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THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY, DISCUSSING ONLINE:

THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT QUICKENS WITH NEW MEDIA

by

CAROLYN G. BENDER

Under the Direction of Dr. Leonard Teel

ABSTRACT

Even with its opposition to "fast" and "globalization," the Slow Food movement has embraced new media and speed to disseminate information to a worldwide audience. The organization's use of new and social media is the focus of this ethnographic study to examine the online discourse of the movement through the theoretical lens of international political economy of media and globalization theory. Online interviews via social media and supplemental textual analysis of Slow Food-related online discourse reveals themes concerning time, education and community and shows that participation in the dialogic discussion surrounding Slow Food online varies widely across groups and new media platforms.

INDEX WORDS: Slow food, Globalization, New media, Political economy, Facebook, Online ethnography, Social media

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by

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May 2012

DEDICATION

To everyone who loves to talk about food.

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Thank you to all my friends and family for their support and encouragement while I was working on this project. And a special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Teel for all his help.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Dining is complicated and eating is a political act. Beyond personal preference, you have to consider all the costs involved when you think about what you want to pay out of your own pocket, about the costs to transport meat and produce and the environmental costs of that transport. There are the political discussions about regulation of that transport and the safety and proper labeling of your food. Restaurants give detailed descriptions of their locally and idyllically raised organic ingredients to satisfy ethical concerns about genetically and chemically altered foods, of the process by which they were prepared in order to amaze patrons with the feats of artistry and recaptured tradition unique to the region. Preservation of historical recipes and skills is political too. Sometimes you step into a Starbucks or a McDonalds anywhere in the world and order what looks and tastes familiar. You are either supporting or counteracting the homogenization of culture brought on by globalization through eating.

Food has become part of how we construct our identity. Are you a vegetarian, vegan, omnivore, or locavore? Are you the kind of person who eats exotic food, traditional food, organic food, expensive food, fast food or too much food? Through various media, people are influenced everyday by all of these labels and debates surround food and what it means for their identity. The globalization of media and of the economy brings concerns about the world food supply and the practices used to obtain it into homes everywhere. Slow Food as a social movement works, in part, through media to bring a new awareness about food sources and food choices to both a global and a local audience. It developed as a grass-roots organization committed to supporting food education, biodiversity, the preservation of food traditions and the idea of slowing down to take pleasure in food.

Slow Food has been described as a group, an organization, a community and a social movement. This study demonstrates that it is all of these things and will refer to it by any of these names in this pa-

per. However, it is Slow Food as community and social movement on which this research focuses. The use of new and social media by members of Slow Food is central to the research questions.

The history of Slow Food

The Slow Food movement evolved from earlier groups, starting in Italy in the 1980s, with more overt political motivations. The organization evolved from "arci" the acronym for "associazione ricreativa culturale italiana" or the political group divided into local chapters promoting local cultural festivals and sporting events. Arci Gola began as an oeno-gastronomic league in 1983. This was only a year after *La Gola* the food and food culture magazine was launched. Both were affiliated with Carlo Petrini who went on to found Slow Food which came eventually out of "Arcigola" which officially solidified in 1986 into a nationwide organization (Petrini, 2006). The Slow Food movement, based in the small town of Bra, Italy, has always had a strong opposition to the destructive side of globalization. Slow Food gained momentum and attention during its 1989 protest of plans by McDonald's to build a restaurant in Rome near the famed Spanish steps. The multi-national fast-food chain was an emblem of the global homogenization of food the group was fighting in its efforts to promote the pleasures of local food traditions and the need for an increased awareness of our food sources. However, Slow Food was not set up solely to defeat McDonald's or the McWorld it represents. The organization also focuses on preserving culinary traditions and biodiversity from disappearing. It had developed complex campaigns in network moving between issues of politics, food, culture and economics (Veseth, 2010).

The movement now

Currently, Slow Food is active in 153 countries around the world with over 100,000 members in 1300 convivia (the name given to smaller local chapters within the larger organization). The publishing arm of the movement produces *Slow*, a quarterly magazine in multiple languages and *Osterie d'Italia* a

restaurant guide. In Slow Food USA alone, there are over 24,000 members in 225 convivia. This study focuses on these particular sections of the organization as examples of the international, national and local levels, with Atlanta, Georgia, United States as the location of the research itself. The Atlanta metro area now hosts two convivia currently with any online presence, Slow Food Atlanta and Slow Food Le Cordon Bleu Atlanta, with a third, Slow Food Emory University, which does not have a website or email address as of yet.

Members and supporters of the Slow Food movement are concerned with a number of different food related issues. They have a focus on the preservation of local traditions and of biodiversity, in part through their opposition to GMOs (genetically modified organisms). They are involved in efforts to promote sustainable farming practices and food sources which follow the Slow Food "Buono, Pulito e Giusto" or "Good, Clean and Fair" philosophy as stated on all the Slow Food websites (SFIS, 2012; SFUSA, 2012; SFAtlanta, 2012). Overall, they subscribe to the belief that everyone has the right to the pleasures of good food (Andrews, 2010; Petrini, 2006).

The movement has also spawned a number of programs, networks and events to spread the "Good, Clean and Fair" philosophy both internationally and also domestically within the individual national Slow Food associations. The Terra Madre networks seek to spread sustainable food production through both local and global connections. The Ark of Taste program endeavors to preserve endangered food products such as disappearing heritage breeds and local specialty production practices. The Slow Fish campaign focuses on fishing and farming practices particularly in relation to biodiversity, environmental impact and the welfare of the animals themselves. Slow Citta are "slow cities" whose citizens have decided to live by certain guidelines set out by the movement for a slower lifestyle. The intent is to create a city with greater awareness of its historical identity and with a commitment to remaining a community and to having environmental sustainability built into its infrastructure. For others, involvement in Slow Food is purely an intellectual pursuit. The University of Gastronomic Sciences was founded

in 2004 with two campuses both located in Italy to provide undergraduate and graduate degrees in gastronomy, food culture and food communications.

Significance

Previous academic work on the Slow Food movement has concentrated on the history of the organization (Andrews, 2008) and the rhetoric of its philosophy (Greene, 2008; Schnider, 2008). A case study of Slow Food by Wendy Perkins and Geoffrey Craig (2006) centers on the lifestyle and globalization issues from a cultural studies perspective, but they are less concerned with discussions about media and food. Research has not yet explored the power behind the media the movement has chosen to use for conveying its message or that its supporters use to communicate with each other.

This paper explores how Slow Food functions online. It focuses primarily on the Slow Food website, the Slow Food pages on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and the blogs associated with the Slow Food movement. For an organization whose existence is predicated on being "anti-fast, anti-globalization and anti- homogenization of culture," the embrace of new media and the speed by which information can be transmitted and products can be offered to a global audience and a world-wide marketplace is remarkable. "Slow Food has thus always encouraged members to travel, taste, and discuss – to spread the movement's message globally…. Gastronomic tourism supports the movement's principles, it social mission, and the economic interests of many of its members" (Veseth, 2010, p. 144). This connects advertising and knowledge for local producers to availability and education for those interested in consuming their goods. The Slow Food movement attempts to be pro-local and anti-global within new media outlets with global reach. This research proposes that this particular discourse with both the local and global surrounding Slow Food can be viewed through the lens of international political economy of media as well as the international political economy of food.

Often the literature regarding online texts and communities is focused on political engagement and how the web can be used to reach large audiences (Vergeer and Hermans, 2008) or the motivations to join social media groups. Haferkamp and Kreamer (2009) use surveys, quantitative and qualitative analysis to find that decision to join and influenced by public presentation but the actual number of postings on Facebook is not influenced by desire to be a part of a particular group. Studies of Twitter and microblogs reveal that user-generated posts can generate positive comments about companies they encountered, but also share information, questions and updating status (Sreenivasan, et. al., 2010). When random tweets are examined, they show two clear types of texts – informational and phatic (Lai, et. al., 2010). The split between these categories fell into 20% informational and 80% phatic. However, tweets coming from corporate sources, like airlines, are largely marketing and into responding to the comments from other users (Sreenivsan, et. al., 2010).

As far as blogs and communities are concerned, rhetoric scholarship looking at virtual communities suggest a focus on content rather than the structure of the websites and on the differences between topic oriented and individual oriented blogs on a continuum of content (Hartelius, 2005). In an analysis of digital texts of many kinds, Francisco Ricardo (2009) challenges the assumption of a large difference between language in digital and traditional writing and conversation. He compares sentences on blogs, email, printed text and in verbal speech. He found that while sentence length was statistically equal, it was varied in the actual "richness of language" (p.23). The use of complete sentences and pronouns changed depending on the form of communication used. Apparently, the terms found in the discourse surrounding almost any topic, including that of Slow Food, may change depending on the media used, which leads to questions about literacy and levels of knowledge required and the political economy implications for mediated conversations about food.

1.1 Literature Review

Access to food at reasonable prices is a major issue for both the general public and study done in the fields of sociology, health and political economy. In the study of political economy especially, there is concern over the effect of food costs on households, as well as on agriculture commodity markets (Karapinar, 2010). Since the food supply is important to the general public and food providers, debates about food security and globalization are multifaceted and often rather heated. For the perspective of the discussions in the WTO, the main issues to tackle are how to go about securing the global food supply and how international trade figures into the process and how do small farms fit in the global scene. Opinions tend to fall between two tracks of thought: the small farm or rethinking rural development (Karapinar, 2010). Experience and studies have shown success in policies that increase productivity of small farms but these policies also reveal that there are "major political challenges to adopting this strategy" (Birner and Resnic, 2010, p.1442) and that the economic prosperity of small farms in developing regions is difficult to achieve (Birner and Resnic, 2010).

