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## **“E-associations? Using Technology to Connect Citizens: The Case of Meetup.com”**

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There has been much research on whether the Internet helps or hurts social capital (the strength of our social networks). This paper explores one of the more promising examples to-date, Meetup.com, which enables individuals to find others locally who share an interest of theirs and meet monthly about this topic. This paper reviews who meets in these Meetups, whether they develop social capital through the Meetups, and what predicts whether they stick with Meetups. The paper overturns some stereotypes about Meetup (that it is attracting young people primarily, that people are drawn to Meetup by surfing Meetup’s website, that it is attracting the civically disengaged, and that it is attracting community newcomers). Given the transient nature of the commitments of Meetup participants, there is also a surprising amount of social capital being created. Creation of new social capital plays a strong role in whether Meetup participants return. And those with more social capital at the outset tend to make more social capital through Meetups.

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This paper is one of the first examining in detail the social significance of what Paul Resnick calls a “convening technology,” in this case Meetup.com, which strives to enable individuals to meet face-to-face wherever on whatever issues interest them. For example, a person in Dallas or Peoria or Spokane through Meetup could find others who want to meet monthly to practice Spanish, share their appreciation for Britney Spears, talk about personal investing, or work on the Howard Dean campaign. Meetup appeared to be promising for several reasons:

- It has been growing dramatically;
- In principle, it doesn’t require any pre-existing social relationships for the Meetups to occur;
- Meetup’s founder explicitly hoped to use it to build social capital;
- Meetup set the hurdle for participating extremely low;
- A lot of the Meetups concerned fun topics that might make it easier to attract participants, especially the civically disengaged; and
- It provided a way to link to others in a way that might cut across race, class and local geography<sup>1</sup>.

I start with a review of the “Bowling Alone” trends and the evidence that the Internet might make this better or worse before returning to a fuller description of Meetup and the analysis of the Meetup evidence.

By a host of different measures American have pulled back from their communities over the last generation.<sup>2</sup> We vote less, see our neighbors less, socialize less, go to church less often, attend meetings less frequently, and even bowl less in teams (the title factoid of “bowling alone”), to name only a few indicative measures. This declining engagement with others can be captured by the concept of “social capital”. Social trust stands for the value of social networks, stemming from the trust, reciprocity and information flows they lead to.<sup>3</sup> Many have suggested that the Internet and technology were somehow to blame for this era of disengagement and our declining social capital. While some forms of technology (like air conditioning or the car) may have played a contributing role, if by technology one means computers and the Internet, these civic declines were already well underway by the 1970s, long before the Internet was publicly available and personal computers were ubiquitous.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, depending on what the underlying demographics were of the topic in which users were registering to meet about, one could imagine a very interesting cross-section of participants. For example, Harry Potter fans might link in interesting ways across age, class or geography; a hip-hop Meetup might attract an interesting mix of urban and suburban teenagers; an Oprah fan Meetup might cross interesting social divides; or a Spanish-speaking Meetup group might attract an interesting mix of immigrants, Hispanics, and non-Hispanics 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Hispanic immigrants who wanted to practice their Spanish-speaking skills.

<sup>2</sup> For a relatively thorough summary of this evidence see Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller description of why social capital benefits communities, see Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community (Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 21-25.

But what role will the Internet play in the future? More and more of us are connected now to the Internet, and we spend increasing amounts of time behind these screens.<sup>45</sup> And the range of what we do over the Internet has expanded dramatically, and now includes many tasks that we used to do in more public settings: like banking, shopping, research and reading, entertainment, etc. Will the Internet help turn around the declines in “social capital” we’ve experienced over the last generation, or exacerbate them?

### ***Does the Internet Help or Hurt Our Levels of Civic Connection***

In principle the Internet could be social-capital-enhancing.<sup>6</sup> This is hardly an inclusive list, but for example:

- Cheap and efficient e-mail, list serves or even “phone over Internet” may make it easier to communicate with a wide circle of friends and thus to maintain geographically distant networks;
- The Internet may enable work from home, making it easier to maintain ties to family and community<sup>7</sup>;
- New Internet-based tools (like evite.com, or e-neighbors, etc.) may make it easier to invite others to social events or to keep in contact with neighbors;
- The Internet can make participation easier for certain pockets of individuals, such as:
  - Elderly shut-ins or those with physical disabilities or
  - Individuals who are not open about some fact in their life (that they have breast cancer, that they are gay, etc.) to find community with like-minded individuals while keeping this aspect of their life hidden from the larger community.

But the Internet could also be socially isolating, for example by<sup>8</sup>:

- Causing individuals to lose opportunities to socialize with others by shopping or banking on-line;
- Substituting real face-to-face connections with virtual ones (in which anonymity is greater and trust is harder to build);

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in Annenberg Center’s Digital Future Project they found that users were spending 12.5 hours online a week, the highest in the five years that they surveyed in (from 2000-2004). <http://www.digitalcenter.org/downloads/DigitalFutureReport-Year4-2004.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> About 63% of Americans were connected to the Internet in February 2004 in the roughly 10 years since it has been available as a tool. [Pew Internet and American Life Surveys (200-2004). And evidence as early as 1998 suggests that time on the Internet was coming out of leisure activities. [Strategis Group’s 1998 Internet User Trends Report indicating that Internet and online services by the American public is reducing time spent watching TV/VCR, reading, and exercise.]

<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive list of the way in which the Internet could have pro-social effects, see Paul Resnick, “Beyond Bowling Together: SocioTechnical Capital” (Chapter 29 in “HCI in the New Millennium”, ed. John M. Carroll. Addison-Wesley. 2002, pp. 247-272), or see Wellman 2001. “Physical Place and Cyberspace: The Rise of Personalized Networking” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25:227-252; or Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan Haase et al. (2001) “Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital?” *American Behavioral Scientist* 45(3):436-455 at, p. 438.

<sup>7</sup> Albeit, potentially at the expense of social ties to work colleagues.

<sup>8</sup> See also Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan Haase et al. (2001) “Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital?” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3):436-455 at pp. 439-440.

- Building communities where exit is much easier than in real communities resulting in lower investment in one's good reputation, less commitment to work through difficulties when conflict arises, etc.<sup>9</sup>
- Causing our communities to become ever more specialized – what van Alstyne called “cyber-balkanization”.<sup>10</sup>

To be sure, sorting out the social impact of the Internet is a complicated affair. First of all, the Internet is *multi-faceted* (covering everything from home shopping to chat groups to virtual games to sites where users research and gather information) and *protean* (how we use it today may not be how we used it a year ago or will use it five or ten years from now). Second, there are *selection effects* since who uses the Internet and the speed of their Internet connection is likely a function of visible social factors (education, income)<sup>11</sup> and invisible factors that may lead some to the Internet sooner than others; for this reason, it is hard to disentangle the impact of the Internet from who is drawn to the Internet.

Some have used longitudinal studies to rule out such selection effects and have found a pro-social impact of the Internet or at least found no statistically significant negative effect. For example, Robert Kraut's Pittsburgh-based HomeNet studies involved monitoring the social impact when individuals in a city were supplied with Internet connections and computer training. He initially found anti-social Internet effects (ironically among the heaviest Internet communicators), but a second wave of data showed these negative effects to have largely dissipated and another longitudinal survey (1998-99) showed pro-social Internet effects, although these benefits were disproportionately distributed among extraverts and those with greater social support at the outset (in other words, a social capital “rich get richer” story).<sup>12</sup> Axel Franzen, in a longitudinal study of Swiss internet users, found that using the Internet was neither associated with a statistically significant change in social network size nor with time spent with one's social network; he found further that the Internet most tends to displace television watching, obviously preferable from a social capital perspective than the Internet replacing time spent in social activities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Galston, William. (1999) “How Does the Internet Affect Community? Some Speculations In Search of Evidence” in [democracy.com](#) ed. Elaine Kamarck and Joseph Nye (Hollis Publishing).

<sup>10</sup> Van Alstyne, M. and E. Brynjolfsson (1996) “Widening Access and Narrowing Focus: Could the Internet Balkanize Science?” *Science* 274 (5292):1479-1480 or see Sunstein, Cass. (2001) [Republic.com](#) (Princeton University Press).

<sup>11</sup> See Everett M. Rogers, [Diffusion of Innovations](#). NY: Free Press, 1995, for a discussion of the role of various types of capital (human, social, financial) in the speed of adoption of new technologies. If the digital divide disappears in the future so will the selection effect issue, but Paul Dimaggio and Joseph Cohen in a thoughtful paper indicate that while access to the Internet may become nearly universal, other digital divides are like to persist (connection speed, knowledge of how to use the Internet or make sense of information on the Internet). DiMaggio, Paul, and Joseph Cohen. "Information Inequality and Network Externalities: A Comparative Study of the Diffusion of Television and the Internet." DiMaggio, Paul, and Joseph Cohen. [<http://inequality.princeton.edu/papers/dimaggio-inequality.pdf>]

<sup>12</sup> Kraut, Robert, et al. (2002) “Internet Paradox Revisited”, *Journal of Social Issues* 58(1):49-74.

<sup>13</sup> Axel Franzen, (2003) “Social Capital and the Internet: Evidence from Swiss Panel Data”, *Kyklos* 56(3):341-360. Norman Nie notes that in the U.S. some of the 10 hours a week (on average) that Internet users report spending on the Internet comes at the expense of television watching time (according to

Nevertheless, scholarly debate continues to rage between cyber-enthusiasts such as Barry Wellman who believe that the Internet augments other forms of communication and enhances social interconnection and social capital<sup>14</sup> to cyber-wary scholars like Norman Nie who see the Internet as ushering in greater social isolation and disengagement.<sup>15</sup>

My colleague Robert Putnam has speculated that whether the Internet becomes an asset or a liability in the creation of social capital will turn largely on whether the Internet becomes a *nifty phone* (enabling us to connect with a wider range of individuals than before, cheaply, efficiently and effectively) or a *nifty television* (that provides endless channels of entertainment, but leaves us passively sitting behind yet another ghostly screen).<sup>16</sup>

Our hypothesis is that “*alloy social capital*” that interweaves virtual and real strands will be stronger in producing social capital in the same way as alloy metals (like steel) are stronger than their constituent elements (iron, nickel, etc.).

Meetup.com appeared to be such alloy social capital; Meetup enables users to meet face-to-face monthly but uses the Internet to convene them and enables them to communicate electronically with each other between Meetups.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, we thought Meetup was worthy of research.

### ***What is Meetup.com?***

Meetup.com is a for-profit Internet company launched in the summer of 2002 to enable users to find others locally wanting to meet monthly on any one of a myriad of potential common interests. Meetup.com does not decide what the list of potential topics will be and is willing to add any meeting topic that is not pornographic, hate-based or promoting illegal activity.<sup>18</sup>

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respondents), but Nie is suspicious of these self-reports since there was no significant decline nation-wide in television watching over this period. Nie, Norman. (2001) “Sociability, Interpersonal Relations and the Internet.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45 (3):420-435. Ben Anderson also finds spotty and very limited effects of Internet access or usage on respondent’s assessment of the quality of communications with friends. Anderson, Ben, “Information Society Technologies, Social Capital and Quality of Life”, Chimera Working Paper Number:2004-2005, January 2004. [<http://www.essex.ac.uk/chimera/>]

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan Haase et al. (2001) “Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital?” *American Behavioral Scientist* 45(3):436-455 at pp. 439-440.

<sup>15</sup> Nie, Norman. (2001) “Sociability, Interpersonal Relations and the Internet.” *American Behavioral Scientist*. 45(3):420-435.

<sup>16</sup> See Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 179.

<sup>17</sup> In the Meetups that we observed over the Summer of 2004 (what Meetup refers to as version 2.0), the ability to communicate with each other between Meetups was fairly limited and largely relied on Meetup users voluntarily deciding to swap e-mail addresses with each other (either on a bilateral or group basis).

<sup>18</sup> For a good description of Meetup, see Hubert, Anne. (2004) “Module 2.0 – Business: What Lessons Can Internet Businesses Teach Political Movements?” pp. 12-17 in *Briefing Materials Internet and Society 2004: Votes, Bits and Bytes*. Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

[http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/events/is2k4/is\\_briefing.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/events/is2k4/is_briefing.pdf)

Interestingly, the founder, Scott Heiferman, was motivated to start Meetup.com after reading Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone, since he thought he had a technological answer for how to use the Internet to build more social capital in the aftermath of 9-11-2001. That said, Meetup's goal of building social capital obviously doesn't ensure that their approach will actually succeed.

*How does it work?* As a potential user, you type in your zip code and a topic that interests you (e.g., auto mechanics, dachshunds, practicing Spanish, pinochle, stay-at-home Moms, Howard Dean). You register for a local Meetup, say the Cleveland Meetup of stay-at-home Moms. When there is a quorum of interested users (6 or more Stay-at-Home moms for the Cleveland Meetup, to stick with this example), you are asked whether you can attend the next monthly Cleveland Stay-At-Home Moms Meetup (as each Meetup has a specific day and time associated with it). You are also asked to select which of 3 venues works best for you. The software detects whether there is a quorum for the next Meetup, and if so selects a venue, and then lets the Cleveland Stay-At-Home Moms know about the time and place of the Meetup.

Meetup invests no resources in training anyone to run these local Meetups<sup>19</sup> and doesn't send anyone to these Meetups to monitor them. They assume that a group of people converging on a common location with a common interest can figure out how to run the meeting.

Users can nominate new ideas for Meetups. Interestingly, if someone in one location proposes a new Meetup idea (let's say a Jon Stewart Meetup), Meetup sets up a latent Jon Stewart Meetup in all Meetup locations that becomes active as soon as there is sufficient local interest.

Meetup currently take place in thousands of cities in scores of countries at bookstores, cafés, restaurants, pubs, and other local settings.

Meetup, to ensure the privacy of participants, gathers no data about individuals' demographics and Meetup managers don't actually know precisely who attends what Meetups.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Meetup upgraded their platform to what they call Meetup 3.0 (the features were slowly rolled out but a bulk of them took effect by August 2004). A full description of these Meetup 3.0 changes is beyond the scope of this article, but in short, they are insisting that each local Meetup have a volunteer coordinator-leader (who is self-nominated). They allow for more local control (how frequently the Meetup meets, requirements of membership, where they meet, etc.). Meetup users have an easier time e-mailing each other between Meetups (if they are MeetupPlus members). And the site will ultimately be more transparent, so Meetup participants in one Meetup can find out what agendas their brother and sister chapters are pursuing, for example. There will be a federated structure to Meetups, so Meetups can generally affiliate together with other same topic Meetups or even episodically coalesce with other Meetup topics around shared specific issues. It's also possible that under 3.0, Meetup will devote some resources to training these volunteer local coordinators.

