficulties due to the volume of the data, as I had previously when extracting data from the Facebook pages. I continued to use grounded theory in order to remain observant of emerging patterns while implementing qualitative data analysis, which Creswell (2009) calls “is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 184).

I made note of how many followers each group had on Twitter. I also noted each groups’ number of tweets, photos and videos uploaded and shared, and the number of individuals each group was following. I counted the number of tweets present on each group’s page between May 17, 2012 to May 23, 2012. I differentiated between tweets made by the group and tweets made by individuals. As with the Facebook analysis, I also tracked the number of original created posts versus the number of posts that contained shared information (memes, news stories, links, pictures, etc.). Although there were more tweets that were critical of the strike, the majority of the tweets analyzed evidenced strong support for the strike among those who were using Twitter. The targeted sampling method clearly displayed the students’ tactical use of Twitter during the strike. Twitter was used to coordinate the marches and demonstrations, relay and share information, and provide student-generated stories, reports and narratives about the strike.

**Data Collection and Textual Analysis of the Student Strike from a Variety of Media**

The third part of my project involved an investigation and textual analysis of how the students were portrayed by a variety of media. For this section of the project, the data that I collected were taken from a variety of media ranging from corporate-owned English-language national media such as *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* to local corporate-owned French-

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10 May 22, 2012, commemorated the 100th day of the strike.

11 Bill 78 in French.

12 $1625 was the amount of the proposed tuition fee increase.

13 GGI stood for grève générale illimitée or indefinite general strike.

14 Roughly translated to “demonstration underway”.

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language media such as *La Presse* and *Le Devoir* to student-run media such as CUTV and *The McGill Daily* to English-language independent media such as *Rabble.ca*. The data that I gathered ranged from well before the strike, reports as far back as 2011, through to the summer of 2012. I paid particular attention to the variances between the Anglophone and the Francophone media as well as the corporate-owned versus the independent practitioners. I used a direct and simplified coding scheme. Stories were delineated as one of the following: explicitly against the strike and depicting students negatively; implicitly against the strike and depicting students negatively; neutral about the strike, no clear bias whether for or against it, and neither positive nor negative portrayal of the students; explicitly for the strike and depicting the students positively; implicitly for the strike and depicting the students positively. While there was the possibility of reports being written that were against the strike but portraying the students positively or stories supporting the strike but demonizing the students, none of these were found. Biases against the strike were clear and depicted the students negatively. Conversely, biases for the strike were equally identifiable and the students were portrayed positively in these stories.

Using strictly online sources, I began by reviewing a number of articles from national English-language corporate-owned outlets, *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and Canada’s national public English-language broadcaster, *CBC News*. I gathered a total of 85 articles from the three sources dating as far back as March 18, 2011. I paid specific attention to the type of language used by each media outlet to describe the students, the strike, and the events that unfolded during the strike, as well as the accompanying images included with many of the reports. I also paid particular attention to the variances between the Anglophone and the Francophone media as well as the corporate-owned versus the independent practitioners. Since I was researching differences in how students were portrayed by differing media outlets, the themes that I searched for included an explicit anti-strike sentiment, explicit pro-strike sentiment, negative portrayals of the student, and sympathetic and positive portrayals of the students. Through my analysis, evidence of various types of bias became evident and was identified.

Using strictly online sources, I began by reviewing a number of articles from national English-language corporate-owned outlets, *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and Canada’s national public English-language broadcaster, *CBC News*. I gathered a total of 85 articles from the three sources dating as far back as March 18, 2011. A large number of the
articles were from May of 2012, which was arguably the busiest month of the entire strike. By focusing largely on the students’ arrests, I determined that the *National Post* articles were the most critical of the students. Chris Selley’s (2012) article entitled “Quebec’s student protests should alarm all Canadian politicians and voters,” a narrative that positions the students as “irrational,” “violent,” and “blackmailers” is perhaps the most opinionated piece against the strike. On the other hand, both *The Globe and Mail* and *CBC News*’ ranged in scope. Some articles such as Rakobowchuk’s (2012) “Riot police step in as Montreal students block bridge in tuition protests” and “Gatineau student protest leads to 151 arrests: Crickets released in university library, walls vandalized” (“Gatineau student protest,” 2012) which was published by *CBC News* indicate both anti-strike sentiment and a negative portrayal of the students. In contrast, the tone of the Rob Carrick’s (2012) article, “Young adults have the right to be up in arms,” which was published by *The Globe and Mail* and the Canadian Press’ “Quebec students bare it all for transparency” (The Canadian Press 4, 2012) published in the *CBC News* both show support for the students and the strike. The only non-Canadian news source analyzed was the United Kingdom’s *The Guardian*, which was chosen because of its writers’ apparent general concern for neoliberalism and its superb coverage of student uprisings worldwide. Fifteen articles that were published in *The Guardian* displayed the same variation as the stories found in *The Globe and Mail* and *CBC News*.

From a local perspective, English-language news stories published by *The Montreal Gazette*, and *CTV Montreal* were analyzed. A total of 59 news reports dated between March 24, 2011 and July 22, 2012 were gathered. In using content analysis to examine the stories, it became quite clear that a much more distinct pro-student bias was displayed by the two news outlets. Moreover, stories with headlines such as “Many parents on the frontlines in Quebec student strike” (The Canadian Press 5, 2012), “Quebec protesters cheered by UN criticism of Bill 78” (The Canadian Press 6, 2012) and “Quebec students take to the streets with anti-Liberal message as election looms” (“Quebec students take,” 2012) display a sympathy for the students. As opposed to words such as “storm” and “riots” that were used by the national corporate-owned news services, *The Gazette* and *CTV Montreal* instead used less critical words such as “protest march” and “take to the streets” to describe the students’ actions.

*CTV* and *The McGill Daily* were two student-run media that were analyzed. Of course, both had a distinct pro-student and pro-strike bias in their reporting despite the fact that many
McGill students elected not to participate in the strike. For example, C*UTV*’s story on May 26, 2012 read “Freedom of Press Under Attack in Montreal” which alluded to the violent police actions against the students and the press during the strike. In a similar vein, on April 26, 2012, The McGill Daily reported that, “Student march ends in arrests across the city” (Corbeil & Gass, 2012). Not only did the two media outlets show firm support for the students throughout the strike, but they also purposefully characterized the police in a negative fashion.

Two relatively popular independent news sources were examined. Rabble.ca, which was established in 2001 is an alternative and independent online English-language news source. Le Devoir, which has been a stalwart in Montreal since being established by journalist, politician, and nationalist Henri Bourassa in 1910, is published as an independent French-language newspaper with online presence. Although fundamentally different in terms of the language that they are published in, an analysis of both Rabble.ca and Le Devoir’s reports showed that the two media sources were similar in their support of the students during the strike. Likewise, French-language corporate-owned newspaper, La Presse displayed even more support for the students and the strike than its English-language counterparts. Surprisingly, another French-language corporate-owned newspaper, Le Journal de Montréal, had very little coverage of the students and the strike.

Methodological Challenges
My own subject position as a racial minority, male, Canadian, doctoral student, activist, and self-proclaimed anarchist undoubtedly shaped my theoretical and methodological approaches, and my interactions with the student organizers that participated in the study. Although I purposefully attempted to remain impartial during the interview process, I also did not attempt to hide or mask my support for the Québec students and the strike. This bias may have affected the results somewhat, although it is impossible for me to determine the extent of this possible influence.

Language also limited my research. Although all of my participants were bilingual and I was able to conduct my interviews in English, there remains a strong possibility that there may have been even more fruitful discussions if the interviews had been conducted in their native French. Hopefully, the language barrier was of minimal consequence to the entire project.

As previously stated, the use of Google Chrome and Internet Explorer in conjunction
with NVivo’s NCapture software proved to be limiting at times as it would not allow for unlimited data gathering. Also mentioned previously, there was a discussion amongst Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) scholars about this exact problem. Many researchers reported similar difficulties when working with NVivo and other types of software. I have kept abreast of the discussion with the hopes of identifying a valid solution for this unfortunate shortcoming. At the very least, a list of additional data mining software compiled by Deen Freelon looks promising and will be tested in future projects.

Finally, this study was situated in a specific time and place, and about a specific social movement. Results, then, are not necessarily generalizable. The success of the Québec students does not necessarily guarantee a similar type of success for a different uprising – even if the activists were to replicate all the tactics used during Maple Spring. However, despite these forewarnings, I have no doubt that my findings contribute important empirical evidence to the emerging body of theory within social movement theory, social media theory, and critical communication studies as it articulates how a student strike against tuition fees grew into a very important social movement that resisted neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice, the corporatization of the university, and the criminalization of protesting and basic human rights. I also believe that my methodology contributes to the ways in which contemporary social movements can be examined as it incorporates traditionally successful methods such as triangulation, free-format semi-structured interview and textual analysis in examining a social movement and its use of new technologies, such as social media.
Chapter 7 – Tactics Used by the Québec Students During the Strike of 2012

From their values and discourses to their models of communication and organization, the youth of Québec had arisen to carry forth the paradigm of a new age, where the old top-down designs of order and authority make way for a world of networked and autonomous communities, open structures of governance and grassroots empowerment.


The Québec students had ample time to organize their strike in 2012. The decision by the Jean Charest-led Liberal Party to announce the university tuition fee increase several months earlier not only provided the students an opportunity to organize in the months leading up to the 2012 strike, but it also gave them a clear issue to oppose: an increase in tuition fees. The Québec students engaged in, what many would argue, a successful campaign against an increase in tuition fees, primarily, but also protests against both social and economic forms of austerity measures, in general. I argue that the Québec strike of 2012 was largely successful due to the variety of tactics used by students.

This chapter focuses on three very important categories of tactics that were purposefully used by the students: 1) a unified front: the student groups set aside their differences and organized themselves into a unified lobby; 2) direct democracy and horizontal leadership: the students privileged democratic values and maintained a transparent horizontal leadership structure; 3) diversity and escalation of tactics: the students embraced both escalation of tactics and the use of diversity of tactics as a primary tactic. From Chapter 1, I define the term “tactic” as any and all actions and strategies used by the students in an attempt to achieve their goals.

Many (but not all) tactics have more than one effect; negatively impacting the opponent while also having a positive impact on the cause. For example, 300,000 striking students and their supporters marched in the streets of Montreal; an action that had two distinct results. Firstly, it had a positive impact on the strike and the strikers as it displayed their strength, unity, and commitment to the cause, which undoubtedly had a positive effect on the morale of the strikers due to explicit displays of camaraderie. Secondarily, and perhaps even more importantly, the many people demonstrating in the streets of the city led to closures of streets, stores, restaurants and numerous businesses. Undoubtedly, these actions negatively impacted many
businesses in a very real sense as they lost revenue due to the strike. In turn, the Liberal government was indirectly negatively impacted through the numerous complaints from the business community – not to mention the increased negative press that Charest received. Thus, it is apparent that many tactics do have a variety of effects. This section of the chapter investigates a number of these tactics and explains their relevance to the movement.

In addition to news stories that support my findings, this chapter also includes evidence and opinions from the interviews that I conducted with seven individuals that were directly responsible in helping to organize the students during the strike. The interview questions that I asked were meant to respond to my two main research questions: What tactics did the Québec students use during the strike of 2012? and, How did the students utilize social media in conjunction with and in addition to these other tactics? In articulating these findings, I attempt to tell the movement’s complicated and “messy” story – a promise I made to Micah Fournier.

I certainly do not suggest that any of the tactics mentioned in this study are the purview of the Québec students alone. Indeed, some of the tactics that were used will be identified as appropriated from other social movements. However, what I am suggesting is twofold: the way in which particular tactics were used during this time by the students of Québec, in addition to the province’s distinctive culture and its rich history of student political uprisings, is what made the 2012 Québec student strike a very unique uprising worthy of its own analysis; and, the way that tactics were used by the students of Québec helped make their uprising wildly successful.

**The Student Groups**

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the Québec student strike of 2012 can categorically be defined as a social movement. Tarrow’s (2011) definition of a social movement as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (p. 9) describes the actions undertaken by the students. Moreover, the students’ struggle against Charest’s Liberal government likewise satisfies Melucci’s (1980) definition of collective action, which he claims to be “the result of a strain which disturbs the equilibrium of the social system” (p. 200). The student movement itself was the result of a united stand against the government as organized by four student groups (see Table 1).
## Table 1: A List of the Student Groups Involved in the Québec Student Strike of 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Leader/Spokesperson</th>
<th>URL of Group Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec</td>
<td>FECQ</td>
<td>Léo Bureau-Blouin (president)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fecq.org/">http://www.fecq.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec</td>
<td>FEUQ</td>
<td>Martine Desjardins (president)</td>
<td><a href="http://feuq.qc.ca/">http://feuq.qc.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante</td>
<td>ASSÉ</td>
<td>Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (spokesperson)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/">http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table de concertation étudiant du Québec</td>
<td>TaCEQ</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>Unavailable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the four groups, TaCEQ was often overlooked because of its relatively small membership of 63,409 members (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). These four groups represent the post-secondary students in the province of Québec. While FECQ only represents the students of certain CEGEPS (colleges) in the province, university students and other CEGEP students are divided amongst FEUQ, ASSÉ and TaCEQ. This structure is further complicated as membership in FEUQ, ASSÉ and TaCEQ varies by university, faculty and even by department. On their website, FEUQ claims to be an organization that is comprised of 13 student associations with over 125,000 members throughout Québec. Meanwhile, members of ASSÉ include a number of CEGEP student bodies such as Association étudiante du CÉGEP de Matane (AECM), Association étudiante du CÉGEP Saint-Laurent (AECSL) and Société générale des étudiantes et étudiants du collège de Maisonneuve (SOGÉÉCOM). In addition, student groups such as Association étudiante d’anthropologie de l’université de Montréal (AEAUM) from the Université de Montréal, Association des physiciens de l’université Laval (ADÉPUL) from Université Laval and Association facultaire étudiante des arts de l’UQAM (AFÉA-UQAM) from Université du Québec à Montréal also belong to ASSÉ.

As I have illustrated, various student associations belong to one of the four student organizations, and the diversity in membership is reflective of the difference in philosophies between the four groups. Whereas both FECQ and FEUQ are more paternalistic towards their membership, former coordination secretary Guillaume Legault asserts that ASSÉ takes a more democratic stance by refusing to “tell people what to do” (Legault, 2014). It was quite difficult to ascertain TaCEQ’s politics as it appears that the organization is currently in flux with a current
membership of less than 28,000 and no functioning website. But at the time of the strike, although TaCEQ members were certainly amongst those opposing the tuition fee increase, the organization was often overlooked and did not have the same media representation as the other three. Moreover, TaCEQ was left out of most narratives, unlike FECQ, FEUQ and ASSÉ, and very little was written and reported about the group. They also had no member present in the meetings and discussions with the government.

To further complicate matters, in December of 2011, a temporary student group known as Coalition large de l’ASSÉ (CLASSE) was formed. According to Katz (2015), this organization was made up of all ASSÉ members who then invited “all Cegep and university student associations (whether unaffiliated or already affiliated with one of the federations) who had voted a strike mandate, were governed democratically via general assembly and shared their longer-term goal of free university education” (p. 71). In short, CLASSE was essentially comprised of ASSÉ with some FECQ and FEUQ groups joining them during the strike. Katz (2015) highlights this development: “For most of the spring, the CLASSE represented approximately three times the average number of striking students represented by the FEUQ and over five times the number represented by the FECQ. Despite the frames of the mainstream media, CLASSE affiliates were thus the overwhelming heat and muscle of the student revolt” (p. 75). For Katz, and many others, the striking students were helped by the formation of CLASSE as an organization. As a further display of how much they had learned from the 2005 student strike, ASSÉ purposefully chose the acronym CLASSE: “The polysemic acronym for its coalition this time around, CLASSE, cleverly evoked the class-based interests behind the government’s austerity agenda, as well as their campaign for the right to education” (Katz, 2015, p. 75).

Regardless, my analysis will be based on statistics derived from ASSÉ, FEUQ and FECQ only. For one, it was difficult to gather statistics specific to CLASSE’s actions during the strike. As well, using statistics derived from CLASSE may have resulted in “doubling errors” and erroneous data as some members of FEUQ and FECQ had switched allegiances to CLASSE during the strike, but were subject to FEUQ and FECQ’s “lengthy and bureaucratic process of disaffiliation” (Katz, 2015, p. 71). Thus, for the remainder of the chapter, the focus will be primarily on the three largest organizations: FECQ, FEUQ, and ASSÉ.
Certainly, Québec had previously witnessed a large number of students on strike. According to *National Post* reporter Allison Cross (2012), “In 1996, roughly 60,000 Quebec students went on strike for a month to protest Lucien Bouchard’s government’s attempt to unfreeze tuition. The government eventually announced a 30% hike but it was followed by a freeze.” Continuing on with her report, she notes that “Roughly 170,000 Quebec students went on strike from February to April in 2005 to oppose the Charest government, which wanted to cut $103-million from the province’s grants and loans program. The students came to an agreement with the government, which saw $70-million put into financial aid for 2005/2006, and the $103-million returned for four years after that” (Cross, 2012). But there were many differences with the 2012 strike compared with previous ones.

Advanced preparation time was key to the 2012 movement. For Léo Bureau-Blouin, the president of FECQ during the strike, mobilization began as soon as the Liberals decided to increase the tuition fees:

> We started the mobilization at that moment. For example, there was a big government meeting on December 6 of 2010, so all the student unions, the labour union, the representative of the universities were together and that was the moment that we really decided to work on this. I had the opportunity to discuss with the ministers, and we were able to make a coalition on this and decided to leave the meeting that was organized in December. We worked against the government on that issue because we really felt that the government was not open for discussion and we organized a future protest around March of 2011. (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014)

Micah Fournier, an executive member of a large student association from a Montréal university, likewise explains the mobilization process:

> And the other thing is that it totally didn’t happen overnight. There was maybe….so for the first demonstration they worked on organizing, relating to this tuition fee increase was in December 10, 2010. So that’s years before the ggï. That was in Québec City and we sent buses and buses, so many buses, and it was a snowstorm and it was horrible and it took our bus 8 hours to get home from Québec City and people had to pee on the side of the road. But we sent like 10,000 people to Québec City and that was to send a message to the government. And students and labour, organized labour walked out of the meeting happening between the government and organized groups about the possibility of tuition fee

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15 ggï was an acronym for the French term “grève générale illimitée” which stood for “unlimited general strike” and referred to the Québec student strike of 2012.
increases, and it was clear that it wasn’t much of a consultation at all. They were
telling you that it was going to happen, so students and labour walked out. There
were 10,000 people out in the snowstorm and we bussed everyone back and then
we sort of built up for November 10. (M. Fournier, personal communication,
January 31, 2014)

The students had several months to prepare for and eventually mobilize during the strike of 2012.
More importantly, all three student organizations agreed to join forces and work in unison,
putting aside their differences – a point that I will expand on shortly.

For a myriad of reasons, which may have included a lack of understanding, a lack of
interest, insufficient time to fully explain the phenomenon, or simplifying the situation for easier
consumption by its audience, the corporate-owned English-language media largely failed to
articulate and address the complexities of the organizations and the students involved in the 2012
strike. The website, Translating the Printemps Érable, a volunteer collective, was created “in an
attempt to balance the English media’s extremely poor coverage of the student conflict in
Québec by translating media that has been published in French into English” (Quebec protest,
2012).

Most English media reports oversimplified the participants and their issues, as those
taking part were generalized as the “striking students” or “young people” or other equally similar
terms. For instance, an article by Canadian Press’ Peter Rakobowchuk, which appeared in the
Globe and Mail on February 23, 2012 includes the following description: “Student
demonstrators temporarily blocked access to a Montreal bridge amid protests over tuition-fee
hikes Thursday, triggering a brief showdown with riot police” (Rakowbowchuk, 2012). The day
after, La Tribune’s headline read, “La colère étudiante monte d’un cram” [“Student anger rises a
notch”], Le Soleil’s headline was “Des manifestants par milliers” [“Thousands of protesters”]
and La Presse reported that “Nos journalistes se sont mêlés aux milliers d’étudiants qui ont
manifesté hier à Montréal” [“Our journalists among thousands of protesting students yesterday in
Montreal”] (Bertolino et al., 2013). Whereas Rakowbowchuk’s article uses a relatively generic
description of the group as mere “student demonstrators,” La Tribune’s headline is much more
graphic pointing to “student anger,” Le Soleil’s headline clarifies the number of students
involved with “thousands of protesters” and La Presse’s report even situates their own
journalists as being a part of the crowd of protesters. Choudry (2012) supports this assertion in
blaming certain sections of the media as having “infantilized, criminalized, and brutalized” the
students and the movement (p. 2).

On May 29, 2012, a CBC article written by Jennifer Clibbon included a picture with a caption that stated, “Quebec students march through Montreal on May 20, 2012, in what has become an almost nightly occurrence. Since February, some 150,000 students from more than a dozen Quebec colleges and universities have been on strike over proposed tuition fee increases” (Clibbon, 2012). These headlines, as well as numerous other examples, are representative of how the students were portrayed in corporate-owned English-speaking media throughout Canada. Whether done purposefully or accidentally omitted, English-language media largely failed to illustrate the nuanced and complex hierarchy and organizational structure of the students and their leadership nor any significant differences between the students. The students were not merely one monolithic entity as often narrativized in the news. Al-Saji (2012) furthers this point by suggesting that “the participation in the movement itself might be diversified (linguistically, ethnically, racially, and inter-generationally, in terms of gender and sexuality) – this qualitative differentiation and nuance are overlooked” (p. 2). At the very least, the majority of the students were members of distinct student associations that, historically, did not agree on most issues. In 2012, all the groups were nevertheless united and unwavering in their fight against Charest’s proposed tuition fee hikes.

**The United Front**

Despite their historical differences, and given several months to organize and respond to the Liberal government’s proposed tuition fee increase, one of the most effective tactics that the students engaged in was joining together all four student associations as a “united front.” Four factors that led to this unwavering union included a recognition that they were stronger together; an agreement to refuse to negotiate if one organization was not present; a decision to never recommend how local organizations should vote on government proposals; and a decision to never criticize (at least publicly) what another organization did (Poirier St-Pierre & Éthier, 2013).

This united or “common front” was the brainchild of ASSÉ. ASSÉ had invited all student associations to a Rassemblement national étudiant [national student gathering] held in May 2011 at the Université Laval in Québec City (Katz, 2015). As a way to unite all three major student groups and to have all three agree to a “solidarity pact,” ASSÉ proposed an “entente minimale”
“which included the following three deceptively simple yet astute clauses: that all national student associations refuse to negotiate if the government excludes one from the negotiating table; that the national executives commit to not recommending any entente to their members, instead allowing the local assemblies the first and final word; and that all national and local associations refrain from denouncing to the media the actions of other national and local associations” (Katz, 2015, p. 69). The agreement between ASSÉ, FEUQ, and FECQ led to “a shrewd and unwavering grasp of the political necessity of maintaining a united front” as displayed by their respective representatives (Katz, 2015, p. 70). Any and all “significant tensions” that existed between the three groups were never expressed publicly and “ultimately confined to the corridors” (Katz, 2015, p. 69): “In spite of plentiful backroom dramas, the events of spring 2012 therefore publicly exhibited a student movement united in common cause for the first time since the schisms of the 1980s. The importance of this triumph for the success of the movement was enormous, as Charest discovered much to his dismay” (p. 70). No provincial government in the history of Québec had ever dealt with a committed united student front.

As reported in Rabble.ca, this united front was the exact opposite of what had transpired in the previous student strike: “This common front of the student organizations was a major change from the previous student strike, in 2005, when the two more conservative federations had abandoned the CLASSE predecessor, CASSÉE (Coalition de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante Élargie), and bargained an agreement with the minister that was subsequently criticized by many students, not just CASSÉE supporters, as grossly inadequate” (Fidler, 2012c). The united front created by the student groups in 2012 was highly unexpected.

Perhaps because it came as a surprise to many, the unification of the student organizations proved to be an excellent tactic. For despite the government’s many attempts to utilize “divide and conquer techniques,” FECQ, FEUQ, and ASSÉ held steadfast to their agreement. The Liberals could not simply target one of the leadership groups in an attempt to defeat the students. A great example of this is that during the negotiations the Liberal government, at one point, refused to invite CLASSE to the bargaining table, citing violent actions perpetrated by CLASSE members as the reason for their exclusion. Fidler (2012c) reports:

When Education Minister Line Beauchamp, under mounting popular pressure, grudgingly offered to meet with student leaders (but not to discuss the fees increase), she ruled out meeting with the largest of the three groups, the CLASSE.
Her pretext? CLASSE leaders had not denounced violent attacks allegedly committed by a few students, including an incident in which her constituency office was invaded, staffers assaulted and some furnishings destroyed. Leaders of the other two federations - the Fédération Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) and the Fédération Étudiante Collégiale du Québec (FECQ) - refused to meet with the minister in the absence of the CLASSE, and pointed out that under the CLASSE's democratic structure and procedures, its leaders had no mandate to issue such a denunciation pending a decision by its weekly congress to do so.

The Montreal Gazette reported a similar story:

Beauchamp offered to speak to the FEUQ and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), but left out the Coalition large de l’Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE), an umbrella organization of student groups organizing much of the strike movement and considered more radical. After Beauchamp’s office was trashed by Friday morning by 15 protesters, FEUQ and FECQ said it was not in favour of vandalism or violence, but CLASSE refused to condemn the actions of the vandals.

“To my knowledge, the CLASSE has never submitted a demands for discussion, and that extreme position has led even their spokesperson unable to condemn acts of vandalism or violence,” she said. (Bruemmer & Muise, 2012)

By refusing to meet with the government without CLASSE or ASSÉ present, FEUQ and FECQ further demonstrated how the students were unwavering in their unified stand.

As evidenced by an April 6, 2012 interview on Radio-Canada, Bureau-Blouin is explicit in identifying this newfound and unprecedented cooperation and solidarity between the student groups: “It shows we have a consensus. It’s a first for all three associations, to be at the same table sending the same message. I’m confident we’ll get the Charest government to back down and guarantee us universal, affordable education” (Bertolino et al., 2013). Similarly, when asked about what she felt was important about the strike, Anne-Marie Provost, an organizer for ASSÉ, asserts that the cooperation between the three groups was instrumental in the success of the movement:

The way ASSÉ, FECQ and FEUQ were organizing each together. Because we never saw this before in the history of student movements. FECQ and FEUQ were here since 1992, and ASSÉ has been around since 2001-2002. And these organizations hate each other a lot….The fact that FEUQ wouldn’t negotiate without ASSÉ was a huge game changer in the events because the government was trying to divide. And it didn’t work, mostly because of ASSÉ and FEUQ who wanted to work a little bit together, and FECQ….Yeah, I think that it was a big game changer. (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014)
However, in spite of their unified front against the government, there was always a sense of distrust between the three organizations, most of it stemming from ASSÉ’s camp.