The role of biotechnology is changing farming practices for many and with those changes comes a shift in power balance as well. "There is significant evidence that the legal and regulatory framework associated with the technologies is being used a new capital accumulation strategy in agriculture" (Pechlaner, 2010). The power is moving to the corporate capital and those who developed biotechnology and away from the farmers growing our food and it is up to society to decide what tools are really necessary for providing our food supply (Pechlaner, 2010). Not every part of the world is able to achieve enough productivity to sustain themselves, primarily in periphery nations with only small scale farming, and some technology or trade is necessary to provide an adequate supply. But there is some question as to whether more trade is helpful or bring them food security or if it is subjecting these regions to large cost fluctuations instead (Karapinar, 2010). The socioeconomic factors that are studies in the political econ-

omy of nutrition are about those costs along with access to fresh food and the time to find and purchase it (Fine, 1998).

Trust for who will provide and how is another large issue in discussions of biotechnology and the political economy of food and nutrition. Social marketing is often used in a dual manner to both provide education about nutrition but to also promote the commercial motives of those providing the information. When done well, this can combine marketing and social responsibly to provide good information (Fine, 1998).

However, when it comes to GMOs the public does not always trust the information that is given to them from the global commodity chains (GCCs) (Schurman and Munro, 2009). According to one study, it tends to be based less on the actual information given to them by transnational corporations and GCCs, or even anti-GMO campaigns brought about by movements such as Slow Food, but more on their own attitudes towards GMOs which color their perception of the motives behind those groups providing the information (Frewer, Scholderer and Bredahl, 2003). Another study focused on how advertising and labeling is a way of communicating about food and influencing consumer behavior. It found that there is an "effect of placing the emphasis on individual product rather than on diet as a whole" (Fine, 1998). I would contend that Slow Food draws attention to both through its focus on local sourcing and preservation of cultural traditions. David Croft (2006) finds that media attention brings awareness about food sources and the food industry which leads to social and corporate responsibility. While the GCC may be primarily concerned with political economy factors like brand protection, risk management and legal compliance, the result is slowly changing how those businesses work (Croft, 2006).

The authenticity of motives behind sharing knowledge of the food supply comes up often in food political economy and in food activism literature. Some see activism as the best way to introduce knowledge to the public hoping that it will lead to change in how transnational companies (TNCs), agribusiness and the GCC works. Others counter that the information makes the public feel more ethical and

authentic about their food choices and those same TNCs use it to their advantage for profit (Bell and Valentine, 1997). In fact, some see a combining of theory from political economy and cultural studies as a good way to approach study of authenticity and the commodity of food (Cook and Crang, 1996; Bell and Valentine, 1997). The feelings about ethical behavior and authentic food choices have come under fire as being really a "conspicuous authenticity" and a way for members of the public to view their food "not only does it provide me with a meaningful life, but it is also good for society, the environment, even the entire planet" (Potter, 2010,p.126). Andrew Potter (2010) also sees many of the people who embark on projects for raising food in home gardens or living without buying anything but writing about it as anti-consumption publicity seekers. Also, he doubts that organic is significantly different from regular food and the feasibility of sustainable organic farms, mocking the elitist distinctions between local and organic in light of the growth of large corporate organic farming (Potter, 2010; Pollan, 2006).

Slow Food touches on the intersection of the traditional and local culture with the global economy and also the politics of promoting the local within a globalized media system. To put it simply, Slow Food is an organization seeking to bring attention to the local, for both food and culture, in the face of the growing homogenization of cuisine and culture through globalization. They look to be the anti-McDonalds force promoting the local, but on an international scale. A large part of their efforts are centered on the promotion of "farm to table" food systems and sustainable and organic farming. However, the name of the movement, Slow Food, indicates its founding and primary focus of slowing down and thinking about what we eat (Schneider 2008). Janet Flammang, in *Taste for Civilization (2009)* even goes so far as to link "the rise of fast food and the decline of leisurely meals" and correlates this trend with the state of civil society and democracy. While not specifically mentioning Slow Food, these ideas are closely related to what Carlo Petrini puts forth as the goals of the Slow Food movement (Petrini, 2004, 2007). Flammang goes on to discuss the traditions associated with food as the responsibility of everyone – a

form of cosmopolitanism requiring citizens of the world to be aware of the global consequences of their food choices even if they personally do not travel far from home (Flammang, 2009).

Mediated culture clashes – food tradition and biodiversity

On the subject of tradition, food and hunting enter the discourse too. One example debated in traditional and new media is the controversial practice of trapping and consuming songbirds called *ambelopoulia*, *beccafico* or *ortolan* depending on the country, region and language involved. In some areas of the Mediterranean, such as Cyprus and Italy, the hunting season is a cultural event defended passionately by those who participate (Franzen, 2010). For others in the region the hunting of the birds is a long-standing source of income and is especially needed in the current economic climate (*Cyprus Hunting*, 2007). The status of the economy reflects the worldwide connections between countries. Criticism of globalization as cultural imperialism (Barber, 1996) could be part of the impetus for the hunters' claim of tradition in the face of negative reports about the tactics they use and the international questioning of the killing and eating of the songbirds altogether.

A case can be made that as culinary traditions, *ambelopoulia* and *ortolan* are part of a nostalgia or "a shared historical past" (Appadurai, 1996) where the birds are always plentiful and therefore less care need be taken in the capture. Today we are more aware of the numbers of endangered birds snared along with the targeted prey in the mist nets and on the lime sticks (Progress International Media, 2009; Viegas, 2010). The risks to biodiversity by the hunt in the face of shrinking habitats, also caused by human actions, cannot be denied. However, the practices are difficult to regulate across multiple nations and governments (Elliott, 2004) and there has not been an alternate way suggested as of yet. The hunters need a technique to capture birds that is closer to a natural cycle that preserves endangered species and only kills a few of the songbirds intended for consumption. Currently, the hunting in Cyprus more closely resembles an industrial operation (Glass, 2005), and not a practice keeping a harmonious balance

between nature and man, which is the ideal called for by Michael Pollan, Dan Rhoads and many of the other activists (Pollan, 2006; Rhoads 2009; Progress International Media, 2009).

In Cyprus, tourism has led to changes in diet and long-standing food culture. British style pubs have become very popular for both tourists and locals alike. And along with those tourists, has come the demand for foreign food and drinks such as fried food items and colas. The visitors and the natives consume the varied foods which have arrived to supply the tourist industry (Heltosky, 2009).

This industry also has been found in other parts of Europe to promote fabricated traditions of recipes and foods in pursuit of profits (Warde, 1997). This leads to the question of whether *ortolans* and *ambelopoulia* are still really served as part of their respective local cultures, or are they presented more for the foodies and tourist thrill seekers? Is the controversy supported by the press as a play for more attention to the locations and to the animal population and treatment problems? Is tradition used as an excuse for truly objectionable behavior? Warde goes so far as to link food traditions to the concept of "imagined community" not necessarily based only on nationality but also on regional identity, class and ethnicity. Are the hunters of Cyprus forging a unique identity for themselves in the face of globalization through their attitude towards the songbirds? My answer is no since many Cypriots do not engage in the hunting or the eating, much less approve of it taking place (Bergen, 2010). The appearance of articles in the media of the countries where the slaughter happens holds up hope that the efforts of NGOs such as BirdLife and Greenpeace are helping to change attitudes where they matter the most. Even an article in the Cypriot media acknowledges the danger that the hunting can bring to their burgeoning tourism industry (Lewis, 2010).

Communication technology plays a part in the fight by the animal activists to protect the birds. They use cell phones to coordinate rescue efforts in the groves filled with captured birds and they use the internet to spread the word about events to their supporters. The internet with both its traditional reporting outlets and its citizen journalists and bloggers is a source of information about the viewpoints of

people on both sides of the controversy. The way in which they are raising the issue in the media could serve to help raise support for the NGOs working to help the birds directly and also through the exertion of public pressure on the governments of the nations where it happens and the communities which participate in the slaughter. The conflict is not just online and in the media though. The activists and the hunters also have confrontations in person out in the fields among the devices used to catch the songbirds (Franzen, 2010).

News media cover the culinary aspect of the songbird controversy as well. The reports of how to cook the birds and when and where they have been served have come up in newspapers for years (Nickerson, 1950, Claiborne, 1975, Burros, 1997). However, the subject of bird slaughter in relation to the food supply and environmental concerns does not come up in the press as often as that of topics like overfishing and its damage to the marine ecosystem and biodiversity and both receive far less attention than the hunting of marine mammals (Elliott, 2004, Bergen 2010). The Slow Fish campaign, sponsored by the Slow Food international movement and explained on its website, covers these areas regarding marine life and seafood production as well.