<sup>20</sup> The data Meetup gathers can identify which individuals RSVPd that they would attend a specific Meetup (although some of these no-show and others attend without RSVPing). In addition, to gauge the quality of the leader and the venue, to estimate the Meetup size, and to see which Meetups took place, Meetup sends out an e-mail post-event to everyone who RSVPd that they would attend. From users who respond to this

Meetups could be important for social capital along two dimensions: first, through the Meetups themselves, participants might expand their social networks; second, either directly or indirectly, it is possible that through the Meetups participants would take collective action or increase their political power by aggregating their interests. Given the Meetup 2.0 structure that existed at the time of these observations we focused mainly on the former (do Meetup participants form new friendships through Meetup, do they get together with Meetup participants outside of Meetups, etc.). But Scott Heiferman's grander vision is that Meetup.com under version 3.0 and beyond might be the engine for 21<sup>st</sup> century associations and a vehicle to empower the disempowered. For example, he envisions that local pizza delivery Meetups could be federated together into a Pizza Delivery Union, or that Stay-at-Home Mom's through Meetups might collectively have political power through their linked Meetups to effect Mom-friendly policy.

### *Growth*

Meetup's growth has been impressive. In the roughly three years since their founding they have gone from 0 to 1.5 million members worldwide.<sup>21</sup>

Meetups were not envisioned to be political. As founder Heiferman commented: ““We never thought it would be used for politics. We figured that we would attract Lord of the Rings geeks and poodle owners.”<sup>22</sup> But they did become political; Meetups rose to fame when the Howard Dean campaign decided to use the Meetup infrastructure during the democratic primaries, and some speculated that Meetup wouldn't survive post-Dean, but the number of Meetups has continued to grow with some peaks and valleys since the summer/fall of 2004 and politics accounted for less than 15% of Meetups by February 2005.

### *Why is Meetup Interesting?*

The Meetup phenomenon appeared interesting primarily for three reasons:

1) In theory, Meetup could generate social capital from complete strangers. Most social capital is “parasitic” on existing ties — existing social networks are used to mobilize some new effort (for example, part of a workgroup forms a social group, a softball group starts a book club, etc.) The fact that Meetup could bring complete strangers together

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survey, Meetup triangulates an estimate of Meetup size and gets an under-inclusive count of who specifically was at that Meetup. [Since they only hear from people who RSVPd for the Meetup and who filled out the post-Meetup survey.] Meetup also gets pictures sent in voluntarily of Meetups and from eyeballing these company managers have a very rough sense of gender, age, and ethnic composition of a fairly large number of Meetups.

<sup>21</sup> As explained later in the text, the level of membership (at least in Meetup 2.0) is somewhat thin, so only a fraction of Meetup members actually attend one or more Meetups in a given month.

<sup>22</sup> David T. Green and John M. Pearson. 2005. “Social Software and Cyber Networks: Ties That Bind or Weak Associations within the Political Organization?” Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

appears to be a distinct advantage, especially in the current era of declining social capital.<sup>23</sup>

2) Meetup might attract different types of “civic” players and might be fun: “broccoli” solutions to civic engagement that appeal only to an NPR, C-SPAN “do gooding” civic audience may have limited effect, since this segment is rather narrow and presumably already civically engaged. While some Meetups are political, many are purely social and fun, convening individuals, for example, to play Boggle, share their love of Anime movies, or meet other chihuahua owners. We believed that for these reasons, Meetup might attract a younger, less already engaged crowd.

3) There is a low hurdle for entry: One commits to registering for a Meetup, trying out a Meetup and getting a monthly e-mail encouraging one to come to others. In this sense, Meetup is the “casual dating” equivalent of associationalism. In an era of declining civic engagement, we believed that having a low barrier for entry might be an ideal mechanism to getting people involved initially (and perhaps for the longer-term), especially the commitment-phobes.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Methodology***

Over the summer of 2004, our research team observed roughly 40 Meetups across eight locations (Portland, OR; Denver; Albuquerque/Santa Fe; St. Louis; Houston; Ann Arbor; the NYC metro area; and Pittsburgh). A complete listing of the Meetups observed and their distribution by geography and type of Meetup is described in Appendix 1. While we made an effort to choose a diverse group of cities for observations and attempted to observe a diverse group of Meetups within and across these sites, the selection of Meetups was in no purely scientific sense random.<sup>25</sup> In a few cases we returned to the same Meetup for the following month’s event to get a sense of how dynamics and attendance changed from one Meetup to the next.

At each Meetup, the observer noted that he/she wished to observe the Meetup and got the group’s consent. The observer generally played an inactive role in the Meetup itself, but recorded information on everything from the group dynamics, to what general topics were discussed (and whether the group went off-topic together<sup>26</sup>), to whether individuals arrived in groups or left in groups, to how people sat, to whether there was evidence of group norms, to whether there were introductions, etc.). I believe that nothing reported in this paper is directly at odds with the ethnographic evidence.

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<sup>23</sup> See Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> See a later conversation in this paper about megachurches’ “seeker service” and how they have used this remarkably effectively to build their membership base in last several decades.

<sup>25</sup> For example, one topic that was of interest to us, given that we are based at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard was the political/activist meetups which constituted 48% of our respondents and 35% of our Meetups, even though such Meetups account for only 15% of Meetup’s active Meetups. In general, most of the variation in our Meetup respondents tended to arise from individual-level responses with some (often on order of 20% of the variation arising from Meetup-level variation). An insignificant amount of the variation tended to arise from city-level variation.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Resnick’s criterion for whether online groups are communities is whether they go off-topic together.

In addition, at the end of each Meetup, the observer asked Meetup attendees to fill out a one-page survey. We collected 337 survey responses from 37 Meetups and got an 81% response rate in total and a median response rate by group of 90% (since a few of the much larger Meetups observed had slightly lower response rates). Almost all of the discussion in this paper draws from quantitative analyses of these surveys.

The methodology was not specifically designed to test or examine political Meetups.<sup>27</sup> After discussing Meetups more generally, I discuss political Meetups specifically. That said, I believe that if non-political Meetups succeed in building more social capital, it would naturally have implication for improved political mobilization more generally.

### *Typology of Meetups*

For purposes of analyzing the responses, Meetups were divided into the following 4-fold typology:

- *Hobby/Social* (which included Meetups like Anime, Boggle, Pug-owners, Star Trek, Book Crossing<sup>28</sup>, Knitters, etc.)
- *Public Purpose/Activist* (which included Dean Meetups, Democracy for America, Kerry Meetups, 9-11 Questions Meetups, Human Rights Campaign, Townhall<sup>29</sup>, Republicans, Nader, etc.)
- *Skill-Building*<sup>30</sup> (which included foreign language speaking groups and Investor's Business Daily Meetups)
- *Religious* (which uses a loose definition of religion and included groups like ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, Pagans, Witches, etc. as well as Buddhists).

*Meetup Outsider Groups:* In looking over the data it became fairly clear that there was something distinctive about Meetups that were a haven for groups that felt uncomfortable in the surrounding community. A variable was created that was 0 for groups fairly evidently were not Outsider groups and 2 for Meetups that fairly clearly were outsider groups and 1 where the evidence was less clear one way or another. The criteria used was whether there was evidence that the Meetup attendees were less comfortable socializing with a random individual drawn from the surrounding town, so groups like Pagans and ex-Jehovah Witnesses, Anime, and LiveJournal where comments of group

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<sup>27</sup> Some research efforts have focused specifically on measuring political Meetups, see most notably Prof. Christine William's effort at Bentley. [<http://www.DeanVolunteers.org/Meetup/>]

<sup>28</sup> Book Crossing concerns "releasing" books into the wild so others can enjoy them and then trying to make a connection with the readers/finders of these books and encouraging them to in turn release these books after they are done reading. For more information see [www.bookcrossing.com/about](http://www.bookcrossing.com/about)

<sup>29</sup> A Heritage-sponsored conservative group.

<sup>30</sup> This category was a bit open to interpretation since a Chess Meetup for example (or even Boggle) could be seen as a skill-building Meetup, but the skill-building category was confined to skills likely marketable in the broader society. If anything, putting foreign language skills into the skill-building category may dampen the findings a bit since these groups were among the most social we witnessed (since by definition nothing was off-topic as long as it was said in the requisite language).

members or intuition led one to believe that these were likely to be people ostracized from the surrounding community were given a 2 on this variable.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Findings:***

The quantitative survey data gathered suggest that four stereotypes we had about Meetup were unfounded. In reality, Meetup is not a young person's phenomenon; it is not especially engaging the civically disengaged or community newcomers; and is only sometimes about strangers meeting strangers.

Moreover, these data suggest a "rich get richer" picture of social capital, where those most likely to develop new personal friends from Meetups are those who have lived in the town for longer (who presumably have higher social capital) and those most likely to do something with *new* Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup are those who had the most number of pre-existing friends at their first Meetup.

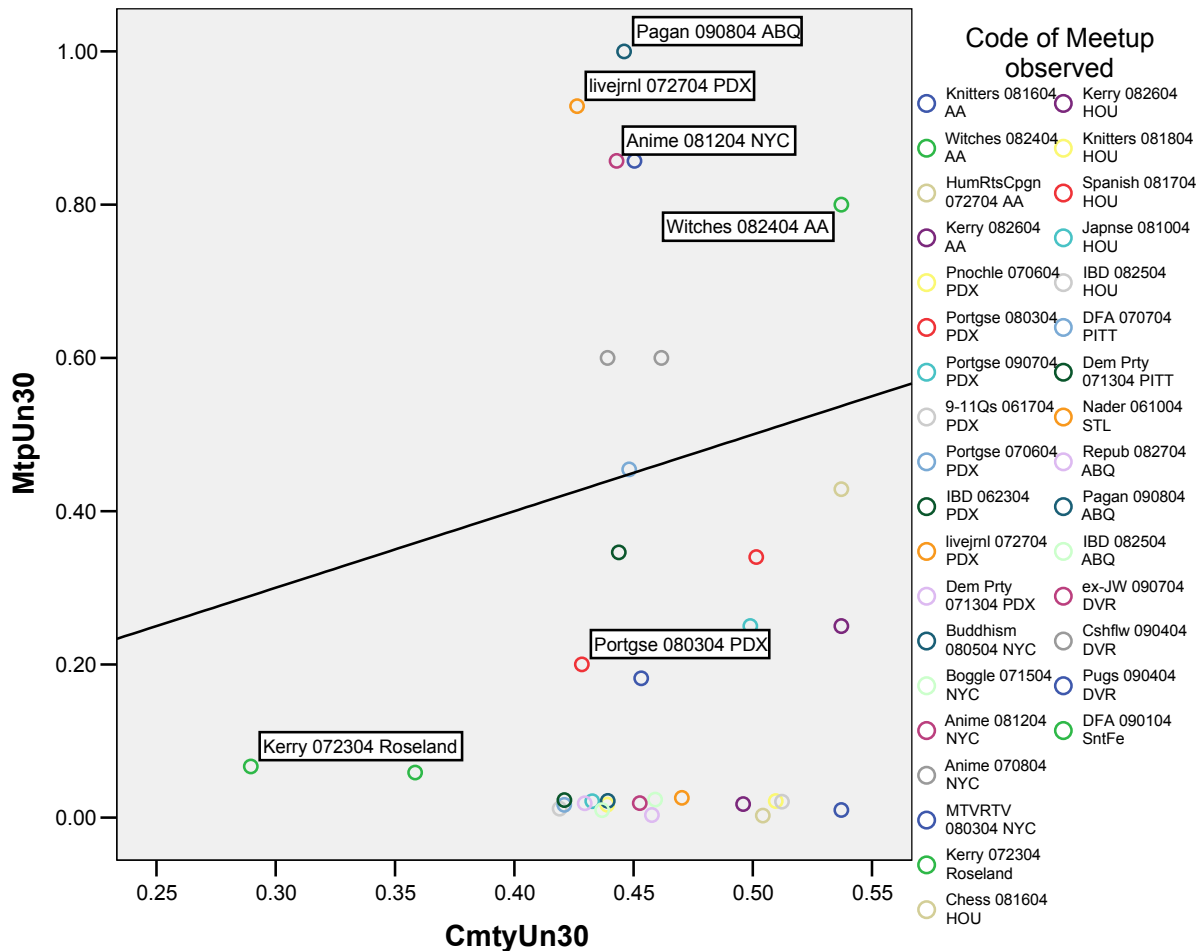
Finally, they suggest that social capital with others is a key determinant of ongoing Meetup involvement: the strongest predictor other than having attended more previous Meetups and attending a smaller Meetup was having done something with a new Meetup friend/acquaintance outside of Meetup, i.e., having demonstrated that Meetup was a useful channel for building increased social capital.

First, dispelling our stereotypes:

1) Much as we associate Internet socializing and high-tech socializing as a young person's phenomenon (Friendster, chat rooms, instant messaging, etc.), this did not seem to be true of Meetup.

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<sup>31</sup> To be sure, this variable seems more subjective and is not in some cases something we could have categorized prior to observing the group (for example with livejournal), but it is clear from factor analysis and regressions that there is a distinct appeal of Meetup to these social outsiders, although there is clearly lots of appeal of Meetup to non-social outsiders as well. Social outsiders might be thought of a Meetup sub-niche. (The third factor in both unrotated and varimax factor analysis rotation, explaining 8% of variance, was most heavily loaded on a group being an Outsider group (.651) and also being a skill group or hobby Meetup, being male, being smaller and doing things with new Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup.)



The above chart (and three others later in the paper) plot the characteristics of the Meetups observed against the corresponding community characteristics. Groups on the black line in this chart had the *percentage of 18-30 year olds* one would expect from to the surrounding community demographics; Meetups above the black line had an over-representation of 18-30 year olds and Meetups below the line under-represented 18-30 year olds. 26 Meetups had fewer attendees ages 18-30 than the surrounding community (below the black line) and only 8 over-represented 18-30 year olds.<sup>32</sup> On average, groups had 20 percentage points fewer 18-30 year olds than the surrounding community (and the median was 35 percentage points fewer 18-30 year olds).

It is unclear why young people are not more likely to be over-represented. It is partly a function of Meetup topic, but not in the way one would expect. One might have assumed that 18-30 year olds were dramatically under-represented only in political/activist Meetups but this was not the case. On average non-political Meetups had 28% of 18-30 year old attendees whereas political meetups had 30% in this age bracket. But young

<sup>32</sup> Community demographics taken from 2003 American Community Survey data (Census).

folks *were* slightly more likely to be represented at religious groups (53% of attendees were under age 30) or hobby groups (43% were attendees under age 30) or social groups more generally. Given that younger cohorts are more likely to have an Internet connection and regularly use the Internet than older cohorts, the under-representation of youth adults is doubly surprising (since the X-axis that lists what % of the community is 18-30 doesn't control for Internet access).<sup>33</sup> This might possibly result from meeting face-to-face seeming “square” for younger people or young people suffering from a perceived surfeit of social ties.<sup>34</sup>

2) Meetup did not appear to be significantly attracting the civically disengaged. We asked a standard question of respondents “How many times in the last year have you been to a public meeting at which town and school affairs were discussed?” Meetup respondents on average attended 20% more such public meetings than the nation as a whole (3.0 in the last year versus 2.5 in the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey).<sup>35</sup> However since Meetup attendees were especially well educated and education is the strongest, most consistent predictor of virtually every form of social and political participation, one needs to control for education.<sup>36</sup> Controlling for the education level of Meetup attendees more than makes this difference go away: education-controlled, Meetup respondents attended 16% fewer public meetings (2.1 public meetings a year for Meetup participants vs. 2.5 in the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey). So Meetup participants are a bit less civically engaged, but mainly are way more educated.

