
THE FACEBOOK PROJECT SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE CHIEF

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INTRODUCTION

- Who am I?
 - 2nd year graduate studying Sociology and Library & Information Science, attended UIUC as an undergrad
 - Social Computing meets Sociology: Social and community informatics, human-computer interaction, and digital divide
- What is the Facebook Project?
 - Big research project on the impacts of Facebook.com on the UIUC undergrad population
 - Upcoming Papers include:
 - Expression, Sharing, and Construction of Identity (Masters)
 - Social Capital and the Chief (this presentation)
 - Racial Politics behind Interface and Identity (for LIS)

WHY STUDY FACEBOOK?

- What is Facebook?
 - A Social Networking Service (SNS), basically a way to connect people to each other and share information (process, knowledge, and thing/media)
- Why is it a big deal?
 - It's a monumental presence on the internet, a sort of evolution of the web
 - Almost everyone has a profile and checks it frequently, most people use the site quite extensively
 - Facebook very effectively crosses the boundary between the digital and face-to-face world, employs an effective interface, and allows users control

SOCIAL CAPITAL?

- Social capital based on the Wellman-Haase-Witte-Hampton model (2001)
 - Networked capital (strong and weak ties)
 - Participatory capital (organizational related)
 - Community capital (a happy combination)
- Previous studies have found Facebook to impact Social Capital (Elison 2006)



SOCIAL CAPITAL TO SOCIAL CHANGE?

- An example (Alla Zollers, ASIS&T Conference, 2007):
 - “As the landscape of the Internet has changed, so have the forms of online activism. For example, in March of 2006, an estimated 14,415 high school students in the greater Los Angeles area participated in school walkouts as part of the protests against legislation that would toughen immigration laws in the United States. The majority of the walkouts were coordinated on the Internet, and more specifically on the social network site MySpace (<http://myspace.com>). Additionally, on September 5, 2006, Facebook (<http://facebook.com>) rolled out news-feeds, which sparked the creation of a Facebook group called the “Students Against Facebook News Feed (Official Petition to Facebook)”, with over 13,000 people joining the group in a matter of hours.”

THE CHIEF ON FACEBOOK

- No need to reiterate the basics...
- As the Chief was removed in February of 2007, the issue sparked quite a response
- One of the flashpoints of the debate took place on Facebook in the form of threats made against an anti-Chief student
- Facebook still contains a record of much of the Pro-Chief material, and also serves as a platform of support and mobilization of resources towards keeping the Pro-Chief campaign alive



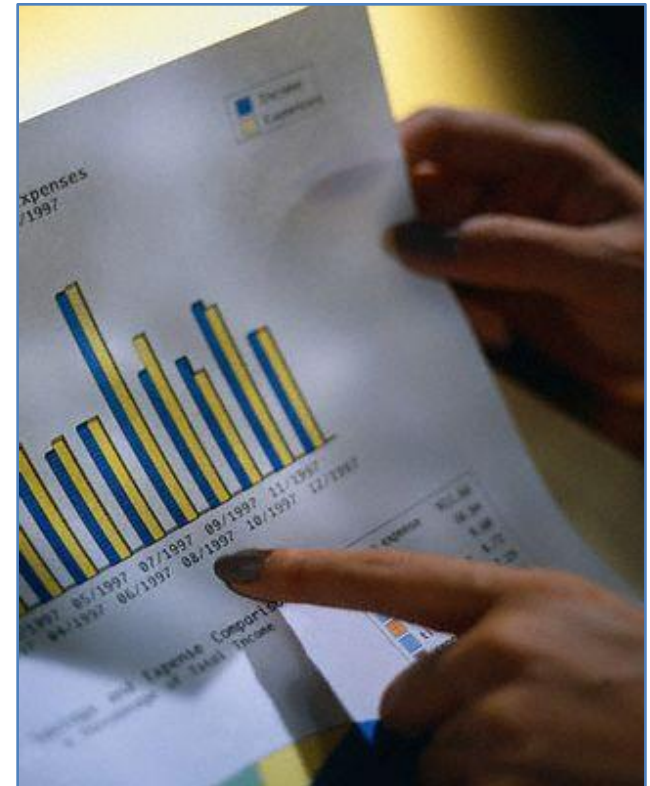
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What do people think about the campus climate in regards to race? What actions have they taken in regards to the Chief?
- What is the character of groups surrounding the topic? What do we notice about group purpose, composition, and activity?
- What does this suggest about Social Capital and Social Movements?