Alongside the ecological concerns are the economic problems facing so many countries, especially those in the Mediterranean region. And let us not forget the legislative tangles over who has a right and responsibility to control and to protect the wildlife in any given area as they pass through during a migration (Elliott, 2004; Van Hooft, 2009). In the past, discussions about biodiversity have often centered more on agribusiness practices, and not hunting and its effects on the environment. Regulations put forth by the European Union to address some of these concerns have helped with maintaining bird habitats somewhat but this assistance was not the main focus of the laws when they were enacted (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009). Slow Food is concerned with both protecting the diversity of the bird population, but also with traditional food preparation too. The international political economy of regulation and community income play a big part in the discussion of this thorny issue as well.

The discussion surrounding the hunting and the eating of songbirds birds is important because it raises awareness of environmental issues we face today in the global community (Stutchbury, 2007). The predation of endangered species alongside the desired songbirds as they follow their natural migratory pathways threatens biodiversity. "We have learned that birds are not just bio-indicators of environmental change; they are nature's blue-collar workers, helping to sustain the environment that we share with them" (Stutchbury, 2007, p.219). This sentiment is echoed by Michael Pollan in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) through his experiences on Polyface Farm where he witnessed how the birds worked as part of a system with the cows, the tress, the grasses and even the sun, to maintain the health of the land and the animals living on it.

The controversial methods used to catch songbirds bring out questions about human responsibility to treat animals without cruelty. The status of the bird populations is further endangered by development, construction and pollution from humans encroaching on their habitat and migratory paths (Cribb, 2008). Many of the small songbirds being discussed here travel from Africa across the Mediterranean Sea and into Europe on their natural pathways, but humans are getting the in the way (Hahn, Bauer and Liechti, 2009; Cribb, 2008). The Slow Food movement as an international organization seeks to counteract this kind of disturbance in the balance between people and nature which crosses borders and is often associated with the growth of transnational corporations. But it cannot do this without reaching the all the actors in the situation and the general public on an international scale.

The meaning of the snail

The promotion of movement includes the advertising of restaurants and shops which carry items certified by the organization both in the Slow Food literature and in the individual locations with the snail logo. Slow Food uses a variety of media both to gather members and donations as well as to distribute its message. In addition to the books published, and the online presence with websites for the interna-

tional organization and also local convivia, there are events, farmers markets and film festivals (SFIS, 2007). Slow Food uses social media such as Facebook and Twitter on an international scale.

The movement has several subgroups each focused on difference topics. These cover biodiversity, food education, fishing practices and events such as conferences, publications and markets. Slow Food sponsors and promotes movies and film festivals relevant to its ideals as well as publishing food related books and magazines. The support for some of these activities by the Italian government leads to discussions about the formation of identity based on place as well as cuisine and cultural traditions. Particularly in Italy, there is no singular national cuisine but instead many local and regional culinary and cultural traditions stemming from the relatively late formation of modern Italy from historically separate nations, ducal provinces and kingdoms (Andrews, 2005). The Slow Food movement touches on issues of identity as part of both a national and more local hybrid within the context of globalization (Hall, 1997). With its use of new media to position itself as an international movement, the organization can be viewed as a kind of "imagined community," as described by Benedict Anderson (1983), binding people together outside of the construct of the nation-state.

Stephen Schneider (2008) examines the rhetoric of the group. He calls Slow Food a new social movement with a more diverse membership notable for blending the public and private political spheres and for using culture along with politics in the formation of "collective forms of identity". He also sees Carlo Petrini and Slow Food trying to define a new gastronomy, "one that uses traditions as a means of evaluating rather than rejecting modern agricultural science" (Schneider, 2008). Here Slow Food is not seen as anti-science or anti-progress or even anti-globalization really. The emphasis that the movement puts on opposing fast food has much in common with the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, since both are opposed to the negative effects of globalization, but the primary goal for Slow Food is closer to that of promoting biodiversity and cultural preservation than purely economic or political protest (Schneider, 2008). This leaves room for a wider world view than the simple dialectic pairing found in Jihad v.

McWorld (Barber, 1996) or Lexus and the Olive Tree (Friedman, 1999) in relation to the subjects tackled by Slow Food such as the industrial food system, organics, sustainable farming and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). For some, Slow Food is not so much about opposing "fast life" as it is a focus on "a more intense mode of engaging the world" (Schneider, 2008). This notion allows for examination from a cultural studies perspective along the lines of David Abram's work on the connection between nature, language and culture (Abram, 1996). With Slow Food, the links are between change at the local level preserving culture, ecology and biodiversity to the betterment of the global environment and human health. With Innis and also David Suzuki, the links are between time, nature and the speed of media (Babe, 2008) and a need to understand the expectations of changes in nature and in culture brought on by the speed of media.

Part of the argument made by Slow Food discusses need to decrease our "fast-food" lifestyle in favor of "slowness" is a call for increased awareness of where our food comes from, and the consequences of industrial agribusiness practices (Flammang, 2009; Schneider, 2008, Petrini, 2007). Documentary movies such as *Food Inc.* (2008) and *Food Beware* (2008) portray evils of the transnational corporations farming practices through images of animal cruelty and stories of tragedy brought on by the chemicals used to produce our food. In its efforts to promote biodiversity, the movement has had isolated cases of success in encouraging the farming of native wild rice in Minnesota, special rare breeds of cattle in North Carolina and multiple rare fruits and herbs in Australia (Flammang, 2009). Without naming Slow Food outright, Harriet Friedmann describes the need for food policy changes and further regulation of agribusiness through organizations like it which push for the kind of "good, clean and fair" products and production practices of the Slow Food ideals (Friedmann, 1993).

The health, label and culture debates

Discussions about environmental concerns of the chemicals and antibiotics found in our food inevitably lead to organics and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) but the health concerns do not end there. The issues of nutrition and food choice often come down to marketing and socio-economic status. The ability to afford healthy food and to have the time to make thoughtful food choices often is determined by economics as well as cultural settings and exposure to advertising (Harker, et al, 2007; Signorielli, 1993; Koplan, et al. 2005). While a case could be made for the egalitarian side of access to fast food in modern city life, more often the blame goes to McDonalds and its brethren for the rise in obesity, especially in the United States (Flammang, 2009). Genetics, environment, behavior in food choices and physical activity cannot be ignored as factors in the obesity rates though (Harker et al. 2007). The attention paid to time management and the desire to spend less time working and more time enjoying life with family is attributed by Flammang (2009) to the events of 9/11 in the US, but these ideas match that which Petrini has already proposed in his philosophy of pleasure in slowness but not in hedonism (Petrini, 2004).

The labeling of organic food and GMOs varies from country to country. The practice by big corporations of selling GMO seeds is dealt with across many media such as the news coverage of the Fidenato corn scandal (Cozzarini, 2010; Morganti, 2010) and in the movie *Food, Inc.* (2008). In addition to the litigation over seeds which places an undue burden on the farmers (*Food, Inc.* 2008) there are also the intellectual property issues stemming from the patenting of food at the seed level. The identifying of the place origin has long been an issue of cultural and economic importance in many parts of Europe but the questions of who is in charge of the appellation controls could change in the future (Hall, 2003).

The decision as to who will regulate the labeling of food products and the trade surrounding cuisine will be determined by the status of food as a “cultural product”. Michael Hall (2003) finds clearly identified economic links between food and tourism and also in the relationship of food as part of the

expression of identity and culture. Hall states that food can be "used as a means of differentiation for a destination in an increasingly competitive global marketplace" (Hall 2003). However, Slow Food is less concerned with food tourism and more focused on local everyday practices (SFIS, 2007). Critics of Slow Food frequently bring up charges of nostalgia seemingly offered by the movement's promotion of traditional cuisine and farming practices (Flammang, 2009; Pratt, 2007) but not the idea that Slow Food is merely capitalizing on notions of a shared communal past in the collective imagination (Appadurai, 1996). Culture is not static and the idea that cuisine is a kind of monopoly of cultural knowledge is confounded by globalization changing and dispersing culinary traditions (Lang, et al., 2009). Some see cultural imperialism (Barber, 1996) but take a more positive view of transnational corporations using globalization for profit by efficiency of production while tailoring the results to local tastes instead of only providing homogeny (Lang, et al., 2009; Bell and Valentine, 1997).

The discussion about the Slow Food organization as a social movement also should acknowledge the authenticity questions that are raised are not so much class issues as ones of socioeconomic status and elitism and identity. When Slow Food uses new media communication, it creates an interesting paradox of medium and message. It is an international movement that encourages its members to focus on both the local, in their culinary traditions and also the global in its campaigns to protect biodiversity and to stop GMOs. In what Manuel Castells calls a network society (2007; 2000), this online communication changes the nodes within the network to expand what we refer to as the local and the global in new ways. Clay Shirky (2009) explains that "By lowering transaction costs, social tools provide a platform for communities of practice" (p.100) and says that new and social media provide a challenge to geography as an organizing force. Participating in the conversations which happen online with people based all over the world changes what we consider to be our community. Anderson's "imagined community" (1983) now also moves beyond the nation state of people who we have never met but to whom we feel connected, and into a group which is connected by personal interest in a topic, which in this case is Slow

Food or the case of Fidenato and his GMO corn. Charles Lindholm (2008) and Andrew Potter (2010) have written books on the subject of authenticity and how it is used to construct both national and cultural identities "for those struggling to sustain, or find, a collective identity, in the face of the politicization, commodification, and bureaucratization of authenticity" (Parrish, 2009).