Moreover, Meetup attendees were not just well more educated than the nation but well more educated than their surrounding communities. The following is a comparison of Meetup attendees versus their surrounding communities in levels of education.

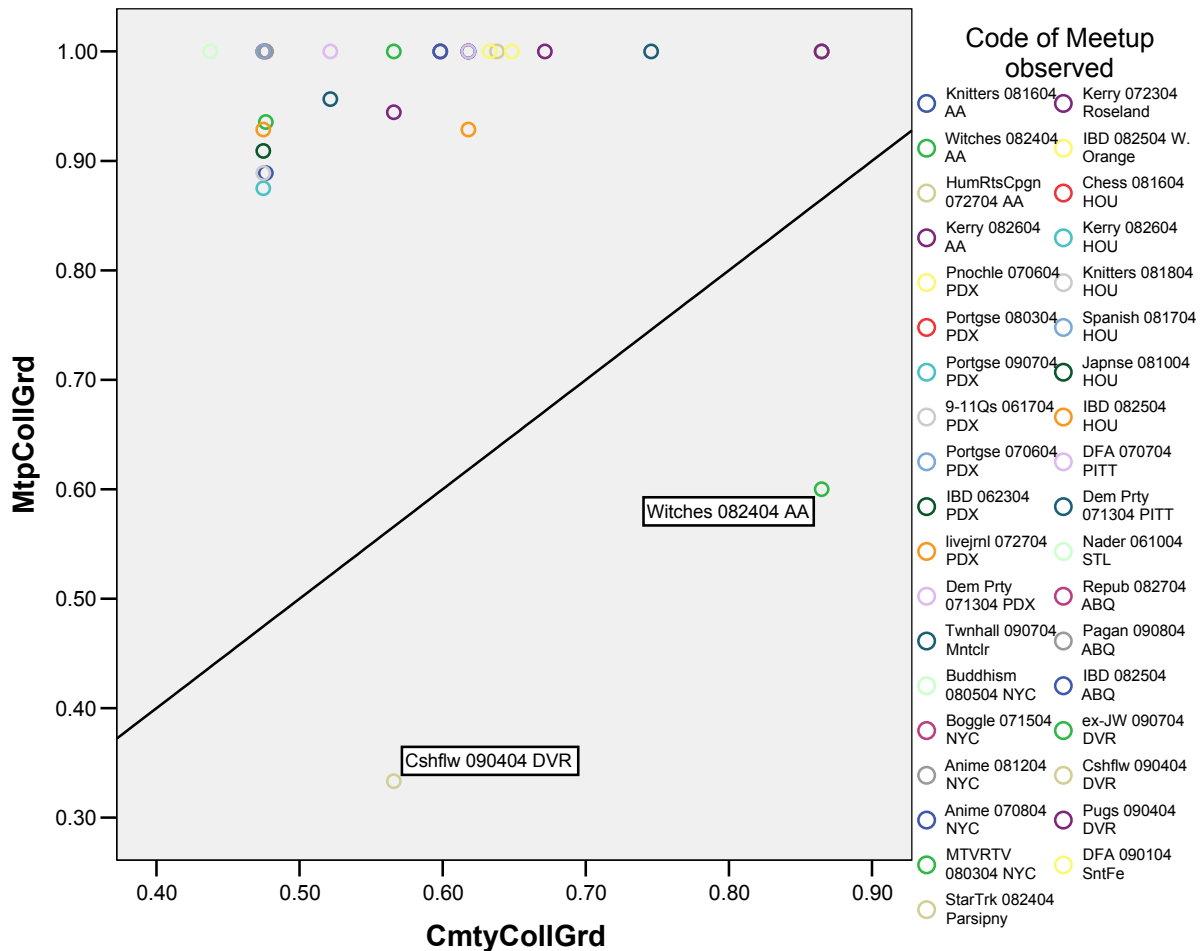
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<sup>33</sup> 82% of Americans 18-29 used a computer in May-June 2004 vs. 82% of Americans 30-49, 68% of Americans 50-64, and 33% of Americans 65 or older; 78% of Americans 18-29 went online in May-June 2004 vs. 74% of Americans 30-49, 60% of Americans 50-64, and 25% of Americans 65 or older; and 37% of Americans 18-29 were “online yesterday” in May-June 2004 vs. 41% of Americans 30-49, 32% of Americans 50-64, and 12% of Americans 65 or older. [May-June 2004, Pew Survey on Internet and American Life.]

<sup>34</sup> The author is indebted to Keith Hampton for these comments; youth, in Hampton's view, may suffer from the “weakness of weak ties” since they treat all ties, no matter how shallow as ties and thus be in the unenviable position of, on the one hand, feeling that they have lots or even too many ties, and at the same time having a dearth of social ties that they can actually draw on for emotional or economic support. (Private conversation with Hampton, Summer 2005)

<sup>35</sup> Obviously one can't strictly compare the results because of differences both in methodology and the survey date. For SCCBS methodology see [http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/scc\\_bench.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/scc_bench.html). In the SCCBS survey, the polling firm (TNSI) conducted up to 15 callbacks to try to reach reluctant respondents. While the Meetup survey had no such follow-up, the Meetup survey response rate was significantly higher than the SCCBS response rate, presumably because the Meetup surveys were shorter, face-to-face and in a setting where the researcher already had a bit of trust and respect with the Meetup attendees.

<sup>36</sup> In most of our regressions on the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey of social capital variables, education is by far the most significant factor, and this is why Robert Putnam held levels of education constant in comparing social capital levels between the Boomers and their parents (the Long Civic Generation) See Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp.248-257.



As one can see, only 2 Meetups were less educated than the surrounding community (below the 45 degree black line) and almost all Meetups had a much more educated attendee-base than the surrounding community (above the black line).<sup>37</sup> On average, Meetup groups had 36 percentage points more participants with at least a 4-year college degree than in the surrounding community (the median was 38 percentage points higher).

The extreme cases were in Houston and Albuquerque where 71% of the Meetup attendees had a 4-year college degree or more vs. 24% and 29% in the Census respectively. Although many of the Meetup participants are not learning about Meetup through the Meetup.com website, the fact that more educated groups are more likely to use the Internet may contribute to the educational bias in who attends.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Education data taken from 2003 American Community Survey data (Census).

<sup>38</sup> Only 22% of respondents with less than a High School education were online in November 2004 vs. 75% of individuals with some college and 82% of respondents with a college degree or more [Pew Internet & American Life Project, Post-Election 2004 and November 2004 Tracking Surveys.]

3) While we had thought that Meetups might disproportionately be attractive to “community newbies” (people who recently moved to a community), this certainly is not true as a rule, and if anything, Meetups seem to disproportionately *not* attract community newcomers.

Most Meetup groups generally had 10-15% of respondents who had lived in community under 2 years, but the average tenure of people in the community was 16 years. The below chart compares what percent in the Meetup had been in the community for one year or less against the percentage of the community that moved across County or State lines in the last year.<sup>39</sup> Suggesting that Meetups under-represent community newcomers were the following bits of evidence:

- 18 Meetups had lower newbie representation than the surrounding community (below the black line) and only 15 had higher newbie representation than the surrounding community (above the black line)
- The group *median* was 6 percentage points fewer community newcomers than the surrounding community

The only evidence that Meetups over-represented community newcomers is that the average Meetup group had 5 percentage points more community newbies than the surrounding community (because of some high outliers). As you can see there is mixed evidence, but on balance Meetups appear to slightly tilt away from disproportionately attracting community newcomers; in any event, the evidence is certainly not dramatic in either direction.<sup>40</sup>

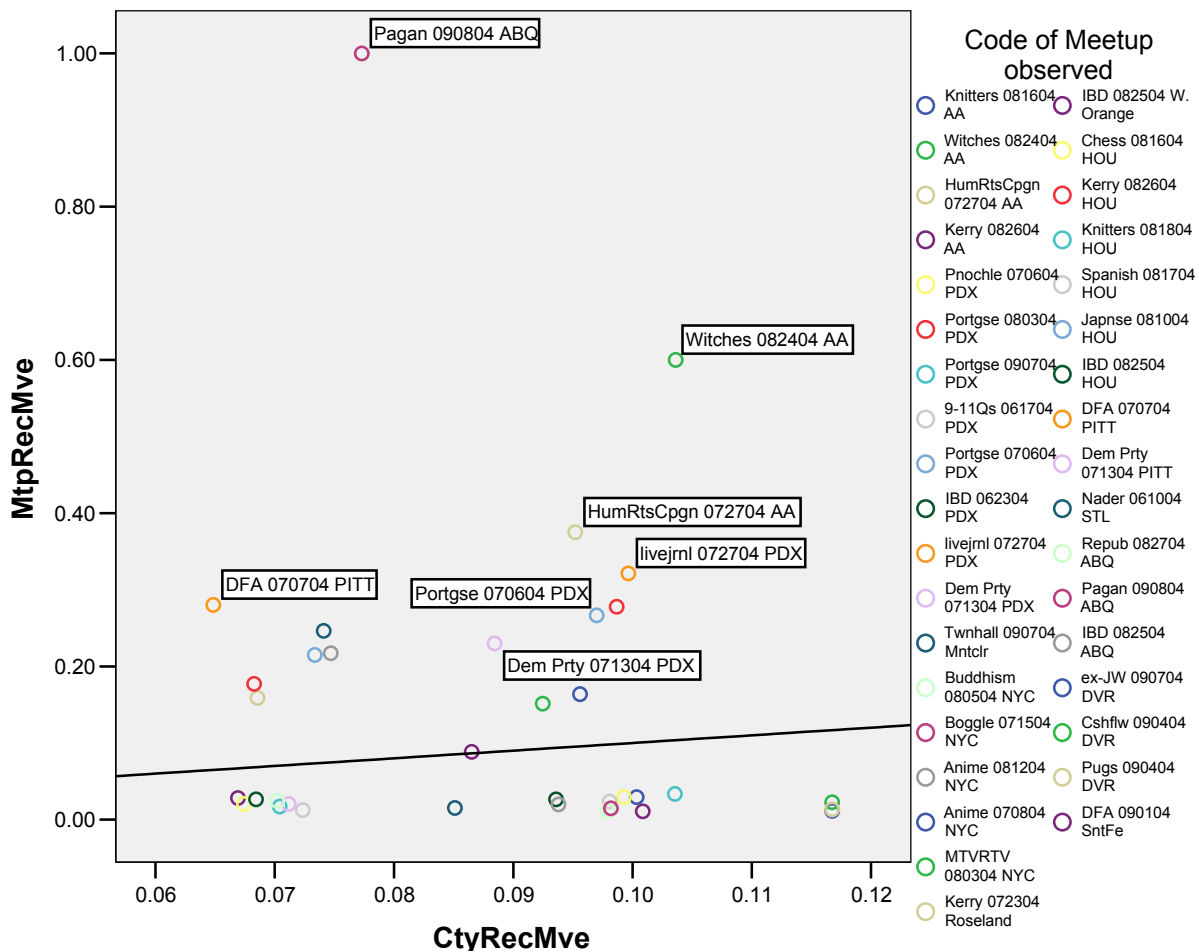
One notable example, which you see from some outliers on the above chart, is religious groups where 46% of respondents (albeit on a very small sample of 15 respondents) had been in community less than a year.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mobility data taken from 2003 American Community Survey data (Census).

<sup>40</sup> Political Meetups were the only category of Meetups that attracted more community newcomers on average than statistically would be suggested.

<sup>41</sup> Skill-building groups were an exception which were slightly *more* likely to attract community newcomers (7 of skill-building groups had a higher proportion of community newcomers than the community and only 6 had lower).



4) While we had imagined that Meetup was about strangers meeting strangers, this was almost as often untrue as true. Across all respondents, a bit more than half (60%) said they didn't know anyone at their "first Meetup" (on the topic which we were observing).<sup>42</sup> Conversely, a full quarter of respondents knew 2 or more people at their first Meetup. New York City came closest to a location where strangers were meeting strangers: almost three quarters of respondents at NYC Meetups knew no one at their first Meetup. Conversely Ann Arbor, least fit this impression (71% of Meetup attendees knew at least one person at their first Meetup).

Part of the explanation for this concerns how people learn about Meetup. We had assumed that most people would learn about Meetups through the Meetup website and thus would be unlikely to know others at their first Meetup.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> While this 60% was low compared to our expectations, it is likely significantly higher than various "old world" counterparts like the Rotary or PTAs or bowling leagues where the percentage of attendees that know no one in the group at their first meeting is likely much closer to 0%.

<sup>43</sup> Our hunches were correct. People learning about Meetup through the website were much less likely to know of someone at their first Meetup. Eighty six percent of those learning about Meetup through the website did not know anyone at their first Meetup versus 40% among those who learned about Meetup from a friend (even an e-mail from a friend).

Our question asked Meetup attendees how they learned about Meetup and only a very small fraction (approximately 10%) of participants indicated that they learned about Meetup originally through Meetup.com.<sup>44</sup> Most heard about the Meetup from a third party website, from a friend, or from an anonymous e-mail or listserve. In addition, some of the Meetup participants that were at their first Meetup voiced questions (either on the survey or elsewhere) about “what is Meetup”.<sup>45</sup>

Meetup is thus more of a “pull” rather than “push” technology. Users, once they visit Meetup.com, are more likely to know what group they are planning to attend and register for this group rather than surfing Meetup.com for possibilities of local groups.