As shown in Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir, a documentary which chronicles the actions of the organizers for ASSÉ prior to, during, and shortly after the strike, there were numerous instances in which ASSÉ members spoke amongst themselves about their fear of FECQ and FEUQ striking a deal with the government without their knowledge (Bertolino et al., 2013). As it turns out, these doubts were unfounded. Both FECQ and FEUQ were equally loyal to the agreement. As Fournier admits, the mistrust became part of the dynamics of the movement:

There’s this thing where the ASSÉ is certain, they just know it in their blood, that the FEUQ would go to the table and sign some sketchy deal with the government, behind the ASSÉ’s back, and that’s going to kill half of the strike movement, and people would go back to class, and it would be a big failure just like in 2005. This was always the story. Except for there was never a discussion at the FEUQ table of going to the government without the ASSÉ because number one, it wasn’t strategic, and number two, no one wanted to betray this beautiful this mutually respected movement that we had created. But there was so much time wasted on Facebook, on Twitter, in terms of the movement in fighting these accusations…. And I thought that was really interesting because I’m not the biggest fan of FEUQ, frankly, but the amount of time and energy spent on this weird mistrust….I don’t want to say splinter….because I don’t think that the student movement was ever really united in Québec. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Their distrust of FECQ and FEUQ appears to be a shared trait by many members of ASSÉ, and one that still exists even months after the strike. Nadia Lafrenière, for one, stresses that the three groups have historically been opponents and continue to be so up to this day: “We were not in solidarity, only during the strike. There was the summit of education last year organized by the government, and FEUQ and FECQ were totally opposed on each topic. I was there and I had a feeling that FEUQ was there just to oppose the ideas of ASSÉ, saying that free education was not possible, and that we should just shut our mouths on the subject.” (N. Lafrenière, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Jolly Roger is more succinct in her explanation: “Many associations of the ASSÉ don’t trust FECQ or FEUQ….When you take the point of view from the grassroots from the association, many many people don’t like each other. They don’t like the organization of FECQ and FEUQ because it’s just a hierarchy in the association, they don’t share a lot of information with their members.” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). This distrust was very real because in previous student strikes, the provincial government
had been successful in exploiting the differences between the student groups to divide their solidarity (Ayotte-Thompson & Freeman, 2012). Thus, it can be said that ASSÉ’s distrust for both FECQ and FEUQ was widespread. And in December of 2012, this rivalry between the organizations was once again in the news (Teisceira-Lessard, 2012), and rekindled as FECQ “took to the media to denounce the rival Association for Syndical Solidarity among Students (ASSE)” (Cox, 2012).

To further compound the issue, in addition to the distrust that historically existed between ASSÉ members and their FECQ and FEUQ counterparts, the act of striking was not a unanimous decision amongst all of Québec’s post-secondary students. Thousands of students who belonged to the three associations actually voted against the strike and wanted to continue with their classes. As chronicled in *Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir*, the strike vote at Collège de Valleyfield was only separated by 12 votes for the strike. As well, the film also showed a number of students choosing to return to class. To claim that all Québec students were for the strike would be a gross overstatement. And if the strike vote at Collège de Valleyfield was indicative of the results of the other strike votes held at the various institutions, then almost half of the secondary school student population were clearly opposed to going on strike.

The divisiveness of the strike was explicit throughout the province, and “student mobilizations varied across Québec” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). At McGill University, eight departments voted to strike while six departments at Concordia University similarly voted to strike, but most of the students attending Anglophone institutions, at the time, remained in class (Beauchemin-Laarman, 2012; Delancour, 2012). As well, more than half of all CEGEPs did not go on strike, and of those that did, the majority were French language CEGEPs that were located in the Greater Montreal area (ASSÉ, 2012; Vézina, 2012). Perhaps these complications strengthened the movement. Certainly, having the four major student associations that had never before organized together unite against a common cause helped to galvanize the movement while simultaneously buoying the students’ resolve. As Fournier describes, it was the diversified leadership that strengthened the movement:

> Another thing is that no one agrees. Yet all of these organizations have found a way to co-exist. Even when they bitch each other out. They need each other! Because this whole idea of a united student movement, this idea of this homogeneous entity that is the student movement is never going to exist, and if it did, it would be really weak. Concentrating all of your power on a singular leadership group or singular organizational structure means all you need to do is
take out that structure. One of the things that Québec really had going for it was this diversity of organization, diversity of organizational cultures, goals, priorities….the idea was that if you made some bullshit concession, if someone did sign a deal with the government, for example, students would just stay on the streets. So there was a lot of power in that. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Despite ASSÉ’s fears that FECQ and FEUQ could betray them by reaching a deal with the government without their approval, the three groups were able to maintain a united front throughout the duration of the strike. It was because of this united front against the government that despite all the tensions that existed between the student groups, the movement was nevertheless able to “work together and avoid political fragmentation” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). After all, the creation of a unified front between FECQ, FEUQ, ASSÉ and TaCEQ, which had never happened before in the long history of Québec student politics, was, in itself, perhaps the most effective tactic used during the strike.

**Direct Democracy and Horizontal Leadership**

Another important tactic that the students used during the strike was direct democracy and horizontal leadership. As much as I was impressed with the unwavering united front that FECQ, FEUQ, and ASSÉ (and TaCEQ) had embodied, I was equally impressed with the students’ continuous privileging and maintaining of direct democracy and horizontal leadership. Made popular by the Occupy Movement, this “new type” of political organization is based on “decentralized, horizontal direct democracy” (Kruzynski et al., 2012).

At its basic level, direct democracy and horizontal leadership means that “people who are directly affected by a political issue must be involved in the decision-making process on that issue” (Kruzynski et al., 2012). Further, at the core of this political ideal are two fundamental principles: self-determination and self-organization (Kruzynski et al., 2012). Kruzynski et al. (2012) uses CLASSE’s structure to help explain how decentralized, horizontal direct democracy functions:

> General assemblies are held in departments, CEGEPS and universities, then delegates participate in weekly spokes-council meetings where they coordinate decisions and actions. There are no representatives, no presidents, no leaders, just people working together and experimenting with new, empowering, horizontal, and equitable relations. (p. 2)

CLASSE, or ASSÉ, prides itself as functioning via direct democracy. “ASSÉ uses a form of
direct democracy in which spokespersons (a man and a woman, one coming from the CEGEP sector and the other from the university sector) can only report what has been decided by the congress” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). As Katz (2015) notes, even the united front agreement between the three student groups was ASSÉ’s way of bringing “FEUQ and FECQ closer in line with the more robust democratic practices” of the group (p. 69).

First and foremost, all major decisions by the organization must be approved by a majority of its membership. Prior to the actual student strike, members of ASSÉ visited each and every institution where there were members and conducted a strike vote. Apparently, this is markedly different from how FECQ and FEUQ function as “their structure of democracy gives more leeway to presidents” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). Myriam, who was a member of ASSÉ, but was also a member of FEUQ because of her university’s involvement with the association, claims that, “FECQ and FEUQ are absolutely not democratic. They don’t permit people to organize themselves and they organize the students, and it’s not working” (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014). Moreover, she contends that “FEUQ and FECQ are really with the political parties and they represent students and the students don’t really have anything to say about it, and ASSÉ is really more like a leftist organization and you have to choose to be part of it” (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014). Unlike FECQ and FEUQ, ASSÉ’s desire for horizontal leadership is evident in the way that they conduct their affairs. As an example, general assemblies and votes were continually held in order to deal with major issues. In this way, all of its membership had a voice within the organization and an input into all possible actions or inactions. Arguably, this was an effective tactic utilized by ASSÉ during the course of the student movement, as it allowed its members to take ownership of the movement (Legault, 2014).

By promoting a leaderless movement that desires transparency, ASSÉ adopted a fundamental ideology that other recent movements likewise promote. The Occupy movement, for one, insisted on a leaderless movement and consensus decision-making (Boler et al., 2014; Costanza-Chock, 2012a; Gerbaudo, 2012). All of the ASSÉ members that I interviewed fondly referred to themselves as “facilitators” and “organizers” as opposed to “leaders” which further supports the construction of a leaderless organization. Moreover, these general assemblies created spaces where students were able to express themselves freely, which allowed them to openly share ideas, and, as Legault (2014) asserts, “people radicalized themselves through
knowledge,” providing even more proof of a non-hierarchical leadership structure. However, there are those who are skeptical that a leaderless movement is indeed possible.

According to Gerbaudo (2014b), even if a movement promotes a leaderless hierarchical structure, individuals such as “charismatic leaders” and “informal leaders” will nevertheless take on leadership roles. And in terms of recent uprisings, Gerbaudo (2014b) proposes that new forms of grassroots power, new forms of leadership, and informal leadership structures are emerging – just not leaderless and horizontal. This is an interesting argument that requires further investigation. On the one hand, we have members of the movements themselves supporting a leaderless horizontal structure: “There are no leaders….People who speak to the media, though perceived as leaders, are simply spokespeople” (Kruzynski et al., 2012). On the other, we have academics, such as Paolo Gerbaudo, simultaneously refuting these claims.

Moreover, the sense of a leaderless movement also somewhat contradicts Wolfson’s (2014) assertion. In his study involving IndyMedia, Wolfson (2014) concludes that the sense of leaderlessness, the fact that IndyMedia’s organizational structure is not hierarchal but diffuse, horizontal and autonomous is both its strength and its weakness. Their organizational structure allows IndyMedia to reach out to countless individuals and helps recruit them to join in the fight against globalization, but it is also its weakness in that it is unsustainable over a long period of time (Wolfson, 2014). In terms of the Québec student strike, I argue against the latter because it was the Québec movement’s privileging of direct democracy, horizontalism, and autonomy which led to its sustained action. Every night in Montreal, different groups organized to protest in the streets for a strike that lasted nearly half a year. In comparison, the graduate student strike at the University of Toronto, which I partook in, involved a trade union, was completely hierarchical, and only lasted four weeks. Although it was not only because of its organizational structure that the University of Toronto graduate student strike could not sustain itself for a much longer period of time, but the lack of democracy, horizontalism, and autonomy most certainly contributed in ending the strike much quicker than Maple Spring, as many students, frustrated with the strike after four weeks, simply voted for the union and the university to go to binding arbitration in order to resolve the dispute (“Striking University of Toronto,” 2012).

Nevertheless, in the case of the Québec student movement, the promotion of a leaderless movement, horizontal leadership and transparency was a tactic that the students willfully employed. This ideology was, by and large, what led to the creation of CLASSE: “a larger
coalition that included all ASSÉ members, plus any association (including FEUQ and FECQ members) that had a mandate from their members for a strike, supported the abolition of tuitions fees, and accepted horizontal-decision making” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). Effectively, CLASSE, which also housed the most militant individuals of all the groups, as it turned out, sought to unite all like-minded students under one unified coalition. Undoubtedly, the decentralized leaderless direct democracy model adopted by the students empowered them. No leaders likewise meant that they were all leaders as everyone was equal. Countless numbers of students took ownership of the strike as evidenced by the numbers who partook in the nightly marches, the demonstrations, and the protests – all of which were coordinated by many unknown and unheralded individuals.

**Diversity and Escalation of Tactics**

The third set of tactics that I identified as key to the Québec student strike of 2012 can be categorized as belonging to either “diversity of tactics” or the “escalation of tactics.” While the groupings are not identical and certainly do not connote the same meaning, they are nevertheless entwined, relational and encompass many (if not all) of the same tactics. For example, a tactic such as economic disruption most certainly fits in with both diversity and escalation of tactics. While economic disruption is one of several different tactics that a group can choose from, it can certainly be argued that it is a form of escalation as it directly targets its opponents by impinging upon their profitability, or in the case of the Liberal government of Québec in 2012, the loss of revenue felt by numerous businesses and corporations then led to political pressure from these businesses on the government to end the strike. As identified by Katz (2015), the diversity of tactics privileged by CLASSE/ASSÉ, “with its roots in the alter-globalization movement, upholds the legitimacy of a wide array of protest actions, which includes both economic disturbances (such as bridge blockades) and direct action (such as occupations of campuses or ministers’ offices)” (p. 68). CLASSE/ASSÉ despite being adamantly against violence that was “perpetrated against individuals,” were much more accepting of acts of vandalism, and “generally refrain from condemning such actions that, for example, target the property of multinational banks and corporations” (Katz, 2015, p. 68).

The diversification of tactics reinforces the idea put forth by Legault (2014) that “people are not told what to do as long as the common goal remains in place.” On a slightly different
Note, diversity of tactics is explained as considering “a rainbow of possibilities when it comes
time to take action” (Kruzynski et al., 2012). Kruzynski et al. (2012) continue:

This principle does not rest on the idea that anything goes in any given situation, but implies that the debate about the legitimacy of various tactics must occur within the movement, and should be decided for each situation by the people taking action themselves. Certainly the media should not make this decision for us. Indeed, we have all witnessed on many occasions how the mainstream media, along with State politicians, tend to create an image of the “good” versus the “bad” protestors in an effort to divide and conquer. This strategy has been used against the current student strike activists. However, for the first time, movement “leaders” – or spokespeople – for the most part, have not denounced tactics such as economic disruption, contributing to the maintenance of a certain unity and a strong sense of solidarity within the movement. (p. 14)

For Kruzynski and others, a diversity of tactics is a legitimate tactic to be used by a movement as it deems necessary. As opposed to the State or corporate-owned media dictating which tactics are acceptable, Kruzynski et al. (2012) posit that a strong sense of solidarity remained with the movement because more “radical tactics” were not denounced by the movement leaders or spokespeople.

Previously, supporting a diversity of tactics has included “solidarity with the full range of resistance” and it presupposes that “no tactics are ruled out in advance and activists refrain from publicly criticizing tactics with which they disagree” (Conway, 2003, p. 507). Conway (2003) argues that a respect for diversity of tactics must include “a tolerance of pluralism” which means respect and acceptance of the tactical choices other activists have made, which could include such actions as “rock throwing, window-breaking, garbage can burning, and vandalism” (p. 511). Respect for diversity of tactics is then a tactic on its own that promotes solidarity. Because most proponents are implicitly or explicitly non-violent, respect for diversity of tactics does not mean engaging in or even agreeing with another’s tactic, but instead, it does mean that everyone has “the right and responsibility to identify their own thresholds of legitimate protest and make their own political, strategical, and ethical choices, while also allowing others to do so free from public criticism or censure” (Conway, 2003, p. 511). In short, respect for diversity of tactics allows members to partake in more radical activities (i.e. violent actions, Black Bloc actions, etc.) without reprisal and rejection from the other members.

One tactic employed by the students that could be considered as belonging to both diversity of tactics and escalation of tactics is economic disruption. A purposeful action that
targeted profitability, economic disruption was strategically and effectively utilized by the students. Fournier explains:

Why the strike was powerful was because it created enormous political and economic pressure. When you shut down every day that students were not at school because of the strike, the university has to open one day longer. So that means that when all this is eventually over, they’re going to have to pay professors extra to stay longer, services to stay longer….it’s billions and billions of dollars….and the demonstrations in the subway….you’re affecting the tourist revenue, you’re shutting down major arteries, you’re destabilizing traffic. The idea was that peaceful protest, even in that context, was highly economically disruptive. And at some point, business leaders started calling and putting huge amounts of pressure on the government to do something because they were losing money. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Like Fournier, many of the students believed that the government was motivated to do something due to the complaints from corporations and businesses that suffered economic pressure from the students’ actions.

Certainly, numerous businesses were negatively affected by the many demonstrations that occurred in Montreal. Not only were business owners losing revenue because of the strike, but many feared even greater losses as the strike slowly moved into the summertime – festival season in the city. According to a CBC News report dated June 5, 2012, hotel room rentals decreased by 10.7 percent in May of 2012, and were expected to drop a further 10 to 12 percent in June (The Canadian Press, 2012). The hotel industry was reflective of the entire city’s tourism as the industry “[was] feeling the effects of the student demonstrations, which march through the downtown core and adjoining areas” (The Canadian Press, 2012). At the time, the Montreal International Jazz Festival, The (Montreal) Grand Prix, and the Just For Laughs comedy festival were listed among the businesses fearful of a loss in revenue. Gilbert Rozon, the President of Just for Laughs, even held a meeting with the student leaders in an attempt to get assurances that his festival would not be targeted by student demonstrators (The Canadian Press, 2012). Not surprisingly, the student leaders shrugged off the negative press as being “wildly overblown as part of a general effort to discredit the movement” (The Canadian Press, 2012).

Another example of economic disruption took place on March 6, 2012 as “about a hundred students entered the Loto-Quebec building in downtown Montreal, blocking access to the elevators. The march started in Victoria Square at midday and ended with anti-riot police and tear gas” (Kelly, 2012). A brainchild by members of ASSÉ, the students involved not only
attempted to negatively affect the Loto-Québec corporation economically by disrupting their day-to-day operations, but also hoped to elicit media coverage for the strike by creating a spectacle in an attempt to gain additional support for their cause from students and the public alike. But instead of succumbing to economic and political pressures and revoking the proposed tuition fee strike, the Charest-led Liberals instead responded by creating and implementing the highly unpopular Bill 78 (Sterne, 2012).

Like many others, Myriam believes that because the students did not require “anyone to give them permission,” due to the movement’s democratic ideals and horizontal leadership, it allowed them to explore and carry out a multitude of varying tactics – a diversity of tactics – which everyone in the movement privileged (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014). Myriam also credits the diversity of tactics for helping to maintain the length of the strike:

People organized things with their friends by themselves and that’s why the movement was so strong. Because for example, the nude manifestation, I never went….it wasn’t my kind of tactic, but that’s OK….it just sprouted out, like mushrooms, it was everywhere, every time….there were three manifestations by day….there were people everywhere in city, in the province, and people just organized themselves alone. There were new events and everything. They didn’t need….I think what was important is the organization…why stop the debates….thinking about strategy and those kinds of things….but for tactics, for what was going on in the streets and in the conferences and the arts, people just did it. (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

However, those engaged in diverse tactics were not exempt from criticism, even from some of their peers as well as others engaged in the movement. In other words, not all of those involved in the movement were in favour of some of the tactics used – although most did adhere to respecting the diversity of tactics.

In a brief conversation with Legault shortly after his talk, he commented that Bureau-Blouin and the members of FECQ denounced many of the tactics that ASSÉ had proposed to use as they were deemed “too radical” (G. Legault, personal communication, June 21, 2014). Certainly, this left Legault and many of the ASSÉ members frustrated. Much like Bureau-Blouin, however, Fournier believes that many of the tactics used were quite detrimental to the movement. Fournier posits:

There were pressure tactics on the ground that kept this debate going but from my perspective, you can have a group of people wearing masks and setting off smoke bombs and shutting down buildings….and as an activist, I understand the principle of diversity of tactics….but as a strategist, in that moment, I felt that
those tactics were not strategic. And there was this sort of tension on the left....there was this non-denunciation issue of violence and its role.... it's such a played out debate. But for me it was an issue of strategy. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

As an executive member of a Montréal university’s undergraduate student union at the time of the strike, Fournier was placed in an unenviable and very compromising position by the actions of some of the students who engaged in a variety of tactics:

These people could go…and I’m talking a group of 10 to 15….a lot of who were close friends....we just ended up in different parts of the movement. You can go shut down a building, but you don’t have to answer for that action! The media is going to call the elected executives and other representatives. You don’t send out a press release, you can’t have a spokesperson after that kind of action....so when something like that happens [on campus], the person that has to respond on behalf of those actions wasn’t involved in planning them, doesn’t have the information. And I’m in a tricky position because I can’t denounce what these people, who I know, who were running around, were doing. Right? But I can’t also really defend it, because it’s actually not helping. It’s not winning any points in the media, it’s not making the business students likely vote for a strike next time, or you know, the engineers, or whoever.... (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

As Fournier postulates, there was a sense of “ideological admiration” for the students at UQAM who were using a variety of tactics such as blocking and preventing access to their university:

So there was an ideological admiration for this tactic, they wanted to be doing what the people at UQAM were doing....and no one does what the people at UQAM were doing....but even the people at UQAM have a huge amount of blowback, they just don’t give a shit. Which is cool for them. That is their organizational culture. But on most campuses, the culture is not as militant, and some of this stuff was so new that you had students standing outside of a room saying, “We’re not going into this classroom.” And that’s like the first time it ever happened. It was revolutionary in this moment and certainly I think that it was really transformative. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Despite objections to some of the actions undertaken by some students, the prevailing consensus from most of the other students was that of admiration for the diversity of tactics that others were engaging in. To illustrate, as recounted by Fournier, students from less militant campuses who were new to activism were encouraged and even emboldened by the more radical actions that were enacted by the UQAM students. And, as Sterne (2012) reminds us, “as the student movement has already demonstrated, the protest cultures here are extremely vital” (p. 2).

Yet, the promotion of diversity of tactics was not without their own set of problems.
Since the students had the ability to do what they wanted without repercussion from the student leaders, some turned to violence as a tactic. Consequently, ASSÉ (or CLASSE) was often blamed for the “Black Bloc” tactics used by some of the students. Very briefly, the Black Bloc is said to have made itself known on November 30, 1999 during the Movement for Global Justice in Seattle when members “smashed” the windows of businesses including McDonald’s, Nike, Gap, and a few banks (Dupuis-Déri, 2010). Dupuis-Déri (2010) posits that the Black Bloc is “an easily identifiable collective action carried out by individuals wearing black clothes and masks and forming a contingent – a black block – within a rally” (p. 46). The Black Bloc represents “the renewal of anarchism on the political scene in general and among anticapitalist forces in particular,” can vary in number depending on the event, and its primary objective is to “signal the presence within a demonstration of a radical critique of the economic and political system” (p. 46). Further, Dupuis-Déri (2010) claims that “there is no such thing as the Black Bloc; there are, rather, Black Blocs, each of them arising on the occasion of a rally and dissolving when the rally is over” (p. 46). Paris (2003) further explains the Black Bloc as “a tactic open to anyone who seeks to escalate the social and economic costs of repressive governmental activity” (p. 321). In Brazil, Mattos (2014) describes the Black Bloc not as an organized group but one that “instead represent a tactic in confrontations with the police” (p. 73). Since its formation, the Black Bloc has appeared in many worldwide uprisings (Dupuis-Déri, 2010; Paris, 2003). From Québec, to Brazil, to Genoa, to Spain, to Egypt, to San Francisco, the Black Bloc has participated in demonstrations worldwide. As mentioned previously, to be a Black Bloc, effectively, is to partake in a particular tactic.

Victoria, a student at Cégep du Vieux Montréal, explains Black Bloc tactics as targeted violence against capitalist forms and those that support it, including banks, large conglomerates and their retail outlets, and the police (Bertolino et al., 2013). A report by Zoran Bozicevic, which appeared in the National Post on May 2, 2012, is indicative of the type of press the English-language corporate-owned media was reporting about the Black Bloc. Bozicevic’s (2012) headline read, “Montreal May Day anti-capitalist march sees protesters use Black Bloc anarchist tactics.” The article, complete with photographs of violent acts being committed by both students and the police, in addition to confrontations between students and the police, also included the following narrative:
A May Day protest in downtown Montreal on Tuesday, led by the anti-capitalist group CLAC Montreal, quickly dissolved into a violent fracas that saw 108 people arrested and 33 charged. The march began at 5:30 p.m. but was declared illegal within 30 minutes, as protesters covering their faces with black and red bandanas threw bottles at police officers, smashed windows and dangled donuts in front of officers on fishing rods, said Const. Daniel Fortier, spokesman for the Montreal Police Service. Some wore red squares pinned to their clothing, a sign of support for tuition freezes in Quebec. (Bozicevic, 2012)

Due to this incident and other similar actions, the Liberal government demanded that ASSÉ denounce the violent actions and barred them from the negotiating table. As was shown in Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir, this demand was a ploy by the government to place ASSÉ in a highly problematic position (Bertolino et al., 2013). On the one hand, the promotion of diversity of tactics without any sort of supervision was a fundamental principle for ASSÉ. On the other, the government was demanding them to denounce the violence before allowing the group to the bargaining table. What occurred instead was ASSÉ formally denouncing violence that was perpetrated against innocent civilians only, through Nadeau-Dubois’ announcement to the press, and FEUQ and FECQ’s steadfast refusal to negotiate with the government without ASSÉ joining them at the bargaining table (Bertolino et al., 2013).

The escalation of tactics, the other grouping of tactics presented in this section of the thesis, promotes the idea of continually increasing pressure on the opponent until victory is achieved. Concurrent with and alongside the diversity of tactics that they used, the Québec students also engaged in “pressure escalation.” This particular tactic, which was also referred to as “escalating tactics” or “escalation of tactics” implies a “progression” in the type of tactics that were utilized. Legault (2014) explains how ASSÉ approached this particular tactic: “In the quest for a balance of power against an opponent, you try to win. Pressure escalation is a way to achieve goals, as you are able to build short-term struggles, and you can build a solid base based on solidarity…We just kept on doing mobilization, kept on talking to people, and building a grassroots movement. By going slowly, you get more people to join in.” For example, in the early days of mobilization, organizers approached students with petitions in order to gauge their attitudes about a possible student strike. Moreover, these petitions allowed the organizers to also inform those interested students about the issues at hand. Although most of the organizers do not believe in the effectiveness of petitions, they nevertheless utilized this tactic initially: “Although petitions are fairly useless, since governments don’t listen to them, it is a way to help mobilize
individuals, to get them to participate” (Legault, 2014). As Katz (2015) recalls, “Petitions were used primarily as a mobilization and outreach tool by the CLASSE to build a preliminary database of supporters; only once significant numbers adhered to a petition could the true organizational work commence, and the CLASSE took pains to ensure that no step was initiated before students exhibited a readiness to proceed” (p. 73). The organizers of the movement used the petitions as one of the first tactics, eventually moving forward and “escalating” to using other tactics such as “symbolic actions, then small-scale demonstrations, and then escalates to include limited strikes, direct action and economic disturbances” (Katz, 2015, pp. 73-74).

When asked about petitions, and online petitions in particular, most of my interviewees gave similar answers to Legault and were quite adamant about their ineffectiveness. Bureau-Blouin admits that petitions do nothing to change the situation:

I think that the petition itself sometimes does not change the whole situation, but it is a way to get people to engage easily in a cause. I think that if I go back to my experience with the student strike, we used online petitions and paper petitions at CEGEPs and the universities and it was our first approach to people. Instead of saying to people, “would you like to go on strike?” people would say “hmmm….not sure.” But if you got them to sign the petition and then you come back to them asking them to take part in the protest, maybe the third time you come to see them they will be ready for something bigger. So I think that online petitions and these types of means of pressure can be a way to get new people to get involved in a cause. They can be effective, but not necessarily the petition themselves, but what comes after. (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014)

Laurent Gauthier is even more pessimistic about the role of petitions: “Petitions by themselves don’t do much. Maybe they can create awareness, but that’s pretty much it” (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Myriam is similarly pessimistic: “I would say no. I think that maybe it can help to bring visibility to a cause, but I think it’s only to get people to realize that something is happening, but it stops there” (Myriam, personal communication, Feb. 19, 2014). Provost is slightly more optimistic about using petitions as a tactic: “I’m really skeptical with the effect….I saw the petition as a pressure….to start with the petition and after the demo and then the strike and occupation. But the petition is really low-level. You have to do it, but it isn’t really effective from my point of view” (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014). And while she is likewise hesitant about championing their benefits, Lafrenière rightly insists that they can be used effectively as part of an escalation of tactics:
I don’t think they will affect change, but they are part of an escalation of tactics. Either petitions online and in person. If you don’t do petitions or such things that don’t really change things, when you want to do greater actions, people are like, “Well, you haven’t even tried to do a petition.” So if you want to convince them that it’s a good idea to go on strike or to make direct actions, etc., you should say that we have tried everything possible before that, even a petition.

It’s also a great way to inform people. You give the petition and there’s text there explaining why you are concerned about it. So that’s a good thing. And if in person, you could talk to the person – it’s a great way to approach them. But I don’t think that it’s effective, mostly online, because people are just in front of their computer, they’re not really mobilizing themselves, they’re not really feeling that they’re part of a movement that are reclaiming something.

Before the strike, there was a petition that wanted Charest, the premier, to go out….and there were 200,000 signatures, but of course, there was no effect. (N. Lafrenière, personal communication, February 18, 2014)

Despite their perceived ineffectiveness, petitions were nonetheless utilized by the Québec students as one of the initial tactics used in a series of escalation of tactics. As Lafrenière points out, the petitions served a dual purpose in the beginning of the strike, by providing information and proving to be insufficient, thus necessitating adopting different tactics which included the strike.