Political economics

Critics of Slow Food see this search for authenticity as elitist and a way of deepening the "dinner divide" between those who can afford to search for locally grown produce and those who are forced to buy whatever is cheapest on the way home from two jobs in an area without a produce market of any kind (Miller, 2010). It is not just an economic advantage but almost a monopoly of knowledge at work. If you have a better education then you more likely earn more, have more free time, and have the means to travel to an organic market further from home or to pay for local foods. Traditional economics does not take into account the financial value and political economic power of the expanding networks and corresponding possible transactions made through new and social media (Mosco, 2008). On the other hand, the Slow Food movement can be viewed as following the belief that the internet cannot replace the traditional networks of connections but that they can enhance them (Van Aeist and Walgrave, 2002) For example, the organizing of the Terra Madre conference happens thought a lot of discussion and advertising for delegates online to then meet up in person for the event.

If we compare the movement to empires along Innis' lines (2007), then the various media produced, sponsored and celebrated by Slow Food (books, films, new media, social media, magazines) are space-based media which can be sent to new and old audiences all around the globe to connect the community members. The main Slow Food organization is subdivided by countries and then into local convivia and online communication still connects them to the central group and to each other, further expanding he reach of the network (Castells, 2000; 2007). The farms themselves and the local culinary

traditions emphasized by the movement are the time-based media. The land itself is changed and marked by what the community has done.

The previously mentioned monopoly of knowledge includes the elites and those who have received the information from media conveying the movement's ideals and the thoughts of its critics and also it is the farmers to know how to provide the goods and the chefs who carry on the local culinary traditions. Even the news reporters in other non-affiliated media outlets see not only the need to specialize in writing about food but also the depth of knowledge needed on many subjects all related to food – health, ecology, science, agriculture, economics, culture and politics (Gustin, 2009). However, as Slow Food fits also into the network society of Castells, it contains multiplicity of information as well. The participatory nature of social media and blogs where one can comment on posts lends itself to sharing and spreading knowledge beyond the elites.

Access is more readily available through the internet due to low cost with large reach (Mosco, 2008). But there are limits to the power of the web. New media networks often reproduce the old networks of traditional media based on western dominated power structures (Himelboim, 2009). The internet does not necessarily give the developing world more voice. However, this phenomenon may not be such a detriment to Slow Food which is primarily present in core countries so far. Furthermore, official sponsorship of new media sites does not mean total control of text or image (Gilpin, 2010). So much of what we find online in social media is user-generated content.

Food as Art

With the glossy images of desserts, fruits and vegetables on display, the blog postings remind us of the claim to be made for food as art. But does food as art in relation to Slow Food fall under the label of high or low culture? Through the lens of Adorno's view of mass culture, a case could be made for the praise of gourmet cuisine, the seasonal nature of Slow Food cooking, and unique qualities of local special-

ties as high culture. This is especially true when locavore cuisine is placed opposite the mass produced food provided by large corporate agribusiness of the sort opposed by both Slow Food and food writers like Michael Pollan in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), Carlo Petrini's *Slow Food Nation* (2007) and Barbara Kingsolver in *Animal Vegetable Miracle* (2007).

However, the status food as a cultural product and art form also serves to support the critics who see Slow Food as elitist and promotion of a false authenticity of identity and culture. Andrew Potter points to the organic and Slow Food movements as part of a move towards a "conspicuous authenticity" that

> raises the stakes by turning the search for the authentic into a matter of utmost gravity: not only does it provide me with a meaningful life, but it is also good for society, the environment, even the entire planet (Potter, 2010, p.126).

He raises his own doubts about the difference between organic and regular foods and also about the feasibility of sustainable organic farms. For Potter, the label of organic frames food to influence the subjectivity of taste and the tales by some writers and activists of raising their own food or living without purchasing new products, as mostly anti-consumption publicity seeking projects. Steven Parish (2009) in his review of Charles Lindholm's *Culture and Authenticity* (2008) supports this notion. He finds that

> The value of authenticity lends itself to constructing, asserting, and ranking groups or individuals. Slow food is better than fast food - it is for its proponent ''real'' food, local, natural; but slow food advocates can be seen as snobs, out of touch with ''real people' (Parish, 2009, p.140).

He goes on to equate this constructed authenticity to identity issues related to both nation and culture. This attempt at creating an identity through association with the authentic and food relates also to projecting one's socio-economic status since the elite and more wealthy tend to be the people who can afford to pay for organic and local foods (Miller, 2010). Just as the digital divide is growing between those

who can afford the technology and education to read the Slow Food blogs online, the distance is increasing between those who can spend money on fresh organic produce in an urban setting and those who must settle for cheap fat and sugar filled foods to survive (Miller, 2010). The way we view mediated messages about food and the Slow Food movement is framed by our ability to participate economically and by what we value most about food.

The sense of food issues as a community problem comes up often in blogs too. Some find the idea that food can be separated from social activity to be a strange, and even uniquely American, idea (Miller, 2010, McNamee, 2007), and that food problems will need to be tackled by the community as a whole, not each separate person (Miller, 2010). The food blogs bring sense of community to people even when they are not linked by geography as an organizing force and "By lowering transaction costs, social tools provide a platform for communities of practice" (Shirky, 2009, p.100). It does not matter if you are writing to just your friends or to a global audience. The act of putting the words out into cyberspace is how writers can "allow themselves to be found by interested searchers" (Shirky, 2009, p.101). Even the story of the success of Wikipedia (Shirky, 2009) can be applied to food blogs because of the ways in which readers can comment on the blog posts and generate suggestions to alter the recipes often provided by the bloggers.

Within the recipes on the blogs, the language used to describe the ingredients follows the ideals of the Slow Food movement and being mindful of the sources of your food. While some mock the "Supermarket Pastoral" (Pollan, 2007) and give an example of "Story pork…. The meat with a narrative" (Gustin, 2009), the idea of language influencing your perception, particular of nature, and therefore your participation is one that is familiar (Abram, 1997) or at least it is to cultural studies scholars. Slow Food exhorts slowing down and taking pleasure in your surroundings, not unlike the narratives explored by David Abram (1997) relating to nature and Stephen Batchelor in connection to meditation and spirituality (2010).

Even if food is art reproduced for the masses (Benjamin, 1992), the discussion of what to eat and where to get it is colored by an emphasis on nutrition, tradition, ecology, economics or a combination of any of these together. The value of media regarding food will be negotiated and received differently by various individuals (Hall, 1973) no matter who is producing that media; be it a large transnational corporation or a social movement or an individual blogger.

Through expansion of networks, both local and transnational, by its media use, Slow Food increases the perception of knowledge monopoly but also disperses that knowledge to more people about the discussion surrounding issues of political economy of food, food sources and GMOs on local and global levels. And after all, "social movements are particularly important for a political economy of communication because they have influenced the development of the means and content of communication" (Mocso, 2009, p.204). In new media, Slow Food provides links to communicate among the wide community of members in this social movement concerned with food choice.

1.2 Methodology

This research will use ethnography to describe the Slow Food organization as a social movement drawing on examples from previous studies in media ethnography in both cultural studies and anthropology. However, this will be an online ethnography, also referred to as a virtual ethnography or netnography. The practice of conducting ethnography through the internet increased along with the need to understand the cultures and communities which flourish online. Often, these groups only exist within the chat rooms and social media of the world wide web and have no physical address to which a researcher can go to observe their interactions and interview their members.

Activism and the internet

New media and the rise of the independent media centers (Indymedia) changes not only who controls the media message by giving more tools to citizen journalists but also the rate at which news can be distributed.

> While in the past activists had to rely on experts and the mass media to circulate their messages, largely due to high transaction costs and time constraints, they now can use new digital technologies to take on much of this work themselves, assuming greater control over the media production process, while enhancing the speed of information flow (Juris, 2005, p. 201).

However, these new citizen journalists are not trained to use the best practices and are not bound by the ethical codes used by more traditional media outlets. As Juris puts it "the refusal of editorial control allows users to draw their own conclusions about the veracity and relevance of particular posts."(p.201) The burden is on the audience to determine the authenticity of information provided. This is a slippery slope for some who may be already self-selecting what information that they want to hear and lead to a propagation of false data. This disinformation is what Kolbert and Sunstein discuss in relation to the Internet and politics specifically.

> There is a temptation, as a result, to confuse the medium with the message, to assume that because the Internet is being used to produce a certain political effect, it was somehow destined to do so. This account is, in the end, too easy on us (or at least on them). To borrow that old favorite of the right: computers don't spread rumors; people do (Kolbert, 2009, p.114).

The open access of the Internet and even large email distribution lists can be a great way to mobilize a big group, or to warn the public of malice, but the audience has to determine the trustworthiness of the source for each and every message which may or may not have a clear or honest author. The use of Twit-

ter and Facebook in political protests, such as the 2011 Arab Spring events in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, have been widely reported along with accounts of the authorities also using this public information to target participants as well.