#### 5) Whiteness of Meetup attendees versus population as a whole

Meetups were generally fairly heavily Caucasian. 28 of the Meetups observed were whiter than the surrounding community (above the black line on the following chart), and only 6 were more diverse than the surrounding community. The average Meetup was 24 percentage points whiter than the surrounding community and the median Meetup group observed was 23 percentage points whiter. It is worth noting that some of this bias stems from the fact that whites are much more likely (especially than African Americans) to have Internet access and to use the Internet regularly.<sup>46</sup> [Moreover, some of the whiteness of our sample could be an epiphenomenon of the fact that our research team was all white, and on average may have been more attracted to topics that drew whites rather than non-whites, much as we aimed to observe a diverse set of Meetups.]<sup>47</sup>

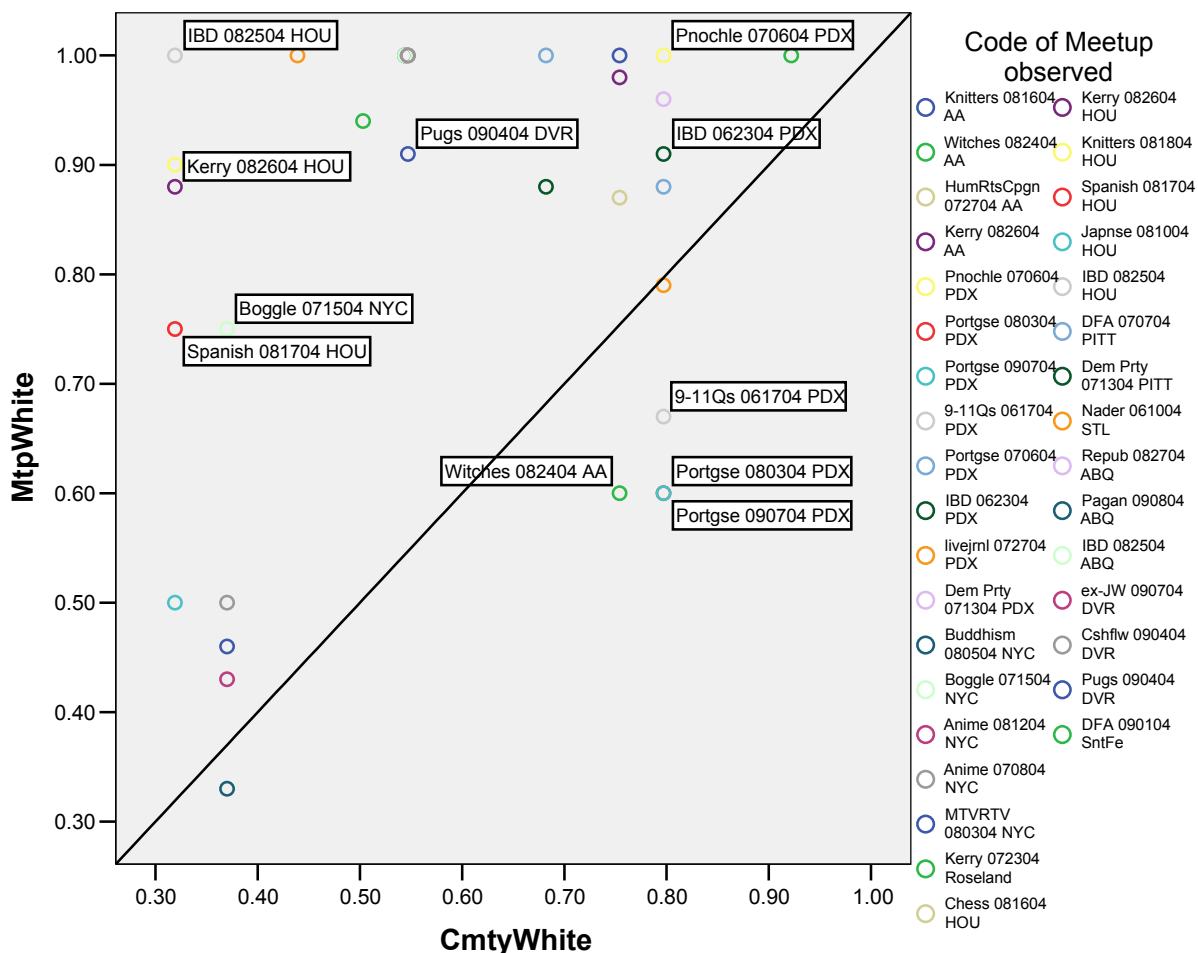
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<sup>44</sup> The write-in form of this question did not enable precise calculation of the importance of the Meetup website, but private communication with a Board member of Meetup suggest that this 10% figure is more likely accurate than inaccurate. Moreover, a survey of political Meetups in the second wave of the Bentley College Meetup research project found that 16% of the 328 respondents learned of their first political Meetup through the Meetup.com web site, and this difference is likely within the margin of error. [e-mailed data from Christine Williams, February 2005.]

<sup>45</sup> Presumably these attendees didn't know what Meetup was since a friend encouraged them to attend, but over time learn what Meetup is since they register for the Meetup and get at least monthly e-mails from Meetup.

<sup>46</sup> For example, only 55% of blacks use a computer versus 70% of Hispanics and 73% of whites; only 43% of blacks go online versus 59% of Hispanics and 67% of whites; and only 14% of blacks were “online yesterday” versus 26% of Hispanics and 38% of whites. [May-June 2004, Pew Survey on Internet and American Life.]

<sup>47</sup> The fact that Meetup seemed to attract a very highly educated audience only partly explains why it we found such a high percentage of white Meetup attendees. 83% of Meetup attendees in our sample were white, and even adjusting for the levels of education we found in Meetup, this was 10% whiter than what our Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey would predict.



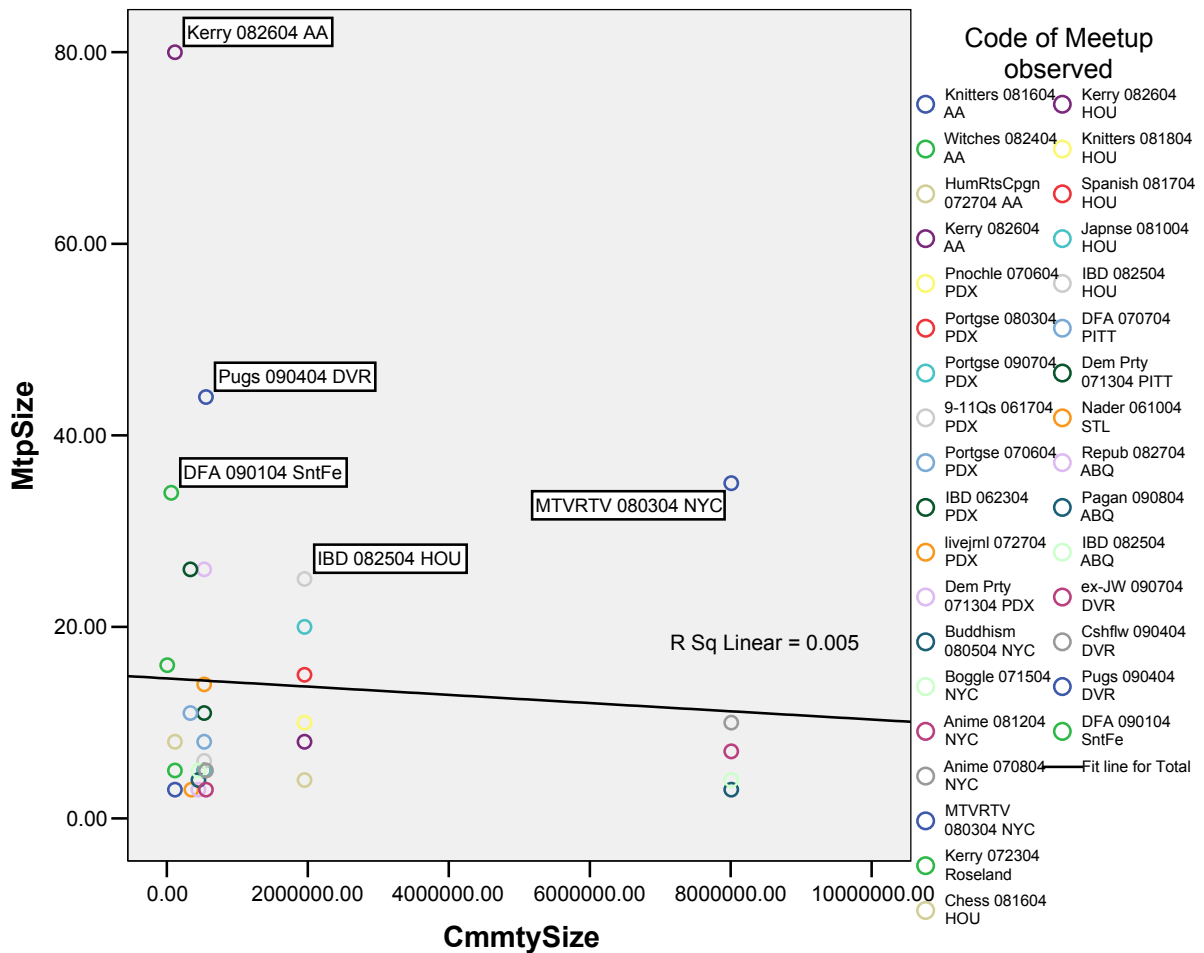
**6) Meetup and Size of Surrounding Community apparently unrelated**

The size of the underlying city is basically uncorrelated with the size of the Meetups in that community.

There is essentially no relationship between log of city size and size of the Meetups. (The correlation of these two is  $R=-.064$ .)<sup>48</sup> But if this tentative finding that city size is uncorrelated with size of Meetup tends to dovetail with the more general finding outside of Meetup that social capital and engagement is higher in smaller towns (since by definition having a 50 person Meetup entails a higher percentage of residents attending if the population of the surrounding community is 5000 than if the surrounding community is 5,000,000).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> I have not yet been able to look at Meetup data to see whether the number of Meetup participants per capita actively meeting in a given month is larger or smaller in big cities. In principle it is mathematically possible, but highly unlikely, that there are simply many more active groups in larger cities and this overcompensates for the fact that Meetups are actually smaller. In addition, it's possible but unlikely that this is an artifact of the Meetups that we happened to observe, but this merits additional research]

<sup>49</sup> For consistent evidence outside of Meetup, see Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, pp. 205-207.



Meetups, in short, attract educated men and women of all ages, people already reasonably well-integrated into their communities. Meetup participants do not appear to be mostly lonely community newcomers craving community.

### A. Who Sticks With Meetups

Since the survey could only ask about past behavior and current state of mind, we couldn't know for sure who actually returned to the following Meetups, but we did ask respondents about their intention to return.<sup>50</sup> Which of the following factors predicted who expressed greater likelihood of returning?

<sup>50</sup> Note that in the handful of cases where we did track Meetups longitudinally and attended the following Meetup, it appeared that stated intention to return was in no means a *strong* predictor of actually showing up at the next meetup. (In partial defense of the integrity of the word of Meetup respondents, our survey question didn't ask whether you would attend the *next* Meetup, but how likely you were to return to this Meetup.)

- *Demographic factors* (respondent's age, education level, marital status, ethnicity, number of years lived in community).
- *Meetup characteristics* (size of Meetup observed, size of prior month's Meetup, type of Meetup, whether there was a Meetup leader, % of Meetup that was ages 18-30, % of Meetup that was over age 50, number of times the Meetup group had previously met, type of Meetup)
- *Respondent's Meetup behavioral characteristics* (how many personal friends respondent had at first Meetup, how many new personal friends R met through the Meetup, number of Meetups and other groups previously attended, whether R recommended to others that they attend, how many public meetings on town/school issues R attended in last year, whether R had gotten together with new Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup)

[Insert Tables 1-1c here]

These results of an OLS multivariate analysis, controlling for all the items listed in the above bullets are shown in Table 1. Table 1a shows the results of a standard OLS model with robust standard errors on the variables significant from Table 1, Table 1b shows the results of a 3-level random intercepts model that adjusts for the clustering of data at the city level and Meetup level, and Table 1c shows the results of a 3-level random intercepts model with ordered logit.

As can be seen in Tables 1b and 1c, the only variables that were statistically significant at predicting "intent to return" (at  $p \leq .05$ ) were:

- Doing something with new friends/acquaintances outside of Meetup;
- Whether the Meetup group is a Hobby group; and
- Attending a greater number of previous Meetups on this topic and on other topics (in the ordered logit, clustered model);

To some extent this tells a fairly pure social capital story, in which unless you develop meaningful new social capital with group members (i.e. new friends or acquaintances that you do something with outside of Meetup, rather than merely pre-existing friends), you're not as likely to return. The role of having been to more prior Meetups (on this topic and other topics) could be something of a tautology. If you've been to more such Meetups, you've presumably found value in the Meetup proposition. So it is little surprise that the cumulative impact of all these individual decisions to return to the Meetup group is driving the decision this time (that is after all what one would expect unless the most recent Meetup was so bad as to swamp the long-term average of whether the participant had felt the urge the return).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> It is unclear why hobby groups were outliers. In the hobby groups, 8 out of the 37 groups we examined, all had high averaged expressed likelihood to return and 3 of the 8 had 100% of respondents who said they were "very likely" to return. This was much higher than the average expressed intention to return where 74% indicated they were very likely to return. (The hobby groups were 2 anime groups, 2 knitting groups, 1 boggle group, 1 chess group, 1 pinochle group, and 1 livejournal group.)

It was also interesting some of the factors that were not significant:

- Education, which is a prime driver of many social capital measures, was not predictive<sup>52</sup>;
- New Meetup friends were not predictive if you also controlled for doing something with new Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup.<sup>53</sup> I'm not sure what to make of this fact and it's a bit surprising, but it seems to suggest that as it relates to intention to return, it is only repeated play with new folks and not new personal friendships with others in Meetup that are important.
- The group having a clear leader was not predictive of whether the Meetup respondent wanted to return. I suspect this is because some leaders ran the meetings in more of a "command and control" approach that didn't build group loyalty or engagement with other participants.]

## B. Social Capital Impact

### *i) Do people stick with Meetups?*

We have just explored the evidence of who sticks with Meetups (or voices their intention to return). It is worth noting that in Meetups we attended consecutively where we could gather data on overlap of attendance between the prior and current Meetup, there was **low member stickiness** even in cases where members seemed engaged in the prior Meetup and indicated intent to return.

Groups observed longitudinally had drop-off rates in the following month of 60-75%, meaning that on average only one of 3 or one of 4 folks returned. The number of longitudinal groups observed was only three so this sample is far from stable, but these were groups in which the Meetup attendees appeared fairly engaged and in which a high percentage of respondents indicated their intent to return.

If this were the only fact on stickiness, it might be chalked up to the unpredictability of summer schedules, but other facts point in the same direction. For example, a best-fit line shows that for a Meetup that has met 20 times, the average attendee has only been to roughly 5 prior Meetups. And two extreme cases (out of the 40 groups observed) had met 8 and 15 prior times respectively and were composed all of first-timers. In future research, we want to try to quantify more systematically what the stickiness rate is, but it is worth noting for these purposes that this is not an especially conducive environment for building trust and friendships. By analogy, if you showed up at a local bar and knew that only one of 3 or 4 of your fellow bar mates would return (but didn't know which ones),

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<sup>52</sup> As noted later in another regression, this obviously says something about who is drawn into the Meetups or Meetup characteristics that make the results hinge less on the respondent's level of education. It might also be a consequence of the fact that the Meetups observed were not attracting very many participants with low levels of education. Since this may be truncating the variance on the educational variable, perhaps the variation is insufficient to show an education effect.