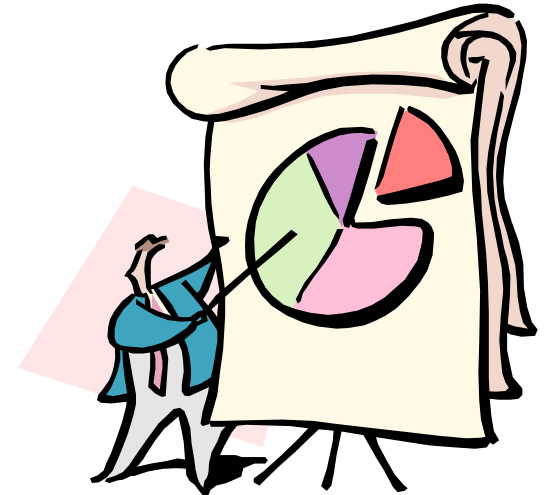
MY METHODS: SURVEY

- The Facebook Project multi-year survey
 - 75 person response set (2 w/o active accounts)
 - Random sample from DMI
 - Undergraduate, full-time, degree-seeking, 18+
 - Not specifically designed for this project



MY METHODS: CONTENT ANALYSIS

- Overview data for future studies (17 groups)
 - Basic ID info (name, URL, date, group category, etc...)
 - Written purpose (description)
 - Composition (number and racial identity of members, officers, and admins, relevant related groups)
- Text content analysis
 - Sociological ethnographic style coding
 - Topic, tone, issues of identity, and connection to social capital



AN INADEQUATE SUMMARY OF A FEW FINDINGS

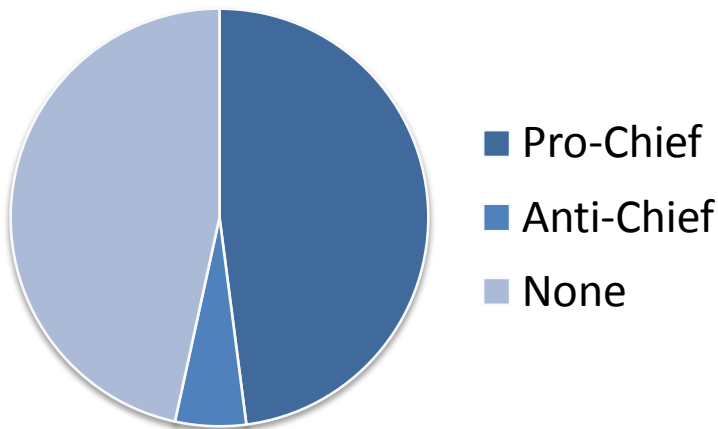
- **Survey: Feelings on the campus climate**
 - On the whole people feel both the Facebook and campus environment are pretty friendly to both minorities and Native Americans specifically
 - People of color felt it was less safe, but only a little bit
 - This sample did not reflect a high number of racial minority respondents (and no NA participants), however

AN INADEQUATE SUMMARY OF A FEW FINDINGS CONTINUED...