Cottle (2009) has a different view of the role played by new media technology than that of many other including what I have previous cited from Sparks (2005). Sparks questions the availability of new media to many areas around the globe and sees limits to the so-called open access of new media. Instead, Cottle gives an example of how access to the Internet and mobile phones is becoming more common everywhere in the world. A refugee living in a camp in Kenya was able to contact UN officials by texting them on a mobile phone after finding their phone numbers online. A desperate appeal for more food in the camp was conveyed by the new media in a place where access was unlikely, but evidently possible (p.161). The organizations are trying to use the advances in technology too. Cottle finds that, "Some NGOs now also seek to bypass traditional news media to ensure that they get their intended message across to their intended audiences without the risk of mediated scandals" (p.163). Cottle concludes that the humanitarian activists in these NGOs are pursuing media to "proactively regain control over the news communication environment," to avoid scandal and negative publicity and at the same time raise brand awareness and funding. The new technologies are helping shift the "established relations of communicative power" (p.163).

The NGOs are right to fear focus on scandal. The need by groups for attention by the public, especially from donors and supporters, meets up with the need for the news media to find stories that also capture the attention of an audience (Thussu, 2000). Environmental activists have often used stunts to get noticed by traditional media and by the general public. Now they are able to add new media to this concept. Lester and Hutchins (2009) give the example in Tasmania of Neil Smith who staged a sit-in up a tree to protest logging in the area. He brought with him a computer and emailed politicians and news media to bring attention to the situation. Coverage by other media was his goal and "Smith's campaign

was considered a success in that it drew national attention via new media to forestry activities in the area ”(Lester and Hutchins, 2009, p.586). His use of new media is similar to another tree sitter in the United States where a woman named Remedy blogged from her perch on an old growth redwood tree (Kahn and Kellner, 2004). This example is part of a discussion on the use of blogs which they see as extremely useful because they are “relatively easy to create and maintain – even for non-technical web users” (p.91). Blogging is user-friendly but again there are issues of authenticity and the sheer volume of information to contend with in discussion their success.

Media ethnography

While the practice of ethnography has crossed over into the medium of the internet, media have also become the focus of the ethnographic research itself. Works such as Cinzia Padovani’s (2010) study of the activists during the 2009 G8 summit in L’Aquila, Italy and Stephen Bachelor’s (2010) description on his personal journal and research into Buddhism demonstrate the practice of participant observation in media and cultural studies, not just in anthropology. The chronicles of personal adventures in sustainability and activism, particularly that of the projects undertaken by Barbara Kingsolver and Alice Waters, can be told in the manner of ethnography to shed light on the communities and cultures in which they live, and are trying to change (Kingsolver, 2008; McNamee, 2007). All of these works fall under the heading of ethnography because of the methods employed by the authors such as interviews and participant observation in order to paint a picture of what life is like for the people living in these cultures. It does not matter that one depicts citizens seeking attention from world leaders to allow citizen participation in the rebuilding of their city (Padovani, 2010) or another gives us a view of how the free speech movement in Berkley, California sparked one woman to begin what she and her friends viewed as a food revolution (McNamee, 2007). Both Kingsolver (2007) and Batchelor (2010) give insight into how they chose to enter a new lifestyle and how they adjusted to that new culture and who they found there. All of these ac-

counts describe the particular language used by the cultures during the time which the authors have observed in detail. Culture is not static, but is always changing and evolving and so these accounts are just snapshots of communities taken in a particular time, and so is this ethnography of Slow Food online. The community formed by social media is also changing and not completely defined yet leading to differences in a sense of belonging between those who write the blogs, tweets and posts and those who merely follow them without actively participating (Mersey, 2009).

Online/virtual ethnography

Ethnography requires deep immersion in the culture to be studied by the researcher before embarking on observation and interviews, but with a virtual or online ethnography such as this one, much of that background research involves reading texts and examining websites before contacting any key informants online (Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2006). It is also important to spend time learning to speak and move through the online discourse of the group itself just as a researcher would in a traditional ethnography project (Kozinets, 2006). And the process of observation in an open forum is the same even though the public place is now a website and the observed are acting online. For example, social media data collection can be done without any specific references made to participants' Facebook pages or names thus preserving privacy and anonymity and still yielding rich qualitative results (Bosch, 2009). The qualitative information gleaned from online ethnographic methods, such as interviews and participant observation can also be paired with quantitative data from content analysis of online discourse to enhance our understanding of online communities (Ducheneaut, Yee and Bellotti, 2010) if the research question calls for it.

In a virtual ethnography, participant observation of activity on public web pages helps to identify key informants within the studied online community. Using a snowball technique to recruit more informants for interviews based on recommendations from those initial key informants enables the gather-

ing of useful data from willing participants. Interviews are to be semi-structured in that they consist of mostly open-ended questions but all participants get the same set of initial questions. However, any follow up questions can vary based on the informants' previous answers. Informants may be part of the Slow Food movement on a local, national or international level so the interviews are conducted online thorough electronic means such as email, Facebook messaging or chat, according to privacy and security guidelines set through the IRB approval process. While some of these methods of communication do lack the visual and non-verbal cues which greatly enhance our understanding of any conversation, qualitative analysis of these virtual interviews is essential to online ethnography.

Throughout the analysis of the data collected from the online ethnography, this study looks for patterns in the discourse recorded. It draws on cultural studies and political economy to discern what is significant about the patterns and how they illuminate the group as a whole. The method is analysis of online texts associated with Slow Food such as on the organization's websites, social media pages and blogs linked with the movement. Data from questions posed to supporters of the organization online will also be included. This study is a qualitative analysis of the new media texts gathered by ethnographic methods and the theoretical viewpoints of globalization and international political economy of media. Issues of power and control such as ownership, decision making and means of production have previously been studied in relation to political economy of agrifood (Green, et al., 2011). Socio-economic status, race, location, ethnicity and gender are all factors in access to resources and power in know-how decisions and influence ownership and the means of production – the monopoly of knowledge and the control of land and equipment. Changes in living situations and media centers through the shifting mediascapes and ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996) are seen by Teresa Mares and Devon Pena (2011) as an example of Appadurai's 'end of the local' in light of people moving from rural to urban settings and the rise of neo-liberal globalization This is what I want to investigate here in questioning if the global nature of

Slow food as part of the end of local focus or are they fighting to slow down the process by opposing this neo-liberal globalization.

1.3 Research Questions

In an examination of the new media presence of the Slow Food movement the questions must asked of what is available online about the Slow Food movement and how do the online sites and texts linked to Slow Food differ as they move from international to a more local focus and how do these texts and discourse show Slow Food supporters are using new media? The research here focuses on the web-sites, blogs, Twitter feeds and Facebook profiles and groups as texts all associated with the organization that supplement our understanding of the organization's online presence. Also, the question is raised within the ethnography of whether the online discourse surrounding the Slow Food movement shows a tension between the concept of promoting the local within a global organization and/or between "slow food" and "fast" new media?

2 ONLINE CONTENT: FINDINGS

When looking for the texts of the online discourse surrounding the Slow Food movement, the first logical places to start are the official websites of the organization. The main one being the Slow Food International site and it is easily found by any basic internet search engine. The Slow Food USA and Slow Food Atlanta web pages are also readily found this way or linked to through the international one. All of these websites also connect the viewer to other new media sites that are associated with the movement. You can click through to blogs written by the organization and its members or you can like them on Face-book or follow them on Twitter. All of these media have been previous analyzed in reference to political

campaigns, visual rhetoric and semiotics. However, this paper looks at these particular new media through the international political economic theory.

The power of information and discussion by the public about such topics as GMO technology leads to questions about the language and forum used in the debates on all food topics (Munro and Schurman, 2008). It seems that online is a good place to start because the wide access to information available to the public but only if the language is also accessible for understanding by the public as well. Munro and Schurman (2008) cite limited access to information because articles so often have a scientific focus and terminology not easily understood by lay people. This problem even comes up in setting such as Davos. The scientists are asked to use terms more readily grasped by media and financial experts, much to the scientists' frustration (New Yorker, 2012). Activists have worked to expand and change networks to reach the pubic (Munro and Schurman, 2008) but there still is concern over the scientific monopoly of knowledge by academics and even by corporations (Starr, 2000).

In fact, this monopoly of knowledge and language extends to the literature written by the movement and its supporters, not just the scientists. Not everyone knows the meaning of the acronyms and terms frequently used in food-related media. For example, the names NGOs, CSAs, GMOs, CAFOs[1] can be tossed around without being understood by members of the general public who have not read anything written by Wendell Berry, Michael Pollan, Raj Patel, Peter Singer or Eric Schlosser.[2] Terms and labels like locavore, food security and pescatarian, often need to be better defined as well.

Regarding activism, journalism and media, Reber and Kim (2006) approach these topics from the perspective of public relations scholars who look at online press rooms. They support the notion that a good relationship between journalists and activists is mutually beneficial. The activists get news coverage on their organization and the journalists get access to information about the organization.

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[1] NGOs, Non-Government Organizations; CSA, Community Supported Agriculture; GMOs, Genetically Modified Organisms; CAFOs, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

[2] Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (1977); Michael Pollan, *The Ommnivore's Dilemma* (2006); Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved* (2008); Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (1976); Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (2005)

> The Internet would seem to provide an ideal context for journalists and activists to find this feeling of shared control. Journalists are able to access posted information freely on a 24/7 basis. Activists are able to control the content, availability, and frequency of posted material (Reber and Kim, 2006, 315).