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that "Meetup friends" asked the respondent how many personal friends he/she had made through Meetup, and "doing something with others" only asked about doing something with people you first met through Meetup, so having a new personal friend is not a pre-requisite for "doing something" since the something you did could be with people who never were or are not now considered "personal friends".

you'd presumably spend less time making friendships with anyone.<sup>54</sup> I note this only as a backdrop against which to evaluate the levels of social capital created which we'll discuss below.

### ***Evidence of Social Capital Creation***

Given the somewhat social-capital-unfriendly high-turnover environment of Meetup, it is somewhat remarkable that Meetup *does* show signs of building social capital.

***ii) Doing something with new Meetup friends outside of Meetup:*** On average 29% of respondents reported doing something outside of Meetup with people they first met at Meetup! (These activities ranged from e-mailing each other to jointly attending events to socializing informally with each other).<sup>55</sup> [It would be worth finding out in future research how often this happens, i.e. whether it is one-time or repeated, and whether it is with the same individuals or different ones.]

The likelihood of doing something with new Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetups varied statistically significantly by city, but only because of the Meetups in that city.<sup>56</sup> Doing something with others outside of Meetup varied somewhat by type of Meetup but was not statistically significant.<sup>57</sup>

In political/activist Meetups, 28% did things with new Meetup friends outside of Meetup, but this was more likely to be true if the group had a clear leader.<sup>58</sup> [Strangely, hobby/social and religious meetings were more likely to do something with a new Meetup friend if they *didn't* have a clear leader, but instead had an emerging leader. The latter merits further analysis and research, although it's possible that the political Meetups needed more of a command and control structure to work, and otherwise participants simply dropped out, but in the non-political Meetups, the presence of an emerging leader signaled more group involvement in selecting him/her.]

***What predicts who will do something outside of Meetup with folks met through Meetup?*** An OLS multivariate analysis was run, controlling for a slightly reduced list of

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<sup>54</sup> In reality, the likelihood that you would see future Meetup familiar faces would be higher since by visit<sub>x</sub> you have a chance to recognize individuals from visit<sub>1</sub>...visit<sub>x-1</sub>. To attempt to model this, one could assume that there were 4 participants at Meetup<sub>1</sub>, and then on each subsequent Meetup, 1/3 of the individuals who have been at the last 3 Meetups show up, and 2 new participants show up. A couple of runs of this model showed that by month 6, 6-7 of the 12 participants that had been to more than one Meetup (50-58%) would have had at least one repeat encounter with another Meetup participant.

<sup>55</sup> Of the people who had taken action, 71% had met with Meetup friends/acquaintances, 28% had done something other than Meetup or communicate by e-mail, and 1% had had an e-mail dialogue.

<sup>56</sup> The raw differences were dramatic: 46% of people in Portland did things with new friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup vs. only 6% in Denver or Ann Arbor. But city itself was not statistically predictive. Unconditional multilevel logit models on "doing things with others", showed that removing Meetup as a cluster term affected the log-likelihood statistically significantly, whereas including cities or not as a cluster term did not.

<sup>57</sup> A combined chi2-test on dummies for the Meetup types produced a p of 0.516 and dummy variable regressions on the types of Meetups all produced statistically insignificant results.

<sup>58</sup> Significant only at the p<.1 level in OLS regression.

variables from Table 1 (since some of the variables in Table 1 were not clearly exogenous to this dependent variable). The results are shown in Table 2. Table 2a shows the results of a logit model with robust standard errors on the variables significant from Table 2, and Table 2b shows the results of a 3-level random intercepts logit model to account for the clustering in the data by Meetup and city (on the variables significant from Table 2).

[Insert Tables 2-2b about here]

The variables that most predict who were more likely to do something with new Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup were:

- The number of pre-existing friends respondent had at first Meetup<sup>59</sup> ( $p < .01$ )
- Being male ( $p < .05$ );
- A higher percentage of Meetup participants over age 50; and
- A higher percentage of Meetup participants between ages 18 and 30;<sup>60</sup> and
- The Meetup being a hobby Meetup.

Almost all of the significant factors in this regression are a bit of a mystery.

- A higher number of pre-existing friendships that the respondent had in his/her first Meetup on this topic predicts doing more with other *new* Meetup friends and acquaintances outside of Meetup. Perhaps Meetup attendees with one or more friends in a Meetup feel a more secure base from which to do things with others, although one might also have assumed that people who came into Meetup with pre-existing friends would feel *less* of a need to find new friends/acquaintances and socialize with them. This is one of the two factoids that lead me to believe that those with initial social capital benefit the most from Meetups.

- The percentage of the group over age 50 may be significant since it is a marker for a culture that helps people get together with others outside of Meetups.<sup>61</sup> But what that cultural factor might be is unclear. It does not appear to be a proxy for low turnover.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> It can't simply be that respondents were doing together with these "old friends" since we asked about doing something with someone who you had *first* met through Meetup.

<sup>60</sup> In a model that included all variables, the following variables were also highly significant predictors of doing something with new Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup:

- The respondent's likelihood of future attendance ( $p < .05$ ); and
- New Meetup personal friends respondent had made ( $p < .01$ ).

But these were excluded from the final model since they might be endogenous with the dependent variable (and be caused by the extra-Meetup activity). [The number of new Meetup personal friends is not tautological with the dependent variable (doing something with new Meetup folks outside of Meetup) since it could be acquaintances that the respondent was doing something with. (The correlation was high at  $R = .413$ , but not impossibly high).]

<sup>61</sup> This appears to be the case because in groups with a high percentage of older participants (top third of distribution), Meetup participants under 30 are as likely to do something with new Meetup acquaintances outside of Meetup as those over 30 (mean of 29% versus 32%).

<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, in a direct bivariate correlation, the percentage of folks over age 50 is almost completely uncorrelated with the voiced intention to return to the next Meetup ( $R = .005$ ), and even controlling for the same factors as were in the standard OLS regression, the bivariate correlation between % of folks over age 50 and expressed intention to return is essentially uncorrelated ( $R = -0.012$ ).

- That being male predicts action with others outside of Meetup could indicate that males feel safer than females either initializing this behavior or getting together with people they know less about, but this is purely speculation. (A few people have commented that some use Meetups as dating pools; if this is true, one would have to know more about the frequency of this and the distribution by gender of who's doing the asking and who's being asked to see whether this significantly explain why males more than females were doing something with a new Meetup friend outside of Meetup). Meetups as dating venues was not something we widely observed in Meetup group observation. Interestingly, men and women were about equally likely to report that they knew people when they came to their first Meetup.
- Meetups that have a higher concentration of younger folks encourage both young and older to get together with others outside of Meetup. In fact participants over age 30 in such Meetups are more than twice as likely as respondents 18-30 to do something outside of Meetup with a new Meetup friend or acquaintance (34% likelihood among those over age 30 versus 15% likelihood among those 18-30 years of age).
- The hobby group finding might be a bit anomalous. This is largely the function of 3 groups observed that were way off-scale in having participants take action with others (livejournal, pinochle, and Anime, the latter because participants often attended movies together outside of Meetup).

All of these factors are worthy of further future research to understand what is going on.

- It is surprising that the number of Meetups previously attended is not a statistically significant predictor, especially given the general climate of Meetup turnover in version 2.0 since one would expect that it would take time to make friends in such an environment;
- As noted earlier, it is also surprising that education is not a predictive factor since it highly predictive measure of most social capital measures. This may be a function of the truncated variance on the education measure or say something about Meetup dynamics that makes the results hinge less on the respondent's level of education.

**iii) Developing new Meetup friends:** The number of new personal friends made through Meetup was not enormous -- only 30.5% reported that they had made any new personal friends through Meetup, but 23% reported making 2 or more personal friends and 16% reported making 3 or more new personal friends. However, this is surprisingly high given the turnover of participants described earlier.

**Table 3**

## Number of New Personal Friends through Meetup

# new personal Meetup friends	Non-Political Meetups		Political/Activist Meetups		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
0	107	66	112	74	219	70
1	16	10	7	5	23	7
2	10	6	11	7	21	7
2.5*	1	1	0	0	1	0
3	7	4	7	5	14	4
3.5**	0	0	1	1	1	0
4	7	4	2	1	9	3
5	3	2	6	4	9	3
6	1	1	2	1	3	1
7	4	2	2	1	6	2
9	1	1	0	0	1	0
10	2	1	2	1	4	1
15+	1	1	0	0	4	1
TOTAL	163		152		315	
2+ new friends	37	23	33	22	73	23
3+ new friends	26	16	22	14	51	16

\*=Respondent marked 2-3 new personal friends

\*\*=Respondent marked 3-4 new personal friends

Social and hobby groups were especially likely to lead to personal friends (34% reported at least 2 new personal friends). These results were statistically significant from all other types of Meetup groups other than religious Meetups.<sup>63</sup> The variations by city while noticeable were not statistically significant.<sup>64</sup>

What predicts who will make the most new personal friends through Meetup?

An OLS multivariate analysis was run, controlling for a slightly reduced list of variables from Table 1 (since some of the variables in Table 1 were not clearly exogenous to this dependent variable on new Meetup Friends). The results are shown in Table 4. Table 4a

<sup>63</sup> Social/hobby groups were statistically significant from the other types (although the difference between social/hobby groups and religious groups was not statistically significant because of the small sample size of respondents from religious Meetups). A combined chi2 test on dummies of the Meetup types produced a p value of .003 and regressions on dummy variables for the different types of groups were all statistically significantly different from the baseline of social/hobby groups at  $p < .05$ , other than religious groups which had a p of .065.

<sup>64</sup> For example, in the multi-level regressions including clustering by city or not did not statistically affect the log-likelihood of the model, but including clustering by Meetup or not did, and a combined chi2 test on city was not statistically significant ( $p = .260$ ).

shows the results of a standard OLS model with robust standard errors on the variables significant from Table 4, Table 4b shows the results of a 3-level random intercepts model that adjusts for the clustering of data at the city level and Meetup level (on the variables significant from Table 4), and Table 4c shows the results of a 3-level random intercepts Poisson model (Table 4c) given the skewed distribution of new Meetup friends found in Table 3.

[Insert Tables 4-4c here]

As can be seen in Tables 4b and 4c, the only ones that were statistically significant at predicting number of new Meetup personal friends (at  $p \leq .05$ ) were<sup>65</sup>:

- The percentage in the Meetup ages 18-30 ( $p < .01$ )
- The number of other Meetups the respondent attended, other than on this topic ( $p < .01$ );
- The size of the Meetup where smaller Meetups led to more new personal friends ( $p < .01$ );
- The number of times the Meetup group had previously met ( $p < .05$ ); and
- The number of years the respondent had lived in the community ( $p < .05$ ).

Some comments on the above regression:

- First, the third and fourth factors are not so surprising. One would expect that smaller Meetups make it easier to produce personal friendships (since participants have an easier time sharing personal anecdotes and each participant gets more airtime, increasing the chance that participants will discover common links meriting a friendship). The number of times the group had previously met also seems naturally to lead to more Meetup friends, but I would have assumed that the number of times that the *respondent* had been to this Meetup group would have been predictive, and it wasn't.

- The final three factors above (first, second, and fifth) are less self-evident:

- One would normally expect that higher number of years in the community would make respondents less interested in forming new friends (presumably because they already had sufficient social networks), so the fact that higher number of years in the community predicts *more* Meetup friends perhaps says something about the types of long-timers drawn to Meetup. Or similar to the story of taking action with others, that those more comfortable in the community and with

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<sup>65</sup> Variables are listed from the one that was the most predictive to less predictive (ranked by standardized betas). Three variables were significant in the Poissant clustered model (Table 4c), but not in the clustered OLS model (Table 4b): 1) whether the respondent was black, with blacks less likely to develop Meetup friends conditional on other factors controlled for (possibly because the Meetups tended to be more white); 2) whether the Meetup was religious, with religious groups less likely to lead to Meetup friends, conditional on other factors controlled for, and 3) whether the Meetup had a high percentage of attendees over age 50, which led to more new Meetup friends.

- highest initial levels of social capital benefit more in the Meetup by making more new personal friends.
- One would expect that younger respondents were more likely to make new Meetup friends (since younger folks in general are less set in their social networks). But the regression results only say that respondents in groups that had a higher concentration of young folks, regardless of the R's age, were more likely to make friends. [Meetup participants ages 18-30 are a bit more likely to make Meetup friends than those over 30 in such heavily-concentrated young adult groups, but not dramatically, an average of 1.08 new Meetup friends for respondents 18-30 versus .93 for respondents over age 31.]
  - Given the turnover described earlier, it is not completely surprising that the number of Meetups previously attended would be a big factor, but one would have assumed that previous Meetups on *this* topic rather than on other topics would be significant since presumably it takes some time in a high-turnover environment to see faces enough times to build to a relationship that might justify getting together between Meetups. It merits further research why previous number of Meetups on other topics is a predictive factor but not the prior number of Meetups on this topic;
  - As noted previously, it is surprising (given how predictive education is of social capital) that it is not *predictive* of making more Meetup friends, but this may be a function of the truncated variance on the education measure.

#### ***iv) Predicting Who Recommends Meetup to Others***

What predicts who will recommend Meetup to others? I ran a logit regression on a slightly reduced list of variables (since some would not be exogenous to the dependent variable). The results are shown in Table 5. Then based on the variables which were significant, I ran a logit model with robust standard errors (Table 5a) and a 3-level random intercepts logit model to account for the clustering in the data by Meetup and city (Table 5b)

[Insert Tables 5-5b here]

The following three variables in Tables 5a and 5b predict who is most likely to recommend Meetup to others (significant at  $p < .05$ )<sup>66</sup>:

- The Meetup not being a Religious Meetup ( $p < .01$ );
- The number of other Meetup group topics the respondent attended ( $p < .01$ );
- The Meetup not being a Skill Meetup ( $p < .05$ ).

Some comments on the above regression:

- First, given the turnover described earlier, it is not completely surprising that the number of Meetups previously attended would be a big factor before one felt comfortable recommending the Meetup to others, but one would have assumed that previous Meetups

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<sup>66</sup> Variables are listed in z score order from largest to smallest.

respondent attended on *this* topic would be predictive rather than the number of Meetups on other topics<sup>67</sup>;

- Second, having a higher percentage of the group over age 50 was good for recommending the Meetup to others. Interestingly, this effect interacted with age, since respondents over age 30 were more than twice as likely in such groups to recommend it others (63% on average) versus only 29% among respondents 18-30 years of age.

- Third, why are Religious and Skill-building Meetups less conducive than the baseline of Political Meetups to being recommended? These results hold in a straight crosstab (where on average only 7% of respondents in religious groups recommended Meetup to others or 44% in skill-building groups versus 85% in political groups). This may be a consequence of the fact that so much of the *raison d'être* of political groups is mobilizing others to attend.

Before discussing political Meetups, some additional notes on differences among Meetups by type of Meetup.