Legault (2014) describes other examples of the pressure escalation tactics that the students used which included the aforementioned privileging of direct democracy and horizontal leadership. This allowed the students themselves to decide upon the importance of the issues and how to react. Some students began mobilizing. Some began training other students how to coordinate a strike. Many students took to informing even more people about the situation while attempting to garner support. Different initiatives were taken, which not one group had control over because of direct democracy and horizontal leadership. This particular tactic also allowed for different modes of personal participation in the strike.

Legault (2014) is also quick to point out that “getting in touch with other groups and organizations who support your demands and support you” is key to any movement. For ASSÉ, reaching out to these allies helped them build a much stronger movement, as some groups were able to provide outstanding and invaluable resources (Legault, 2014). But perhaps most importantly, in incorporating pressure escalation as part of their arsenal of tactics, members of ASSÉ were able to introduce “ideological debates over violence” (Legault, 2014). In other
words, students were given the opportunity to understand the issues and decide for themselves prior to “hearing them from corporate media” (Legault, 2014).

Perhaps the best explanation of the pressure escalation that the Québec students adopted comes from Fournier. Fournier points out that the strike took years of planning and did not “happen overnight,” and that pressure escalation was fundamental to the success of the movement:

People in small groups deciding to see if it’s possible for them to do a small thing and seeing gains through that process. And that’s how it starts. The process of escalating growth that eventually becomes exponential and in a sort of thoughtful exercise of escalating pressure tactics. We don’t go right from… “There’s a tuition fee increase, so let’s go shut the city down.” That’s not the process. First we’ll do a letter writing campaign. And even if… as someone who has gone through this process a few times in a few different campaigns… even if those tactics pretty much never work, you have to do them because later on, it becomes essential in your messaging to say that “We’ve tried everything else.” And it becomes essential to say that to the unconvinced students. The ones asking, “Do we really have to go on strike? Do we really have to throw away our semester? Can I really take this risk?” You can say that this is really the only way because we’ve tried everything else. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

For Fournier, the escalation of tactics occurred over a span of several months. The worry was that people who were not involved in the strike would only see the end results, not understand that tactics were escalated after previous ones had failed, and thus react negatively to the students’ actions.

So the system of escalating pressure tactics in whatever manifestation makes sense for the campaign that you’re running… that’s really profound. And I worry that people in the rest of Canada don’t really see that. They don’t see that process because that process is invisible. All they see is that one day we’re in the streets, and we’re shutting down universities, and we’re setting fire to cop cars… it all just happened overnight… There are hundreds of people who haven’t been sleeping for several months making this magic happen. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

To sum up, the effectiveness of the Québec student strike depended heavily on their use of both diversity of tactics and pressure escalation. The students’ success, arguably, was largely due to the use of these tactics. To further illustrate this point, I will now focus on five specific student tactics (the use of corporate-owned and independent media; the red square; activism against Bill
Exploring these five elements of the strike will assist in further demonstrating the students’ use of diverse tactics and pressure escalation. These tactics and the government response were not only characteristic of the Québec student strike of 2012, but each one was also instrumental in helping the movement forge its unique identity.

The Tactical Use of Corporate-Owned and Independent Media

During his talk at the Montreal Student Movement Convention, in which he addressed pressure escalation as a tactic utilized by the Québec students, the former coordination secretary of ASSÉ, Guillaume Legault (2014), mentioned that the student-led social movements of the 1960s proved to the organizers of the 2012 Québec student strike that it was possible to organize in a spontaneous manner. Thus, it comes as no surprise that similar to the American anti-war protesters in the Sixties, the Québec students purposefully used mass media “to disseminate their message” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). Gitlin (1980), for one, outlines the symbiotic relationship between the American anti-war protesters and U.S. corporate-owned mass media in the Sixties: Gitlin (1980) proposes that although corporate-owned mass media relied on the protesters for their content and stories, the young protesters also needed mass media for publicity and used the media as a way to express and spread their ideology. Seemingly, one can rightfully argue that the Québec students used Canadian corporate-owned mass media in much the same way as the anti-war students used American corporate-owned media in the Sixties. The students’ tactical use of corporate-owned media was both diversity of tactics and an escalation of tactics. It was part of a diversity of tactics as it was in addition to earlier tactics such as petitions, rallies and dissemination of information about the issue of an increase in tuition fees. The use of corporate-owned media was also an escalation of tactics as it was meant to exert additional pressure on the government; the students used it to solicit support from the general public and to argue that the increase in tuition fees was unjust and was in direct opposition to the long-standing ideal of education being a right for all Québécois.

Using Canadian Corporate-Owned Media

At the inception of the movement, even prior to the strike, the students’ attempt to garner media coverage proved to be quite challenging. Fournier states, “The media didn’t want to talk about the issue either initially. We had to put thousands of people in the streets for it to even become an issue. Early on, September, October, November, even into December, January, and
February, it was hard to get the press to talk substantially about the tuition fee increase” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014). As shown in Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir, media strategy was a primary consideration by the ASSÉ organizers. During their discussion of the media and in determining effective strategies to employ, an unidentified student organizer was adamant about the group’s need to use corporate-owned media: “Some contradictions within these institutions can play to our advantage. What’s on Radio-Canada and Le Devoir is not total crap. So we can’t always ignore….we shouldn’t be dogmatic. We can’t trust the media, they’re doing cheap journalism. They use sensationalism, they’re not usually on our side. But we can’t be dogmatic and just block them” (Bertolino et al., 2013). Moreover, as Chouinard (2013) notes, the students did not just have to gain the media’s attention, but they also “had to find original ways to maintain” this attention. Some examples of tactics developed to elicit and hold the media’s attention included the following: students studying design at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) founded the School of the Red Mountain, which created serigraphs and the expression “Maple Spring”; students studying theatre presented silent choreographies in Montreal subway stations; students in urban studies covered monuments and trees with red banners; and other students initiated sewing groups, backward walks, and symbolic weddings (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). Katz (2015) was even more complimentary in explaining CLASSE’s media strategy:

    CLASSE made the highly strategic decision to play the game, but on their own terms. Press attachés (three at the height of the crisis) were made available twenty-four hours a day to respond to up-to-the-minute events and requests and maintain constructive contacts with the press. The strategy would at times call for intelligent manipulation of coverage as well, for instance by providing ‘exclusive’ information to select outlets as to guarantee front-page coverage. Frequent press releases, briefings, and the entirety of the political milieu’s professional communication strategies were deployed to combat the governmental campaign and keep the spokespersons abreast of anything that could affect the movement. Students they may have been, but these Net Geners were no media amateurs. (p. 76)

Even prior to the strike, the students were cognizant of the fact that the tactical use of media was imperative to their success. Katz (2015), claims that, “CLASSE’s manipulation of mass media’s cinematic and photographic qualities – especially its affinity for the clip, soundbyte and image – revealed a shrewdly sophisticated grasp of the affective power of symbols and spectacle in inspiring and casting a movement” (pp.76-77). Commonly referred to as “pseudo-events,”
members of CLASSE participated in symbolic protests that “harness[ed] the qualities of mass media to construct a potent political imaginary” (p. 77). Some examples of these pseudo-events that were created for the media included the “Kraft Dinner eat-ins to highlight student poverty” and the “many maNUfestations where protesters stripped down to highlight the Charest government’s lack of transparency, evoke humans’ fundamental equality and contrast the heavily armed riot police with their own pacifism and vulnerability” (p. 77). Examples highlighting innovative events created by the students during the strike for media consumption are surfeit.

Press Conferences

One of the cleverest tactics displayed by the students was revealed before the glut of media attention was given to the strike. Much like the American anti-war students of the Sixties resorted to creating media events as a way to get noticed, the Québec students employed a tactic which was utilized solely to gain the media’s attention. In a desperate attempt to attract media coverage, the students began to attend any and all government events as a way to gain visibility and to elicit media interest. Fournier recounts the following:

One of the tactics that we used, one that you might appreciate….is that since media wasn’t covering what we wanted to talk about, we just started going to every single press conference the government held! Every time the government had a press conference, it could be about opening up a new daycare or a new funding envelope for a certain charity or signing a trade deal….I remember once, this was way later, but there was this big thing about Charest and opening a Google office in Montréal….and every time Line Beauchamp [then Education Minister] and Charest and the Liberals had a media event, we would send a demonstration, just people to go and scream and shout outside their press conferences. The press conferences went on, but that’s where all the media was. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

The responses to the students’ actions varied. Sometimes, security would not let the government officials leave and that became the story. At other times, the students made so much noise that they were heard throughout the actual press conference. Always, the students sought out the media and demanded to be heard:

But there would always be journalists surrounding them and we would swarm them, “We want to talk about this issue…” And that was a really powerful tactic and made a very big difference because every time there was a government announcement, it would just point out that there were students outside protesting the tuition fee increase, and then it became stories about “Well, what are these tuition fee increases all about?” So in terms of tactics, if you have a small number
of people, and your campaign really hasn’t yet hit a critical mass, you have to be creative about the ways you get your message across. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

As Fournier notes, the tactic was to be visible and heard (loudly) at each and every public function that was attended by government officials. Due to these disruptions, the media was given very little alternative but to begin interviewing the students and airing their voiced displeasure at the tuition fee hikes – since the students themselves became the news stories. Furthermore, CLASSE was credited as being strategic in organizing symbolic actions, such as flashmobs, explained as a “recent global, social phenomenon that involves the aggregation of people in a predetermined public space for a brief period of time in order to commit a performative act that can include dancing, singing, or even nonsensical activities” (Teruelle & Shade, 2014). These symbolic and performative actions were “designed to attract the attention of the media, the population and other students” (Bertolino et al., 2013).

**Challenges in Dealing with the Corporate English-Language Media**

At the time of the strike, Provost was a member of the media committee for ASSÉ, and as she stated, she “did the press releases, organized the press conferences, called the journalists, tried to put Gabriel in interviews while we were doing stuff. I was analyzing the way we were being seen in the media and adjusting ourselves to be better at passing the message. I also did a communication plan” (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014). She recalls that her group had difficulties dealing with sections of the corporate-owned English-language media:

> You know, ASSÉ is really Franco, so we had a real difficulty using the Anglo media. Once the strike was really big, the Anglo media was calling us. But at the beginning, there was no Anglo media, it was real difficult. It’s a big debate in ASSÉ between the activists, because something that ASSÉ is bad at is integrating the English in the structure. For the media, we have the reflex to not really care about the Anglo media, and I think that it is a problem. (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014)

What Provost describes could have very well contributed to the frustrations the students had in attempting to gain media coverage from the outset. Despite the fact that the three main leaders were proficient in both languages, the language barrier was perhaps detrimental and an obstacle that both the students and the corporate-owned English-language media had to overcome. As
Provost recalls, the strike was not covered by English-language media in the beginning. Only after the strike had become the main news story in Québec did the English-language media begin contacting ASSÉ for stories. And as Provost posits, a reluctance for French-language students to interact with English-language media is a problem that was magnified during the strike, and one that still exists.

Moreover, not all students who participated in the strike were fond of the media. As Roger recounts, alongside her close group of friends, they refused to interact with corporate-owned media: “NO! Actually, we refused to talk to mainstream media because most of the mainstream media were saying that we were villains, radicals, anarchists, so it was just useless to talk to them. It was true, but, we just couldn’t talk to them seriously” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Not only were many of the students more comfortable dealing with French-language media because of the language barrier, but also many of the students simply avoided dealing with English-language media because of how they were being portrayed by these same media corporations.

Perhaps one of the unspoken issues when dealing with English-language media was French-speaking students’ self-consciousness regarding their ability to speak English. I witnessed this firsthand as the majority of my interviewees were Francophone members of ASSÉ, and they were sometimes hesitant during the interviews – mostly blaming their “poor English” – which, quite frankly, was more than passable to me. But within the context of their interactions with English-language media during the strike, their hesitancy and discomfort in dealing with the English-language media is understandable, especially when coupled with their negative portrayal in the news by many of these media outlets.

Without a doubt, once their coverage of the protests began, corporate-owned Canadian media reports on the strike did benefit the students tremendously. Bureau-Blouin clearly credits corporate-owned Canadian media for helping the students:

I think that if TV did not talk so much about it, it wouldn’t have been so big. So us, we’re really glad about it because it gave a lot of power to these protests and it gave us the ability to organize such big protests. And TV were also happy because they live on advertisements and the more people watching TV….and that protest was something big. Each time people were going to watch the news it was policemen, students, protests. I had the opportunity to talk to a lot of people that were controlling the newsroom and they were polling their audience each night during the strike, and the audience was, you know, incredible even during the day when normally it was slow news, it was incredible, the number of people
watching the live channel. It was a win situation for the students, but it was also a win situation for the TV channels, and I think it explains so much why they kept talking about it. (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014)

As evidenced by these examples, it is apparent that the students’ use of corporate-owned mass media was both purposeful and productive. The students were constantly in the news, able to voice their opposition to the tuition fee hike, and being in the news allowed them to “put considerable pressure on the Liberal government” (Bertolino et al, 2013). Thus, one can ascertain that the relationship between corporate media and students of Québec, and corporate-owned mass media and the U.S. anti-war protesters of the Sixties was, indeed, quite similar.

CUTV

Aside from corporate-owned media, however, the students also used other forms of alternative media in a similar fashion that the Sixties’ protesters turned to the underground press. As a more recent example of the creation and the use of alternative media by young activists, Occupy Wall Street’s communication technologies included alternative print media publications such as the Occupied Wall Street Journal, autonomous technological infrastructures such as the NYCGA.net and InterOccupy.net, and a 24-hour livestream media channel known as Globalrevolutiontv, which, at peak times, had as many as 80,000 unique viewers per day (Costanza-Chock, 2012a). In terms of the Québec student protests, Roger singles out CUTV, Concordia University’s media channel, which consists of membership-produced videos, film, and live broadcast, as being extremely helpful to the students’ cause: “I know that we used a lot of CUTV. CUTV helped create underground media to counterbalance the mainstream media, and it really worked. When CUTV went to these demonstrations, there were many many followers on the live cams” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Roger also lists blogs, YouTube, posters, journals, and flyers as various forms of alternative media that the students used (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Additionally, Myriam cites student newspapers among the various media that they used:

We used a lot of newspapers because a lot of student associations have their own, as ASSÉ. L’Ultimatum which is the student newspaper of the ASSÉ. We also, at University of Montreal, have Quartier Libre. There was also a creation of a newspaper that only came out one or two times.

We had flyers and articles that we were writing and transformed them into a mobilization tool. For example, I was part of La Rush, and we created a pamphlet
that would give the people…and use it to talk to them. I do know that there were other newspapers, but not at my school. So videos, newspapers and flyers and posters. There was a huge role of creating information during the student strike. (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

Of all the alternative media that covered the strike, CUTV was mentioned by all interviewees as one of the most helpful to the students’ cause. A student-run university-based media, CUTV was explicit in its support of the protesters and gave the students a medium which allowed them to voice their opinions without censorship. The content that CUTV aired was explicitly in support of the strike. Jeppesen (2012) argues that “the best media coverage of the student strike in Montreal [came] from an unexpected source – CUTV, or what is now called Community-University TV (formerly Concordia University TV) (p.1). Jeppesen cites Leah Lievrouw’s (2011) “participatory journalism” as key to CUTV’s role during the strike: “the kind of reporting that is rooted within a social movement, providing an insider view” (Jeppesen, 2012, p. 1).

Jeppesen (2012) states, “Unlike some forms of participatory journalism, however, where the journalist joins a movement in order to report on it, CUTV is staffed predominantly by student volunteers and is thus not embedded (like war reporters) but grounded or rooted in the student movement and the broader Montreal anti-authoritarian social justice milieu” (p. 1). In this sense, CUTV functioned in support of the students and countered mainstream media: it showed alternate perspectives to that presented by corporate-owned media; and it allowed the students to broadcast their own stories from their personal perspectives as participants in the strike. Thus, CUTV was not only wildly popular amongst the students, but the station also provided tremendous coverage and assistance for the students throughout the strike, particularly in recording and reporting on systemic police abuses and harassment through the live streaming of events (Jeppesen, 2012).

Disregarding and not utilizing corporate-owned media was never an option. So instead, the students devised ways in which they were guaranteed media coverage. Between news reports on the strike which came from corporate-owned media sources such as the National Post and CTV to the reporting done by student-led media such as CUTV and The McGill Daily to independent media coverage from Rabble.ca and other independent outlets, the Québec student strike was effectively broadcast and reported throughout Canada and the rest of the world.
The Red Square

The iconic red square became synonymous with the Québec student strike of 2012. The documentary, Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir, is representative of the relationship between the red square and the strike as the title of the movie is literally translated to mean “Red square on a black board.” A symbol of solidarity adopted by the Québec students against tuition fee increase in 2012, the red square is said to have originated during the 2005 Quebec student strike (“So? What Does,” 2011; McSorley, 2012). In the words of the website Free Education Montreal.org, the red square is derived from “the French saying ‘carrément dans le rouge,’ which means ‘squarely in the red’ or basically, that students were in debt because of tuition increase and cuts in bursaries” (“So? What Does,” 2011, Swirlz, 2012). Similarly, McSorley (2012) finds that “carrément dans le rouge,” or “squarely in the red” referred to “the large levels of debt the students are facing.” The actual red square itself was typically “made out of felt,” but to further reflect the students’ desire to save costs, “the idea is that it can be made out of any spare piece of red clothing or material, so it doesn’t cost anything to get one” (“So? What Does,” 2011). Even before the Maple Spring of 2012, Free Education Montreal.org, befitting a website that promotes solidarity with a tuition freeze, encouraged students to wear the red square by cutting “one out for yourself” and pinning “it to your knapsack with a safety pin” or to “just pick one up at the Graduate Student Association” as a “very easy way to support the struggle against tuition increase” in November of 2011 (“So? What Does,” 2011).

Bureau-Blouin explains that the student groups decided to once again utilize the symbol of the red square because of its simplicity. Bureau-Blouin proposes, “So we decided to use the symbol again because it was really simple to reproduce. To manufacture it, all you need is a piece of paper or a fabric and you cut it into a square and a clip and that’s it. So that’s why I think it was a really powerful symbol. It was easy to reproduce, and anyone at home could do it” (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014). Moreover, Gauthier alludes to its historical importance: “It was discussed in the summertime, and we decided to use it because it was easy to make, plus the message behind it, it had historical importance” (L. Gauthier, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2014). In addition to its simplicity and historical importance, all of the interviewees agreed that it was an acknowledged symbol of support for the students and protest against the government. Lafrenière gives a detailed account about how the students began to use the red square:
It had been also used a lot in 2005 strike, and since this moment, it has been the symbol of the student movement. But it hasn’t been used that much until 2010. There were some unions in UQAM that decided that it could be a great idea to use that symbol to legitimize the movement, to show a lot of people were part of this. They proposed in ASSÉ congress, but widely they gave red squares to everyone, so people could show that they were agreeing to the idea of the student movement. And during the strike, of course we were distributing them so people could show that they were supporting the strike. (N. Lafrenière, personal communication, February 18, 2014)

Myriam traces the red squares’ roots to even before the previous student movements, to a time where the red square “was a symbol that was linked with poverty” (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014). Regardless of its history, the current meaning associated with the red square was explicit: those who wore it did so in order to show support for the students and their displeasure with the Québec government.

Support for the students was not limited to other students or even just within the province of Québec. One could rightfully argue that support for the Québec student revolt was noticeable both within Canada and also internationally. For instance, during their live performance on the popular American television show Saturday Night Live on May 19, 2012, I watched as Montreal-based band Arcade Fire performed the Rolling Stone’s hit “The Last Time” with Mick Jagger and with each band member clearly showing their support for the students by wearing the red square. And whether or not it was intentional, Jagger himself (at the very least) symbolically supported the cause by wearing a red shirt underneath his blazer. According to Roberts (2012), noted documentary filmmaker Michael Moore watched the performance and “tweeted about the show, adding that the strike in Québec was ‘one of the most amazing mass protests of the year.’” And a few days earlier at the Cannes film festival, Québec filmmaker Xavier Dolan along with his entire cast, which included French actors Nathalie Baye and Melvil Poupaud, were noticeably wearing their red squares on the red carpet (Roberts, 2012). During that time, the red square was observed being worn by individuals around the world on a daily basis.

However, not all who chose to don the red square were praised for their actions, nor were all uses of the red square deemed to be positive. In other words, there were also negative attributes associated to the use and impact of the red square. For example, the students themselves chastised the opposition party, the Parti Québécois, for their decision to wear the red square. As Wyatt (2012a) observes, many critics resorted to calling PQ leader Pauline Marois an
opportunist. Francis Piché, a junior college student seemed to echo a sentiment held by the majority of the Québec students:

It doesn’t surprise me that Pauline Marois decided to stop wearing the red square because it wasn’t real support for the students. The only reason she was opposing the tuition fee increase was because the Liberals were doing it but a Pequist government wanted to do it too. She just wanted to avoid controversy when the election is called. For me, there’s not a lot of difference between the Parti Québécois and the Liberal party. (Wyatt, 2012a)

And when asked about Marois being an opportunist, Piché was reportedly enthusiastic with his reply: “That’s the right word. It describes very well the attitude of the Parti Québécois and its leader” (Wyatt, 2012a).

In addition to the problematic appropriation of the red square by politicians, despite their peaceful defiance, it was reported that Québec students were targeted by police; specifically, those that displayed the red square. In his report in Huffington Post, Jonathan Montpetit (2012) warns that the Montreal Police were being accused of “political profiling — of searching and detaining people wearing the red square, the symbol of Quebec's protest movement.” Montreal police chief Mark Parent disputes the complaints: “There was no systemic searching, detentions of people based on red squares. It was based on behaviour that raised questions about their presence” (Montpetit, 2012). In addition to the political profiling, another equally problematic use of the red square was one entrepreneur’s decision to file a trademark application for the red square and use it in his new brand of clothing. So although he may have feigned support for the student movement, it became clear that Raymond Drapeau’s polo shirts and tee-shirts sported the red square for one reason alone; to commodify and profit from the symbol (Fenn, 2013).

While the two aforementioned examples highlight the negative use and impact of the red square, for the most part, the symbol served its purpose. Not only did it help to bring about local, national and international awareness for the Québec students’ fight, but it also helped to solidify support for their revolt. The red square became synonymous with the uprising. Because of this relationship, it would become difficult, if not impossible, to imagine one without the other. Undoubtedly, the red square was one of the most effective tactics employed by the Québec student movement.
Activism Against Bill 78

Bill 78, which was introduced on May 18, 2012 by the provincial government, was a tactic employed by the Liberals and Jean Charest in an attempt to end the strike. However, the opposite occurred as the introduction of Bill 78 instead helped to galvanize countless individuals against the government as they denounced the law and instead supported the students. Created as an Act “to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend,” Bill 78 was introduced by the Liberal government, “passed in principle,” passed and “assented to” all on the same day (Gouvernement du Québec, 2012). Essentially, Bill 78 was an emergency law introduced by the Liberals “in response to the province’s escalating tensions over student strikes” (“Québec court rejects Bill 78,” 2012). Premier Jean Charest had hoped that “the measures restore order after daily student walkouts and demonstrations that have turned increasingly violent” (The Canadian Press 7, 2012). While many supported Charest’s heavy-handedness in passing the law, a much greater number of individuals opposed the bill. Even for some who did not previously support the students, the Liberal government’s new law persuaded them to side with the students in a growing fight that no longer only pertained to increased tuition fees, but was now against perceived injustices and the freedom to demonstrate and speak out against the government en masse (Bélair-Cirino, 2012; Kennelly, 2014). In effect, additional tactics were devised to counteract Bill 78.

Bill 78 had a very decided effect on the student revolt. Those that were unhappy with the students commended the Liberals’ action, while the majority of the students’ responses were as expected. “This is an abuse of power,” said Nadeau-Dubois, considered the most strident student leader, who also quickly added the following: “It’s totally unacceptable in a democracy to table such legislation” (The Canadian Press 7, 2012). Another who opposed the Bill was Bureau-Blouin, who claimed that, “This legislation strikes a blow to the freedom of expression” (The Canadian Press 7, 2012). In the same vein, another student leader, Martine Desjardins, categorized the bill as a “declaration of war against the student movement” (The Canadian Press 7, 2012). It is interesting to note that just over one month after it came to fruition, Bill 78 was chastised as impeding on people’s fundamental rights, as per Québec’s own Human Rights Commission (“Québec’s Human Rights Commission,” 2012).

Without a doubt, Bill 78 was a heavy-handed attempt by the Liberals to put an end to the student revolt and criminalize the strike. In Fournier’s terms, “there’s a thing…lawyers against
Bill 78….so you know that something’s really bad when you have a demonstration of hundreds of lawyers participating” (M. Fournier, personal communication, Jan. 31, 2014). To summarize, Bill 78 contained three main tenets: it paused the school year at institutions affected by the strikes; it imposed steep fines for anyone who attempted to block access to a school; it limited where, how, and for how long people could protest in Québec (“Québec court rejects Bill 78,” 2012). To be more precise, Bill 78 included the following specificities: fines of between $1,000 and $5,000 for any individual who prevents someone from entering an educational institution, with penalties climbing to between $7,000 and $35,000 for a student leader and to between $25,000 and $125,000 for unions or student federations; public demonstrations involving more than 50 people to be flagged to authorities eight hours in advance, with the itinerary, duration, and time of demonstration detailed; police allowed to order a protest to move to a different location; and as subject to punishment, offering encouragement for someone to protest at a school, either tacitly or otherwise (“Québec court rejects Bill 78,” 2012). For Fournier, and the majority of the students on strike, Bill 78 was an egregious law that was passed solely to attempt to destroy the movement:

And when Bill 78 went to the national assembly, it was validated. It’s actually horrible to say that, but we posed such a threat to the government that they had to….they literally tried to take away our right to speak, our right to protest. They tried to take away the strike by cancelling the semester. So we said that the strike doesn’t end when we’re not blocking classes. The movement goes on. It was a bit of a game of chicken, I think. And when ordinary people looked around and realized that everyone they knew was a criminal, they realized that the government was in the wrong. They created an untenable political outcome by attempting to criminalize dissent. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

In reviewing the law, it became clear that the Liberals had criminalized the act of protest and were penalizing protesters with exorbitant monetary fines in an attempt to end the strike.

As reported in Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir, Bill 78 signalled “the start of the largest wave of arrests in Québec history” (Bertolino et al., 2013). Six months from its introduction, close to 3,500 arrests were made. But instead of adhering to the government’s demands, the majority of students, with additional support from many members of the community, were united in rebelling against Bill 78. Myriam notes the following:

For Bill 78, we had to discuss it in the GAs [general assemblies] because in my association, we decided to stay on strike regardless of that bill, which put us at
really big risk as an executive as an association, but we decided to do it anyway. So we had to discuss it in the GAs to see all the risks, and to not write our names when telling the people of what was happening, to be aware of what could happen. And finally as an association we decided to say, “This is anti-constitutional and we won’t pay attention to it.” And finally, that’s why the director of our university sent anti-riot forces to our school because we were on strike. (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

Roger reports engaging in similar tactics: “For Bill 78, everyone just went to the streets because they made it illegal to go to the streets without advising police, so everyone just went to the streets without advising the police department and demonstrated in the streets. Since demonstrations were made without telling the police….we just did it without asking” (J. Rogers, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Fournier similarly chastises the law: “People just laughed in their faces. If you’re going to round up people one by one, that may be scary, but if we all go into the streets together, then your law is meaningless. A law that no one respects has no power” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014). Undoubtedly, the introduction of Bill 78 was a poor strategy by the Liberal government, as it faced widespread denouncement of the draconian bill, galvanizing the movement with regular citizens simultaneously supporting the students.