The authors note activists frequently possess less funding than the companies and interests which they are opposing and then state that "the Internet may level that playing field" (Reber and Kim, 2006, p. 316). They say that "tactics used by activist organizations warrant their own stream of public relations scholarship" and acknowledge that "Activist groups often use the media not only as a means of setting the public agenda but also as a way to convey legitimacy to the activists' cause" (p.317). After an analysis of activist websites and the elements needed for a dialogic one, they conclude that activist organizations could make better use of websites to foster relationships with journalists. Lester and Hutchins (2009) also support the idea that the Internet can and should be used as a tool, especially by environmental groups, to attract the attention of the traditional media and "to alter information flows in the mass media" (p.434). Marette and Roosen (2011) use case studies on the coverage of the controversy around GMOs and bovine hormones as examples of food issues in which online discussion is part of "supranational regulation" (p.504) and they have concern about consumer views of regulation of animal welfare in food production and other influences on food preferences. According to them, regulation is confounded by market forces and consumer trust in labels like "free-range" and "natural" when they do not know how industry defines these terms.

Quality assurance has financial, political and cultural power, particularly when endorsed by groups like Slow Food which link place, product and quality standards together with education of the producer and the consumer and use media to reach both groups (Veseth, 2010). Online media can be seen as a perfect match to Slow food with its focus on preserving traditions and balance of sustainable farming to provide enough 'good, clean , fair' food for everyone. In theories by Innis we find this need for

connections between media and cultural change and for balance (Babe, 2008) which can be interpreted here as falling between time and space or new media and farmland.

Financing this education is not simple though. There are now so many NGO's out there that the organizations seek to raise their media profile to rise above the crowd of groups competing for attention and for funding. Slow Food is one of these groups and as a non-profit is largely dependent on contributions for its survival. In reference to the media presence of NGO's, Simon Cottle (2009) states, "This profile can more readily be termed a market 'brand' in so far as it purposefully deploys associations, meanings and values to distinguish itself from its nearest competitors in the media marketplace" (p.147). These organizations have enough experience to know the corporate models to emulate when seeking media coverage to promote awareness of the group and the brand and also what pitfalls to avoid such as stories of scandal (Cottle, 2009).

Scandal can spread quickly through news coverage, especially online where there is less emphasis on the veracity of sources, more anonymity of authors and depending on the website, the potential for a fairly large audience. However, Colin Sparks (2005) agrees with Reber and Kim in believing that the Internet is useful for dialogic communication. He does not agree though with others who would ignore the limits of who, and where, new media can reach. One example would be Jeffrey Juris (2005), who says that the Internet increases speed and the ability to connect groups across distances. He says, "Despite the shrinking yet still formidable digital divide, the Internet facilitates global connectedness, even as it strengthens local ties within neighborhoods and households, leading to increasing "Glocalizaion"(p.191). Sparks acknowledges that the Internet has global reach but still maintains that there are great limits to that global audience because using the new media requires a computer and electricity as well as understanding of how the technology works.

> In the advanced world, and in pockets of wealth in the developing world, the Internet is an integral part of the life of millions of people. But for millions of others outside these charmed regions it is simply absent. Talk of a global public sphere is meaningless in such circumstances. What is more, even amongst those who have the technology, the time and the social competence to use the Internet for information about the world, the evidence suggests that this usage is generally patterned on the states within which people happen to live (Sparks, 2005, p.44).

Just because we have the ability, does not mean that we explore much beyond the online presence of familiar local or national news outlets. Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2000) also raises the issue of money and time needed to access and to effectively and frequently use the Internet, as well as the "customization" of what we choose to view online (p.304) and points out that another issue complicating the promotion of the Internet as the ideal media for activists is the dominance of the English language online (Himelboim, 2009). And knowledge of which sites to trust is important. Better education leads to less reliance on television and friends for nutritional advice but many people end up looking on commercial websites for information that may not be correct (Drichoutis, et al., 2011).

Commercial and entertainment websites also drive consumption patterns by reaching international audiences. They show them new lifestyles and products of which they were not previous even aware existed (Fabiosa, 2011) and new media sites link to each other such as Facebook and networked blogs or websites with the ability to post items to Facebook or Twitter, exponentially growing the distribution networks (Himelboim,2009). It is not academia and activists like the Slow Food supporters who acknowledge the potential trans-national reach of social media for mobilizing large groups, but also governments are getting interested (Van Aeist and Walgrave, 2002). The US State Department has worked with technology developers on projects like Haystack in hopes of helping political protesters abroad to connect with one

another safely. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has spoken publicly in support of the opportunities made possible by the internet in these instances (Clinton, 2010).

2.1 Websites

The websites of the movement are organized so that you can choose to seek out information on the international, national and local scene and all contain links to each other to facilitate use. It is notable that for a group which originally started in Italy and is currently headquartered there, the Slow Food International website is entirely in English and not Italian. However, the individual national associations which have their own websites (Italy, USA, Germany, Netherlands, UK, Switzerland, Japan) use their own languages despite the name "Slow Food" being in English.

The websites of traditional media outlets sometimes offer links and access to information from activists (Meikle, 2000). However, these sources and alternative media sources employ corporate terminology because it is necessary to engage global audiences in terms they already know, such as a traditional website set up. They do this even if this uses the forces of globalization that they are in fact trying to oppose (Meikle, 2000). This is why it is necessary to have international organizations and governments involved even if they are promoting local change. And for some, the local can be defined as "bio-region" rather than depending on cultural or national boundaries (Starr, 2000). However, the Slow food does not follow this thinking. Their websites continue to make distinctions between sub-groups, or convivia, based on location such as nation or city and to put emphasis on the preservation of local culture and traditions (SFIS, 2012; SFUSA, 2012; SFAtlanta, 2012). Where the network begins to expand is in other new media, such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook. The groups are linked more loosely based on common language and place but also by interest in Slow Food ideals and the related topics like GMOs, food sources and traditional recipes. This can be viewed as an example of Appadurai's theory of disjuncture within various scapes and global flows (Meikle, 2000).

The Slow Food International website can be viewed in nine languages. It clearly defines what is the organization, what they focus on and includes stories in the news related to the movement on the home page. Readers can find a clear statement of the "Good, Clean, Fair" philosophy and the official Slow Food manifesto. Supporters are able to subscribe to the newsletter, join as a member, donate to the organization and follow it on Facebook and Twitter. The website features calendar information on events both national and international with links to regional and local event calendars as well. The home page also displays links to campaigns sponsored by the organization, the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy founded by Slow Food and the history of the movement.

In a similar fashion, the Slow Food USA website explains what Slow Food is, its programs, events and local chapters. It also gives people the opportunity to join, donate and subscribe to the official newsletter. However, the United States website has current posts from Twitter and its blog along with upcoming events around the country displayed on the front page.

Current Twitter feed texts are also displayed on the home page of the Slow Food Atlanta website in conjunction with information about the Slow Food organization as a whole and links to join or contact leaders. Links are available to the Slow Food Atlanta blog, events, volunteer contacts, and calendar but there is not any recent information. The blog is only for February and March 2010. The most recent event was held in September 2011 and this past event is still featured on the home page and the calendar is 'coming soon' and has been for almost a year. In contrast to the national and international websites, the Atlanta local website does not appear particularly active. Supporters are forced to investigate further in other new media sources, such as email and Twitter, for current information and chances to get involved at a local level.

2.2 Twitter

The number of food related Twitter posts available for the public to follow is enormous and the content of them varies widely. Users can choose to follow famous chefs, food critics, magazines and their editors, websites and their founders, television shows and their hosts and food related organizations and their organizers. And this is all before you get to the food news items found in the Twitter feeds containing only current official Slow Food news content on a national, international and local level.

Elizabeth Kolbert (2009), in her review of books by Cass Sunstein, also discusses the limited range of information that we can each choose to view. Sunstein refers to the tendency of people to seek out others with similar views online and for that agreement to foster extremism as cyberpolarization. This enhancement of ideals is related to the idea of group polarization and explains it in this way: "People's tendency to become more extreme after speaking with like-minded others has become known as "group polarization," and it has been documented in dozens of other experiments" (Kolbert, 2009, p.112). According to Sunstein, the availability of so much information on the Internet is very democratic but also leads to confusion and later our tendency to try and limit the amount of data we are exposed to each day. The large amount of information and developments such as the RSS feed, makes it easier to avoid news that you do not want to hear. Sunstein warns against the ease of our ability to filter out any opposing viewpoints and the dangers of combining those filters with cyberpolarization to produce misinformation.

We choose which way to view news, as well as which stories, but with traditional media there are not as many options. As an audience we are generally aware of who is generating the news coverage, especially in traditional media, and we know that there are forces of influence acting behind the scene. Sparks (2005) states that political and economic constraints on broadcast news are unavoidable, even when trying to reach an audience not defined by a state or government. There are consistently some elements of state control over the broadcast because of regulation over the physical location of the de-

livery systems and the licenses needed to operate. The economics of broadcast news even via cable or satellite always gives it a 'local' slant due to the location of the viewer and the advertising, as well as the location of the delivery system. Content will always need to be tailored to the audience and their location too. This somewhat limits use of broadcast media by activists who want to reach a wide audience all at once. The decision to view certain news, entertainment and information items contains elements of forced choice and also self-confirming selection and the effects of both are enhanced online (Himelboim,2009). Microblogs such as Twitter and Tumblr provide a constant stream or specialized information. Users can "follow" tweets on topics or for news by other writers with whom they agree or at least share an interest with. People can search for tags on Twitter and Tumblr about any subject they choose.