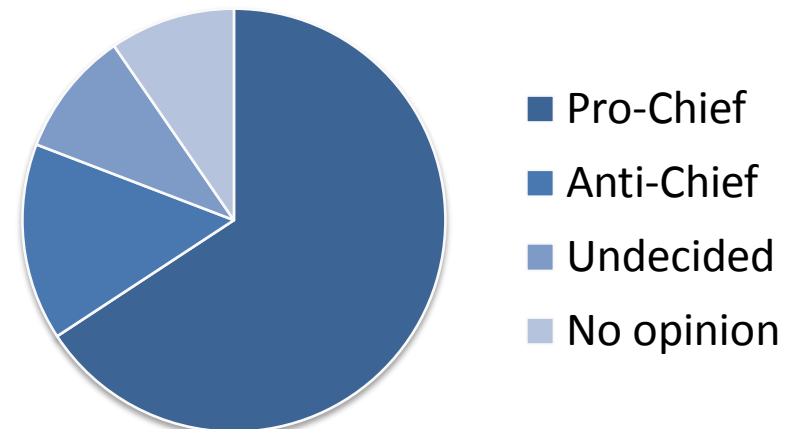
- **Survey: Pro and Anti Chief Activity**

- Active picture-changing protest was relatively low (17.8%)
- These findings suggest that the environment on Facebook (based on this study) is dominated primarily by pro-Chief users. This fits with the next section

Group Membership



Opinions on the Chief



AN INADEQUATE SUMMARY OF A FEW FINDINGS CONTINUED...

- **Content Analysis: Sheer Numbers**
 - Of the 17 groups examined only 4 were anti-Chief.
 - In general the overwhelming majority of groups were pro-Chief, many with members numbering in the hundreds or even thousands
 - A few 300-800 person pro-Chief groups were left out.
 - The two biggest anti-Chief groups (Anti-Chief and F*** the Chief) had only about 250 members each
 - Whereas the top three biggest pro-Chief groups have:
 - 7,900+ (Chief Illiniwek Forever.)
 - 5,300+ (Save the Chief)
 - 4,300+ (We'll Never Forget Chief Illiniwek)

AN INADEQUATE SUMMARY OF A FEW FINDINGS CONTINUED...

- **Content Analysis: Composition**
 - Not surprisingly estimates on racial composition found **more White students in pro-Chief groups** and **more students of color in anti-Chief groups**
 - Methods for collection of this data were highly flawed and can only be regarded as good suggestions or well-informed speculation
 - There was a great deal of cross-over between ethnic/racial cultural groups and causes and anti-Chief groups, and between various pro-Chief groups and sporting and school pride groups
 - Both sides seem to like Stephen Colbert

AN INADEQUATE SUMMARY OF A FEW FINDINGS CONTINUED...

- **Content Analysis: Discourse** - It's too early to say, but here's what I've got:
 - Topics include issues of race/ethnicity, racism/discrimination/prejudice, presentation and ownership of image/identity, mascots vs. symbols, school pride and tradition, reliability/validity/relevance of facts and information, and more.
 - Tone ranges considerably, I purposely chose a couple of very volatile groups so my results included (with varying degrees of passion/expressiveness and articulation): anger, condescension, criticism, sadness, thoughtfulness, and more.
 - Identity included self and imposed identification, performance/expression of identity, and complications of this process (symbolic interactionism)
 - Social Capital is a little harder to encapsulate and was mostly absent from these two small groups. The few examples present were related to potential network capital (in the anti-Chief group) and participatory capital (in the pro-Chief group). Mostly resource linking to other websites and occasionally face-to-face organizations. Preliminary observations suggest other groups (such as the Save the Chief related) are better observation grounds for social capital.

IN CONCLUSION

- This is honestly just a start
- It's a pretty intense topic and gives a strong reflection of campus climate
- Facebook is a rich environment in which we can study perspectives on race and campus climate and get an idea of how Facebook might supplement or impact social capital

FOR FUTURE STUDY

- A larger survey sample specifically about the Chief, potentially with subset populations (distributed to pro-Chief and anti-Chief groups)
- Use of this analysis set in exploring the other 12 groups (plus the half dozen big ones that are missing)
- Further explore just how connected the digital interactions and mobilization is to the face-to-face world (how they're specifically extending and enabling social capital)
- How students are socialized by these groups – especially as they acclimate to the University atmosphere

Thanks!

www.thefacebookproject.com