Soon after, a 56-page report by the Québec’s Human Rights Commission found Bill 78 to be highly problematic and an impingement on people’s rights (“Québec’s Human Rights Commission,” 2012). Despite this, it was not until the Parti Québécois took power on September 4, 2012 that incoming premier Pauline Marois repealed the punitive sections of the controversial anti-protest law. In their report, the commission found the following sections of Bill 78 as violating the Charter of Rights: article 13, because it affects freedom of expression, of reunion and peaceful association; article 14, because it affects freedom of peaceful gatherings, and, in association, freedom of expression by making it illegal to assemble a group within or outside an educational institution; articles 12 to 14, because they directly impact people’s sense of solidarity and personal convictions towards a cause; article 15, because it imposes certain responsibilities on student associations (under Québec’s charter, associations do not have control or the right to exert such control over members); articles 16 and 17, because it requires approval for protests larger than 50 people, in violation of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly; and articles 18 to 31, because it imposes financial sanctions, in violation of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly (“Québec court rejects Bill 78,” 2012). Moreover, the commission recounts
that “Bill 78 is also unclear about what acts are legal or illegal” ("Québec court rejects Bill 78,” 2012). Given the blatant disregard for some of the fundamental rights that we have as Québécois and Canadians, it is not difficult to understand why Bill 78 was so problematic. Not only were the students vehemently opposed to the law, but civil rights advocates and some lawyers also voiced their intense displeasure. Unwittingly, and ironically, the Liberals helped to strengthen the movement that it desperately sought to destroy. Despite the fact that Bill 78 was not a tactic devised by the students, the widespread public denunciation and activist moves against the bill nevertheless helped shift the discourse of the student uprising.

The Casseroles

In a similar fashion as the red square, casseroles became equally synonymous with the Québec student revolt of 2012. Sterne (2012) describes the moment when, “Every night around 8pm, in neighborhoods across Montreal and Quebec, you can hear the din of clanging pots and pans in manifs casseroles (manif is short for manifestation en cours, a street protest)” (p. 1). The banging of casseroles and regular pots and pans or the “cacerolazo tactic” was used throughout Québec during the student strike of 2012. Similar to the red square, the use of casseroles was appropriated from a different previous political uprising as a tangible and effective tactic during Maple Spring. Ostensibly, the use of casseroles and “the pot-banging protests originated in 1971 in Chile to oppose food and supply shortages caused by the policies of President Salvador Allende. They resumed in the 1980s to oppose the military dictatorship of Auguste Pinochet” (“Casserole protests,” 2012). It was not even a member of the student revolt that invoked the tactical use of pots, pans and casseroles, but rather, a college teacher of politics in Saint-Hyacinthe, just southeast of Montreal: “Using social media and the now-famous pots-and-pans protest, teacher François-Olivier Chené pulled Montreal back from the edge” (Perreaux, 2012).

As Perreaux’s (2012) article in the Globe and Mail describes, “Mr. Chené went on Facebook to launch his appeal for the pot-and-pan demonstrations, inviting people to take to their balconies with their pots” to display their opposition to Bill 78. At first, a few hundred people accepted the invitation. However, Mr. Chené’s original plan, which was to have protesters “stick to balconies and sidewalks for only a few minutes and avoid confronting the law” was quickly appropriated by “thousands of protesters gathering in scattered Montreal neighbourhoods” which overwhelmed such constraints (Perreaux, 2012). Due in large part to the
overwhelming unpopularity of Bill 78, tens of thousands of residents took to the streets throughout the province to express their displeasure of the law, as “les casseroles” were likewise heard in Quebec City, Longueuil, St. Jerome and St. Eustache (“Casserole protests,” 2012). As Perreaux reported, “Students now make up a minority of people in the streets, overtaken by legions of grandparents, young professionals and children. People who shrugged at a tuition hike, the point of student protest, were drawn out by the new law and poor handling of the crisis by the province” (Perreaux, 2012). Indicative of what many felt were the sentiments expressed by physician David Barbeau: “What mobilized me is mostly the 78 bill, which I feel is totally inappropriate for this situation” (“Montreal protesters march,” 2012). If Bill 78 was the reason given for the citizenry of Québec uniting against one common enemy, then les casseroles helped to materially signal their defiance.

Quite poignantly, Roger proclaims that “This is a citizen movement….the casserole is more citizen than student” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Roger notes that the casseroles were “not from students” but from citizens: “It was a citizen group that begins the casserole, from the Villeray district, to help the students. It began at the same time as Bill 78, so it started when the bill came out as citizens criticized the bill and helped students with the strike.” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Those that I interviewed were quick to credit regular citizens as being responsible for originating the idea of making noise by banging pots, pans and casseroles as a tactic to show their opposition to Bill 78. In a similar vein, Provost claims that the casseroles was a tactic that was initiated by Montrealers:

I think the casseroles were really grass roots. The first time I heard about it, it was a YouTube video of people in areas of Montreal, just videos of people banging casseroles. And after I saw it spreading on Facebook events saying that at 8pm, everybody take your casserole….it was pretty grassroots….I think a person just created an event and everyone became fond of the idea and after it just kept spreading…. (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014)

Bureau-Blouin equates the use of the casseroles as the people’s right to protest freedom of speech:

People did not agree with something reducing rights and freedoms. It was really something, the turnout in the strike because now it was no more the movement on tuition fees, it was more on rights and freedoms and the right to protest and freedom of speech. At that moment, you saw people using their casseroles, like in Chile, family, grandmothers, grandfathers, all these people were really supporting
– not really the tuition fee strike – but against the attitude of the government. (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014)

Fournier explains that the use of casseroles “was about taking up space, and making noise, and feeling a sense of belonging. So that’s what it felt like, sort of a collective solidarity and frustration and it was kind of like….there’s a cheekiness in that. It was like, ‘No, you just can’t pass laws like this.’ It’s not going to work, you know? And the casseroles were a lot about that feeling….indignation, maybe” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

Moreover, the use and popularity of the casseroles mirrored the ideology that CLASSE promoted: people, free to use any tactic they want, took it upon themselves to begin a grassroots-level initiative that became popularized and adopted by others as a way to display their support for the movement and displeasure with the government (Legault, 2014). Perhaps more importantly, for the citizens supporting the students, “the casseroles became a form of symbolic warfare, aimed in part at countering dominant rhetoric on an affective level. Through the casserole protests, residents – with no special political status or claim within the government – were able to deploy the most ordinary household items to act as guardians of community values” (Spiegel, 2014). Ordinary citizens were as empowered as the students in their fight against the government.

Additionally, the demonstrations were peaceful as the nightly student rallies “expanded to include other groups primarily concerned with the new special law, which sets restrictions for organized public rallies,” albeit loud: “The clanging of pots and pans sounded throughout Montreal’s downtown core Saturday night and into early Sunday morning, as thousands of protesters marched on in peaceful — but loud — defiance of Bill 78” (“Montreal protesters march,” 2012). But the demonstrations spread, not only across the province, but also nationally and internationally. As reported in a Huffington Post article dated June 7, 2012, “the clanging of pots and pans in protest isn't just a Quebec thing anymore” as the same was heard in places as far away as New York, Chicago and Berlin (The Canadian Press 8, 2012). Through the use of social media and Facebook in particular, marches were coordinated in 125 different cities – “everywhere from Frankfurt to Madison, WI” (The Canadian Press 8, 2012). Ethan Cox, the Montreal-based organizer of the event known as ‘Casserole Night in Canada,’ says “photos and videos of pots and pans protests held last night have been coming in from all over – Europe, South America, the United States as well as elsewhere in Canada” (The Canadian Press 8, 2012).
But Cox also admits that, “while marches are held in solidarity with Quebec students, protesters in various cities add their own cause to the march” (The Canadian Press 8, 2012). Nevertheless, what began as Chené’s vision of peaceful protest, “les casseroles” is now a tactic that is used worldwide.

The Québec student protesters benefitted the most from the introduction of “les casseroles.” A graduate student in history at the Université de Montréal, Kevin Audet-Vallée postulates that Bill 78 and “les casseroles” shifted the focus away from the students: “It was suddenly a lot harder to paint the students as violent radicals. Students aren’t even the dominant force any more. There are as many grey heads as students. It’s completely peaceful, and it’s filled with average Joes” (quoted in Perreaux, 2012). And although perhaps a bit overstated, Perreaux (2012) nevertheless makes a poignant observation: “Those clanging pots, known as les casseroles, were initially seen as just another tactic, but a remarkable thing happened: Ordinary citizens armed only with kitchenware took back their streets from rock-throwers and riot police. They also pushed student and government leaders back to the negotiating table with fresh hope the conflict might end.” “Les casseroles” signified a definitive win for the student protesters, as articulated by Nadeau-Dubois: “Even if the strike dies in August, we have already won a lot. We have already won the fact that a whole generation now has learned what is power, what is repression and what is social justice. The strikes have ‘politicised a generation’, potentially bringing CLASSÉ’s ultimate goal one step closer” (quoted in Gabbatt, 2012). Perhaps most importantly, Nadeau-Dubois admits that a particular lesson that was imparted on the students: “Those people have learned collectively that if we mobilize and try to block something, it’s possible to do it” (quoted in Gabbatt, 2012). The casseroles were undeniably another highly effective tactic introduced during the strike and used effectively by the students alongside regular citizens.

MaNUfestation

On May 3, 2012, many of the Québec student protesters engaged in another memorable tactic – the (almost) nude march, known as the “maNUfestation.” The strategy was fairly simple. The students were to arrive at a downtown park in Montreal fully clothed, and carrying a backpack. During the course of the march through the “trendy” Plateau Mont Royal neighbourhood, they were to disrobe until almost fully nude (“Nude student protest,” 2012; The
Canadian Press 4, 2012). However, the grassroots and unknown organizers were explicit in telling the students that frontal nudity was not acceptable due to the illegal nature of public nakedness in Montreal (The Canadian Press 4, 2012).

Perhaps the most recognized organization for using nudity as a political tactic is Femen. The Femen activist movement is “notorious for their topless protests and ‘attacks’ on everything from Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel to Notre Dame, Barbie Dream House and Germany’s Next Top Model” (Reestorff, 2014). Anna Hutsol is credited with creating the Femen movement on April 10, 2008, as “a response to exploitation of Ukrainian women in the sex industry” (Reestorff, 2014). The movement grew quickly and now has official branches in France and Germany along with known activity in the Ukraine, Canada, United States, Turkey, Poland, Egypt, Italy, India, Kurdistan, Russia, Belarus, Holland, Brazil, Tunisia, Germany and France (Reestorff, 2014). In the case of Aliaa Magda Elmadhy, more popularly known as the “nude Egyptian blogger,” Elmadhy’s use of nudity as a political tactic “offers a compelling invitation to map out sites of sexual and political provocation that challenge dualisms of secular/religious, erotic/sacred, flesh spirit…It also demonstrates how the presumed divide between secular-liberal and Islamic feminisms contributes to reductive analyses of women’s experiences in the Middle East and North Africa” (Eileraas, 2014). These two examples display that there is more to using nudity as a tactic than simply garnering interest and prurient publicity to a cause. Dr. Paul Rapoport, coordinator of the Topfree Equal Rights Association (TERA), believes that “through exposing their bodies, women may be able to simultaneously take control of their bodies and reclaim them from a history of patriarchy” (Bernstein, 2012). Given how aware and politically savvy the students of Québec are, the creation of the maNUfestation certainly wasn’t limited to gaining publicity.

In much the same way the strike itself was no longer only about an increase in tuition, but, effectively, a fight for individual rights and a stand against economic austerity measures, the maNUfestation was not merely about garnering publicity and local and national support, but was designed as a tactic to directly challenge the Liberal government. Yanick Grégoire, the vice-president of FEUQ during the strike claims that the maNUfestation was symbolic on three important levels:

First of all, by removing their clothes the students are suggesting they would have to “sell their shirts” in order to afford tuition hikes. Simultaneously, the nudity also represents the lack of transparency in the Quebec government and university
administration. Finally, going nearly-nude is a response to the government’s attempts to demonize students because it helps "remind people that students are humans," Grégoire explains. (Bernstein, 2012)

According to Bernstein (2012), there were many other “nude student protests over the months” with the most notable held during the Montreal Grand Prix event.

In lieu of full frontal nudity, the students were instead encouraged to carry signs and wear red body paint when partaking in the “nude” marches (The Canadian Press 4, 2012). Reasons given to justify the marches included sustaining the attention received from the government, to directly rebuke the Mayor of Montreal’s admonition to the protesters to not wear masks, to distract police officers, and to celebrate the arrival of spring after a long winter (The Canadian Press 4, 2012). At the time, there were discussions amongst government officials regarding a ban on masks, which came to fruition on May 19, 2012 as Montreal city councillors approved a bylaw that “prevented the wearing of masks at public protests” (“Montreal bans wearing,” 2012). Among the many slogans found amongst the crowd were “Rien à Lacher” [“Keep On Fighting”], “Le corps etudiant contre la hausse” [“The student body is against increase”] and “Reveillez vous!” [“Wake Up!”] (ScottMontreal, 2012). Clearly, the success of this tactic benefitted from social media, as the event was highly publicized by the students on both Facebook and Twitter. As well, this particular tactic is representative of CLASSE’s values, as the march was not created by the leaders, but rather evolved directly from students’ actions – once again evidencing the value of direct democracy and horizontal leadership.

As a testament to the effectiveness of horizontal leadership and a diversity of tactics, only one of my interviewees associated the march with one of the main groups. Gauthier credits FEUQ with organizing the march, but is quick to point out the students’ impact: “For the May nude march, it was a(n) FEUQ demonstration which was organized by students in UQAM. But I would say that most of the demonstrations were started and organized by the students themselves, almost 90% of them were. We organized the big ones, but the students were responsible for most of them” (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). The remaining interviewees could not identify who was involved with organizing the march, but were well aware that it took place and of its popularity among the students. In Roger’s words, “The nude march, I’m not really sure where it came from, but people really liked it. I think it was just people who wanted to get naked to protest the student fees….I don’t know, but people really
liked this one” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). Likewise, Provost makes a similar claim: “As for the nude manifestation, it was called on the social media. So it was not organized by a structure or by ASSÉ or whatever, neither by local associations. It was really people on Facebook who created an event and called it the nude manifestation and everybody went crazy with the idea” (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Bureau-Blouin echoes a similar viewpoint: “But the nude march – that was more organic. We didn’t really talk about it. But again, why did it work? It was catchy, it doesn’t require a lot of stuff. But it’s also very interesting for the media because showing this on the news, of course, is a success” (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014). Perhaps another way to rationalize and explain the maNUfestival would be to equate it with other forms of performative protests such as the daily event called *La Ligne Rouge* [“The Red Line”] (Spiegel, 2014).

According to Spiegel (2014), at 8:30am daily, students dressed in red from the Theatre Department at the Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM) “would spread out along the southbound subway station platform in Montreal’s Jean-Talon Metro Station” (p. 774). Once other passengers had boarded the train, “the red-clad protestors would board the subway together in silence, getting on and off at every station for maximum visibility until they arrived at their final stop. This had allowed the trajectory to school to become visible as a shared public space maximizing peaceful yet politicized interchanges between students and those commuting to work” (p. 774). Numerous examples of performative protests were enacted by the students during the strike of 2012.

The same tactic, the maNUfestival, was once again utilized before the start of the Montreal Grand Prix – a yearly event that attracts many wealthy and influential visitors to the city. As per a *National Post* article dated June 8, 2012, “the protests and media attention have already put a dent in the global sporting event, which usually generates an estimated $100 million in revenue for the city but this year has seen lagging ticket sales” (“Naked protesters flood,” 2012). But unlike the initial maNUfestival, the students’ justifications for the second event were slightly different: to show the government they had been transparent in their demands to freeze tuition fees; to garner more media attention for their cause; and to discourage police from handling them roughly (“Naked protesters flood,” 2012). This particular march took place on Montreal’s Crescent Street, which is the road “most closely associated” with the Grand Prix (“Naked protesters flood,” 2012). “You know what?” said Michael Mohammad of Toronto,
watching the nude marchers, “I think it’s a worthy cause now. If you’re willing to take your clothes off I’m willing to shave some dollars off your student fees” (“Naked protesters flood,” 2012). If this gentleman’s sentiments are indeed indicative of the many other onlookers at the event, then it can be surmised that the students were able to actualize their goal by garnering even more support for their movement due to the tactic of marching (almost) nude through the streets of Montreal.

As indicated, the Québec students were quite strategic in their invocation and utilization of particular tactics, as characterized by the maNUfestation. Not only were they able to bring awareness to their cause, but with the help of certain elements such as the prevalent public protests against the introduction of Bill 78, the students were also able to muster support from a myriad of individuals from all walks of life. This support extended to various cities and nations around the world. The student leaders were deliberate, strategic and thoughtful in their planning. As articulated by Gauthier, the majority of the tactics, marches and demonstrations were actually organized by students in non-leadership roles and coordinated through social media (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 8, 2014). Whether or not certain tactics were devised by the leaders was inconsequential, as any and all tactics were utilized to help the student revolt and aided by direct democracy and horizontalism. In reflecting on these tactics, it becomes obvious that they too can and should be utilized by other movements. What requires further clarification, however, is how they functioned in addition to and in tandem with the use of social media. These analyses will be forthcoming in the following chapter. As Fournier found, the tactics only worked insofar as they disrupted the businesses in the city: “The idea was that peaceful protest, even in that context, was highly economically disruptive. And at some point, business leaders started calling and putting huge amounts of pressure on the government to do something because they were losing money” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014). In our current economic state, perhaps governments only address protests and protesters seriously once businesses and corporations are negatively impacted economically.

**Conclusion**

In *Carré Rouge Sur Fond Noir*, Jeanne Reynolds is depicted as a regular CEGEP student at College de Valleyfield who eventually became an ASSÉ organizer during the course of the strike. During a television interview, she is recorded as stating, “We demand that the government
cancel this tuition hike. Many organizations and social groups are here to support us. This struggle isn’t just a student struggle. It’s a social struggle for Québec’s future” (Bertolino et al., 2013). Reynolds puts forth an ideal that was adopted by many of those involved in the strike. Indeed, many scholars view the strike as so much more than a mere rejection of an increase in tuition fees.

For one, Drainville (2013) compares the strike to other worldwide uprisings: “The printemps québécois is an event that took place in its own time and fashion, in the context of a worldwide wave of protest against the neo-liberal world order” (p. 785). Likewise, Giroux (2013) counts the students of Québec among the youth that are “challenging the current repressive historical conjecture by rejecting its dominant premises and practices” (p. 515). Giroux (2013) believes that the students’ battle is largely against “neoliberal austerity measures”: “Lacking a political voice and political power, many young people now inhabit a precarious existence marked by neoliberal austerity measures that have created massive levels of unemployment, or they find themselves in low-quality, boring jobs that are at odds with the qualifications that many young people actually have” (pp. 515-516). Collombat (2014) shares the same sentiments and describes the student strike as a movement that resisted the commodification of education and, more broadly, fought “the arrogance and authoritarian methods of a conservative government increasingly associated with corruption scandals” (p. 140). Collombat (2014) continues, “As it aimed at raising the individual contribution of consumer-payers to what used to be considered a public service (education), the proposed tuition fee hike was undeniably a manifestation of austerity measures. This hike favored a regressive form of funding to universities instead of making them accessible through a progressive and equitable tax system” (pp. 140-141). For Baillargeon (2012) the student revolt said, “we refuse to accept that after all these years of supposed economic growth, we can no longer collectively pay for the common goods that we have put in place yesterday, and that we cannot pay for them because a government, whose democratic legitimacy appears to us to be nil, sells or even gives away our collective resources to corporations, some of which are foreign” (p. 3). Clearly, as highlighted by the above scholars, and as I have articulated throughout this chapter, what initially began as a fight against increased tuition fees metamorphosed into a more encompassing “social struggle” that engaged the passions of many Québécoers.
Veiled as necessary to keep Québec’s educational system functional, the proposed tuition fee hike represented so much more. Barney (2012) heralds the students and clarifies their stance against the government’s proposal:

What makes the strikers politically exceptional is that they are militants of a truth they understand to be non-negotiable. The strikers’ fidelity to this truth has taken the form of a demand—a tuition freeze—that can only be regarded as unintelligible by those to whom it is addressed. Their refusal to accept the government’s proposed 75 percent tuition increase is a refusal to concede post-secondary education to the logic and priorities of neoliberal capitalism, a refusal of the social logic in which it makes sense to finance public education on personal debt and corporate investment, a logic that transforms the colleges and universities into purely economic enterprises. (p. 3)

For Barney and many other critics of the government, the proposed tuition fee hike was symbolic of the Liberal’s promotion of a number of ideologies. Thus, the students’ fight became a fight against neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice, and even the corporatization of the university. Through deployment of a variety of tactics, the students transformed their refusal of tuition hikes into an uprising that challenged many political and social issues. This resonated with hundreds of thousands of students and, eventually, a wider Québec populace who, in turn, became part of the movement themselves.
Chapter 8 – Tactical Use of Social Media, Facebook and Twitter

It would be a mistake to say that there wasn’t a relationship between what the mainstream press was doing and what people were doing online. The non-denunciation thing, in playing out in the media…..on one end, you have the mainstream press pinning you down and you have voters watching you, grandparents and firefighters and politicians who are just tuning into their television and they’re just like….all this shit is going on and I don’t know what to think about it….and what do all these students want? And it’s so sexy to play these images of smoke bombs going off in the metro and people firing off bottle rockets in the middle of a protest and cop cars burning. And it’s so easy for that to be the story for the media because it’s such an easy story to tell. “Here the people are breaking stuff, when will the violence end?” Instead of asking, “Why are these people angry? Why are these tactics being used?”

-Micah Fournier (executive member of a large Montréal university’s student association), personal communication, Jan. 31, 2014

Aside from corporate-owned media and the alternative media used by the students, another form of media that helped the Québec student movement was social media. There is much attention paid in looking at the impact of social media on various forms of activism, within the scholarly community, activist community, and by pundits, and in the last year alone, numerous events focused on the role of social media in social movements and social change. Many more upcoming conferences and publications similarly evidence an interest in investigating how contemporary activists are utilizing social media.

As the literature review and conceptual framework of this thesis described, scholarship on the impact of social media on contemporary social movements is flourishing. For instance,

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16 Examples of inquiry into the role of social media in social movements and social change include a cultural studies seminar held at the University of East London on March 2014 promoted an event which focused on social change co-ordinated through social media” which, effectively, “take[s] place both on the street and in information space.” There was also a call for papers for a one-day conference held at Canterbury Christ Church University on October 2014 for the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) Social Movements Network Conference which looked at “The role of social media in the development of contemporary social movements.” A recent special issue of the International Journal of Electronic Governance which “presents researches on online political participation over various countries.” A call for papers for the 20th Anniversary Conference of the Institute of Comparative Media and Communication Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, held in Vienna on November 2014 explored how “the changes to political processes as triggered by the changing media structures along three perspectives, which might be responsible for different assessments of the democratic potential of social media: citizens, politicians, journalists.”
Todd Wolfson’s (2014) book entitled *Digital Rebellion*, investigates the “cultural logic of resistance” through an exploration of the Zapatista movement, the Cyber Left and Indymedia. Wolfson’s examination of the impact of new media and communication technologies on social movements adds to the scholarly conversation on social movements, networks, and technology and how they assist with the struggle for positive socio-cultural change. Additionally, Costanza-Chock (2012b), Soep (2014), Loader et al. (2014), and Boler et al. (2014) have all produced work that interrogates young activists’ tactical use of social media. As indicated by these examples, many scholars are now investigating the relationship between activists and social media. My own investigation into the relationship between the Québec student protesters and social media reveal that the students’ use of Facebook and Twitter was, undeniably, crucial to the success of the strike.

This chapter focuses on the students’ tactical use of social media during the strike. In addition to the interviewees’ narratives, evidence of the movement’s use of social media was surfeit and complex, reflective of the strike. As previously alluded to, social media was often credited for helping to organize the students. Non-leaders almost always turned to social media to assist in coordinating and organizing events, and in introducing new tactics. From the launch of the casseroles to the nightly protests, and to the success of the maNUfestation in May, students were quick to allocate praise to the use of social media for the success of these events. Social media’s ability to transmit information effortlessly and instantaneously was key to helping the students organize and mobilize rather quickly and easily. As this chapter illustrates, there were a variety of ways students used social media: to assist with spontaneous actions, to promote the extension of the strike, to share media reports and respond to criticism, and to create a social space for the students to develop and sustain solidarity.

**A Variety of Ways the Students Utilized Social Media**

The Québec students utilized social media in a variety of ways. As one of FEUQ’s organizers, Gauthier was tasked with organizing a few of the major demonstrations. He credits both Facebook and Twitter with assisting him with this organization: “There were three individuals who were in charge of social media, so they would relay all the information of the three associations. The Facebook group was up to 300,000 people at one time. We were able to get instant feedback and advertise for free. And during the strike, we used Facebook and Twitter to
send as much information as possible to the students” (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). From Lafrenière’s perspective, both Facebook and Twitter were tremendously helpful in announcing and organizing general assemblies, as well as announcing events from the student unions (N. Lafrenière, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Myriam shares similar sentiments: “There were a lot of debates on Facebook before the GAs (general assemblies), so people could exchange articles, information, information about what’s happening elsewhere, who is on strike. So it was easier to share information” (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014).

Assisting with Spontaneous Actions

One of the ways in which social media was particularly helpful to the student organizers was in assisting with spontaneous actions. Aside from its helpfulness in allowing the students to share information, organize and mobilize, Lafrenière also credits both social networking sites (SNS), Facebook and Twitter, with assisting in creating “spontaneous actions”: “They were also great when used for spontaneous actions. For example, the night demos were started by calls on social media, and then they happened each night….the slogan was ‘each night until victory’….in the beginning, it was totally spontaneous and created through social media by the students, and then people knew it was each night, so they met at 8 pm at the same places” (N. Lafrenière, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Similarly, Provost underscores Facebook’s strength in supporting “spontaneous” and “rapid” organization: “The strategies used….I wasn’t involved directly….but, I think that it was useful for spontaneous organization. Because Facebook events, like in the strike, it could go viral. So in two hours, you could have 6,000 attendees for a big demo. It was a good way to wrap up everybody, in one day or two days or three days go to that big demo or go to that event. It was great for rapid organization” (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014).

Assisting in Extending the Student Strike

In addition to assisting with spontaneous action, social media was credited with assisting in extending the student strike. Roger, for one, credits social media with helping to extend the strike: “I think, personally, that social media helped make the strike longer. We shared information, we debated, and then when something happened, everyone was prepared to debate about the particular subject….like new bills or new negotiations. When negotiations come up
with the government, everyone was prepared with what they saw in the negotiations. I think that it helped to make the strike longer, but it was not the core of the strike” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). And perhaps somewhat understated, the use of social media allowed countless protesters to remain anonymous: “Social media was also useful for staying anonymous, like even with a fake account. The call for action was kind of anonymous, but not really, since Facebook could know your IP address and identify you, but people could not see who was calling the demo. So that was useful for that purpose…mostly for more radical demos” (J. Roger, personal communication, February 24, 2014). The aforementioned reasons are what made Facebook and Twitter appealing to the students. Not only could they remain anonymous while participating in the strike, but they could also develop a tactic or organize an event that could go viral within seconds. Or, they could simply follow along and remain informed through the respective pages. Most definitively, quite a number of protesters were empowered through their use of social media during the movement.