Often the tweets, both officially sponsored and from other users, are about events, recipes and recent meals. These mentions are both about personal cooking and restaurant meals and recommendations. The #slowfood tweets come in a wide range of languages – often within the same posting. This may be notable considering in light of the dominance of English online but not surprising considering the strong international span of the Slow Food movement. Even the tweets in various languages have English tags for #slowfood and other terms related to the organization such as #organic, #food, #sustainable, #slowtravel and #carlopetrini.

The Slow Food International profile is found under @SlowFoodHQ and states that it is produced in Italy but it is written all in English and does not include the #slowfood tag. Instead it often updates news regarding Terra Madre Day or other international Slow Food convivia in the news. The retweets on its feed are from other users but they are generally also in reference to Terra Madre day as well. The author(s) of Slow Food HQ are not tweeting every day but there are frequently posts of multiple messages in one day. Slow Food HQ does not post many pictures and the few which can be seen are not recent. It has approximately 856 tweets, follows over 519 others and has almost 3700 followers.

The Slow Food USA Twitter profile also does not have up-to-date pictures. It does however have over 230,000 followers of its 3626 (and climbing) tweets and @slowfoodusa follows over 27,000 other twitter users. The Slow Food USA news feed often contains food related news items along with references other Twitter users and posts multiple times per day. Josh Viertel, the president of Slow Food USA also has a Twitter account containing mostly retweets, quotes, food news and event information. Often these retweets are from other Slow Food convivia in the United States. Viertel has posted over 1000 tweets. He follows close to 225 others on Twitter and he has almost 7350 followers. In contrast to Slow Food HQ and Slow Food USA, his profile has lots of pictures, many of which are recent.

For an example at the local level, I looked at the Slow Food Atlanta Twitter profile. Similar to the HQ and USA profiles, Slow Food Atlanta does not have many pictures, but the few posted are recent. In contrast to the tweets for the international and national groups, the Atlanta Twitter pages lists the authors who do not post every day and rarely tweet multiple messages per day. At the moment, it shows a little over 500 tweets total, but follows over 930 other Twitter users and has at least 3169 followers of its posts. Slow Food Atlanta also re-tweets posts from other sources but these are coming from individual farms, other Slow Food convivia and government agencies, such as the FDA and the USDA. It is here that we see producers and consumers connecting the way the Slow Food manifesto wants the organization to do.

2.3 Blogs

The blogs which focus on the Slow Food movement and its ideals can be found online in a number of ways. Using a basic internet search engine to look for “slow food blogs” will yield a great many results. Some of these are more focused on the organization while others contain more recipes, pictures and personal anecdotes than information about the movement, its manifesto or its current events and efforts.

There are also the official blogs maintained through the websites of the organization and its separate convivia at all levels. These are updated to varying degrees depending on the activity levels of the individual members in charge of them. Discussion in public spaces like blogs sparks comments and it is useful for organizations, public relations professionals and scholars, and the audience to remember this when considering the public perception of the official identity of an organization or social movement (Gilpin, 2010). There are a lot of stakeholders involved in the texts published online and groups like Slow Food do well to acknowledge that Slow food related blogs are often not just only about the movement itself or the topics it includes in its campaigns.

Finally, we can look at the blogs and postings on Tumblr. This site facilitates blogging on all sorts of topics and allows users to search through them passed on key words. Information about Slow Food on Tumblr can be mixed in with other similar food related subjects on blogs which are not entirely devoted to the movement itself.

Supporters can search through microblogs on Tumblr for smaller posts about Slow Food or they can access a number of regular blogs related to the movement and linked to Facebook through its networked blog application. Many of the networked blogs are in languages besides English giving a wide international audience access to news about the movement and topics related to it. Many of the authors of these blogs follow each other and connect through other new media outlets including Facebook. Of the three groups featured in this study to represent the international, national and local sections of the organization, only Slow Food USA has its own up-to-date blog.

The Slow Food USA blog can be accessed through Facebook's Networked Blogs app and also through the Slow Food USA official website. The blog contains articles on international campaigns sponsored by the movement along with posts regarding the authenticity of local food source claims and local food traditions. The Slow Food USA blog also features posts on the or-

ganization's involvement in schools and food education. The items that really stood out though were the posts which acknowledge how much the price of local and organic foods and the income of customers both often determine who shops at local farmers markets. The same blog also related these socio-economic factors to questions of identity for Slow Food supporters and the movement overall.

Finally, the Slow Food USA blog frequently has posts concerning overtly political and economic issues. There is news about the regulation of GMO labeling, the US Farm Bill, and the taxes and budgets for commercial farms.

Slightly confusing the search for accurate information online about the Slow Food movement is the fact that someone has claimed the domain name slowfoodblog.org but has nothing to do with the organization or even with food. The blog found at this address comes up in the networked blog directory through Facebook and shows tags for the terms organic, food and cooking but does not have any content related to these topics. However, this does not mean that finding good blogs with valuable information related to Slow Food are all that hard to find. If anything, there are too many to choose from and supporters of the organization can choose to follow various sites based on their food interests and food issue preferences.

The unofficial blogs

Some of the blogs chosen for discussion here mention Slow Food, but are not officially affiliated with the organization. For example, Lisa Reeder, a professional chef, caterer and cook instructor writes *A Local Notion* "Adventures in local food and drink in Central Virginia" (2010) on which she includes personal anecdotes, restaurant reviews, information about farmers markets and news about Slow Food and Terra Madre. In 2010, she was a US delegate to the Terra Madre conference which is a Slow Food sponsored international event. The blogs originating outside the United States are *The Gourmet Worrier*

(Johnson, 2010) from Malta and *Fill Up On Bread* (Doyle, 2010) from Australia. *The Gourmet Worrier* herself is a writer who also runs a travel business so her blog is full of recipes and the personal stories that go with them as well as information about organic foods and travel. Mairead Doyle gives us mostly recipes and restaurant reviews on her blog along with volunteer opportunities.

On *A Local Notion*, Reeder writes about the cultural differences about coffee, among other items, she discovered during her experience at the Terra Madre conference in Italy. The relates to her readers the discussion she had there about the importance of quality ingredients and the designations given to food items considered to be "totally unique and culturally important" according to the Slow Food movement. She also blogs about her everyday actions to seek out and obtain local food products such as produce from a nearby CSA and her share of raw milk. She vividly describes how she can taste what the cows have been eating and how this has changed with the seasons as well as the pleasure she gets from walking around on her errands. This slowing down to enjoy even the procurement of food and the awareness of exactly how and where the food is produced is central to the Slow Food ideals.

Doyle (2010) also gives her audience elaborate descriptions of her efforts to find quality local ingredients at the farmers' markets near her home. However, she acknowledges the prices involved in getting such produce and the practicality of needing to plan a menu that will result in leftovers to be eaten at another time in the future.

Finally, it is *The Gourmet Worrier* (Johnson, 2010) who gives us the pictures so often associated with food in the digital age – the food porn we see on blogs, Twitter and Facebook. A whole other paper could be written on the fetishizing of food in pictures shared online with friends and with the wider public (Gustin, 2009). It is her descriptions of the food in her recipes that bring her posts back to the Slow Food ideals and in the emphasis on quality and often organic ingredients and references to traditional ways to cooking. She conveys the pleasure that she gets from cooking, eating and sharing food which are key elements of the Slow Food philosophy.

The focus on sharing information about healthy food and including references to Slow Food itself come up in a number of other food blogs too, including *slowfoodhealthyfood*, T*he S(low) Down* and *3 Wheeled Cheese*. These are especially helpful sites because they are well designed and frequently updated with current food and Slow Food news.

Some blogs connect Slow Food with travel and with community building on a global scale. *Good Things From Italy* is a multilingual blog with content in English, Italian and Dutch. *Real Food Traveler* expresses Slow Food ideals throughout its posts including discussion of the Slow Food organization. *Resilient Farms Nourishing Foods* has links to a university level food study course in Italy not affiliated with the classes offered by Slow Food through the University of Gastronomic Sciences. It also shows other food and Slow Food information including pictures of the blog author with founder Carlo Petrini. And while not entirely food related, *The Cultureist* has Slow Food related posts and is designed for "members of global society" and states goals of fostering connections and respect for the diverse cultures of the world.

Lots of blogs can be found for individual chapters of the Slow Food organization at all different levels – city, region, university, nation. There are also blogs with news about the Slow Food organization linked to the more general notion of promoting non-profit organizations and ethical businesses and building communities. *Localblu* and *Pledging for Change* are two examples of these kinds of blogs which include directory information along with food and activism related posts.

3 FACEBOOK ETHNOGRAPHY: FINDINGS

It is within the groups and pages on Facebook that one can find the best evidence of a community formed around the Slow Food movement online. There are groups which identify themselves as "interest" and "non-profit organizations" and "cause." The pages that you can find just be searching "slow

food" are Facebook homes for convivia all around the world. They are in dozens of languages and represent members of the global movement who also are involved on the national, regional and city levels. The thirteen interviewees represented Slow Food supporters from a variety of locations. Four are in Europe and one lives in India. The rest are spread across the United States with two located in Atlanta, GA. Atlanta was chosen to represent the local chapter level for the purposes of this study. Already, the research has found that the Atlanta group is not as active on blogs or websites as it is on Twitter. The small number of Atlanta residents who responded to the interview invites further supports the findings of uneven participation across media platforms for this particular group.