Some groups, notably social outsider groups<sup>68</sup> exhibit starkly different demographics and social characteristics. Outsider groups were:

- Significantly younger (70% were under 30 vs. 23% in non-outsider Meetups)
- More likely to be male (63% vs. 51% in non-outsider Meetups),
- Generally smaller (average size of 8 versus average of 22 overall).

And the outsider groups were also more likely to generate more social capital. Attendees of outsider groups were:

- Likely to have attended many more Meetups (6 vs. 3.5 overall average),
- More likely to have made new Meetup friends (4.8 mean number of friends vs. 1.4 overall)
- More likely to do things with Meetup folks outside Meetups (57% vs. 29% overall average)

There may be something almost axiomatic about social outsiders feeling uncomfortable in the broader environment that makes them especially seize on friendships within gatherings like Meetup.

Social and Hobby groups were also good at building social capital this since the heart of the Meetups were about enabling bonds to be built through conversation (as opposed to some political Meetups, IBD Meetups, etc. that were more about reporting information).

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<sup>67</sup> Crosstabs of the number of Meetups attended on this topic versus number of Meetups attended on others seem to suggest that this result may be partly driven by a couple of high outliers. In general having attended more than 3 prior Meetups on this topic or other topics almost always predicts having recommended this Meetup to others, but there were a few respondents who had been to 8 or 10 prior Meetups of the Meetup observed who said they had not recommended this to others. We can't know why since we didn't ask them this question.

<sup>68</sup> Note: this variable is described earlier under Methodology section, and includes ex-Jehovah Witnesses, Pagans, livejournal, anime, witches, star trek, and chess groups. [Because of the lack of data availability, I have not been able to calculate what % of total active Meetup groups are social outsider groups.]

Social and Hobby Groups were different statistically significantly<sup>69</sup> versus non-social, non-hobby groups in the following ways:

- Younger, i.e. they had lower percentages of attendees over age 50\*\*\* (19% vs. 40% in non-social, non-hobby groups)
- More female\* (54% vs. 44% in non-social, non-hobby groups)
- Had met more times previously\*\*\* (14 vs. 11.5 in non-social, non-hobby groups on average)<sup>70</sup>

And in building social capital, the Social/Hobby Meetup attendees were more likely to:

- Have made new Meetup Friends\*\*\* (2.7 on average vs. 0.8 in non-social, non-hobby groups)
- Plan to attend in the future\*\*\* (a mean of 3.8 vs. 3.6 among non-social, non-hobby groups on their intention to return on a 1-4 scale)
- Somewhat more likely to recommend the Meetup to others acquaintances (62% vs. 56% in non-social, non-hobby groups) or do something with new Meetup friends or acquaintances (35% vs. 27% in non-social, non-hobby groups), but these latter two factors were not statistically significant

To sum up, the Meetup data gathered thus far suggest the following social capital conclusions.

- Almost a third of Meetup participants were developing social capital (making new personal friend, doing something with others outside of Meetup) in a relatively inhospitable social-capital-building environment.
- One was far more likely to return to Meetup if one developed new meaningful relationships in the Meetup
- As to who was likely to do something with others, it is a SK “rich get richer” story (where those already had friends in the Meetup or had been in community longer) benefited the most
- And social Meetups and smaller Meetups all made a difference in forming new personal Meetup friends.

### **C. Political Meetups:**

Although it was not the focus of our methodology, we did have a significant concentration of political Meetups observed. Given the fact that many pundits are wondering how the Internet is changing politics,<sup>71</sup> and the fact that the 2004 presidential

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<sup>69</sup> Marked with asterisks where \*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

<sup>70</sup> With some of the groups, this could have been a function of the fact that political Meetups were “invented” in the fall of 2003 whereas some social groups could have existed as far back as the summer of 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Howard Dean came to prominence originally largely through Meetup as it gave a way for the Dean campaign to quantify the growth in their support. Moreover, the projected growth rates combined with the fact that Howard Dean (and later John Kerry) were able to raise significant amounts of money over the

election was one of the first ones in which the Internet played a starring role<sup>72</sup>, and the fact that I'm presenting to political scientists, here are some observations specifically about political Meetups.

Three things seemed especially interesting about the political Meetups we observed: first that the use of Meetup tended to be left-leaning politically; second that the political Meetups along certain dimensions looked unlike the other Meetups; and third, some speculation about whether Meetups are or are not candidate-specific.

**1) Left leaning tilt of Meetup groups.** Meetup aims to be non-partisan and lets anyone set up a political group that doesn't advocate crimes, bigotry, etc. Despite this, there seems to be a noticeable leftist tilt of the Meetup groups. For example, a count in October 2004 showed 379 Meetups that were pro Bush in some way<sup>73</sup> versus 2,413 that were against Bush in some way.<sup>74</sup> Moreover the number of attendees in a month (over last 6 months from June through November) was 10-15 times higher per month for Kerry than for Bush in an environment where neither campaign was pushing individuals toward Meetup.com. There is some evidence that Internet users tip slightly liberal but nothing close to this magnitude.<sup>75</sup> I'm not sure what to make of this observation,<sup>76</sup> although one thoughtful commentator at an earlier presentation of these data suggested that this may be a consequence of the other available channels for liberals and conservatives to express themselves politically. Over the last generation, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of evangelical Christians (more apt to be conservative) and a significant decline in unions (more often liberal politically). These net changes may have left liberals more thirsting for avenues of political engagement and have given conservatives more

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Internet, changed the equation of where the funding would come from for the primaries and the general election.

<sup>72</sup> George Bush raised \$13-14 million online (5% of total contributions), recruited 1.2 million volunteers, and enlisted over 6 million e-mail activists. And [www.johnkerry.com](http://www.johnkerry.com) attracted 750,000 volunteers, 2.5 million e-mail subscribers, and \$82 million in online contributions (33% of the total he raised). Moreover, the total contributions of people contributing under \$200 quadrupled from 2000 to 2004 according to the Campaign Finance Institute (much of it presumably directly traceable to the rise of the Internet as a fundraising tool). As a point of comparison, Kerry raised more from the Internet than Gore raised from *all* campaign contributors in 2000 (approximately \$50 million). [Statistics from Alexandra Samuel's "Internet plays wild card into U.S. politics" *Toronto Star*, 10/18/2004, p. D1 and "Glen Justice's "Kerry Kept Money Coming With Internet as His A.T.M., *New York Times*, 11/6/2004, p. 12.]

<sup>73</sup> 49 Bush Meetups and 330 Bush 2004 Meetups.

<sup>74</sup> Against Bush (131 Meetups), Impeach Bush (277), Repubs Against Bush (137), Kerry in 2004 (859), Democratic Party (490), Democracy for America (ex-Dean) (509 groups).

<sup>75</sup> Georgia Tech. Survey showed 25% very conservative/conservative in U.S. and 32% liberal or very liberal. [http://www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/user\\_surveys/survey-04-1996/graphs/general/political.html](http://www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/user_surveys/survey-04-1996/graphs/general/political.html)

<sup>76</sup> Meetup.com speculates that it partly had to do with the fact that Democratic politics relies more on lower-level grassroots contributions than Republicans and that the Bush campaign decided not to promote Meetup.com and build their own system. They did so since Meetup couldn't offer the campaign perfect behind-the-scenes integration, control over the groups or communications with them, and integration of individuals' activity and demographics (e.g. Meetup activity, donations, volunteering for campaign, where they lived, prior voting, , etc). For this reason, the Bush campaign did not promote Meetup. [Private communication with Matt Meeker, Meetup, December 2004.] But the Kerry campaign also did not promote Meetup and built a parallel operation, but wound up with many more Meetup participants in a pretty evenly divided race.

opportunity to express their political engagement through church-initiated activities (as we saw in the 2004 presidential election).

2) While there was some variance, political Meetups in general were different statistically significantly<sup>77</sup> in the following ways. Political Meetups:

- Were older\*\*\* (40% over age 50 vs. 28% for non-political Meetups)
- Were larger\*\*\* (26 on average vs. 19 for non-political Meetups),
- Devoted less time in Meetups to socializing, meeting others, introductions, etc. and were more command-and-control<sup>78</sup>

The Political Meetups we observed were generally connected to campaigns, but sometimes (in maybe approximately 1/8 of the Meetups we sat in on), were unaffiliated parallel operations.

The leader-run, “mostly business”, “command and control” model may be seem justified on efficiency grounds, but it appears that these groups pay a cost in social capital and participants’ commitment to these groups. For example, politics/activist group Members on average reported:

- Fewer new Meetup friends\*\* (0.7 vs. 1.8 for non-politics Meetups)
- Were less likely to indicate that they planned to attend in future\*\*\* (mean of 3.64 vs. 3.74 for non-political Meetups)
- Were slightly less likely to recommend the Meetup to others\*\*\* (mean of .50 [50 percent] recommending to others versus .65 [65 percent] for non-political Meetups)
- Attending two fewer prior Meetups\* (roughly 2.8 vs. 4 for non-politics Meetups). This is probably a consequence of the fact that they indicated lower member stickiness in political groups (i.e. a lower intention to return).

And the political Meetup had met on average roughly two fewer times\*\*\* (11.4 vs. 13.1 times for non-political Meetups)

My conclusion from these facts is that these political groups would likely be wise to try to build stronger inter-personal bonds, even if they didn’t care about social capital creation, since it is likely to be associated with more loyal participants who will be more likely to attend, more likely to recommend the group to others.

3) While the Internet is undoubtedly here to stay in political campaigns and small group meetings enabled by technology will probably also play a key role, the political future of Meetup.com as an entity seems less automatic and may depend both on the stage of the campaign and an internet-optimizing campaign.

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<sup>77</sup> Marked with asterisks where \*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01. Political Meetups were also a bit whiter (83% vs. 80.5% for non-political Meetups), a bit less married (39% vs. 45% for non-political Meetups), a shade more educated (73% had a 4-year college degree vs. 69% for non-political Meetups; and only 2.5% had a high-school degree or less vs. 6.4% in non-political Meetups), and a bit more female (50% vs. 43% for non-political Meetups) but none of these differences were statistically significant.

<sup>78</sup> From qualitative writeups of Meetups.

For example, Kerry Meetup attendees<sup>79</sup> hit their peak in May 2004 at just under 15,000 attendees.<sup>80</sup> This was less than 2/3 the peak number of attendees at Dean campaign peak (in January). I draw three tentative conclusions from this fact and other observations about the process:

a) ***Stage of campaign***: I believe that the value of Meetup as a campaign tool is stronger in the early phases of the primaries. Part of this may have been the persona of Howard Dean, but also it is disproportionately useful in the early days to have a very low-cost way of mobilizing supporters, generating buzz, taking decentralized action before there is a strong campaign operation in place or in the field. The actions of the Kerry campaign to create their own proprietary “Meetup” (the Kerry Volunteer Center) are testament to the fact that at later stages of the campaign, the campaign had more resources to put into these matters and had a greater desire for control.

b) ***internet-optimized campaign***: the Dean Campaign was extraordinarily savvy in doing three things that Kerry campaign didn’t do as well:

- Willingness to decentralize local efforts;
- Providing locals with a sense that their involvement impacted the campaign (for example in the blogs that filtered up some of best local-level advice to a national level)
- Creatively matching supply of volunteers to the task: for example when Dean had lots of Meetup volunteers in the Bo-Wash corridor, someone invented the task of having Meetup participants pen hand-written letters to undecided voters in Iowa.<sup>81</sup>
- Promoting Meetup. Empirical evidence of the Dean campaign showed that little things could make a big difference in increasing Meetup attendance.<sup>82</sup> The Kerry Campaign originally did not really actively promote Meetup, and then later developed a proprietary “Meetup”.

c) ***Tension between campaign staff and Meetup efforts***. In almost all states in which a professional state manager was put in place in the Dean Campaign (other than New York) it had the effect of enervating the volunteer base (even where the state manager voiced enthusiasm for the volunteer efforts).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> This is actually based on confirmed RSVPs since Meetup cannot track which individuals were actually at a given Meetup.

<sup>80</sup> It is hard to precisely measure the volume of Meetup or Meetup-like meetings of the Kerry campaign. In June, the Kerry campaign integrated into Kerry.com some software that had been written by Arkadi Gerney and a programmer (called KerryConnector.com) – in essence a Meetup.com for the Kerry campaign. Later the Kerry campaign developed a more sophisticated piece of software called the Kerry Volunteer Center. The programs were designed to give the Kerry campaign more control over where and how-often groups met. In conjunction with these changes, the Kerry campaign took down their links to Meetup.com.

<sup>81</sup> A wonderful image of low-tech meeting high-tech, although some have claimed that this strategy was actually not that effective in practice.

<sup>82</sup> For example, actively trumpeting Meetup in campaign communication or speeches, and putting a Meetup “above the fold” (so users didn’t need to scroll down a homepage to find out about Meetup) both significantly increased Meetup traffic. [Private communication with Zephyr Teachout, internet coordinator for Dean Campaign (January 2004).]

<sup>83</sup> Private communication with Zephyr Teachout, internet coordinator for Dean Campaign (January 2004).

My conclusions from this are that Meetup.com is likely to have a political future in smaller races or in the early stages of campaigns, but whether Meetup.com has a role in the later stages is heavily determined by whether it provides enough flexibility and control to campaigns, and to some extent whether the candidate or his/her leading staff<sup>84</sup> support a decentralized effort. But beyond this, the greater importance of Meetup and tools like Meetup is that they can play an essential role in campaigns, enabling hundreds of thousands or millions of Americans to feel invested in a campaign, be willing to take individual action (donating money, writing letters, going to events), and that all this could be accomplished with relatively little investment of time of campaign staff. But in order for such tools to work, the participants had to have a sense of meaning about their involvement, that it would change the campaign's effectiveness and perhaps even influence its direction. Campaigns will have to experiment more with when such tools are a distraction from the campaign and when they are win-win propositions.<sup>85</sup> Meetup the tool certainly offers the potential to be such a win-win approach for citizen engagement.

### *Changes to Meetup.com since summer 2004*

The problem with studying the dot.com world is that it rarely stays static. All of the previous observations concern Meetup 2.0, and Meetup has by now rolled out a new platform and structure (version 3.0) and a new payment scheme.<sup>86</sup> The 3.0 version enabled insisted that there be a local volunteer organizer for each Meetup group, gave users more control over where the group met, how often it met, made it easier to gather information about what other similar Meetup groups were doing, and enabled groups to federate together.

The new payment system is a requirement that all group organizers pay \$19 a month, which started in May 2005; groups pay an introductory rate of \$9/month in 2005. Organizers can assess the individual participants as they wish. The cost of the payment obviously hits the smallest and least thriving groups the hardest because there are fewer participants against which to charge this monthly fee and because those attenders who are coming are presumably less strongly attached.