The Sharing of Media Reports and Responding to Criticism

Another aspect of social media that was particularly helpful to the students was in the sharing of media reports and responding to criticism. Not only was social media used to share student-created information amongst the students, it was also used by students to share interesting media reports about the movement. Fournier explains the relationship that formed between the students, corporate-owned media, and social media with the following:

We used it (social media) for lots of different reasons. One, we used it for just informing people….here’s the demonstration, I’m going to spam invite all my friends, and here’s an awesome video clip of an interview someone did….there was a lot of that. There was a lot of social media being used to share traditional media which is powerful because when someone did a good interview with the press, it would be shared everywhere! I think, in a way, it sort of encouraged the mainstream media to keep covering it because they realized that people were looking at it. People were sharing news articles and videos and interviews all the time. So it was a hot topic, it was sexy…. And so there was a lot of student-created propaganda being shared too. And I mean propaganda in a very neutral sense. You know, images that had people with red squares as their Facebook profile picture, advertisements for the next demonstration becoming your Facebook profile picture. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)
Through the students’ use of social media to distribute media reports, corporate-owned media was further encouraged to report on the movement not only because of its popularity, but also because all reports pertaining to the protests were being consumed by a growing audience. Social media was also used by the students as a communication tool to respond to critics and criticisms about the strike. Fournier says, “We used it a lot for….to respond to criticism. For example, the Facebook page….people would post….and people would be frustrated, ‘I don’t understand all this strike shit. Why can’t I just go to school?’….And there would be this space to respond and create dialogue. That was really important. It became a way for people to get to know each other” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

Creating a Social Space and Where the Students Were

Finally, the students were quick to credit social media in helping them create a social space to develop and sustain solidarity. Fournier was adamant that social media should be lauded for being able to create a social space which allowed for strong interaction amongst the students. Fournier explains this sentiment with the following:

So social media was used tactically in those ways, but it was also used as a social space. And people built really strong personal connections with each other, with other organizations because you’re going through something really hard. It’s not easy to block the classrooms. It’s not easy to coordinate the blocking of hundreds of classrooms. It’s not easy to plan a demonstration or mobilize. So these things didn’t happen spontaneously, it’s an enormous amount of work that is happening. A good thousand people lost a year of their life being organizers for 80 hours a week doing this kind of thing. So the social relationships that were created through that kind of shared experience and conflict and difficulty, I think….there were people who met the love of their lives during this process, there were people who met their worst enemies….and those relationships really played out on social media too. People built close communities. (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014)

I believe that the main reason social media became such an important tool for the Québec students is due to the fact that it was “the place” where the students could be found. Recent published statistics support my assertion. In 2012, there were approximately 1.4 billion worldwide users of social media (“Number of social,” n.d.). In 2010, there were just under 1 billion users at .97 billion (“Number of social,” n.d.). This represents an increase of approximately over 400 million people in just two years. Currently, in 2015, there are an estimated 1.96 billion users of social media (“Number of social,” n.d.). This represents an
increase of approximately 560 million people in just under three years. As well, McKinnon (2014) estimates that 86% or almost 30 million Canadians are Internet users, “second only to the UK at 87% and followed by Germany at 84%.” Even more pertinent is that Canadians have “the highest social media network penetration in the World. 82% of Canadians use a social network by comparison to 75% of Americans” (ibid). Individually, Canadians spend an average of 2 hours and 19 minutes on social networks daily (ibid). 91% of Canadian Internet users own a social media account and 66% have admitted to using social media in the past month (ibid). Of all Canadian Internet users, 85% have a Facebook account and 46% have a Twitter account (ibid). Given these statistics, there is a great likelihood that a large percentage of Québec’s post-secondary students also use social media, and were active users during the strike. Thus, using social media and seeking out other students on social media was a great tactic utilized by Québec’s striking students in 2012.

As Provost observed, “Because we were on strike, a lot of the students weren’t on campus, so social media became useful to connect to the students because you couldn’t do it on the floor or give out pamphlets because there was nobody at school. So you had to find other ways to communicate with the students. And I think that social media was really useful for that” (A-M Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Not only is social media convenient and easy to use, but its accessibility feature allowed the organizers to maintain constant communication with the student protesters without them having to be face-to-face or at school. Fournier opines, “You don’t convince people to support your cause when they’re at the protest, you find them in the hallways. You find them on Facebook and then you bring them with you. The reason social media was powerful was because that’s where people were. I know that it sounds like circular logic. I think we saw that Facebook was maybe what the cafeteria or the student bar was 20 years ago. It was where the people were” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014, my emphasis). In this interaction, Fournier was clearly gesturing towards both the power and ubiquity of social media today. Indeed, most young people in North America possess a Facebook and/or a Twitter account. Not only was it easier for the organizers to contact the students by doing a mass contact “blitz” through Facebook and Twitter, but it was almost a necessity to target the students through social media because it was the most effective way to do so. Today, social media is indeed “where the people are.” Fournier’s statement also relates to W. Lance Bennett’s (2012) argument wherein he states, “Participation is
importantly channeled through often dense social networks over which people can share their own stories and concerns – the pervasive use of social technology enables individuals to become important catalysts of collective action processes as they activate their own social networks” (p. 22). Not only could the organizers reach out and contact the majority of striking students through social media, but these individuals could then, in turn, contact members of their own social networks to recruit them to participate in the actions.

Maybe an even better explanation than simply “that’s where the students were” come from Bennett and Segerberg (2012) who identify two elements of “personalized communication” as being particularly important in large-scale connective action formation. First, the political content in the form of easily personalized ideas must be present. This was certainly the case during Printemps érable or Maple Spring as the striking students clearly opposed the proposed tuition fee increase. It is said that “these personal action frames are inclusive of different personal reasons for contesting a situation that needs to be changed” (Bennett & Sederberg, 2012, p. 744). Secondly, various personal communication technologies that allow for the sharing of ideas, “whether through texts, tweets, social network sharing, or posting YouTube mashups” must be available. Again, these particular criteria applied to the striking students of Québec. Suffice to say, Facebook and Twitter functioned as tools which allowed the students to first contact one another, and then to remain in contact with each other, from wherever they were located, during the strike.

Social Media’s Role According to Bureau-Blouin

When asked about social media’s role in the movement, Bureau-Blouin’s response was the one statement which resonated with me the most. His statement effectively summarizes a few key aspects of the strike:

As student representatives, we were not calling the shots of mobilization. Things were moving through social media. They were organizing their own stuff, organizing their own campaign. But as a student representative, it was not easy because organizing on Facebook, sometimes it went well, sometimes it wasn’t that well organized, sometimes not politically correct. But in the media, they were not asking the people who organized it through Facebook, but they were asking the official student representatives – “What do you think about this? Why have you done this?” – but the truth is that we didn’t even know what was going on. I think that this is really changing the face of mobilization in the next years with workers’ unions, student unions, or any sort of mobilization for or against any type of government. It’s a…let’s say…social centralization or authorization of
power. I think that it can lead to great stuff, but also to less organized campaigns that make it more difficult to cut a deal, if I can say. (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014, my emphasis)

As indicated by the italicized statements, Bureau-Blouin notes that examples of direct democracy and horizontal leadership were explicit as students took ownership of the strike and devised and carried out their own tactics without the approval or even knowledge of the student leaders. This type of direct democracy and horizontal leadership are reminiscent of the actions taken by the Spanish Indignados, and those who partook in the Arab Spring and Occupy Movement (Costanza-Chock, 2012a; Gerbaudo, 2012; Katz, 2015). As Bureau-Blouin remarks, “we didn’t even know what was going on” which clearly indicates that the students were enacting their democracy and engaging in various tactics without the guidance or even the knowledge of the student organizers. Moreover, the corresponding actions of using social media to mobilize by the striking students highlight what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) refer to as “the recognition of digital media as organizing agents” (p. 752). The balance of power shifted and clearly made its way to the group and away from the organizers – unquestionable manifestations of direct democracy and horizontal leadership.

In a similar fashion as Fournier had done previously, Bureau-Blouin clearly gestures to the power and ubiquity of social media. According to him, the thousands of students that were involved in the strike were engaging in direct democracy and horizontal leadership which was being manifest through many of their actions – including their use of social media. Despite being the active leader of FECQ at the time, Bureau-Blouin acknowledged that none of the leadership members knew “what was going on.” The students were using social media in meaningful ways: no longer just to spread information, but to coordinate and enact direct action and mobilization – again, similar to that of the Indignados, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy Movement (Costanza-Chock, 2012a; Gerbaudo, 2012; Katz, 2015). In a sense, the striking students had appropriated the movement, and by doing so, made it much more powerful. Bureau-Blouin is also quick to articulate both the symbiotic relationship which developed between the students, corporate-owned media, and social media:

The other aspect that really impressed me is how social media can have a big influence on formal media, like CBC or CTV, mass media. Like the protest, I thought about what started the night protest – by itself, it wasn’t that big, there was maybe 1,000 or 1,500 people, but when Radio Canada saw it on Facebook, they decided to report on it – and it went viral. But is it going viral because of
Facebook, or is it going viral because of that guy on TV who won’t stop talking about it to thousands and thousands of people that are watching TV? (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014)

Although unsure of whom to credit, whether it be Facebook or the corporate-owned media who were reporting on the students’ actions, Bureau-Blouin suggests that something was causing the protests to grow and gain momentum – both in strength and in numbers. Given the ubiquity of social media and the power and influence of corporate-owned media, perhaps it was a combination of both mediums acting in tandem, which helped further galvanize the movement.

Corporate-Owned Mass Media versus Social Media

As will be illustrated through the remainder of the thesis, there are distinct differences between corporate-owned mass media and social media. These differences relate to their structure, how they are conceived by their users, and the power that they possess, among other things. Bureau-Blouin emphasizes the power that corporate-owned media retains: “So there is a big interaction between social media and mass media, and I think that of course, social media are powerful, but mass media and live TV are still the most powerful medium” (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014). As Bureau-Blouin explains, there are both positive and negative attributes to the “social centralization or authorization of power” (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014). In a similar vein, there were both positive and negative aspects relating to the students’ use of social media. On the one hand, they were able to organize “organically” and horizontally. On the other, it made the job of surveillance and tracking their movements easier for the police. These contradictions are precisely the same tensions that I identify in my literature review as existing within the structural foundations of social media. The structure of its ownership, profit margins, and production practices allowed for the striking students to use social media as a tool during their strike. Further, social media’s structural foundation of cultural capital had the ability to empower the students (Shirky, 2008; Dahlgren, 2010; Flanagan & Levine, 2010) as they organized and used social media. However, as is the case in most of today’s social movements, students’ actions are quite easily monitored, surveilled and tracked through social media (Deibert, 2008). Certainly, the striking students were not exempt from this form of surveillance during the time of the strike.
As one of the few student-run media, CUTV had a tremendous impact on the strike. For one, it gave the students a voice—a venue to express themselves, and in their own way. Elise Danielle Thorburn (2014) suggests that the Québec student strike of 2012 was different from other struggles partly due to their use of CUTV’s live streaming technology. By using CUTV live streaming, the students actively participated in the demonstrations while simultaneously “covering all major aspects of the strike” (Thorburn, 2014, p. 55). CUTV’s live streaming technology and footage also allowed for “the self-representation of strikers, for the subject formation of previously unconstituted activists, and for the creation of a new assemblage—the counter-hegemonic surveillance assemblage, that began to challenge and hold accountable the power of the State” (Thorburn, 2014, p. 55). Simply put, the use of live streaming allowed the students to surveil the police continually. In this context, while social media was used by the police to surveil the students through their activities posted on social media, reciprocally, the students were able to surveil the police through CUTV’s live streaming technology. Gauthier notes, “One bad thing about using social media is that because we were letting the students know and giving them all the information, the other side also becomes aware of the tactics that we were using. I’m not sure how to avoid that” (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Much like any other tool utilized by any movement, social media has both positive and negative attributes ascribed to it, particularly in terms of surveillance.

A delicate balance is always in play as long as students choose to use social media. On the one hand, using corporate platforms whose terms of service are problematic because of privacy issues and their ability to act as a surveillance device for the State and law enforcement. On the other, the use of social media by contemporary social movements is necessitated by one simple yet pragmatic reason: “that’s where the people are.” According to Boler & Phillips (2014), “Regardless of how one measures the roles and successes of social media in the context of activism, the uses of corporate-owned platforms and tools position activists within paradoxical entanglements between praxis and ideals” (p. 2). Aside from the tensions that exist within the structural foundations of social media, there exists very real frictions “that reveal discrepancies between the risks and promises of corporate-owned networks” (Boler & Phillips, 2014, p. 2). As Thorburn (2014) indicated, through the use of live-streaming and social media, CUTV was able to surveil the police throughout the duration of the strike. However, while social media provided
Gauthier and the others a space to share the information and organize, the police, the State, and the owners of platform could easily receive the same information as the students to use against them. Indeed, surveillance, in addition to the fact that social media is a capitalistic profit-driven entity, are factors as to why both Fuchs (2008, 2011, 2012) and van Dijck (2013) are a tad skeptical of social media positioned as an emancipatory tool.

**Empirical Evidence of the Students’ Use of Facebook and Twitter**

The following section details empirical results based on the Québec students’ political use of both Facebook and Twitter during the movement. With their consent, I analyzed four of my seven interviewees’ Facebook pages. Two out of seven did not have a Facebook page, one did not feel comfortable reactivating and giving me permission to access their closed Facebook account, while Bureau-Blouin’s page was ultimately unhelpful as this rendition was started soon after he was elected and took office. To gain a more complete understanding of how Facebook was utilized, I also analyzed the Facebook pages of the following organizations (see Table 2). Moreover, I also analyzed the Facebook pages of groups which were associated with the movement: Greve etudiante; Manif en cours; Printemps érable; and Solidarity with the Québec

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec</td>
<td>FECQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fédération Etudiante Universitaire du Québec</td>
<td>FEUQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante</td>
<td>ASSÉ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association facultaire étudiante des arts de l’UQAM</td>
<td>AFÉA-UQAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association Facultaire des Étudiantes de Langue et Communication</td>
<td>AFELC-UQAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Association Facultaire Étudiante des Sciences Humaines</td>
<td>AFESH-UQAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia Student Union</td>
<td>CSU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Table 2: A List of the Organizations Whose Facebook and Twitter Pages Were Analyzed**

student strike. I differentiated between posts made by individual student members and those made by the association themselves. I also made note of the number of shared posts, which included sharing information originated by media or other students, and sharing anything that was not the poster’s own original ideas in relation to the number of posts which contained “original content.” By original content, I am referring to the information that had not been
previously shared and first appeared as content originating from the poster or tweeter. Mostly, original content refers to statements and opinions made by the contributor. Any links, images, pictures, lyrics and memes do not fall under this category and was considered shared content.

With their consent I analyzed the Twitter content of the three interviewees who used this platform. I also analyzed the following organizations’ Twitter pages (see Table 2). Further, I also analyzed the following hashtags (#) that were “trending” or were very popular during the strike: #22mai; #casseroles; #csq2012; #ggi; #grevesocial; #loi78; #manifencours; #non1625. The overlap between some of the tweets and results is unavoidable because many of the tweets included multiple hashtags, which means that the same tweets would appear in more than one Twitter page. I believe that an analysis of the Twitter pages on their own, as well as in comparison to the Facebook pages by the various groups and individuals, provides some interesting perspectives into the Québec student strike of 2012 including English being the dominant language used by the students on both Facebook and Twitter, the students themselves engaging in citizen journalism, and the different ways in which the students resisted Bill 78.

In order to investigate how social media was actually used by the Québec students during the strike, I purposefully chose to focus on the period beginning on May 17, 2012 to May 23, 2012 to provide a fair and accurate representation of the students’ use of social media. This seven-day period was specifically chosen because it was arguably the “height” of the strike, as it included both the introduction and the passing of the emergency law, Bill 78, on May 18, 2012, as well as the celebration for the 100th day of the strike which took place on May 22, 2012. If Bill 78 was the catalyst, then the overwhelming response was evidenced on May 22nd as an estimated 250,000 to 400,000 individuals, including students and regular citizens, took to the streets to protest (Dolphin, 2012a; Gass, 2012a).

Upon further investigation, the students’ use of social media was somewhat surprising. From my interviewees, Provost posted once each on May 17, May 19, May 20 and May 21. All of the posts were her own, and three of them contained shared information from both La Presse and TVA Nouvelles (a French-speaking news source). The only post which contained original information was a general sarcastic statement pertaining to the strike and Jean Charest. During the same time period, Provost tweeted twice, once on May 20 and again on May 21. Both tweets show support for the strike. The May 20th tweet included the statement “Illégale, tu m’fais faire des bêtises dans les rue d’Montréal” which translates to “Illegal, you, do make mistakes on the
streets of Montreal” which is in reference to the students protesting. And accompanying the statement is a link to a French song on YouTube. On May 21, Provost tweeted, “Quand je pense à la #loi78, je pense à cette chanson” which translates to “When I think of Bill 78, I think of this song.” A link to Ludicris’ rap song, “Move Bitch,” which includes the lyrics “causin’ confusion, disturbin’ tha peace, it’s not an illusion, we runnin’ the streets” is found in the tweet, clearly referencing the demonstrations in response to Bill 78. However, what is most interesting about my interviewees’ use of Twitter is that of the three students that had Twitter accounts, only Provost’s two tweets were the only ones made during the time period. Fournier’s use of Twitter ceased completely between May 14, 2012 and Aug. 15, 2012. Subsequently, when questioned about the reason for the lack of tweets during this time, Fournier responded, “I was just crazy exhausted and busy!” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014). For the organizers of the movement, I am certain that Fournier’s response was a statement that most could relate to.

Of all the interviewees that used Facebook, Roger was the most active user with a total number of 15 posts found on her page. On May 17, Roger posted six times on her page. Three of them were original posts including “Charest, Duplessis: Même Combat” which translates to “Charest, Duplessis: An even matchup”; clearly an obvious derogatory reference comparing Jean Charest to former Québec premier Maurice Duplessis, who was in power when a student strike happened in 1958, and was found “personally liable for abuse of power” in 1959 (Boisvert, 2012). And on May 19, one of Roger’s posts read, “Juste pour le plaisir de Big Brother. Ta Loi78, je m'en fou et je compte pas la respecté. Merci SQ” which translates to “Just for Big Brother. In reference to Bill 78, I am crazy and I intend to not respect it. Thank you to SQ (Québec police force).” The remaining posts were either in support of the strike, against Bill 78, or just general posts that were in no way related to the strike.

Social Media Use by the Leadership Groups

Both the leadership groups and the variety of student associations investigated displayed different uses of social media. On their respective Facebook pages ASSÉ had 1,861 members listed, FECQ had 2,266 likes (meaning that 2,266 people “liked” their page), and FEUQ had 5,431 likes. For student associations that include hundreds of thousands of members, these numbers appear somewhat minimal and were surprising to me. Their Twitter pages revealed the
follow: ASSÉ had a total of 4,946 tweets, 258 photos/videos shared, were following 2,623 individuals and were being followed by 27,400 people; FECQ boasted 3,160 total tweets, were following 2,086 individuals and were being followed by 10,000 people. FEUQ had 2,882 tweets, were following 1,837 individuals and were being followed by 13,300 individuals. Although the numbers are greater than Facebook, they are still somewhat low given the number of actual members that each organization had. However, these numbers are not necessarily indicative of their “reach,” as anyone can anonymously log onto the Facebook and Twitter pages of all three organizations and gather information without having to become a member, like the page or become a follower of the group. This could very well be what happened during the strike as students who were involved in the movement could have gathered the information delivered by the three groups and kept “up-to-date” without officially joining, whether on Facebook or on Twitter.

As illustrated by Chart 1, Comparing ASSÉ, FECQ and FEUQ’s Use of Facebook and Twitter during the seven-day period between May 17 to May 23, ASSÉ appeared to favour the use of Facebook, and FECQ’s use of Facebook was minimal compared to their use of Twitter.

FEUQ’s use of both SNS was more equal, although there were more Facebook posts than tweets. On Facebook, ASSÉ had 63 posts, FECQ had 7 posts and FEUQ had 191 posts. FEUQ’s
dominant use of social media, as compared to the other groups is easily explained: FEUQ employed individuals whose jobs included disseminating information on social media. Meanwhile, Chart 2, An Analysis of Facebook Posts by Leadership Group, highlights that all 63 posts on ASSÉ’s page were made by individuals and none were from the group itself. In contrast, all seven of FECQ’s posts were group posts, indicating that they had come from FECQ’s executive committee and not its student members. FEUQ’s results showed a mixture of posts as 154 individual posts were made in addition to 37 posts by the group’s executive committee. Moreover, as illustrated by Chart 2, of the 63 posts found on ASSÉ’s Facebook page, 20 posts contained original content and 43 were shared information. FECQ had 2 original posts and 5 posts containing shared information. FEUQ had 86 original posts and 105 posts containing shared information. There were two equally interesting facts revealed by these numbers. The fact that all 63 posts on ASSÉ’s page were made by individuals and not the group itself is highly indicative of their ideals concerning horizontal leadership and direct democracy within the organization. In contrast, FECQ’s posts, all of which originated from the executive committee, are fairly representative of the group’s control over their page, which further supports Myriam’s assertion that FECQ is “not democratic” (Myriam, personal communication, February 19, 2014).
Secondarily, Facebook was not only used to distribute information about the organizations, the strike and the many events and demonstrations that took place, it also served as a space where students could voice their opinions about the strike.

All 63 posts on ASSÉ’s Facebook page were related to the strike or Bill 78. Examples of the student posts include Aurélie Paquet’s, whose post on May 18 is a plea for feminists in the movement to continue “resisting” and to attend the event that was created (the link has since been removed) as very few specifically feminist events were held in the previous three months: “Il ya eu si peu d'événement féministe ces trois derniers mois... Diffusez –le et joignez-vous à nous! Féministes, résistons!” This statement translates to “There have been so few women’s events these past three months... Spread (the word) – and join us! Feminists, resist!” And likewise on May 18, Camille Marceau posts a link to a petition created to oppose Bill 78, with the following caption included, “Solidairement, annulons la loi spéciale! Signez et partagez massivement!” This statement translates to, “Solidarity, cancel the special law! Sign and share massively.” Links to the petition were also found on FECQ’s Facebook page as well as its executive members sharing information about the strike and Bill 78. From FEUQ’s page, all the posts were also related to either the strike or Bill 78. For example, FEUQ’s executive committee posted, “Courchesne est incapable d'affirmer que le port du carré rouge est légal en fonction de la loi spéciale” which, when translated, basically advised its members that the Deputy Minister of Québec, Michelle Courchesne, was unable to confirm that wearing the red square was legal according to the special law. What struck me as very interesting is that all the posts in all three student Facebook pages were very much for the strike and against Bill 78. Additionally, there were no criticisms of the associations, unlike what was found in the other Facebook group pages that were analyzed.

As previously stated, ASSÉ’s use of Twitter from May 17 to May 23 was minimal: a total of five tweets were made by the organization, and all were made on May 22, the 100th day of the strike. In comparison, there were 91 tweets from FECQ and 136 tweets from FEUQ during the same 7-day period (Chart 3, An Analysis of Twitter Tweets by Leadership Group). From this sample, all 232 tweets originated from the three different groups; Twitter only shows the owner’s or group’s tweets on their respective homepages. Moreover, all five of ASSÉ’s tweets shared information while 49 of FECQ’s tweets contained original information and 42 shared
Chart 3: An Analysis of Twitter Tweets by Leadership Group

The chart illustrates the analysis of Twitter tweets by the Leadership Group from May 17 to May 23. It categorizes the tweets into individual and group tweets, along with original information and shared information.

Information. This is an example of a tweet from May 19: “150 000 personnes ont déjà signé la pétition contre la loi spéciale! Et vous? http://www.loi78.com #AssNat #polqc #ggi #non1625 #loi78.” Basically, this statement implores its members to sign the petition that was being circulated against Bill 78: “150,000 people have signed the petition against the special law. How about you?” And on May 22, FECQ tweeted the following: “La FECQ participera a la manifestation de la CLASSE sous la banniere de l’@Alliancesociale. RV au coin Maisonneuve et St-Urbain” which translates to “FECQ to participate in the CLASSE event under the banner of the @Alliancesociale. Taking place at Maisonneuve and St. Urbain.” On the same date, FEUQ’s page shows that all the tweets pertained to either the strike or Bill 78. However, a major difference is that some of the tweets were directed towards specific individuals. This signifies that FEUQ also used Twitter to respond to questions and remarks by its student members. For example, on May 19, the group tweeted “@Coralinh lla contestation sera depose mardi. Le plus il ya de signatures, mieux cest!” which is evidently a response to @Coralinh’s query: “The petition will be filed on Tuesday. The more signatures there are, the better it is!” Also on May 19, the group tweeted “@bibliofusion le @spvm vient dasser quil ne donnerait pas de contravention pour port de carre rouge” which is an assurance to @bibliofusion that the police will not be handing out tickets to those wearing red squares. On May 21, FEUQ re-tweeted Desjardins: “Demain manifestation 14h place des festivals: 100 jours de grève. #ggi #assnat
which, when translated, is a reminder that there would be a massive demonstration the following day to celebrate the 100th day of the strike beginning at 2 pm. And on May 23, many of the posts were specific to FEUQ’s president, Martine Desjardins’ commentary and responses to the government concerning Bill 78. One tweet included the following: “Nous avons fait plein de propositions lors de la dernière rencontre’ @M_Desjardins #ggi #polqc.” This tweet translates to “We made a lot of proposals at the last meeting,” and highlights Desjardins’ frustration with the government, as all of the proposals made during the last meeting with the student leaders were rebuffed by the provincial government.

My investigation of the students’ tactical use of social media has led me to conclude that all three of the student organizations, ASSÉ, FECQ and FEUQ used social media to a varying degree. While ASSÉ’s members seemed to favour using Facebook, FECQ’s executive committee was more inclined to use Twitter. Nonetheless, the tactical use of SNS by all three groups is quite evident. However, further investigation into the reasons behind why each group used Facebook and Twitter as they did would help answer a few lingering questions. Why were members of ASSÉ more prone to using Facebook? Why did FECQ’s executive committee favour the use of Twitter? Definitive responses from each group as to why they favoured one social media platform over the other should prove to be interesting. Carrying out this type of research on other social movements could, theoretically, provide helpful rationale as to why Facebook functions better for one group, while Twitter is more beneficial to another. Depending on a number of variables, perhaps one platform is more effective than the other and should be used more by particular social movements.

To be even more precise, ASSÉ’s use of Twitter was perhaps not fully captured by my results due to the creation of CLASSE. According to Katz (2015), CLASSE’s use of Twitter during the strike was quite substantial, but enacted by a “four-person dedicated social team.” During my research, I was unable to locate CLASSE’s group account on Twitter, which leads me to believe that members of the four-person social team may have used Twitter personas that were not necessarily directly linked to CLASSE as a group. This social media team, however, certainly utilized Twitter to the best of their abilities:

More than broadcasting the organization’s own messages and information over Twitter, the team of tweeters engaged in constant debate with users online, posting articles and multimedia content related to the movement and creating the hashtag #GGI (grève générale illimitée, or unlimited general strike) to serve as
the principal wire through which people could tap into the movement…[They were] also a steady source of up-to-the-minute information, from assembly vote results to live press conferences, updates on government negotiations, media articles, images, videos and more. (Katz, 2015, p. 77)

CLASSE’s use of Twitter was reflective of the strategy which was reminiscent of the success of “Web 2.0 mobilizations” effectively used during the Arab Spring, and by the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy Wall Street movement (Katz, 2015). CLASSE had identified “the enormous potential of social media’s unmediated sharing of content and information and its capacity to bestow autonomy to the grassroots of a movement” and fully took advantage of these characteristics in their tactical use of Twitter (Katz, 2015, p. 77). Effectively, CLASSE harnessed “Twitter’s potential in nourishing synergies with sympathizers by engaging with them and retweeting their posts, thereby favouring reciprocity and solidarity between them” (Katz, 2015, pp. 77-78). As Katz (2015) mentions, CLASSE borrowed largely from what they had learned from the Web 2.0 mobilizations. From organizing, to disseminating information, to addressing and countering erroneous reports or negative statements about them, CLASSE used social media in a similar fashion as how Gerbaudo, in Tweets and the Streets, (2012) describes the use of social media by three distinctly different social movements, the “Arab Spring,” the Spanish Indignados, and the Occupy Movement.

