



2 million YouTube videos were tagged “occupy” or “ows,” and the official Twitter feed (@OccupyWallStNYC) had more than 137,000 followers (Preston 2011). Some observers view the protests as a failure, since they achieved no tangible political goals, but their supporters argue the movement had intentionally eschewed organizing around any one particular goal. *Adbusters* founder Kalle Lasn had initially hoped the protests would pick a single demand and that protesters would refuse

to leave until it was met. However, only days after the protests began, the protesters released a “Declaration of Occupation” that laid out a general critique rather than any particular demand: “We write so that all people who feel wronged by the corporate forces of the world can know that we are your allies. . . . No true democracy is attainable when the process is determined by economic power” (Schwartz 2011).

In many ways, this declaration reflected the organization and methods of the occupiers. They organized horizontally, without leaders or hierarchy, and attempted to work through consensus or supermajority rule. This organizational style reflected a movement that was resolutely grassroots. Social media helped bring together an unprecedented range of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and political orientations. One of the most celebrated moments in the occupation of Zuccotti Park came when union members affiliated with the AFL-CIO joined the protesters to help prevent police from clearing the park. As one commentator put it, “hard hats and hippies—together at last” (Wiener 2011). The OWS protests didn’t achieve any specific political goal, but they did change the conversation about politics and economics in the United States, something that happened because the protests lived as much on Twitter as they did in the park. The Occupy Movement proved the efficacy of “hashtag activism”; social media had arrived as an invaluable resource in the process of social change.



**Social Media and Social Protest** How different would Occupy Wall Street have been without social media sites like Twitter?



## DATA WORKSHOP

### Analyzing Everyday Life

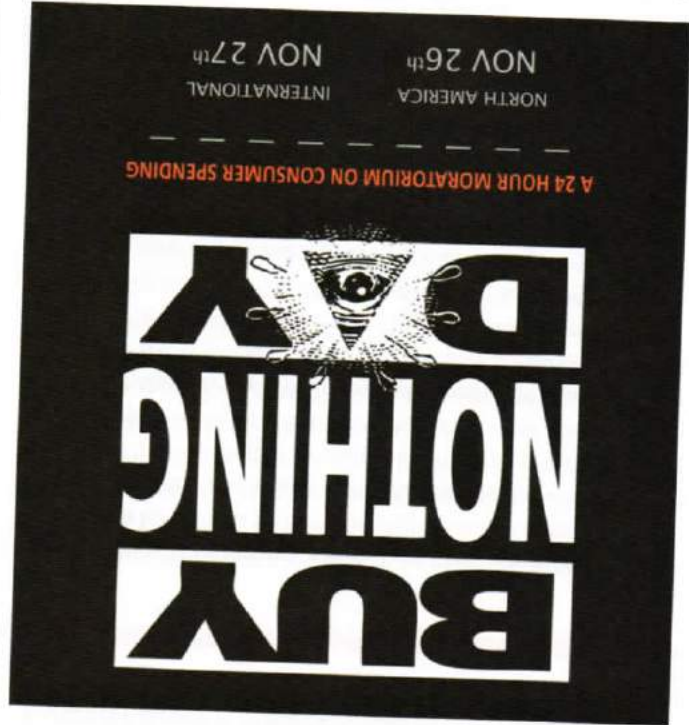
#### Activist Groups Get Organized

The day after Thanksgiving is also known as “Black Friday,” the biggest shopping day of the year. On that day, which is thought of by many as the kickoff day to the holiday shopping season, retailers give incentives to customers by offering extended hours, tremendous discounts, and gifts. Customers sleep in parking lots waiting for the stores to open and are so eager to buy merchandise at discounted prices that injuries and even deaths have resulted. Every year seems

to bring another extreme case where someone is trampled to death by crowds rushing through the doors. In 2008, a stampede left one Walmart worker dead, while a shooting at Toys ‘R’ Us resulted in the deaths of two customers. In 2011, there were forty-six reported injuries but no deaths. In 2013, the hashtag #WalmartFights began trending, with Twitter users posting about incidents in numerous locations. The website Black Friday Death Count keeps a running tally; from 2006 to 2014 seven deaths and ninety-eight serious injuries were attributed to Black Friday.

In protest of the rampant consumerism of Black Friday, a group of social activists started “Buy Nothing Day.” *Adbusters*, an anti-consumerist organization, promotes the event as “a day for society to examine the issue of overconsumption.” The basic goal of Buy Nothing Day is to actually spend no money purchasing items on Black Friday in order to raise awareness of the dangers of consumerism and overconsumption. *Adbusters* also encourages other forms of awareness. Supporters have staged

**Anti-consumerism** How do activist groups protest the excesses of consumerism?



demonstrations in shopping malls where they brandish scissors and cut up credit cards while encouraging shoppers to liberate themselves from debt.

For some, the idea of Buy Nothing Day has grown into a Buy Nothing Year. The Compact is an anti-consumerist group whose members pledge to go a year without buying anything new. Members are only allowed to purchase new underwear, food, and health and safety items, such as brake fluid and toilet paper. Otherwise, they have to make do with the items they already have in their homes (come on: how many bottles of lotion or sunscreen are lurking in your bathroom cabinet right now?), buy from secondhand stores, trade for what they need, or make their own items. Other groups, like the Freegans, take a radical approach to consumerism and try to find everything for free. Websites like Freecycle and FreeCycle help in the cause.

Such groups have much in common: they wish to counteract the negative global environmental and socioeconomic effects of U.S. consumerist culture and to simplify their lives. While it might seem extreme to most Americans to go an entire year without buying new items, many people find multiple benefits to living simply, and, through their example, they are able to raise other people's consciousness about consumption, waste, and carbon footprints.

This Data Workshop asks you to analyze any activist group that is working for some kind of social change. You will be using existing sources to do a content analysis of

1. Describe the activist group you chose. Identify the group's commitment to a larger social movement or cause, and discuss its particular goals.
  2. How is the group attempting to use resource mobilization for their cause? What are their strategies regarding these three important activities?
    - a. recruiting members and organizing supporters
    - b. raising funds
    - c. transforming public opinion and/or achieving change
  3. Describe the group's media campaign. What different forms of media do they use to convey their message? Which do you think is most successful? Least successful? Why?
  4. In addition to the use of media, what other strategies does the group use to achieve its goals? For instance, does the group organize rallies or protests or participate in community events? (These activities may be connected to larger media strategies; for example, a film screening or protest march might be advertised to attract greater support, or be covered in the news.)
  5. How effective is the group at convincing others to join the cause? What kind of reaction did they elicit from you? How might they improve their recruiting efforts?
- There are two options for completing this Data Workshop:*
- PREP-PAIR-SHARE** Collect your data and write some informal notes addressing the steps outlined earlier; bring these notes to class for reference. Partner with one or more students and present your findings. Compare your analyses and insights with others in your group.
- DO-IT-YOURSELF** Collect existing source data on your chosen activist group and follow the steps outlined earlier. Write a three- to four-page paper about the groups' strategies, making specific reference to the materials it developed. Attach photos, screenshots, prints, links, or other relevant data to your paper.