These changes have had 3 apparent results, the latter two of which should be good for social capital-building:

- a) *Changes in the number of members and groups.* After the Meetup 3.0 changes, the number of new Meetup members was still increasing but at a slower rate. (Meetup says that this was intentional and was a function of giving new users a

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<sup>84</sup> Zack Exley, organizing director of moveon.org and the on-line coordinator for the Kerry campaign asserts that Howard Dean never really understood how his grassroots campaign worked and was never interested in grassroots development as a governor.  
<http://www.netpolitique.net/php/interviews/interview35uk.php3>.

<sup>85</sup> For example, moveon.org's 527 fund noticed that when they had a contest for the best political advertisement (Bush in 30 seconds [www.bushin30seconds.org](http://www.bushin30seconds.org)) and enabled members to vote on this, they not only got advice that was consistent with the pollsters and professionals but energized thousands of Americans who then wanted to provide funding to expand the airtime that moveon.org could purchase.

<sup>86</sup> These changes are noted earlier, in note 19.

clearer sense of the expectations.) With the introduction of the required payment, the number of Meetup groups and participants which had increased some 50% in the first quarter of 2005 was cut in half in May of 2005. Since then, in the last 3 months, the number of groups and members has grown by about 50% again and is growing steadily.

b) *A higher percentage of Meetups are actually occurring each month.* In the 2-3 months leading up to December 2004 the numbers of Meetups actually taking place nearly doubled.

c) *Increased retention.* Part of what is accounting for more active groups is that Meetup reports that individual Meetup users are having a higher stickiness rate (i.e., the chance that they will return for the next or a subsequent Meetup is increasing).

The second and third of these changes are good for Meetup and should help with building social capital in Meetups. We hope, with additional resources, to go back into the field to see how these observations might be changed in the Meetup 3.0 environment.

#### *Next research steps*

We need to better understand how Meetup is used by organizations. We had thought about Meetup as basically being a “seeker service”<sup>87</sup> We did observe a few groups that used Meetup as a seeker service (trying to generate a stable list of local pinochle players<sup>88</sup>, as a referral service to campaigns, bringing in new Investors Business Daily folks) and we heard about a vampire Meetup group that wanted to bring in “new blood” (no pun intended!). But other groups didn’t seem to have recruiting new people as the main goal. Some groups (outsider groups) like wiccans, pagans, and ex-Jehovah Witnesses groups were seeking a refuge where they could share key values and concerns in way that wasn’t possible in the broader society and didn’t care much about expanding their numbers. In fact, for some groups there were divides between the newcomers and veterans in a way that almost made it seem that the group would prefer that there were no newcomers. For some groups, like pug owners it was like “parallel play” for their dogs (being in the same park together even though very little social interaction among owners).

As users get more control over Meetup 3.0, it will be interesting to see whether some of these changes increase the level of social capital built in the group. As only one example,

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<sup>87</sup> Megachurches use a “seeker service” to get people in the door. They intentionally make the service maximally inoffensive and create as low a commitment as possible – no religious symbols, no collection plate, a Powerpoint presentation for the sermon, easy listening pop music instead of hymns, no required introductions of newcomers, and people can easily enter or exit services relatively anonymously. They seek to make it comfortable for any member to invite their neighbor (“unchurched Harry”) to the services without offending him. For the megachurches, this is the entry point, not the ending point. These megachurches try to drive attendees to higher levels of commitment (through involvement in thousands of small groups, attendance at the “high church” services on Wednesday as well, etc.). For a good discussion of this, see Chapter 6 on Saddleback church in Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein’s Better Together (Simon & Schuster, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> The pinochle group mainly wanted to gather enough names that they could ensure that they could find a quorum to play a game on a given night, and didn’t have much of an interest in expanding membership beyond that point.

does the frequency of group meetings change the social capital-building potential? One might speculate that participants are more likely to form friendships with other Meetup participants if they expect to get together weekly or biweekly than monthly.

As Meetup moves to a model 3.0 and beyond where Meetup focuses more around serving the local volunteer coordinator, it will be important to understand how various attributes of that local coordinator (his/her style, likeability, time they put into being a coordinator, etc.) affect the Meetup group cohesion and social capital built. Moreover, it would be interesting to see whether making certain leader training and tools available (how to do group introductions, how to do group facilitation, etc.) have a big impact on member stickiness with the Meetups or on social capital creation. Does having the convener attempt to stimulate between-Meetup e-mail dialogue have a strong role on group cohesion or social capital contribution?

As the Meetup 3.0 model enables groups to federate with each other consistently or episodically, it would be interesting to measure whether this materially affects their likelihood of taking concerted action, and whether there are things that can be done to prime these groups to be more likely to take such coordinated action.

Finally, it will be interesting to examine whether the payment structure of local groups increases group's commitment to meet and attachment to each other, or represents the loss of a truly low-cost "seeker service". Will groups less or more open to new surf-by attenders, and will the payment system cause them to be more intentional about covering these surf-by attenders into regular attendees or members?

All of this of course should be empirically testable (although we wouldn't be able to control for unknown factors that might disproportionately lead some groups towards more frequent get-togethers or factors that lead some conveners to access these Meetup-tools and others not to, etc.).

#### Conclusions:

We think Meetup is a very interesting phenomenon in this space of "convening technologies" that combines technology and social capital. Our findings have overturned many of our pre-existing notions (Meetup is not primarily community newcomers, younger folks, disengaged or strangers meeting strangers).

These data suggest that those with social capital tend to build more social capital in Meetups than those with less. For example, folks more integrated into communities by being there longer were more likely to make new personal Meetup friends and those with more pre-existing friends at their first Meetup were most likely to do something with *new* Meetup friends or acquaintances outside of Meetup.

These data suggest that social capital is a key determinant of ongoing Meetup involvement. Having pre-existing friendships with others in Meetup is not enough, but making new friends and acquaintances and doing something with them drives future

attendance in Meetups. Users in short need social capital benefits from Meetup that they couldn't have received from their existing friends.

And despite the apparent high turnover at these Meetups, there is a not insignificant amount of social capital reportedly created. For example, 29% did something with new Meetup friends/acquaintances outside of Meetup and 30% had made a new personal friend through Meetup and almost a quarter had made 2 or more personal friends.

It appears that the newer Meetup 3.0 platform may be more effective at building loyal attendance, and if so, we would expect that Meetup might be all the more effective at social capital-building, although this merits greater attention. Moreover, it will be interesting to better understand how groups use Meetup, whether it leads to collective action, and what determines which volunteer-conveners are more or less effective. Finally, Meetups appear to appeal disproportionately to whites and well-educated individuals if the Meetup data we've gathered is true of the national Meetup participants. If so, it will be important to Meetup both in their quest to bring power to the disenfranchised and appeal to a larger market segment to find ways to make Meetups appeal to less-educated and non-white Americans.

**Table 1**  
**Predicting Future Attendance: standard OLS**  
**model**

	B (S.E.)	Standardized Beta
(Constant)	4.094 (0.273)	
<b>Previous # of Meetups attended</b>	0.019 (0.008)	0.195**
<b>Size of prior month's Meetup</b>	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.172**
<b>Whether R did anything outside of Meetups with someone first met at Meetup</b>	0.193 (0.097)	0.159**
<b># of years R has lived in town/city</b>	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.141**
Meetup % under age 30 - observed	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.230
Clear Leader in Meetup	-0.175 (0.115)	-0.157
# Meetups of Other Meetup Grps R attended	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.113
# of Other Meetup Grps R attended	0.106 (0.081)	0.107
R married	0.105 (0.084)	0.093
Skill-Building Meetup	-0.152 (0.122)	-0.106
Meetup % over age 50 - observed	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.113
Asian respondent	-0.134 (0.165)	-0.056
Religious Meetup	-0.194 (0.262)	-0.072
R was personally recommended to attend Meetup	0.060 (0.084)	0.051
Black non-Hispanic respondent	0.123 (0.174)	0.053
Hobby Meetup	0.120 (0.190)	0.079
Personal Friends met through Meetup	0.006 (0.011)	0.047
Emerging Leader in Meetup	-0.062 (0.124)	-0.044
# of previous Meetups of this Group	0.004 (0.009)	0.039
R's level of education	-0.019 (0.045)	-0.031
Meetup collection of social outsiders	-0.046 (0.111)	-0.062
Social Meetup	-0.091 (0.222)	-0.055
Male	-0.031 (0.077)	-0.028
Pre-existing friends in first Meetup	-0.010 (0.025)	-0.029
Hispanic non-white respondent	0.043 (0.170)	0.017
Size of Meetup - observed	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.015
Number Public Meetings R attended	0.000 (0.006)	0.006

\*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*\*\* 0<.01

**Table 1a: predicting future attendance (OLS model, robust standard errors)**

	Coef.	Robust SE	t	P>t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Whether R did anything outside of Meetups with someone first met at Meetup</b>	<b>0.229</b>	0.058	3.920	<b>0.000</b>	0.110	0.347
<b>Hobby Meetup</b>	<b>0.195</b>	0.064	3.040	<b>0.005</b>	0.064	0.325
<b># of Other Meetup Grps R attended</b>	<b>0.131</b>	0.044	2.970	<b>0.006</b>	0.041	0.220
<b>Previous number of Meetups attended</b>	<b>0.007</b>	0.003	2.730	<b>0.010</b>	0.002	0.013
<b># Meetups of Other Meetups R attended</b>	<b>-0.011</b>	0.004	-2.510	<b>0.017</b>	-0.019	-0.002
Meetup % under age 30	-0.002	0.001	-1.500	0.143	-0.004	0.001
Clear Leader	-0.127	0.086	-1.480	0.149	-0.301	0.048
# of years R has lived in town/city	-0.003	0.003	-1.020	0.314	-0.010	0.003
Intercept	3.721	0.083	44.630	0.000	3.551	3.890

**Table 1b: predicting future attendance (3-stage random intercepts model)**

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Whether R did anything outside of Meetups with someone first met at Meetup, 1=Y</b>	0.206	0.084	2.450	<b>0.014</b>	0.041	0.371
<b>Hobby Meetup</b>	0.240	0.102	2.360	<b>0.019</b>	0.040	0.441
# Meetups of Other Meetup Grps R attended	-0.011	0.006	-1.880	0.060	-0.023	0.000
# of Other Meetup Grps R attended	0.122	0.066	1.840	0.066	-0.008	0.252
Previous number of Meetups attended	0.006	0.004	1.500	0.134	-0.002	0.015
Meetup % under age 30	-0.002	0.001	-1.300	0.195	-0.004	0.001
Clear Leader	-0.094	0.086	-1.090	0.276	-0.263	0.075
# of years R has lived in town/city	-0.003	0.002	-1.060	0.288	-0.007	0.002
_cons	3.711	0.095	39.070	0.000	3.525	3.897
indiv-level_cons	-0.687	0.051	-13.540	0.000	-0.786	-0.587
meetup_cons	0.000	0.071	0.000	1.000	-0.139	0.139
city_cons	0.122	0.060	2.050	0.040	0.005	0.239

**Table 1c: predicting future attendance (3-stage random intercepts model, ordered logit)**

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b># Meetups of Other Meetup Grps R attended</b>	<b>-0.121</b>	0.045	-2.710	<b>0.007</b>	-0.209	-0.033
<b>Hobby Meetup</b>	<b>1.618</b>	0.646	2.500	<b>0.012</b>	0.352	2.885
<b>Whether R did anything outside of Meetups with someone first met at Meetup</b>	<b>1.215</b>	0.522	2.330	<b>0.020</b>	0.193	2.238
<b>Previous number of Meetups attended</b>	<b>0.102</b>	0.044	2.290	<b>0.022</b>	0.014	0.189
# of Other Meetup Grps R attended	0.881	0.477	1.850	0.065	-0.055	1.816
Clear Leader	-0.666	0.417	-1.600	0.110	-1.483	0.150
# of years R has lived in town/city	-0.009	0.013	-0.710	0.475	-0.034	0.016
Meetup % under age 30	-0.004	0.007	-0.560	0.577	-0.017	0.009
cut11_cons	-5.695	1.149	-4.960	0.000	-7.948	-3.443
cut12_cons	-3.681	0.678	-5.430	0.000	-5.009	-2.353
cut13_cons	-1.116	0.556	-2.010	0.045	-2.206	-0.025
Meetup_cons	0.000	0.296	0.000	1.000	-0.581	0.581
City_cons	0.727	0.288	2.530	0.012	0.163	1.291

**Table 2****Predicting Who Does Something with new Meetup friends/acquaintances outside Meetup**

	B (S.E.)	Exp(B)
<b>Male</b>	0.984 (0.377)	2.675***
<b>R Married</b>	0.674 (0.401)	1.961*
Emerging leader in Meetup	0.559 (0.613)	1.748
R was recommended to attend Meetup	0.451 (0.396)	1.570
Meetup an Outsider group	0.344 (0.596)	1.411
<b># of pre-existing Meetup friends at first Meetup</b>	0.270 (0.110)	1.309**
# of time group has previously met	0.057 (0.039)	1.059
Hobby Meetup group	0.045 (0.983)	1.046
<b>% of Meetup over age 50</b>	0.030 (0.014)	1.031**
# Meetups of Other Meetups R attended	0.024 (0.020)	1.024
education level of R	0.023 (0.213)	1.023
<b>% of Meetup under age 30</b>	0.023 (0.012)	1.023*
size of prior Meetup	-0.001 (0.011)	0.999
# of years R has lived in community	-0.008 (0.011)	0.992
size of Meetup	-0.011 (0.018)	0.989
Clear Leader in Meetup	-0.033 (0.594)	0.968
R hispanic	-0.242 (0.851)	0.785
R is Asian	-0.354 (0.894)	0.702
Skill-building Meetup	-0.489 (0.557)	0.613
Religious Meetup	-0.990 (1.350)	0.372
Social Meetup	-1.137 (1.412)	0.321
R non-hispanic black	-1.606 (1.159)	0.201
Constant	-5.424 (1.462)	0.004***

\*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*\*\* 0<.01

**Table 2a: Predicting doing things with Meetup friends/acquaintances outside Meetup ( logit with robust SE)**

	Coef.	Robust SE	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Male</b>	<b>0.799</b>	0.262	3.050	<b>0.002</b>	0.286	1.312
<b>Meetup % over age 50</b>	<b>0.029</b>	0.010	2.920	<b>0.004</b>	0.010	0.049
<b>Meetup % under age 30</b>	<b>0.023</b>	0.008	2.910	<b>0.004</b>	0.008	0.039
<b>hobby Meetup</b>	<b>1.040</b>	0.421	2.470	<b>0.014</b>	0.214	1.866
<b># pre-existing friends at first Meetup</b>	<b>0.251</b>	0.106	2.360	<b>0.018</b>	0.042	0.459
Black non-hispanic	-1.796	0.937	-1.920	0.055	-3.631	0.040
_cons	-4.292	0.810	-5.300	0.000	-5.880	-2.704

**Table 2b: Predicting doing things with Meetup friends/acquaintances outside Meetup (3-level random intercepts logit model)**