Social Media Use by Four Student Groups

Equally interesting are the results revealed from analyzing the use of SNS by the four university groups selected - AFÉA-UQAM; AFELC-UQAM; AFESH-UQAM; Concordia Student Union - as they indicate the different and varying degrees of social media usage of each group. During the dates of May 17 inclusive to May 23 the following was found: Facebook had six posts on the AFÉA-UQAM page, and all posts were by individuals who were sharing information; the AFELC-UQAM page had 26 posts, and 21 of these were by individuals and five were by the group, with 10 containing original information while the remaining 16 included shared information; eight posts were on the Concordia Student Union page, and six were posted by individuals and two by the group, and three were original posts and five contained shared information. AFESH-UQAM did not have any posts as their page was not created until May 4, 2012 and no posts appear on the page until June 28, 2012.
From these posts, I was able to locate two individuals who were explicit in voicing their displeasure with the strike and the movement, and both posts were found on the Concordia Student Union page. To only find two dissenting voices from the dozens of posts analyzed is quite significant. My results were indicative of the overwhelming support of the strike on social media. There were far more users that were vocally in support of the strike on social media than those that were against it. On May 20, an upset student posted the following: “Please stop sending out ridiculous emails using the CSU mailing list to try to promote the strike and the bills attempting to stop it. You are an association representing a student body that is largely against the strike. As for the Bill 78, I am under the impression you are misleading your readers upon its impact.” On May 23, another student was a bit more succinct: “GO TO SCHOOL AND BE EDUCATED.” That last post is an obvious negative response to the strike as the student chastises those on strike to instead go back to school in order to be educated. Meanwhile, the initial post is critical of Concordia’s student union for sending out e-mails promoting the strike to “a student body that is largely against the strike.” These two posts are unlike the majority of the Facebook posts that are in support of the strike.

Chart 4: Student Groups’ Use of Social Media

Unlike Katz’s (2015) report on CLASSE’s activeness on Twitter, my findings showed the opposite. The groups that I was analyzing did not use Twitter to the same extent as CLASSE. To
be frank, the Twitter presence of the groups that I analyzed were lacking, and their use of Twitter was minimal. On Twitter, AFÉA-UQAM’s page was created on May 28, 2012, which is after the period of analysis, AFELC-UQAM’s page had no activity from March 29, 2012 until June 14, 2012, while the Concordia Student Union’s page showed no activity from April 15, 2012 to August 13, 2012. Only AFESH-UQAM’s page revealed activity; six tweets during the period of analysis. All six tweets originated from the group, and while one tweet contained original information, the remaining five tweets included shared information. As an example, a tweet on May 22nd from AFESH-UQAM’s Twitter page read, “N ’oubliez pas votre assemblée générale demain! Il sera notamment question de la loi spéciale!” which was a notice to the student members of the general meeting that was being held the next day, in which Bill 78 would be addressed. Upon further analysis, the results of the four groups’ use of social media were quite surprising. Given the number of members each group had, and despite each group’s vocal and clear support for the strike, the actual use of Facebook and Twitter by the four groups during the busiest period of the strike was minimal at best (Chart 4, Student Groups’ Use of Social Media).

Social Media Use by Four Random Facebook Groups

In addition to the formal student organizations and student groups, I also analyzed four random Facebook groups that were selected on the basis of incorporating popular words that resonated throughout the course of the student strike. The following findings reveal that during the period of analysis, the actual number of posts on Facebook were not plentiful, although one page included over 3,000 members. The four Facebook groups analyzed were Grève étudiante (student strike), Manif en cours (demonstration in the streets), Printemps Érable (maple spring), and Solidarity with the Quebec student strike. Grève étudiante provided no information about its “friends.” There were four individual posts between May 17 and May 23, with two being original and the other two containing shared information. The Manif en cours Facebook page, which was created on May 18, also provided no information about its friends. There were five group posts on May 18 including one post that was original and four that shared information. There were three original group posts on May 19 and one original group post on May 22. There were no posts on the 20th, 21st or 23rd of May. Printemps Érable’s page contained no posts on the designated days as it was created on August 6, 2012. The Solidarity with the Quebec Student Strike page, which was created by an activist from Toronto, James Clark, boasted 3,046
members. Between May 17 to May 23, 29 individuals posted on the page, with three original posts while the other 26 posts shared information. As an example to show the type of posts on the page, on May 17th, a student posted the following: “World’s elite gather in Montreal from June 11-14: let the ‘Maple Spring’ meet and greet them” with an accompanying link to the Facebook page which was created to organize a demonstration for this event. And on May 20th, a member of the group posted a link to the Socialist Worker of Canada page which included an article by Jessica Squires entitled “Solidarity against Quebec’s anti-protest bludgeon law.” These two posts typified the information that was shared amongst this group. Another point worth noting is that almost all of the posts on the page contained only English text, which was highly unrepresentative of the diversity of students involved in the movement.

Although it was not one of the Facebook groups that was originally chosen for analysis, the page named “News from the 2012 Quebec general strike” is worth mentioning. Created by an anonymous individual, this page attempted to chronicle the strike by posting links to both French and English daily news reports and images of the events, as well as summarizing some news.
reports. For instance, on May 22, numerous images taken at the 100-day march was posted on the page (Screenshot 2, News From the 2012 Quebec Student General Strike). One of the images was shared 228 times (Screenshot 2, News From the 2012 Quebec Student General Strike). On May 23, a post quoting Noam Chomsky’s thoughts on the importance of utilizing sustained pressure in a movement was made (Screenshot 3, News From the 2012 Quebec Student General Strike2). On the same day, a post (Screenshot 3, News From the 2012 Quebec Student General Strike2) explaining the use of the casseroles with a picture of protesters banging their pots, pans and casseroles taken at the Villeray Montreal neighbourhood was posted. Although all of the posts originated from one individual who created the Facebook page, the number of likes and shares of the person’s posts shows that other individuals had, at least, read the posts and had engaged with the information presented to them in a variety of ways. I believe that these results are more indicative of the students’ use of Facebook during the strike, as compared to the results gathered from the student groups AFÉA-UQAM, AFESH-UQAM, AFELC-UQAM, and the Concordia Student Union.
Social Media Use through Popular Twitter Hashtags (#)

Locating information on how the students used Twitter between May 17 to May 23 was much simpler because of its layout. Its “hashtags” (or #) allowed me to locate and analyze tweets that were specific to the movement. As shown by the hashtags of tweets sampled, most of the

![Number of Tweets by Hashtag](chart5.png)

**Chart 5: Number of Tweets by Hashtag**

tweets created with the accompanying hashtags did pertain to the movement in some way. Hashtags allow the creator of the tweet to determine how the tweet will be “categorized.” It also helps in terms of “trending” as hashtags that are trending contain the most popular tweets and, thus, are the most read in the “Twitterverse.” For my purposes, I once again focused on the most commonly used words and phrases during the strike. Thus, the Twitter hashtags that I analyzed were the following: #22mai; #casseroles; #loi78; #non1625; #ggi; #manifencours (Chart 5, Number of Tweets by Hashtag). By focusing on these hashtags, I was able to gather and analyze thousands of tweets by the Québec students at the height of the strike. However, Twitter did have its own set of unique challenges, as previously commented on in the Methods chapter\(^\text{17}\). When collecting data on previous tweets, the hashtags were compiled as one set and were displayed

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\(^{17}\) There is an extensive discussion regarding some of the challenges encountered when data mining both Facebook and Twitter while using the NVivo software.
from the most recent tweet to the oldest. Because #ggi and # manifencours had thousands of
tweets that were more recent than those posted between May 17 to May 23, I was unable to
access information between May 17 to May 19, and only some of the tweets made on May 20
were accessible. When attempting to retrieve the older tweets, my browsers and computer were
unable to go as far back as May 17 to May 19, as either the browser or the computer continually
crashed, as previously discussed. The tweets that I did manage to gather between May 21 to May
23 that included one or both of the hashtags certainly displayed a multitude of evidence of the
use of SNS by the Québec students. These tweets also give ample evidence to the act of
produsage (Bruns, 2008), wherein one creates their own content while creating and shaping their
own media and network.

#22mai

A search for tweets that included #22mai between May 17 to May 23 resulted in 83
tweets that met this criteria (Chart 5, Number of Tweets by Hashtag). There were no tweets on
either May 17 or 18. The majority of the tweets, 65 of them, were made on May 22nd, and the
majority of the tweets were in relation to the march celebrating the 100th day of the strike. For
example, Amy Luft @amyluft tweets, “I live a block west of St. Denis – loud sound of drums
and cheers suddenly. Lots of horns honking (in support, I think?) #22mai #ggi.” Another comes
from Ethan Cox @EthanCoxMtl, who at the time was the Québec Bureau Chief of independent
news outlet Rabble.ca, and was one of many journalists who used Twitter throughout the strike:
“I’ve spoken to half a dozen journos who agree, march was around 500k. Largest expression of
civil disobedience in cdn history! #ggi #22mai.” But it was not just the students nor supporters of
the movement who used Twitter, as evidenced by this tweet from the Montreal police @SPVM:
“La #manifencours arrive at Parc Émilie-Gamel in. #22mai.” I believe that the police use of
Twitter was done for two reasons: it allowed them to relay information to regular citizens who
were attempting to avoid the demonstrations; and it gave the students notice that the police were
surveilling their use of Twitter and were aware of their actions.

#casseroles

The casserole hashtag was not nearly as popular as the others (Chart 5, Number of
Tweets by Hashtag). No tweets with this hashtag were made between May 17 to May 20. Only
one individual tweet was made on May 21, six individual tweets made on May 22, and 11 tweets
in total, 10 individual and one group tweet, were made on May 23. Of these, seven contained original information while 11 shared information. Jonathan Sterne @jonathansterne, a professor at McGill University who intently followed the strike throughout tweeted: “Spontaneous pots & pans demo with noisy neighbours -- over 200 ppl blocking traffic @ St-Denis and Jarry #casserol #loi78 #ggi.” As demonstrated by Sterne’s tweet, many such tweets contained more than one hashtag, which more than likely resulted in even more people accessing said tweets. Moreover, Sterne’s tweet was indicative of the growing support for the strike and the students from regular citizens. News sources, both corporate-owned and independent (or alternative), similarly used Twitter. Here is an example from CUTV Montreal @CUTVMontreal: “@CUTVnews st-Denis shut down casseroles on all windows! #Casseroles #loi78 #manifencours.” Using Twitter was a tactic that was effectively used by all media. It allowed them to provide up-to-date news for their audience, as well as enabled them to track the movements of the students and keep abreast of their plans.

#loi78

The #loi78, which was a direct reference to Bill 78, proved much busier and was used more than the previous two hashtags (Chart 5, Number of Tweets by Hashtag). On May 17, there were a total of 118 tweets, 97 from individuals and 11 from groups, with 92 tweets containing original information and 16 including shared information. The results from May 18 showed that there were a total of 125 tweets, 105 from individuals and 20 from groups, with 70 containing original information and 55 including shared information. The next five days provided relatively similar results: May 19 had 102 tweets, 84 individual and 18 group, 51 original and 51 shared; May 20 had 89 tweets, 78 individual and 11 group, 42 original and 47 shared; May 21 had 112 tweets, 101 individual and 11 group, 55 original and 57 shared; 136 tweets were found on May 22, with 112 from individuals and 24 from groups, and 72 original and 64 shared; May 23 had 102 tweets, with 70 individual and 32 groups, and 44 original and 58 shared. Without a doubt, Bill 78 became a rallying point for the movement.

However, not all tweets found with #loi78 were in support of the movement as there were a few that were critical of the students. For example, on May 17, Montreal Taxpayers@MTLTax tweeted: “Did anyone even read the law? Def not removing any freedoms. Read before you tweet people. #loi78 #PL78.” From Montreal Taxpayers’ perspective, the law was acceptable insofar
as it did not impinge upon anyone’s freedoms, which is in direct contradiction to how the majority of the students and their supporters perceived the law. Also, Gino @Habs_Junkie, on May 19 tweets: “Nice to hear most people love the new #PL78 #loi78. The ones who don’t like it haven’t started paying taxes yet so who cares what they think.” Without a doubt, Gino’s tone is condescending, which implies his opposition to the student strikers. And on May 23, Max Harrold @MHarrold CTV, a CTV news reporter, whose tweets throughout the strike were mostly sympathetic towards the Montreal police tweeted the following: “Police showing TV news rocks that were thrown at them, hence the mass roundup taking place near St. Denis and Sherbrooke #ggi #loi78.” Effectively, Harrold’s tweet explains that since the police were victims of rocks being thrown at them, they were merely responding appropriately by “rounding up” the protesters. He may not have been a supporter of the police force, but Harrold’s tweets implicitly promoted a conservative viewpoint throughout the strike.

The majority of the tweets found with this hashtag either provided information about Bill 78 or explicitly condemned the law as being undemocratic and illegal. For example, on May 17, the opposition party, Parti Québécois, were one of the first to condemn the law with the following tweet: “C’est une loi ignoble. Je ne peux pas imaginer que le gouvernement peut adopter une tel le loi. #PaulineMarois #assnat #loi78 ^JD.” Translated, the tweet read “This is a despicable act. I cannot imagine that the government would adopt such a law.” Other tweets attempted to distribute information about the law itself. Ludovic Leclerc @ludoleclerc89 tweeted: “La ministre pourra donner des amendes à tous ceux qui manifestent et retirer la cotisation des étudiants aux asso #Libéraux Corrompus #loi78” which translates to “The Minister may give fines to those who protest and stop funding student associations.” Similarly, Nathaëlle Roy @GAdy_Cookies warned protesters that the red square had been made illegal: “Update on #loi78 #PL78, wearing the "red square" will be punished by law, you WILL be given a fine.” Others, like the Parti Québécois, were critical of Bill 78. Angus Johnston @studentactivism tweeted: “Quebec’s Draconian anti-protest law passes 68-48. Fasten your seatbelts. link #loi78.” Once again, regular citizens were just as critical of the law as observed with Craig Goodman RE/MAX @MistrGoodman’s tweet: “did you know that Twitter falls under #loi78 and tweets can be considered as incentive to protest.. Stand up!!” Not only is Goodman critical of the law, but he even implores people to “stand up” – an implicit request to join the students in their protest. And perhaps one of my favourite tweets during the strike came from
Russell Jones @DR_JONES_MCGILL, a physiology professor at McGill University who tweeted the following: “Is this about tuition anymore? RT Photo: Arcade Fire joue à Saturday Night Live avec Mick Jagger et porte le carré rouge #ggi #loi78.” Jones’ tweet simultaneously questions Bill 78, comments on the movement, and shares a report that popular Montreal band, Arcade Fire, while playing with Mick Jagger on Saturday Night Live showed their support for the students by wearing red squares during both of their performances.

#non1625

Another popular hashtag used by the students during the strike was #non1625 (Chart 5, Number of Tweets by Hashtag). “Non 1625” is in direct reference to the proposed tuition hike of $1,625. An analysis of this hashtag revealed the following: there were 139 tweets recorded on May 17, 179 tweets on May 18, 73 tweets on May 19, 64 tweets on May 20, 93 tweets on May 21, and 139 tweets on May 22. For some reason, there were no tweets associated with the hashtag on May 23. My analysis also showed that there were far more individual tweets than group ones, 525 versus 162, and far less tweets containing original content (146) than tweets that shared existing information (541). As with the other hashtags, I did find a sole dissenting voice amongst the many supporters as Gregory Alan Elliot @greg_a_elliott tweets, “How stupid students must be to think it is smart to get a criminal record. #GGI #polQC #assnat #QMI #EdQc #ggi #non1625 #FEUQ #FECQ #CLASSE.” The implication of Elliott’s tweet is that he believes that students should not be out protesting, and instead accept the proposed hike, thus avoiding the possibility of being arrested and charged criminally.

However, like the other hashtags used, most of the tweets supported the movement and the strike. For one, on May 17, Olivier Lacelle @olilacelle’s tweet encouraged the students to partake in the 100th day May 22nd demonstration: “Nous devons battre un record le mardi 22 mai. Rendez-vous à la Place des Festivals à partir de midi. #manifestcours #ggi #non1625 #polqc” which translates to “We need to break a record on Tuesday, May 22. Meet at la Place des Festivals to leave at noon.” On May 18, Marie-Eve Bujold @MarieEveBujold was more direct with her tweet: “CONTESTONS LA LOI78 http://www.loi78.com Signez ici. #fecq #feuq #classe # polqc #assnat #non1625 #GG1.” Bujold’s tweet was a demand to fight against Bill 78, to sign a petition denouncing the bill, and included a link to a website that created the petition that people were signing electronically as a way to show their displeasure with the new law that
was recently introduced. And this tweet, from Mario Beauvais @mariosmq, a tweet that he sent several times read, “Là où il n’y a le choix qu’entre lâcheté et violence, je conseillerai la violence. de Gandhi #ggi #non1625” which translates to “Where there is a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence”; a quote that he attributes to Gandhi. Of course, most of the tweets were specific to the strike.

#ggi

The hashtag #ggi, which stood for grève générale illimitée, or unlimited general strike, was one of the most popular hashtags during the strike. As previously stated, because of the sheer volume of tweets associated with this hashtag, I was unable to gather tweets that were tweeted earlier than May 21. However, despite this fact, I was still able to analyze 813 tweets spanning the three days of May 21 to May 23. The numerous tweets made on these days are a clear indication of how much and how often Twitter was used by those involved in the movement during this time. With this many number of tweets analyzed, there were certainly ones that opposed the strike, or at least viewed the strike negatively. On May 20, Vanessa LeClair @VanessaLeClair tweeted her displeasure with the strike: “I'm watching the news and don't recognize my own city. People are going insane. I can't stand this never ending strike #GGI.” And on May 23, Global TV journalist Paola Samuel @PaolaSamuel reiterates the hotel industry’s concern over the possible long-lasting effects that the strike will have on the city: “Hotel industry expressing concern over negative image #Montreal is getting as a tourist destination after 14 weeks of demos. #ggi #YUL.” On May 23 as well, the Montreal police @SPVM used Twitter to announce that demonstrations were considered illegal unless they followed certain protocol: “#Manifencours has been declared illegal (City by law P-6). People can march if they follow the instructions of the field commander. #GGI.” Using Twitter to make the announcement was a good tactic employed by the police. After all, the information would spread rapidly and would reach the majority of those involved in the strike.

Many of the tweets that used #ggi, however, were in full support of the students and against Bill 78. For example, on May 21, Chris Zacchia @ZacchiaMachine voiced his support: “I am not a student. I am one of those normal stiffs getting terribly inconvenienced. I sppt the students 100% - Bonne courage mes amis! #ggi.” But on May 22nd, the majority of the tweets focused on the 100th day demonstration. Christopher Curtis @titocurtis tweeted his opinion of
the crowd: “Tough to overstate how diverse and huge this crowd is. All ages, walks of life seem to be represented #ggi #manifencours.” Some news sources, such as CTV Montreal @CTVMontreal, focused their attention on the sheer numbers involved in the demonstration: “A photo from earlier today showing the size of the crowd in Place des Festivals. #ggi #manifencours link.” While other news reports, such as Rabble.ca @rabbleca, attempted to affix a number to the massive crowd of protesters: “More than 400,000 people marching against #Loi78 in Montreal right now – largest protest in Canadian history. #ggi #cdnpoli.” And perhaps some of the most humorous tweets that I found originated from lawyers who had provided their information in case of arrest: “RT@kiimeex core: #manifencours Avoc at Denis Poitras: 514-289-9995, expert en arrestations. RT SVP #ggi.” As one can see, the tweets that originated from lawyers were then re-tweeted by a number of individuals who wanted to share the information, just in case anyone needed it.

#manifencours

Manifencours translated into English means demonstrations in the streets. Lagging slightly behind #ggi in terms of number of tweets, the hashtag #manifencours was nevertheless wildly popular during the Québec student strike. As previously stated the relevant data gathered for this particular hashtag begins on May 21 and ends on May 23. Unfortunately, like #ggi, I was unable to access the data prior to these dates. However, I was still able to analyze a total of 506 tweets that were tweeted between May 21 to May 23 (Chart 5, Number of Tweets by Hashtag), which gives a fair indication of the multitude of tweets that included #manifencours.

Like many of the other hashtags, the tweets that contained #manifencours were mostly in favour of the students and the strike. But not only were they in support of the strike, but many tweets were specifically against the Montreal police. For example, on May 20, Pickle Monger @picklemonger tweeted, “Hey people in the bars, sitting and drinking, and booing at police when they pass by, great contribution to the cause. #manifencours.” Although his remark may have been somewhat “tongue-in-cheek” and made light of the situation, the fact that he reported people at bars booing the police shows that not only were the patrons’ dissatisfied with the police force, but that they also supported the students. Many more tweets on that day were sent from individuals partaking in the marches. In many instances, individuals tweeted what they felt was police brutality.
Maximilian Forte @1D4TW tweeted witnessing police officers assaulting members of CUTV: “BAD!!! @SPVM pigs are roughing up @CUTV, loud bangs in the background (link) #ggi #manifencours.” Many other tweets included photographs as people attempted to chronicle the events and spread the information. For example, Justin Giovanneti @justinCgio tweeted a picture of an injured protester (Screenshot 4, Tweets Regarding an Injured Protester): “Why the zipcuffs? MT @EthanCcox Mtl: Seriously injured protester hit in the face with a rubber bullet. link #ggi #manifencours.” In contrast, on May 22, 2012, Tanya McGinnity @TanMcG tweeted a much better interaction between the police’s mediation team and the protesters (Screenshot 5, The Police): “I LOVE this….via@AnnickVigeant The @SPVM mediation team. #manifencours pic.twitter.com/rKoniuzN.” For the most part, though, justified or not, the Montreal police were often portrayed in a negative fashion.

One such officer, Stéfanie Trudeau, was filmed pepper-spraying peaceful protesters. With the help of Twitter, her actions were instantaneously broadcast to many. For example, J-S Poupart @jspoupart tweeted on May 21, “@AnonyOps Montreal police officer, badge #728
Screenshot 5: The Police

spraying students for no valid reason.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W05MoKEEYAk&feature=yout ube_gdat a_pl ayer… #ggi
#manifencours.” Included in Poupart’s tweet is a link to the video which was posted on

YouTube. Carlito @carlitoguevara, also on May 21st, urged people to make Trudeau famous and

also provided a link to the video: “MAKE #constable728 famous! #manifencours

http://youtube.com/watch?v=W05MoKEEYAk …” Likewise, P4nd0r4 @P4nd0r4, on May 21,
tweeted: “Constable 728: A Star is Born: http://youtu.be/W05MoKEEYAk via @youtube Cop
pepper sprays a peaceful crowd #manifencours.” Many people were vocal in their desire to have

Constable 728 charged with assault. Trudeau was eventually charged with assault; however, it

was not for pepper-spraying the protesters, but for a completely different incident, as she was

found to have used excessive force in arresting some residents of an apartment building on


Media Reporting via Twitter

As a way to capitalize on its immediacy and ever-increasing number of subscribers, various
media organizations have now incorporated the use of Twitter as one of the primary ways to
disseminate news stories to the public. During the Québec student strike, the use of
Screenshot 6: #manifencours

Twitter by the news media was immense. As shown by the following screenshot (Screenshot 6, #manifencours), a number of media personnel were present during the demonstrations and utilized Twitter to send out news and/or information instantaneously. This is indicative of Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) assertion that citizen journalist created media feeds “are often picked up as news sources by conventional journalism organizations” (p. 742). In this particular screenshot, out of eight tweets in total, six were tweeted by news personnel or news groups, while only two tweets were made by individuals. Catherine Sherriffs @CSherrifsCTV tweeted that the police were blocking a bridge: “Police blocking the Jacques-Cartier bridge.
@CTVMontreal #ggi #manifencours.” Ethan Cox @EthanCoxMtl credits CUTV for their work and asks for donations: “Again, huge credit to the @CTVMontreal team for fearlessly providing a window into the protests. If you can, donate! #loi78 #manifencours.” The Montreal Gazette @mtlgazette tweeted something similar to Sherriffs’ tweet: “Police report protesters trying to block Jacques Cartier Bridge. They’ve declared the protest illegal. #manifencours #ggi.” Leftnews @leftnewsorg re-tweeted @mylesdolphin: “RT @mylesdolphin PPL walking by bridge. Not too many stopping. Did not see ppl engage w/ cops. Still: declared illegal. #ggi #manifencours.” The Montreal Gazette @mtlgazette tweeted again, a clarification: “To clarify: SQ officers blocked access to the bridge to keep protesters off, which also blocks traffic. #manifencours #ggi.” And the Gazette @mtlgazette tweeted a quote from the police: “Protest is ‘peaceful and calm, therefore tolerated’ says @SPVM #manifencours #ggi.”

As I’ve illustrated by these examples, the majority of news outlets in Montreal also used Twitter as a way to diffuse their information instantaneously. Aside from Cox and Sherriff, other notable journalists who tweeted several times during between May 21 to May 23 were David Widginton (independent mobile journalist), Steve Faguy (Montreal Gazette), Roberto Rocha (Montreal Gazette), Cindy Sherwin (CTV), and Derrick O’Keefe (Rabble.ca). Not only did the students use Twitter effectively as a tactic, but one can argue that corporate-owned media and alternative media similarly used Twitter successfully during the Québec student strike. The media created and tweeted their own stories, but as some of these examples show, they also re-tweeted or tweeted very similar narratives that were created by the students on strike.

**Conclusion**

My findings reveal that just as the entire movement was complex, so was the tactical use of social media. Without a doubt, social media was used in many different ways during the strike. Not only did the organizations and the students use it to coordinate and mobilize individuals, but students also used social media to create their own stories and report on the events themselves. The latter is direct evidence of what Bruns (2008) calls *produsage*, the using while creating and shaping one’s own media and network or “user-led content creation” (p. 2). In this sense, social media afforded the students a medium and the space to create and tell their own stories.

Despite the evidence, the majority of those that I interviewed downplayed the overall importance of social media for the movement. When questioned, all of them professed a belief
that the movement would still have been successful even without the use of social media. Perhaps this speaks to the ubiquity of social media today. Although the students claimed that they could have been successful without social media, their actions and results prove otherwise. For one, Gauthier believes that “the movement could have been successful without social media,” but not without certain challenges (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Gauthier posits, “It would have been both harder and easier. One bad thing about using social media is that because we were letting the students know and giving them all the information, the other side also becomes aware of the tactics that we were using. I’m not sure how to avoid that” (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Gauthier’s concern over surveillance and providing information to the opposition is one that is shared by many (Cohen, 2008; Deibert, 2008; van Dijck, 2013). Gauthier does raise an important point; although the use of social media allows organizations quick and easy access to their membership, they are also easily monitored by opposition forces. As Gauthier explained, currently, there is no way to avoid being surveilled by the police and the State when using social media (L. Gauthier, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Again, this situation merely amplifies “the paradoxical entanglements between praxis and ideals” of using “the master’s tools” (Boler & Phillips, 2014). By using social media, activists have no choice but to expose themselves to privacy concerns, which includes surveillance.

Provost appears to be somewhat neutral in her stance regarding social media’s importance, stating that, “Social media is a good support for a big mobilization, and to let people express more grass roots creativity, and grass roots events, but at the bottom line, you need structure. Without social media, you can achieve a lot of things too, but it’s just different” (A-M. Provost, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Fournier does not believe that a campaign using strictly social media would work. Instead, in their terms, “why the strike was powerful was because it created enormous political and economic pressure” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014). Further, Fournier makes the following claim: “Online activism is a tool. It’s a place. It’s not like a hammer, it’s like a place. I don’t want to use the word tool like that….like a venue, maybe that’s a better way of putting it. But it’s not enough because you don’t put the kind of pressure that makes government change its mind. I don’t even really think that they’re worried about voters, to be honest with you…..” (M. Fournier, personal communication, January 31, 2014). Bureau-Blouin uses the analogy that since previous
movements in the past have been successful without the use of social media, it stands to reason that a movement today could similarly achieve success without the use of social media. However, he is quick to point out that they did use social media effectively: “I think that the students’ use of social media was really good. I think that it would have been difficult to use it more. I think the way of understanding the use of social media gave the students an advantage over the government” (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014). It is interesting to note that Bureau-Blouin gave this interview after having won his riding and speaking as a politician who was involved in the student movement just a few months ago. He quickly follows the previous claim with this statement: “Just now, you’ll see that the government is using it more, interacting with people to keep them informed of what is going on. So I think that it was a big lesson for the government. The students were really better than the government in their use of social media” (L. Bureau-Blouin, personal communication, January 20, 2014). As he alludes to, their use of social media gave the students a distinct advantage over the Liberal government. It also stands to reason that this advantage helped the students during the course of the strike.

Finally, although both French and English were used by the students on Facebook and Twitter, when analyzing the students’ use of social media, it became evident that English was the dominant language used on both social network sites. There were significantly more Facebook posts and Twitter tweets in English than those in French. What is interesting is that even with the hashtags that were created on Twitter, #22mai, #casseroles, #loi78 (Bill 78), #non1625, #ggi (grève générale illimitée), and #manifencours (strike in session), which were all in French, there were still more English tweets than ones made in French that used the hashtags. Perhaps a reason for this is that a great number of French bilingual students chose to tweet in English. Certainly, there were far more French-speaking students who voted to strike as compared to their English-speaking counterparts (Bertolino et al, 2013). Another possible reason for this phenomenon could be simply because Facebook and Twitter are both English-based platforms. At any rate, the fact that English was used more than French is, ultimately, inconsequential. What is important, however, is that both English-speaking and French-speaking students alike used social media as an effective tactic alongside and to supplement other tactics during the Québec student strike of 2012.
Chapter 9 – How the Students Were Portrayed by the Media

At first the mass media disregarded the movement; then media discovered the movement; the movement cooperated with media; media presented the movement in patterned ways; the quality and slant of these patterns changed; different parts of the movement responded in different ways; elements of the State intervened to shape this coverage.


The main objective of this chapter is to draw a comparison between the various media portrayals of the Québec students involved in the strike of 2012. A comparison of the media portrayal of the Québec students may provide an insight into a universal practice of how various media tend to report on social unrest and their participants. As Gitlin (1980) indicates throughout *The Whole World is Watching*, the public’s portrait of the student group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in the Sixties, as derived from reporting by corporate-owned media was both inaccurate and fictitious; student members of SDS were continually portrayed negatively by corporate-owned media. In a similar way, the striking students were portrayed negatively in English-language corporate-owned media. There is no greater evidence of this perceived transgression than the eventual creation of the website known as Quebec Protest: Translating the printemps érable, which can be found at http://translatingtheprintempserable.tumblr.com. The origins and objectives of this site was to “balance the English media's extremely poor coverage of the student conflict in Québec by translating media that has been published in French into English” (Quebec protest, 2012). This chapter will analyze and articulate the many ways in which the Québec students were portrayed by various media outlets through the use of textual analysis.

Just as one tends to find differing biases embedded within different forms of media as well as media outlets, the Québec students involved in the strike were most definitely depicted in a variety of ways, depending on the media one was to look at. While some media were much more sympathetic to the students’ cause, others were somewhat heavy-handed in their denouncement of the students. Obviously, there was a noticeable difference between the reports produced by corporate-owned media when compared to those shown by student-run media. Also, there was a noticeable difference between the English-language and the French-language media. To simplify things, one could say that the striking students were championed by student-run
media, revered by the majority of both French-language media and independent media, and chastised and demonized by most English-language and corporate-owned media. In short, this chapter seeks to prove the historically negative portrayal of young activists by corporate-owned media by analyzing various reports on the striking students by a number of different media, and providing concrete results regarding the biases that were revealed.

**Media Portrayal of the Québec Students on Strike**

Watching and reading reports on the Québec student strike could have been a confusing exercise if one had gathered their information from different media. Depending on who was doing the reporting, the students were either portrayed as heroes or as villains. Of all the various media analyzed, ranging from English-language corporate-owned media such as CBC and the National Post to independent English-language media such as Rabble.ca to student-run media such as CUTV and The McGill Daily, it appears that the National Post’s reports were the most scathing and biased against the students and the strike. The National Post is a nationally-distributed conservative-leaning Toronto-based newspaper that publishes daily and is also accessible online. Founded in 1988 by conservative Conrad Black, it is now owned by Postmedia Network Inc., remains as Canada’s most popular conservative newspaper, and is self-described and promoted as Canada’s “trusted source for national news, financial news, world news, blogging, twitter, tweets, opinion, vodcast, podcast, commentary, entertainment and sports news” on their website, www.nationalpost.com.

**Reports by English-Language Corporate-Owned Media**

On May 17, 2012, reporters Alexander Panetta and Nelson Wyatt wrote an article entitled, “122 Quebec protesters arrested in raucous night before proposed student-strike breaking legislation.” The article opens with the following statement: “A bid to restore order in restive Quebec was met with streets clogged with thousands of protesters, a multitude of flying projectiles, several smashed windows, and blasts of pepper spray leading to 122 arrests” (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012). Although the report was written by two Canadian Press (CP) writers, the article’s tenor is in line with the conservative paper’s viewpoints. The phrase “a bid to restore order in restive Quebec” (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012), suggests that Québec is a typically quiet and peaceful province that has been turned into a site of chaos because of the student strike. They describe “streets clogged with thousands of protesters, a multitude of flying projectiles, several
smashed windows, and blasts of pepper spray leading to 122 arrests” (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012). These claims suggest that the streets are clogged or “littered” with thousands of protesters, the protesters are violent, throwing things and smashing windows, and the police have no recourse but to arrest and pepper spray them as a way to maintain order. The article continues by using pejorative words and terms that are injurious to the students’ reputation and casts the movement in a negative light. “Raucous protests,” “potential violence,” “the mob,” “angry passersbys,” and “tumult in Quebec” are used to describe the students and the situation (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012). The article also contains the following statement: “Authorities reported 122 arrests, three injured police officers and also some injured protesters” (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012). By stressing the 122 arrests alongside the “three injured officers,” the writers have legitimized the arrests by referencing the officers, and intimating that the students became violent (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012). And by not providing the actual number of protesters that were injured, the writers are effectively minimizing this point, privileging the officers’ injuries over those of the students (Panetta & Wyatt, 2012).

A National Post op-ed worth noting is one that was written by Chris Selley on May 26, 2012. In the piece, Selley (2012) warns “all Canadian politicians and voters” that the Québec student protest and the violent tactics that were employed should not lead to “opening talks for fear that “other minority groups might pursue similar tactics.” Selley (2012) continues: “Too great a sense of entitlement, too great a dependence on government (the so-called ‘Quebec model’), too many Marxist poli-sci professors, something in the water – whatever it is, it is exclusive to one of our founding peoples.” Selley (2012) is adamant that this type of behaviour, while symptomatic of Québec, should not be tolerated by the rest of the country. He continues to warn against the impending violence and gestures towards the students’ “irrational demands” (Selley, 2012). He even states that the Québec student leaders’ actions are “anti-democratic” (Selley, 2012). Through an analysis of Selley’s choice of words, it is apparent that he favours a conservative perspective. The use of phrases such as “sense of entitlement,” “Marxist poli-sci professors,” and “collapse in government authority” are reflective of his use of common stereotypes as well as hyperbole, in an attempt to sway the readers to his point of view. Not only does Selley’s article contain an expressed conservative bias, it is also explicitly highly negative of the students and the strike.
Meanwhile, Graeme Hamilton’s May 25th article is equally scathing of the students, albeit written in a more lighthearted manner. Hamilton (2012b) acknowledges that the students on strike have a “playful side” too, but does lament that the protests “often end with riot police and pepper spray.” Further, he explains that “the student’s refusal to accept the government’s modest tuition fee hikes - $325 a year over five years – has plunged the province into a crisis” (Hamilton, 2012b). Not only is he in favour of the hike, what he terms as “modest,” but also he does not address nor explain the students’ reasons for rejecting the increase in tuition fees (Hamilton, 2012b). And although the students are given the space to voice their opinions (at the end of the piece), Hamilton is nonetheless on the side of officials “who are worried about the fast-approaching tourist season” because of the daily protests (Hamilton, 2012b). Clearly, Hamilton’s article, alongside the previous two National Post articles, demonstrate an explicit mindset that is reflective of the newspaper’s own conservative point of view.

Historically, The Globe & Mail, another nationally distributed Canadian newspaper has displayed a similar traditional conservative viewpoint as that of the National Post. Founded in 1936 when “George McCullagh united two influential and historically important dailies, The Globe and Mail and The Empire,…it quickly became required reading for the educated and business community in Toronto and the surrounding countryside through a shrewd mixture of news, features, forceful editorials, and technological innovation” (Potter et al., 2009c). Potter et al. (2009c) state that the newspaper employs staff reporters based in a number of Canadian cities as well as foreign bureaus “located in London, Moscow, Beijing, Rome, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, New Delhi, New York and Washington.” Moreover, they posit that The Globe and Mail has “an average readership of one million on any given day,” despite not publishing on Sundays, which “puts the newspaper among the country’s most popular dailies” (Potter et al., 2009c).

Whether or not it can be attributed to the sheer number of articles relating to the Québec student strike that it published, as I analyzed 53 The Globe and Mail reports beginning from November 10, 2011 to August 8, 2012, my analysis nevertheless interestingly showed both support and denouncement of the student strike. In a May 16, 2012 article written for the Canadian Press, Myles Dolphin’s headline read: “Protesters storm Montreal university, gang up on students in class.” Dolphin (2012b) reports that “protesters stormed into a university, many of them with their faces covered by masks, and worked through the hallways Wednesday on the
hunt for classes to disrupt.” The article even included a quote from a student who wanted to continue attending her classes at UQAM: “They’re trying to make us afraid to go back to class,” UQAM law student Celina Toia said after talking to the officers, who were sitting in a van, “Teachers are more than willing to give their classes, so they’re trying to make it extremely inconvenient. They’re threatening us and they’re creating a hostile environment for us” (Dolphin, 2012b). Clearly, after reading Dolphin’s article, one could be persuaded to denounce both the strike and the striking students. Definitively, Dolphin’s (2012b) article displayed a negative bias against the students and the strike.

In contrast to Dolphin’s article, there were many other stories that were written that either explicitly supported the students or at least appeared neutral about the situation. If his initial article was scathing, then the one Dolphin subsequently wrote on May 22nd appears to be the exact opposite. In this article, Dolphin (2012a) sounded as if he were cheering for the students in a very celebratory tone as he described the students on strike as a “river of red-clad protesters” who were “in a festive, multi-headed march designed to make a mockery of a new provincial law.” There were even references to the support the students were receiving from outside the country: “Related events were organized Tuesday in New York, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver, which saw only a tiny group of people show up to protest. In France, a few hundred congregated near Paris’ Notre Dame Cathedral” (Dolphin, 2012a). As one can see, this article appeared to be in favour of the protesters. On a similar note, an article by Stefanie Forster which was published on April 28, 2012, detailed how “Quebec’s student protests have received coverage in France, through Agence France-Presse, TV5 and a front-page photo in Le Monde. They also appeared in Australia, New Zealand, on Al-Jazeera and in the United States, including on CNN.” The article was not negative towards the students in any way. It presented facts and even descriptions of police “blasting chemical irritants into crowds — a reaction student activists have called excessive” and “the student groups have received some support from neighbours in other parts of Canada as well” (Forster, 2012) which is indicative of support for the striking students. Overall, the many articles found in The Globe and Mail had varying tenors of discourse: ones that fully supported the student movement; ones that were clearly against the striking students; and some that told the story without any determinable bias.
Reports by the CBC

Interestingly enough, the reports that were presented by the CBC mirrored those from The Globe and Mail; reports that were both for and against the strike were found, but many appeared to be completely neutral. Briefly, the CBC is an acronym for “one of the world’s major public broadcasting organizations, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation” (Eaman, 2012). Historically, one of the CBC’s primary functions was to create Canadian programming to ensure that Canadian content requirements were being satisfied (Pike, 1998). Created as a crown corporation on November 2, 1936, the CBC has maintained and operated the following: national radio (AM and FM) and television networks in English and French; regional and local radio and television programming in both official languages; locally produced programs in English and native languages for people living in the far north; multilingual shortwave service for listeners overseas; and closed captioning for the deaf (Eaman, 2012). For the purposes of this study, I focused on CBC’s English-speaking national news service via their online webpage.

An example of a report, which did not present the story as either for nor against the students, was published on March 22 of 2012. The story reports on a march held in downtown Montreal. It reports that “there were no violent incidents involving the chanting, placard-waving throng” and that “There were, however, reports of some protesters carrying sticks, that police confiscated” (“Massive student tuition,” 2012). If the first phrase can be considered positive for the students, then the second is clearly negative against them as acts of violence are alluded to (“Massive student tuition,” 2012). On May 22, in another story that reported on and even chronicled police clashes, entitled “Massive Montreal rally ends with police clashes,” the reporter did a commendable job in keeping the story fairly well-balanced. It included statements from the police and the protesters and appeared more concerned with reporting the actual facts than creating or adhering to any existing bias. No hyperbole was detected and the unknown writer purposefully took their time in writing and submitting an impartial piece (“Massive Montreal rally,” 2012).

Reports by The Montreal Gazette

The biases found in the stories produced in The Montreal Gazette, an English-language Montreal-based newspaper, were mixed. Some admonished the students, and some heralded them. Of note, “the Gazette began as a French-language paper and became bilingual in the late
1700s, eventually switching to English-language exclusively in 1822” (Potter, 2010). Also worth mentioning is that since 2010 the Gazette has been “one of several major Canadian dailies in the Postmedia Network chain” (Potter, 2010). In terms of its coverage of the strike, the Gazette appeared to present both positive and negative viewpoints concerning the student strike. In journalist Nelson Wyatt’s article, dated June 19, 2012, the writer observes that the student groups are far more adept at using social media than the government; a point previously raised by Bureau-Blouin. In the article, Wyatt (2012b) praises the students for using social media to gain an upper hand on the government. As an example, he reports that “the Quebec government has been less cutting edge, sticking to traditional media such as newspapers, TV and radio” while the students ‘have conquered the strategic high-tech terrain’ that has led to 700,000 tweets “in one month alone” (Wyatt, 2012b). Moreover, he explains that the students’ response to Bill 78 was to be admired: “A social media blitz by the students quickly resulted in massive protests against the law, which was described as outright draconian in its nature” (Wyatt, 2012b). It is evident, then, that Wyatt’s June 19th article is one that supports the student protesters.

Meanwhile, columnist Henry Aubin’s report, which was published on May 29, 2012, painted a grimmer picture and denounced the strike. Aubin (2012) claims that once the student crisis ended, Québec’s society would be left with the following: a serious debt, the highest per capita of any province; a difficulty in “trimming” services; difficulty with the government cutting back costs; and a weakening of the rule of law. He also worries about the state of some universities as “the quality of education at Quebec’s francophone universities can’t help but suffer in the next school year because of compressed sources and crowding” (Aubin, 2012). Aubin’s (2012) article places Québec in dire straits, and categorically blames the striking students for the province’s plight while simultaneously mocking the protesters as uncritically and “euphorically pounding pots and pans through the streets.”

Reports by CTV Montreal

Similar to The Montreal Gazette reports, English-language private broadcaster CTV Montreal likewise presented stories which both lionized and demonized the movement and the striking students. In a report dated February 23, 2012, Education Minister Line Beauchamp is quoted as denouncing “the bullying of strike opponents” (The Canadian Press 9, 2012). On March 5, 2012, a published report stated that “a student protest in Quebec City got heated as
students knocked over barricades outside the National Assembly and many clashed with the police” (“Student strikers vow,” 2012). May 20th saw a Canadian Press article which detailed how “69 demonstrators who participated in protests that began” the night before had been arrested (The Canadian Press 10, 2012). And a report that was published on May 24 included the headline “Montreal protest march ends with 518 arrests” (Canadian Press 11, 2012). All of these examples from CTV Montreal are evident of the negative portrayal of the students on strike.

On the other side, there were just as many (if not more) stories presented by CTV Montreal that were quite sympathetic to the students’ plight. On February 19, 2012, CTV Montreal reported CEGEP student leaders from across Québec as having spent the weekend “planning effective strike action” (“Students spend weekend,” 2012). Even parents were said to have joined in support of the protesting students (The Canadian Press 5, 2012; The Canadian Press 12, 2012). A May 22nd article entitled “We intend to break Bill 78: CLASSE” gave the student group a forum to explain their position: “‘We will continue to fight, even if there are fines,’ said CLASSE President Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois ‘It’s more important to protest according to your fundamental rights than to respect a law that is unjust’” (The Canadian Press 13, 2012). There are several more examples of CTV Montreal articles that I found to be very favourable towards the movement. In contrast to many other reports, these portrayed the striking students as bright and articulate individuals who were on the right side of the fight against the Liberal government, neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university.

Reports by Student-Run Media (CUTV Concordia and The McGill Daily)

As can be expected of student-run media, CUTV Concordia and The McGill Daily newspaper championed the students’ cause. CUTV Concordia defines itself as Concordia University’s video production community. During the student strike, they were quite active in reporting via live stream all the various demonstrations, protests, and marches via their website: http://www.livestream.com/cutvmontreal. As an independent student-run news outlet, CUTV reports not only covered the students’ activities during the strikes, but also included countless commentaries from the striking students. For instance, CUTV’s live coverage of the March 22 student protest was recorded and the videos are now available on
In this way, the students were given the opportunity to voice their opinions without editing or censorship. The two videos are parts one and two of a three-part series entitled “The Revolution Will be Televised – The Whole World is Watching.” For some unknown reason, part three of the video is no longer available through CUTV’s YouTube channel. The title CUTV used for the videos, “The Revolution Will be Televised – The Whole World is Watching” pays tribute to the American student demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic National Convention who popularized, adopted and chanted the phrase “The revolution will not be televised,” knowing that “their brutal treatment by police would be transmitted via TV cameras” (Friend, 2006, p. 244). These words were later turned into a popular song recorded in 1975 by singer-songwriter Gil Scott-Heron (Farber, 1988; Friend, 2006). CUTV’s clever play on the title similarly signaled that the students were broadcasting the entire protest including any possible police violence.

During the march an unidentified student spoke about her reluctance to do an interview with CTV, citing the reporter’s “profiling of conservative-looking straight white boys” as her reason for refusing to do the interview (“CUTV’s live coverage”, 2012). A few weeks later, on the evening of May 20, CUTV was once again covering a demonstration when they were attacked by the Montreal police (“CUTV attaquée,” 2012). The event was recorded and has since been posted on their YouTube channel. As well, constant updates about the events were provided by CUTV through their use of Twitter throughout the student strike. Suffice it to say, not only did CUTV provide a pro-student perspective on the strike, but it also allowed the striking students a forum to voice their uncensored opinions.

The McGill Daily is a self-described independent student newspaper at McGill University that is entirely run by students and has been in production for over 100 years. As a student-run newspaper, it stands to reason that the articles and reports that were published during the student strike were heavily slanted towards the students’ bias and were in support of the strike. For instance, on March 22, Corbeil and Duffort (2012) co-wrote a piece which reported that “the largest student protest in Quebec to date” was comprised of more than 200,000 “peaceful demonstrators.” And on May 7th, Corbeil (2012) wrote an article that criticized the Québec

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18 CUTV’s live coverage of the March 22 protest was recorded and the videos are now available on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY7F1F6Tiho and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGN2i7480LM.
government for employing representatives that “purposely created a ‘sentiment of urgency’ to push through discussions and pressure students into signing a document they did not agree with.” Also, on February 24, 2012, Henry Gass’ article entitled “Riot police break up student protest near Jacques-Cartier bridge” differed from the majority of corporate-owned news that day because of the inclusion of student comments. An unidentified student claimed that, “we weren’t fully kettled\textsuperscript{19}. We just came to the conclusion that there was no point in getting pepper sprayed” (Gass, 2012b). As shown by these examples, The McGill Daily was quite explicit in support of the students during the strike; not surprising for a student-run independent newspaper.

Aside from CUTV and The McGill Daily, perhaps the most vocal supporters of the students and the strike were the smaller independent news sources and the French press. In particular, Rabble.ca and Le Devoir are two independent news sources that covered the student strike extensively.

Reports by Rabble.ca

Clearly supportive of the students throughout the strike, Rabble.ca is an independent English-language online news source that is self-proclaimed as “Canadian-based news, analysis and comment from progressive perspective” via their website: rabble.ca. Launched on April 18, 2001, the founders’ stated intent is to “publish original news stories, in-depth features, provocative interviews, commentaries and more….from some of the few progressive voices in mainstream media.” Rabble.ca was very explicit in its support of the students as evidenced by an article written on September 16, 2011. Millar’s (2011) article, entitled “Introducing Rabble’s Activist Toolkit” included “wiki-style toolkit aimed to be a space for activist collaboration.” The toolkit included such things as “how-to-guides to allow advocates to share valuable organizational skills” and “software tools’ to highlight and provide reviews of the latest technology accessible to activists” (Millar, 2011). Rabble’s reporters were also quite visible during the demonstrations and constantly tweeted about the events. So not only did Rabble.ca cover the strike, but it also knowingly helped the young activists in their pursuit. It is difficult to

\textsuperscript{19} Kettling is defined as “a police tactic to control crowds where officers surround a group of people on all sides. In some instances, police direct protesters toward a predetermined location.” (Crowd control, 2012).
completely ascertain how helpful Rabble’s activist toolkit truly was to the Québec students. In reviewing the toolkit, there are no visible or explicit posts which suggest that it was used by the students during the strike.

**Reports by Le Devoir**

*Le Devoir* is one of three French-language daily newspapers in Montreal. It was founded by Henri Bourassa in 1910 as a “pan-Canadian-nationalist, pro-French-Canadian, pro-Catholic, anti-British but independent newspaper” (Potter et al., 2009b). Moreover, Potter et al. (2009b) describe *Le Devoir* as being “well-known as a newspaper of opinion.” The fact that *Le Devoir* translates to “duty” in English is quite telling, as the independent media outlet actively reported on the largest news story at the time – the student movement and the strike. Not the least bit surprising is the fact that during the strike, *Le Devoir* was clearly supportive of both the students and the strike. An example of their support for the students was evident in an article written on May 24, 2012 by Marco Bélair-Cirino. Entitled “Grand tintamarre contre la loi 78 – Les casseroles s’en mêlent” which translates to “Great uproar against Bill 78 – The pans get involved,” Bélair-Cirino’s (2012) contribution was full of praise for the students and the citizens who had risen up and sided with the protestors. Included in the article was the following vivid description:

«Ting ! Ting ! Ting ! » L’invitation à se joindre au mouvement « Nos casseroles contre la loi spéciale ! » s’est répandue au cours des derniers jours comme une traînée de poudre dans les réseaux sociaux, si bien que des dizaines de milliers d’indignés ont sorti hier soir leurs ustensiles, puis ont tapé… fort. Des personnes de tous âges - des tout-petits en pyjama enfreignant leur couvre-feu sous l’œil complice de leurs parents aux mamies en bigoudis - s’en donnaient à cœur joie sur leur balcon ou dans la rue. (Bélair-Cirino, 2012)

Translated, the paragraph reads:

Ting! Ting! Ting! The invitation to join the movement. The pans against the special law! It has spread like wildfire in recent days on social networks, so that tens of thousands of demonstrators were out last night with their utensils and banged... hard. People of all ages - from toddlers in pajamas violating their curfew under the watchful eye of their parents to grannies in curlers - were having a field day on the balcony or in the street.

Bélair-Cirino is unapologetic for the tone he uses throughout the article. The end of the article documented the 30th consecutive night of the demonstrations, including the heavy police
presence and the arrest of two protesters, contrasting the “festive atmosphere” of the evening (Bélair-Cirino, 2012).

Yet another article which captures Le Devoir’s support for the students appears on May 24. Written by Guillaume Bourgault-Côté (2012), the article addresses the 700 arrests that were made on May 22, after the protests against Bill 78 were deemed illegal by the Montreal police. Bourgault-Côté (2012) comments that, generally speaking, the demonstrations went fairly smoothly despite the arrests. He also tells us that through electronic media and social networking, many people complained about being “kettled” before having the opportunity to respond to the police’s orders to disperse (Bourgault-Côté, 2012). As well, Bourgault-Côté (2012) asserts that the majority of the protesters would agree that the event was peaceful. In addition to the two samples chosen, there are many more examples of published articles that display Le Devoir’s unmistakable support for the striking students. Daniel Giroux and Sébastien Charlton’s (2014) study on how the Montreal daily newspapers treated the students during the strike support the assertion that Le Devoir was favourable towards the students:

Le Devoir fait cavalier seul en montrant un indice d’orientation positif à l’égard du mouvement étudiant qui a tenté de contrer la hausse. Cette prépondérance des mentions positives aux étudiants s’est manifestée même dans les nouvelles publiées par le quotidien indépendant (en ne considérant que la tranche de 20% qui comporte une orientation). Ce journal est également celui dont les textes sont les plus systématiquement critiques envers les actions ou les positions du gouvernement.

[Le Devoir stands alone showing a positive orientation index in respect of the student movement that tried to counter the rise. This preponderance of positive mentions to students was evident even in the news published by the independent daily (considering only the slice 20% having a direction). This newspaper is also the one whose texts are most consistently critical of the actions or positions of the government.]

Giroux & Charlton’s (2014) study found that not only did Le Devoir report on the students positively, but they were also highly critical of the government.

**Reports by La Presse**

Another of the three French-language Montreal-based newspaper is La Presse. Its history includes having been started in 1884 and “created by conservatives who were dissatisfied with Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and the support he received from (rival newspaper) Le
Monde, edited by Hector Langevin” (Potter et al., 2009a). As with its rival, Le Devoir, La Presse also covered the strike quite extensively. In an article written on May 17, 2012, Marie-Claude Lortie opines that the demonstrators that she had encountered were rather joyful, and even after the speech made by Jean Charest regarding Bill 78, instead of being demoralized, the students chanted and still made music (Lortie, 2012). And on May 18th, an article written by Paul Journet similarly supports the students. In the article, Journet interviews Louis Masson, who serves as the director of the department of administrative law. Masson is adamant in his claims that the law is unjust and is “contraire à la liberté d’expression” which translates to “contrary to the freedom of expression” (Journet, 2012). Moreover, Masson does not agree with the law because he believes that it is a fundamental right for individuals to be able to create spontaneous demonstrations and to protest peacefully (Journet, 2012). As evidenced by these two samples, although they did not always present the students’ viewpoints as others had done, it can be said that La Presse was similarly supportive of the movement, the students and the strike.