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]
<b>pre-existing friends at first Meetup</b>	<b>0.298</b>	0.114	2.610	<b>0.009</b>	0.074 0.522
<b>Male</b>	<b>0.853</b>	0.338	2.520	<b>0.012</b>	0.191 1.516
<b>Meetup % over age 50</b>	<b>0.028</b>	0.011	2.490	<b>0.013</b>	0.006 0.050
<b>Meetup % under age 30</b>	<b>0.021</b>	0.009	2.430	<b>0.015</b>	0.004 0.038
<b>hobby Meetup</b>	<b>1.001</b>	0.435	2.300	<b>0.021</b>	0.149 1.853
Black non-Hispanic R	-1.939	1.129	-1.720	0.086	-4.151 0.274
_cons	-4.409	0.901	-4.890	0.000	-6.175 -2.643

**Table 4**  
**Predicting Who Will Make the most new Personal Friends through Meetup**

	B (S.E.)	Standardized Beta
(Constant)	-5.246 (1.584)	
<b>Meetup % under age 30</b>	0.086 (0.014)	0.659 ***
<b>Social Meetup</b>	6.563 (1.253)	0.526 ***
<b>Size of Meetup - observed</b>	-0.134 (0.028)	-0.489 ***
<b># of Other Meetup Grps R attended</b>	1.826 (0.447)	0.244 ***
<b>Meetup % over age 50</b>	0.058 (0.016)	0.365 ***
<b># years R has lived in town/city</b>	0.036 (0.015)	0.135 **
<b>Clear Leader</b>	1.484 (0.680)	0.177 **
Religious Meetup	-2.358 (1.541)	-0.116
Black non-hispanic respondent	-1.540 (1.032)	-0.087
Hispanic non-white respondent	1.424 (1.003)	0.077
R's level of education	0.353 (0.265)	0.076
# previous Meetups of this Group	0.070 (0.054)	0.089
Size of previous Meetups of this Group	0.018 (0.015)	0.082
R married	0.609 (0.493)	0.072
Meetup social outsider group	0.602 (0.655)	0.108
Skill-Building Meetup	-0.391 (0.719)	-0.036
Asian respondent	-0.439 (0.979)	-0.024
Hobby Meetup	-0.407 (1.106)	-0.035
# of Meetups of Other Meetup Grps R attended	0.010 (0.037)	0.016
R was recommended to attend Meetup	0.131 (0.497)	0.015
Emerging Leader	0.151 (0.737)	0.014
Male	-0.083 (0.449)	-0.010
Pre-existing friends in first Meetup	0.003 (0.143)	0.001

\*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*\*\* 0<.01

**Table 4a: Predicting Who Will Make the most new Personal Friends through Meetup (OLS with robust SE)**

	Coef.	Robust SE	t	P>t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Meetup % under age 30</b>	<b>0.055</b>	0.018	3.160	<b>0.003</b>	0.020	0.091
<b># of Other Meetup Grps R attended</b>	<b>1.766</b>	0.639	2.760	<b>0.009</b>	0.466	3.066
<b>Size of Meetup</b>	<b>-0.092</b>	0.038	-2.410	<b>0.022</b>	-0.170	-0.014
<b>Social Meetup</b>	<b>3.520</b>	1.549	2.270	<b>0.030</b>	0.369	6.670
<b>Meetup % over age 50</b>	<b>0.027</b>	0.012	2.210	<b>0.034</b>	0.002	0.052
<b># of times group previously met</b>	<b>0.089</b>	0.042	2.110	<b>0.042</b>	0.003	0.174
Black non-hispanic R	-1.736	1.101	-1.580	0.124	-3.976	0.504
Clear Leader	1.201	0.767	1.560	0.127	-0.360	2.761
Religious Meetup	-1.392	0.971	-1.430	0.161	-3.367	0.584
# of years R has lived in town/city	0.029	0.022	1.280	0.210	-0.017	0.074
_cons	-2.008	0.996	-2.020	0.052	-4.033	0.018

**Table 4b: Predicting Who Will Make the most new Personal Friends through Meetup (3-level random intercepts model)**

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Size of Meetup</b>	-0.092	0.020	-4.620	<b>0.000</b>	-0.131	-0.053
<b>Meetup % under age 30</b>	0.055	0.012	4.770	<b>0.000</b>	0.033	0.078
<b># of Other Meetup Grps R attended</b>	1.766	0.367	4.820	<b>0.000</b>	1.047	2.484
<b>Social Meetup</b>	3.520	1.061	3.320	<b>0.001</b>	1.440	5.600
<b>Clear Leader</b>	1.201	0.515	2.330	<b>0.020</b>	0.192	2.209
<b># of times group previously met</b>	0.089	0.042	2.110	<b>0.035</b>	0.006	0.172
<b># of years R has lived in town/city</b>	0.029	0.014	2.050	<b>0.041</b>	0.001	0.056
Meetup % over age 50	0.027	0.014	1.900	0.057	-0.001	0.055
Black non-hispanic R	-1.736	0.923	-1.880	0.060	-3.546	0.074
Religious Meetup	-1.392	1.050	-1.330	0.185	-3.449	0.666
_cons	-2.008	0.910	-2.210	0.027	-3.792	-0.224
Ins1_cons	1.201	0.043	27.760	0.000	1.116	1.286
Meetup_cons	0.000	0.519	0.000	1.000	-1.017	1.017
City_cons	0.000	0.273	0.000	1.000	-0.535	0.535

**Table 4c: Predicting Who Will Make the most new Personal Friends through Meetup (3-level random intercepts Poisson model)**

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Black non-hispanic R</b>	<b>-1.328</b>	0.352	-3.780	<b>0.000</b>	-2.017	-0.639
<b>Size of Meetup</b>	<b>-0.036</b>	0.009	-4.010	<b>0.000</b>	-0.053	-0.018
<b>Meetup % under age 30</b>	<b>0.025</b>	0.004	5.940	<b>0.000</b>	0.017	0.034
<b># of Other Meetup Grps R attended</b>	<b>0.266</b>	0.062	4.270	<b>0.000</b>	0.144	0.388
<b>Religious Meetup</b>	<b>-1.342</b>	0.485	-2.770	<b>0.006</b>	-2.292	-0.392
<b># of times group previously met</b>	<b>0.046</b>	0.019	2.430	<b>0.015</b>	0.009	0.082
<b>Meetup % over age 50</b>	<b>0.014</b>	0.006	2.290	<b>0.022</b>	0.002	0.026
<b># of years R has lived in town/city</b>	<b>0.008</b>	0.004	2.060	<b>0.040</b>	0.000	0.016
Clear Leader	0.385	0.215	1.790	0.073	-0.036	0.806
Social Meetup	0.810	0.526	1.540	0.123	-0.220	1.840
_cons	-1.481	0.384	-3.850	0.000	-2.235	-0.728
Meetup_cons	0.281	0.105	2.670	0.008	0.075	0.488
City_cons	0.000	0.127	0.000	1.000	-0.250	0.250

**Table 5**  
**Who Recommends Meetup to Others**

	B (S.E.)	Exp(B)
<b># of other Meetups R attended on other topics</b>	1.682 (0.956)	5.374 *
Constant	0.966 (1.219)	2.628
# of pre-existing friends of R at first Meetup	0.130 (0.116)	1.139
R Married	0.060 (0.367)	1.062
Hobby Meetup	0.058 (0.939)	1.059
# of times Meetup previously met	0.048 (0.038)	1.049
# of public meetings last 12 mos. R attended at which town/school affairs discussed	0.018 (0.034)	1.018
Education level of R	0.015 (0.191)	1.015
# years R lived in community	0.014 (0.012)	1.014
Clear Leader of Meetup	0.007 (0.506)	1.007
Size of Meetup	-0.002 (0.018)	0.998
Size of Previous Meetup	-0.004 (0.010)	0.996
Meetup % under age 30	-0.011 (0.010)	0.989
<b>Meetup % over age 50</b>	-0.022 (0.012)	0.978 *
R black non-Hispanic	-0.069 (0.682)	0.933
R was recommended to attend Meetup	-0.078 (0.366)	0.925
Male	-0.097 (0.314)	0.907
Emerging Leader in Meetup	-0.189 (0.539)	0.828
R non-white Hispanic	-0.300 (0.662)	0.741
Meetup a group of social outsiders	-0.339 (0.570)	0.713
R Asian	-0.418 (0.786)	0.658
Social Meetup	-0.565 (0.930)	0.568
<b>Skill-Building Meetup</b>	-1.081 (0.558)	0.339 *
# other Meetup Groups R attended	-1.460 (1.364)	0.232
<b>Religious Meetup</b>	-2.476 (1.433)	0.084 *

\*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*\*\* 0<.01

**Table 5a: Predicting recommending Meetup to others (logit with robust SE)**

	Coef.	Robust SE	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b># of other Meetups R attended on other topics</b>	<b>0.597</b>	0.168	3.550	<b>0.000</b>	0.267	0.926
<b>Religious Meetup</b>	<b>-2.967</b>	0.934	-3.180	<b>0.001</b>	-4.798	-1.136
<b>Skill-Building Meetup</b>	<b>-0.699</b>	0.323	-2.160	<b>0.031</b>	-1.332	-0.066
_cons	0.328	0.113	2.910	0.004	0.107	0.548

**Table 5b: Predicting recommending Meetup to others (3-level intercepts logit model)**

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
<b>Religious Meetup</b>	-2.967	1.044	-2.840	<b>0.005</b>	-5.013	-0.920
<b># of other Meetups R attended on other topics</b>	0.597	0.217	2.740	<b>0.006</b>	0.171	1.023
<b>Skill-Building Meetup</b>	-0.699	0.310	-2.260	<b>0.024</b>	-1.305	-0.092
_cons	0.328	0.138	2.370	0.018	0.057	0.598
Meetup_cons	0.000	0.265	0.000	1.000	-0.520	0.520
City_cons	0.000	0.166	0.000	1.000	-0.326	0.326

## **Appendix 1a: Distribution of Sample Respondents**

		Total	Soc	Politics	Skill	Relig.
Ann Arbor	3.00 HumRtsCpgn 072704 AA	8		8		
	2.00 Witches 082404 AA	5				5
	4.00 Kerry 082604 AA	5		5		
	1.00 Knitters 081604 AA	3	3			
	<i>Total Ann Arbor</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>
Portland	11.00 livejrnl 072704 PDX	14	14			
	12.00 Dem Prty 071304 PDX	9		9		
	8.00 9-11Qs 061704 PDX	6		6		
	5.00 Pnochle 070604 PDX	5	5			
	10.00 IBD 062304 PDX	5			5	
	6.00 Portgse 080304 PDX	4			4	
	9.00 Portgse 070604 PDX	4			4	
	7.00 Portgse 090704 PDX	2			2	
	<i>Total Portland</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>0</i>
NYC	19.00 MTVRTV 080304 NYC	31		31		
	21.00 Kerry 072304 Roseland	16		16		
	13.00 Twnhall 090704 Mntclr	9		9		
	18.00 Anime 070804 NYC	9	9			
	20.00 StarTrk 082404 Parsipny	7	7			
	16.00 Anime 081204 NYC	5	5			
	15.00 Boggle 071504 NYC	4	4			
	14.00 Buddhism 080504 NYC	3				3
	22.00 IBD 082504 W. Orange	3			3	
	<i>Total NYC</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>
Houston	28.00 IBD 082504 HOU	15			15	
	26.00 Spanish 081704 HOU	11			11	
	27.00 Japnse 081004 HOU	11			11	
	25.00 Knitters 081804 HOU	9	9			
	24.00 Kerry 082604 HOU	8		8		
	23.00 Chess 081604 HOU	4	4			
	<i>Total Houston</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>0</i>
	Pittsburgh	30.00 Dem Prty 071304 PITT	24		24	
29.00 DFA 070704 PITT		9		9		
<i>Total Pittsburgh</i>		<i>33</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
Albuquerque/ Santa Fe	38.00 DFA 090104 SntFe	32		32		
	34.00 IBD 082504 ABQ	5			5	
	33.00 Pagan 090804 ABQ	4				4
	32.00 Repub 082704 ABQ	3		3		
	<i>Total Albuquerque/Santa Fe</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>
St. Louis	31.00 Nader 061004 STL	2		2		
Denver	35.00 ex-JW 090704 DVR	3				3
	36.00 Cshflw 090404 DVR	3	3			
	37.00 Pugs 090404 DVR	37	37			
	<i>Total Denver</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Total</b>		<b>337</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>15</b>

## Appendix 1b: Distribution of Sample Groups

		Total	Soc	Politics	Skill	Relig.
Ann Arbor	3.00 HumRtsCpgn 072704 AA				1	
	2.00 Witches 082404 AA				1	1
	4.00 Kerry 082604 AA					
	1.00 Knitters 081604 AA		1			
	<i>Total Ann Arbor</i>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>
Portland	11.00 livejrnl 072704 PDX		1			
	12.00 Dem Prty 071304 PDX			1		
	8.00 9-11Qs 061704 PDX			1		
	5.00 Pnochle 070604 PDX		1			
	10.00 IBD 062304 PDX				1	
	6.00 Portgse 080304 PDX				1	
	9.00 Portgse 070604 PDX				1	
	7.00 Portgse 090704 PDX				1	
<i>Total Portland</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>		
NYC	19.00 MTVRTV 080304 NYC			1		
	21.00 Kerry 072304 Roseland			1		
	13.00 Twnhall 090704 Mntclr			1		
	18.00 Anime 070804 NYC		1			
	20.00 StarTrk 082404 Parsipny		1			
	16.00 Anime 081204 NYC		1			
	15.00 Boggle 071504 NYC		1			
	14.00 Buddhism 080504 NYC					1
	22.00 IBD 082504 W. Orange				1	
<i>Total NYC</i>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	
Houston	28.00 IBD 082504 HOU				1	
	26.00 Spanish 081704 HOU				1	
	27.00 Japnse 081004 HOU				1	
	25.00 Knitters 081804 HOU		1			
	24.00 Kerry 082604 HOU			1		
	23.00 Chess 081604 HOU		1			
	<i>Total Houston</i>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	
Pittsburgh	30.00 Dem Prty 071304 PITT			1		
	29.00 DFA 070704 PITT			1		
	<i>Total Pittsburgh</i>	<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>		
Albuquerque/ Santa Fe	38.00 DFA 090104 SntFe			1		
	34.00 IBD 082504 ABQ				1	
	33.00 Pagan 090804 ABQ					1
	32.00 Repub 082704 ABQ			1		
	<i>Total Albuquerque/Santa Fe</i>	<b>4</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
St. Louis	31.00 Nader 061004 STL	1		1		
Denver	35.00 ex-JW 090704 DVR					1
	36.00 Cshflw 090404 DVR		1			
	37.00 Pugs 090404 DVR		1			
	<i>Total Denver</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>37</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>