Reports by Le Journal de Montréal

The final of the three French-language Montreal-based newspapers, Le Journal de Montréal, is owned by Quebecor, “the largest chain of tabloids in Canada,” and reportedly has the “largest circulation and readership of any Québec daily, with 1.9 million copies sold and 2 million readers per week” as per their website: www.quebecor.com. Established in 1964, Le Journal de Montréal is a self-professed “Montreal institution.” Their coverage of the student strike was “inconsistent.” Whereas Le Devoir and La Presse published a number of articles in any given week pertaining to the student strike in 2012, the attention that Le Journal de Montréal gave the students was minimal in comparison.

I gathered some concrete evidence to support my assertion and was able to collect twelve stories that were published between May 21, 2012 and August 14, 2012. What this highlights is that during the height of the student strike, Le Journal de Montréal’s coverage was well behind that of both Le Devoir and La Presse who published dozens of articles about the strike during the same time period. And in further analyzing the stories themselves, it appears that Le Journal de Montréal most definitely holds conservative political tendencies as they showed very little interest in the student strike. For example, five of the articles were direct attacks against Jean Charest and the Liberal government. On Monday, May 21st, Francis A-Trudel’s (2012) article
highlighted the results of a survey conducted on people’s opinions about Bill 78. François-Xavier Simard’s (2012) article on June 2 compares Charest’s strategy of provoking the students as being similar to the “same Machiavellian plan used by Trudeau.” And on June 5, 2012, Djemila Benhabib penned an op-ed criticizing Charest of being contemptuous and arrogant. While the strike was mentioned in the three examples chosen, nonetheless, the primary objectives of the articles were to criticize Charest, rather than to discuss the strike. Two of the articles were negative criticisms of Bill 78 (Delancour, 2012a; Lefebvre, 2012). Two of the stories were focused on the police: one detailed their attitudes during a demonstration (Renaud, 2012a), while the other lamented the need for more police in the summer due to the students (Renaud, 2012b). One detailed Concordia University’s Vice-President of Institutional Relations and Secretary General, Bram Freedman’s acquisition of a $45,000 Lexus vehicle (Lefebvre, 2012b). The criticism that Freedman faced for acquiring the Lexus was based on being able to afford a relatively expensive automobile, while students and many faculty are facing austerity measures. This despair pointed to a possible mismanagement of university funds, a definite complaint by the students (Lefebvre, 2012b), but more ostensibly, a massive increase at top-heavy administration at Québec’s universities. One article did speak of the students, a return to classes by some of them (Gosselin, 2012), and a letter to the editor likewise discussed the students, but this piece was about their struggle (Théberge, 2012). Again, the point that I would like to stress is that *Le Journal de Montréal*’s coverage of the strike was akin to their support of the students – minimal at best.

**Translating the Printemps Erable**

As previously indicated, the website named *Translating the Printemps Erable* was a brainchild of some of the striking students, created to address the lack of corporate-owned English-language coverage they received at the beginning of the strike. All the translations were done by amateur volunteers who were dedicated to “free public education” and “numerous other social struggles in Quebec” (Quebec protest, 2012). The creation of the website was a measured response to the frustration Québécois were feeling by the lack of coverage of the student strike in English-language corporate news. By translating the French-language news reports into English, it was felt that more people in Québec and across Canada, particularly non-French speaking individuals, would learn about the strike from a different bias. The website also aimed to remedy
the uneven reporting and shame the English-language corporate-owned media to actually cover and report on the strike. With the news available to English-speakers via this format, people were given an alternative to reports from English-language corporate-owned media.

**Conclusion**

A number of scholars have argued that the U.S. anti-war students’ use and creation of the underground press was necessitated because of their negative representation by the American corporate-owned media (Kessler, 1984; Lewis, 1972; McMillan, 2011; Rips, 1981). Although there are fundamental differences between American corporate-owned media and that of their Canadian English-language counterparts, the way that the students were depicted and the stories that were being told by the Canadian English-language news was reminiscent of what happened in the Sixties during the Vietnam War. In the beginning of their movement in the Sixties, the American students involved in the anti-war movement received very little coverage from U.S. corporate-owned media. When they finally were reported on, they were largely characterized in a negative manner. The same can be said for what transpired during the Québec student strike of 2012. At first, they were largely ignored by English-language corporate news. And when they were reported on, most of the reports were negative towards the students.

As I have shown here with my findings, there are distinct biases within each and every news source that covered the student strike. Comparatively speaking, CUTV and the *The McGill Daily* functioned in much the same way that the Underground Press did in the Sixties; by providing stories that were slanted in the students’ favour, as would be expected from student-run media. Independent English-language *Rabble.ca* and French-language *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* were definitively supportive of the students. While *Le Journal de Montreal’s* coverage was somewhat uneven and confusing, CBC news, CTV Montreal, and *The Gazette* offered both positive and negative reporting of the students. Of the three French-language newspapers, both *Le Devoir* and *La Presse’s* coverage of the student strike far outdid that of *Le Journal de Montréal*, particularly in terms of the number of articles each publication published on the topic of the student strike. Unsurprisingly, conservative English-language national corporate-owned the *National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* were both decidedly opposed to both the strike and the students. In their article entitled “Out of the Mouths of ‘Casseroles’: textes qui bougent au rythme du carré rouge,” Rosalind Hampton, Michelle Hartman, Adrienne Hurley and Tom
Lamarre (2012) suggest that the differences between the corporate-owned English-language press and the corporate-owned French-language press are not limited to the difference in language. In fact, they argue that a distinct binary of “good” and “bad” exists in Québec media:

A problematic characteristic of much of this coverage has been the construction of a binary opposition between violent and nonviolent actions, accompanied by notions of “good” and “bad” protesters and protests. This opposition, a cliché mobilized to discredit and disenfranchise certain kinds of people, groups, and movements, is one that distracts attention from the movement and the other critical issues linked to it, in order to resettle a hierarchical order that posits an “us” (good, civilized, nonviolent, liberal minded) majority that sees itself as different from a “them” (bad, uncivilized, violent, poor/student, radical/anarchist) minority. This of course, is part of the broader construction of a Canadian, white, middle class, liberal/conservative, Anglophone, “nice,” multicultural majority contrasted with its Others – indigenous, immigrant, racialized, and québécois/e.

As Hampton et al. (2012), indicate by their analysis, the dichotomy of the good Anglophone citizen versus the bad everyone else is continually reinforced through Québec’s media.

Another important fact to note is the impact of stories written by The Canadian Press. The Canadian Press (CP) is explained as “Canada’s principal news agency” which began in 1910 as Canadian Press Ltd. (Pohle & Potter, 2010). Of note, CP began “using the Internet to deliver reports in English in 1997 and added French-language Internet service one year later (Pohle & Potter, 2010). Moreover, CP is a “membership-based co-operative owned by the majority of daily newspapers in the country” (Pohle & Potter, 2010). Although its head office is located in Toronto, CP has “bureaus and correspondents in every major city in Canada [including one in Washington DC], with access to news from over 100 daily newspapers and 500 radio and television channels across the country” (Pohle & Potter, 2010). Several stories about the Québec student strike were written by uncredited authors working for The Canadian Press. These stories were then “carried” by any number of different news outlets. For example, on May 3, 2012, The Huffington Post printed a CP story entitled “Quebec Student Underwear Protests: Anti-Tuition Hike Fight Gets Bare” (The Canadian Press 3, 2012). The very next day, CBC News carried a story entitled “Québec Students Bare It All for Transparency” (The Canadian Press 4, 2012). Both storylines were similar in that they discussed the Québec students’ tactic of shedding almost all of their clothing in protest of the tuition fee increase. So although the stories were similar and could very well have been authored by the same individual, they were published by two separate news organizations on consecutive days. These stories could have also had an effect
on the biases attributed to the various news organizations. For instance, although the *National Post* was explicitly against the students and the strike, publishing a CP story that was sympathetic to the students and the strike would have affected their overall results in terms of biases for and against the strike.

My results reveal that it would have been problematic for the students to rely solely on corporate-owned media coverage to tell their story. The Québec students benefitted greatly from alternative media, including student-run media such as *CUTV* and *The McGill Daily* and independent media sources such as *Rabble.ca*. By creating their own stories, the students had control over their narrative. By allowing independent media to tell their stories, they were given the advantage of sympathetic media producers and audiences. Without alternative media, the students would have been at the mercy of corporate-owned media alone, and it is highly unlikely that the strike would have progressed as it did. In the end, all forms of media were required to tell the complete story that was *le printemps érable*. 
Chapter 10 – Final Impressions, Contributions, and Future Research

Young people can be powerful agents of social change. Many young people have the desire and capacity to transform the world, and are looking for opportunities to do so. In fact, youth have been key actors in nearly every major social movement in modern history.

-Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Youth and social movements: Key lessons for allies*, 2012, p. 2

**Final Impressions**

I began this project to seek out answers as to what differentiated the Québec student strike of 2012 from other youth-led uprisings. What I found through the course of my investigation was not just interesting but also quite inspiring. It is a complex story that is made up of an infinite number of other singular stories. It is a story of a province that has a history of student strikes. It is also a story of an educational system that teaches Québécois, from a very young age, that education is an individual right. It is a story of a government’s desire to turn to neoliberalism and to implement austerity measures and force students to pay higher tuition fees. Each student organization had their own story, each spokesperson had their own story, and, ultimately, each student had their own story. And added on to these are stories of how the students were able to organize, coordinate and sustain nightly demonstrations for over one hundred consecutive evenings. There were stories of how the students garnered support from parents, grandparents, teachers, lawyers, and other Québécois, largely due to the introduction of Bill 78. There were stories of how social media was used by the students to their advantage. There were also stories of how the students found enough strength to sustain such a long strike. Unequivocally, the story of the Québec student strike of 2012 is complex; a combination of countless other stories that needs to be told. Perhaps, even more importantly, it is a story that we need to learn from.

In search of answers, I was instead gifted with both answers and amazing stories; stories that detailed the inner workings of the 2012 Québec student strike. I was told of stories that explained how one individual, Laurent Gauthier, almost single-handedly managed to coordinate and accommodate for the transporting of 10,000 protesting students to Québec City during a snowstorm. I was made aware of stories of how the Liberal government demonized the students, and conversely, how the opposition Parti Québécois lionized the students and attacked the Liberal government. Stories of students organizing nightly demonstrations and marches for a span of three consecutive months with the help of social media were recounted. There were
stories of parents and elderly grandparents joining in the marches, banging pots and pans, le casserole, to show both their support for their children and grandchildren and their resentment towards the Liberal government. Instead of one cohesive story, the 2012 Québec student strike is comprised of a multitude of differing narratives; concurrently in variation, in unison and in unity.

In considering the debate between the techno-optimists and the techno-pessimists about the efficacy of social media in effectuating social change, viewing social media through such a binary is neither useful nor adequate. Instead of participating in this debate, and “rather than being concerned merely with the efficiency or otherwise of different communication technologies,” I follow in Gerbaudo’s (2012) footsteps and “pay attention to what activists actually do with them, to the concrete and local ‘media practices’ activists develop in their use (p. 9). Also equally helpful is Boler’s (2014) use of the term “entanglement,” wherein “two originally independent and measurable entities interact—particles, for example—the state of the post-entanglement entities can no longer be understood, described or measured independently from one another” (p. 4). In my case, the young activists and the social media that they utilize became “entangled,” and all observations and analyses had to consider both elements. What I have learned, then, is that engaging in the techno-optimist versus techno-pessimist debate would be an exercise in futility. However, with that being said, my research most definitely displayed many instances of political messages being communicated by individuals, and the use of social media to help organize and mobilize large groups. This is the inherent trait of social media, according to Bennett and Sederberg (2012), and these results highlight the importance of social media to contemporary social movements. Personally, I likewise would not discount the importance of social media use by today’s movements.

My results clearly suggest that social media was an effective tactic that the students of Québec successfully utilized during the strike. From organizing, to sharing information, to even surveilling the police, social media was used by the students to help coordinate activities and to achieve these goals. As reported in Chapter 7, many of the student organizers believed that they would have been successful even without the use of social media. Although I am not that dismissive of social media, I still consider it a tactic and a tool, whose effectiveness is highly dependent on how it is used by members of a particular movement. Based on their claims, however, the student organizers privilege “transmedia mobilization”; the use of combined low-tech and high-tech media as a tactic (Costanza-Chock, 2010). Perhaps it was in the way I asked
the questions. Or maybe it was in the way the questions were framed. Or just youthful bravado being invoked. Regardless, I disagree with my participants’ sentiments that the student strike would have been just as successful even without the use of social media. For one, I find it hard to believe that they would have been able to organize and mobilize the well over 300,000 individuals to march the streets of Montréal without the aid of social media. Moreover, coordinating on a nightly basis without the use of social media would have also been difficult to achieve. Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) notion of the logic of connective action helps articulate its function and allows us to fully realize the importance of social media as it is utilized by today’s social movements.

Aside from being the focus of this study, without a doubt, learning about and understanding the various tactics utilized by the students in 2012 was the most enjoyable aspect of this project. Just as there were a multitude of stories involved in the strike, there were similarly a number of tactics utilized by the students. I learned about a historical moment, the first time ever student organizations in Québec banded together as one and agreed to unite to fight the Liberal government. Through their use of direct democracy, horizontal leadership and the power of autonomy, the students were able to wage a legitimate and effective battle against the Québec provincial government, as evidenced by the abolishment of Bill 78 and by defeating the proposed tuition fee hike. I also learned the difference between diversity of tactics and escalation of tactics, as explained in Chapter 7. From the signing of petitions at the very beginning, to “swarming” government functions to attract the media’s attention, to blocking the entrances of classes at the institutions, to the many demonstrations which shut down the city of Montreal, to acts of violence and shutting down the subway system – all of these tactics, even the unpopular radical ones, helped define Maple Spring.

**Contributions**

Although it may have begun as a strike against an increase in tuition fees, the Québec student strike of 2012 metamorphosed into a social movement against neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university (Laferriere, 2013; Smeltzer & Hearn, 2014; Solty, 2012). Thus, one of my innovative findings shows the Québec student strike as much more than a series of protests against tuition fees, but instead, as a social movement that fought against neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university. Alongside the recent
work on the political economy of social media, social movements, and young activists’ use of social media, my research findings allow me to situate my study within these current discussions on social media and youth activism. In addition, this study makes four other significant contributions to academic scholarship: it provides empirical evidence of the use of social media by a contemporary social movement; it gives insight into the symbiotic relationship between the striking students and media; it highlights the tensions and contradictions found within the structural foundations of social media, which makes it usable to activists worldwide; and it chronicles the different tactics utilized by the Québec students during an effective social struggle.

My methods included a textual analysis of the student activists’ use of Facebook and Twitter during the strike. I gathered empirical data from the Facebook pages and the Twitter accounts of the seven student organizers and a selected number of the student organizations that were involved in the strike. By paying particular attention to key words and hashtags (#) that were “trending”, I was able to collect content that provided me with an insight into the variety of ways in which social media was used by the students. For instance, many of the students engaged in the act of produsage (Bruns, 2008) by documenting the strike through Facebook and Twitter as citizen journalists (Atton, 2004). This study provides empirical evidence that positions social media as an important space wherein alternative narratives can be created and used by activists to counter the stories created by corporate-owned media. In addition to this, social media also helped the students organize, disseminate information about the strike, and engage in debates about the strike, and proved to be a very valuable tool for the movement.

My thesis critically interrogates the relationship between corporate-owned media and social movements through a textual analysis of hundreds of reports from a variety of media, both corporate-owned and independent, in order to understand their portrayals of the students. The study provides insight into the symbiotic relationship between the striking students and media, illustrating the various biases held by differing media forms as evidenced by their portrayal of the students during the strike. My findings support the seminal work of Gitlin (1980) by detailing the negative portrayal of the striking Québec students by corporate-owned media. As far as Gitlin is concerned, the deprecation and trivialization of the anti-war students was the mandate of corporate-owned media during the Sixties (1980). I provide ample proof of these negative portrayals of the students in Québec, which suggests that very little has changed from the Sixties to today as it relates to the relationship between striking students and corporate-owned media.
Additionally, just as the Underground Press were supportive of the students in the Sixties, alternative and student-run media most definitely illustrated bias in favour of the students.

My findings call for a development of a new research agenda that highlights the structural foundations of social media and the contradictions and tensions found within - examples such as the tension and contradiction within the structural foundation of profit model, wherein a delicate balance between gaining the users’ trust while monetizing and profiting from them - while further exploring the possibilities of utilizing social media as a viable social movement tactic. This type of inquiry further problematizes the type of critical analysis on the impact of social media that is situated in the techno-pessimist versus the techno-pessimist debate: instead, it looks to move beyond this simple binary. Or, as Gerbaudo (2012) points out, “the problem with the techno-visionary discourse on social media [which] appears as the reflection of a neoliberal ideology, incapable of understanding collective action except as the result of some sort of technological miracle fleetingly binding together egotistical individuals” (pp. 8-9). This type of inquiry must consider all of the tensions and contradictions that exist within the structural foundations of social media while simultaneously considering all the possibilities afforded by social media. Additionally, understanding how young activists negotiate the tensions related to using social media, the monetization of the content they generate, and the eventual commodification of both the user and their data are effectively entangled with questions surrounding how Facebook and Twitter negotiate the tensions between providing a platform for its users and profiting from these same individuals.

Finally, my study into the tactics used by the Québec students provides ample empirical evidence of the variety of tactics used by the striking students. As I had mentioned from the outset, these results can be utilized in much the same way Beautiful Trouble’s toolbox helps activists worldwide. Moreover, my study documents the actions of the student organizers, which helped shape the strike. Through my interviews, I have provided these young activists another forum to be heard, and the ability to share their experiences and wisdom to those that want to listen. In other words, I have given a voice to ones that are not always heard.

Future Research
As I have articulated and shown throughout this thesis, the rise of the neoliberal agenda and the corresponding austerity measures worldwide, including the number of student-led responses to
these actions are growing proportionately, and are very deserving of further investigation. As reported by *The Guardian* on April 20, 2015, students worldwide are fighting back against the commercialization of universities, in conjunction with the fight against neoliberalism and austerity measures (“Students worldwide fight back,” 2015). This appears to be a growing trend as more and more students are joining together in the fight against the aforementioned socio-economic policies that many governments and universities are beginning to implement (Bennett, 2012; Costanza-Chock, 2012b). Even locally, both York University and the University of Toronto saw graduate students striking in opposition to austerity measures and the corporatization of the university (Bedard, 2015; Brown & Khandaker, 2015). From my investigation of the 2012 student strike, I fully agree with the premise that it was, contextually, fully situated within the increasing number of student uprisings worldwide.

I am interested in investigating international collective action in relation to digital media and civic mobilization, including student-led collaborative anti-austerity movements against the worldwide corporatization of the university. Investigating the tactics used by the students, with a particular look at their tactical use of digital media would provide rich empirical data that would contribute to both social movement theory and communication theory. Currently, with the rise of the neoliberal agenda and the corresponding austerity measures worldwide, as indicated above, the number of student-led responses to these actions are growing proportionately, and are very deserving of investigation.

Emanating from my dissertation, there are four additional areas of inquiry that deserve further investigation: the examination of contemporary Canadian resistance groups’ tactical use of social media; research that investigates the implications of citizen activists taking on the role of citizen journalists; the challenges and contradictions of using social media platforms for activism; and methodological issues regarding studying activism on social media.

Locally, in Canada, aside from the anti-Bill C-51, the Anti-terrorism Act of 2015, which many argue allows for unprecedented surveillance to be carried out by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and the Keystone XL protests, protests that are against the possibility of creating and developing a pipeline that would transport oil extracted from the Canadian tar sands to various areas in North America, possible cases of protest mobilization to investigate include the youth-led #Blacklivesmatter and the very recent Women’s Caucus Demonstration Against Gendered Violence. Of course, ongoing resistance by First Nations
peoples against the government and officers of the state, primarily the RCMP, as well as the missing indigenous women, and anti-poverty initiatives across Canada are a few other Canadian phenomena worth exploring. I want to examine other social movements (grassroots, community-led, and from a local perspective) by investigating the tactics that they employ, paying particular attention to their use of social media.

I am also very interested in researching the implications of citizen activists taking on the role of citizen journalists (Atton, 2004) that engage in produsage (Bruns, 2008), through social media. In what particular ways do they benefit their movement by assuming these roles? What possible drawbacks can result from activists becoming citizen journalists? An extension of this line of inquiry would be to explore the results and consequences of activist journalists using corporate-owned media while advocating for and working towards sustainable change and a more just world. In approaching this line of inquiry from a global perspective, I foresee taking on a significant role in the knowledge dissemination process within critical communication studies and social movement studies.

By building on my analysis of the “structural foundations of social media,” which are ownership, profit margins, production practices, and cultural capital, I want to further investigate the challenges and contradictions of using corporate platforms for activism. Critiques of terms of service, privacy policies, and surveillance will be included in this research. As I have previously argued, the tensions within and between the structural foundations of social media benefit uprisings as it is exactly because of these tensions that social media allows itself to be used for political gain. On the one hand, it profits from being used by activists, but on the other, activists do benefit from utilizing social media as a tool for activism. Moreover, answers to questions regarding alternative digital media platforms and their availability and effectiveness for activists, important work which includes Gehl’s (2015) look at “alternative social media” as possible viable sites of contention and resistance for activists are continuing to emerge.

Finally, I also plan to explore the methodological issues regarding studying activism on social media. Included in this exploration would be the archiving of often-ephemeral material, the strengths and weaknesses of the tools that are used for web scraping, and the ethics involved with such research. Carrying out this research at both local and global levels will allow for some interesting comparisons at the conclusion. With the growing number of studies related to
studying activism on social media, or even just data mining social media in general, the findings of this type of work would contribute greatly to current and future research projects.

With all of the future studies that I am proposing, the common thread remains the tactical use of social media by young activists fighting against the worldwide problem of globalization, neoliberalism, austerity measures, and the corporatization of the university. As the recent events in Greece have shown us (Mason, 2015; Monbiot, 2015), the power of those who hold the wealth in this world is frightening. For even though the Greek citizenry participated in democracy and voted against accepting the proposed bailouts and austerity measures offered by the banks and those in charge of the European Union, the Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, and the left-wing Syriza party capitulated and are now in the process of accepting a similar package that the Greeks had previously voted to reject. What this clearly displays is that even when they oppose it, the working class and the poor cannot escape neoliberalism and austerity measures when those in power rule against the people’s wishes. One fact that has become even more apparent because of this study is that although each and every uprising can be considered as its own entity, for the most part, worldwide uprisings have the commonality of foe. Thus, my future research, in whatever form each one takes, will always push back against the neoliberal agenda.

**Final Epigraph**

For each chapter in this thesis, I have included an epigraph that captured the “spirit” or “essence” of the chapter, if you will. In the final epigraph of this chapter, I use Costanza-Chock’s words to articulate the importance of young people in bringing about meaningful social change. Costanza-Chock (2012b) states, “Youth have been key actors in nearly every major social movement in modern history” (p. 2). This is very true. There is power in youth, and there is great power in their resolve and their exuberance. Worldwide, young people have been seen fighting back in this great battle against globalization, neoliberalism, and austerity measures, which bodes well for the future. The students of Québec are evidence of the strength of young people. They spearheaded a movement and led the battle against the government, and won. I believe in the actions of the striking students, and am only happy to report their side of the story.

Many critics of the strike look at the results and question whether the students’ struggle was worth it. They also wonder what it is that the students won. For some, who supported the strike, winning meant that the Québec student movement “transformed the student strike from a
single issue campaign to an uncompromising social insurrection” (“How did the,” 2012). Others claim that the victory was “scored not just against an unfair tuition hike, but against the neoliberal educational reform which is menacing universities and colleges around the world” (Greene, 2012). The students purposefully fought the proposed tuition hike not just to stop the increase in 2012, but to also stop “the ones that are destined to follow it” (Marin, 2012).

Although the ultimate goal was winning, perhaps it was the process that they undertook which we, both scholars and the public, should focus on. Just as the techno-optimist versus techno-pessimist is an insufficient binary when it comes to investigating how social media is used by activists, narrowing it down to an analysis between “winning” and “losing” would not fully encompass the real impact and importance of a social movement. Perhaps a functional model to combat any and all perceived social injustices including neoliberalism, austerity measures, economic injustice and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the Middle East conflict, and the growing climate worries, to name a few, can be developed from studying and learning from the Québec students’ model and the tactics that they used. This thesis posits that the numerous tactics the students deployed to sustain a prolonged strike is the students’ modest contribution to social movement theory. The striking students provided us with many tactics to consider. From their appropriation and adoption of the “cacerolazo” tactic of making plenty of noise by banging pots and pans, direct democracy and horizontal leadership, and diversity and escalation of tactics, to the introduction of the red square, the “maNUfestation,” numerous performative actions, their tactical use of social media, and invoking a “united front mentality” amongst the student groups, many lessons can be learned from the 2012 Québec student strike; lessons that I have highlighted in this project.

Within the activist community, I often hear it said that “nothing happens overnight” and that it sometimes takes a while for change to occur. This is true when one considers the length of time it took for the abolition of slavery, women’s rights, and LGBT rights to become commonplace within our society. And when looked at objectively, despite all the positives associated with them, all three can still be further improved. As the battle against austerity measures and neoliberalism appears to be a long one, maybe the Québec student strike can serve as a marker and a model for a successful fight against these things.

In an interview with Mary Zournazi, philosopher Alphonso Lingis states, “There is a difference between simple expectation and hope….expectation is based on the pattern you see in
the past. But I think hope is always hope against the evidence….there is a kind of discontinuity in time, there is a break, and something starts out of nowhere” (Lingis, 2002, p. 23). I reflect back on the students that I interviewed in a very similar way to what Lingis describes as hope. I recall them telling me how they rallied and organized, and stood up and fought a very powerful adversary – and won. They told me how they struggled for months, refusing to give up, despite the difficulties and hardships many of them encountered, refusing to give up despite government’s pressure tactics. There was a discontinuity in time, a break, and quite literally, Maple Spring started out of nowhere. It began as an ideal shared by a few students who rejected the proposed tuition fee hikes, who then worked together in bringing about the largest expression of civil disobedience in Canadian history (Dolphin, 2012a; Gass, 2012a; Kanuga, 2012). Perhaps the most positive way to frame the Québec student strike of 2012, then, is as a small ripple in a growing tide against neoliberalism.

It is only fitting that I close off the thesis with a poignant statement from one of the students involved in the movement. Attending the CEGEP at College de Valleyfield when the strike began, Justin’s sentiments succinctly echo not just the lessons learned by many, but it also hints at the importance of the students’ challenge to the government. When asked about what he had learned from the Québec student strike of 2012, Justin responded with the following: “I learned that politics is in daily life, and we must ensure that it remains that way. Real change doesn’t necessarily come from the political elite who’re stuck in the existing system’s wheels. Where will real change come from? Well, it’ll come from social struggles” (Bertolino et al, 2013). It is evident that Justin has learned a life-long lesson from his involvement in the strike. At the very least, lessons on how to maintain an effective social struggle will be the legacy of the 2012 Québec student strike. For myself, I am content in knowing that I have fulfilled my promise to Micah Fournier – and I am proud to have told the striking students’ messy story – in their own words.
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233