One theme of the interviews concerned the issue of time. Participants stressed the lack of time to follow many tweets and blogs, much less to write them often or to post more frequently than once a day on Facebook. This included the admins for Facebook groups and the authors of personal blogs and of official Slow Food Twitter feeds (where specific authors were listed).

In fact the interviews lasted longer than the expected 15 minutes because the respondents had a lot to say in response to the questions posed. They often elaborated greatly on their personal interest in the organization overall and also about their own reasons for choosing whether or not they had joined the movement as official members. Their eating habits varied but many mentioned wanting to eat less meat, even if they were not in fact vegetarians. Time was an issue in whether they went to Slow Food events, joined the movement, or spent much time in online discussions about food and the organization. Overall, there is awareness that local actions can have an effect on the larger, natural world but that the change still must begin within home and the community.

The participants were asked questions concerning how often the go looking for information about Slow Food online and where. They were asked to describe what particularly interested them about the movement and whether they were official members or attended Slow Food events. The interview also included questions about their eating habits (vegetarian, organic, local, etc.) and their food purchas-

ing habits (local farmers markets, farm-to-table restaurants) including how they found the food they choose to purchase. Participants were asked what food-related media they followed, read or watched such as blogs, books, documentary movies, television shows and magazines. The question was raised if they thought there was a disconnect between the Slow Food ideals and its use of new "fast" media to reach people. Finally, they were offered a chance to ask their own questions. Then there was a request for suggestions of other people to interview.

3.1 Facebook Posts and Pages

Every member profile, page or group has a wall full of posts and news feeds full of items written and tagged by Facebook users. The texts of these walls and status updates form a large part of the social media discourse available on Facebook concerning the topics which interest these members and groups. The Slow Food members are no exception. With Facebook, much like Tumblr, there are lots of pictures of food made and eaten by the folks who post including 'in progress' cooking pictures. Some of these images are distinctly more appetizing than others. Often, friends of the poster and members of the groups who see these pictures comment either on the images on the content of the food featured. Others post questions or seek advice to go with ingredients or special occasion meals.

Much like the tweets by Slow Food supporters the Facebook posts can be comments about current food related stories found in new and traditional news outlets as well as announcements about upcoming events related to the movement. Much like the tweets by Slow Food supporters the Facebook posts can be comments about current food related stories found in new and traditional news outlets as well as announcements about upcoming events related to the movement.

One can find a lot of different Slow Food related pages on Facebook. Slow Food International has three interest pages with general information about the movement but users are only able to 'like' the pages. They all have food related wall posts and information provided by Wikipedia about the movement

overall and also the organizations in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. Two pages give the Wiki information in English only and one only in Italian. Since the number of 'likes' and 'people talking' vary for each page, it is not easily determined how much the supporters of these pages overlap with each other. The international level of the organization also has a non-profit organization page containing data about the movement, its mission and the office location in Italy but all written in English. This page has wall messages, photos and videos from events, and posts in friend activity but nothing about past or future events.

Slow Food USA is represented by a non-profit organization page. Facebook users can like the page or go to other sections to 'donate today' and to sign up for email updates. Supporters can get the office address and an explanation of the Slow Food organization and mission, but they cannot find information for past or upcoming events. However, it does show photos and videos from events and also pictures of posters for other organizations' events and programs related to Slow Food.

There is no dedicated Slow Food Atlanta group on Facebook, but there is one for Slow Food Athens that includes members living in Atlanta and those who are active in the Slow Food Atlanta convivium. Posts for the Athens group refer to events hosted by the group and pictures from events and special occasions. The open Slow Food movement group which accepted my request to join does not have a specific location associated with it. Posts, comments and pictures for group mostly featured cooking and gardening. Advice for these projects and for using particular ingredients for meals accompanied photos of in- progress and completed meals. A member of this group even asked one of the central questions brought up by people who are curious about the movement. He posted, "What is Slow Food?" and got a very vocal response from a number of group members over the following few days.

Continuing to search for Slow Food pages and groups leads to the discovery of a cause page where supporters can 'like' and also message the group. In the about section, you can find a description of the organization and the Slow Food Manifesto. On this page, you see links to the networked blog for

Slow Food USA and wall posts in multiple languages (Italian, French, English, Portuguese and Spanish) even sometimes within one post.

Next is the Slow Food Network with a home/garden page that you can like and message. It displays more GMO and business oriented posts including discussions of food related politics, legislation, regulation and litigation. While it appears to be company overview and not a Slow Food group, it does feature an online deliberately food-related community. A similar but smaller Slow Food product/service page has no posts and few pictures. Finally, the Slow Food Nation has a local business page that links to the website for the 2008 Slow Food event in the San Francisco, California area.

When you start looking for Slow Food information and groups on social media, you mainly find lots of separate groups organized around their local community. The discussion about the organization on Facebook, Twitter and blogs is so frequently centered on cities, schools, universities or regions that it is difficult to find much general Slow Food information. This presence of local groups in the public forum of online discourse is a testament to the commitment by Slow Food supporters to the idea of promoting the local while also trying to engage with the global public audience.

Sometimes Slow Food group pages and the supporters' individual profiles contain meal pictures that can provoke discussion about Slow Food and the ideas it promotes while also displaying personal achievement. For example, the photo of a dish composed of veal and peppers over pasta garners twenty-two "likes" and thirteen comments. Within these comments are statements about the choice to consume veal. In response to the picture, one woman says", "I know its yummy...I just can't eat veal because I don't like the way the animals are raised. I like meat, but....never order or cook veal." The tone of the next comment, which comes from the cook himself, is almost defensive but the content is informative to all readers, "natural veal are not treated in the same manner as milk fed veal which i also will not buy or eat...natural veal are pretty much free range and allow to roam, unlike the antibiotic loaded boxed up milk fed veal…" The next comment is from the first woman who raised the veal issue expressing sur-

prise, “hmnnn....I didn't know there was a difference. Specialty butchers carry natural veal? I have a gourmet market/butcher I work with - I'll have to ask about that.” This displays how social media works as a source of sharing food-related information within the network of Slow Food supporters and their friends, especially since the cook answers the woman’s question with another posted comment. “you can find natural veal at many markets, supermarkets, and gourmet/farmer's markets...it will always be labeled NATURAL or ROSE Veal.. if not...i will stay away, and i ask before i order it at a restaurant.. if there is a hesitation or clearly it's not noted in the menu, i move onto another menu item.” Other commenters start to weight after these statements, but in a different vein by invoking the nostalgia of the meal. “I'm experiencing a Proustian moment looking at your beautiful dish. My nonna used to make that once every week (Thursday) so we could make sandwiches on the weekends if there were leftovers. I don't think my nonna ever cooked spinach pasta, it was always riggies for that dish.” The cook initially writes that this particular dish is similar to that of his mother’s and he repeats the sentiment in response to this comment about the other man’s nonna.[3] These men connect to their family memories through food and to the online food community through their Facebook posts about the same dish.

The veal dish is an example of home cooking photographed to share online. Other social media users, including the cook of this dish, frequently also post pictures of their dinners in restaurants. Unless these photos were taken quickly so as to not disturb the others at the table, then the restaurant pictures are examples of “fast” new media interrupting the Slow Food ideal of slowing down to enjoy time at a meal with others. They are still sharing in the pleasure of the food in front of them, but they are choosing interaction with the online community over engagement with the others at the communal table in person. These moments in which they are busy with their smartphones and cameras are isolating them, be it ever so slightly, from the community present. The paradox of time spent surfing the web for food-

[3] Nonna is the word for grandmother in Italian.

related information instead of cooking , also being time spent to gather food news quickly so that more hours are left for food activities, comes up in the ethnographic interviews too.

One woman had time to answer the interview questions while she waited for her dough to rise. At a later point in the Facebook chat she was asked if she needed to pause while she dealt with her bread dough. However, she responded in a playful tone that her husband had already come by during the interview and added the raisins and then put the bread in the oven to start baking. In this case, cooperation with family allowed her to participate in both activities without conflict – online discussion about food and taking pleasure in producing good food in a traditional manner. And later after the interview was concluded, the pictures of the freshly baked bread appeared online. Further online participation by the interviewer was possible in the form of "liking" the photo and commenting on it through Facebook.

3.2 Social Media Interviews

For the interview portion of this online ethnography, people were approached on Facebook and invited to participate in a short online chat. All the participants were emailed the same message asking them to take part and all were given the roughly same questions with some variation based on the initial responses. Before beginning the interview, they were sent an IRB approved informed consent form so that it was clear that their participation was voluntary and did not involve a risk any higher than that which they would encounter in their daily lives. In order to ensure only adults were interviewed, they were also asked to self-identify that they were not minors when they were first contacted.

Recently there have been advances in the technology available to conduct online interviews which were developed with ethnographic research in mind. However, it is not yet compatible with all electronic messaging formats and therefore could not be used for this particular ethnography. It does show that the practice of interviewing participants through the internet and the study of online communities is cur-

rently growing in academia. This interest in web based interaction and discourse on new and social media can be found in communication studies, anthropology and sociology.

Thirty-eight potential participants were approached on Facebook and invited to answer interview questions. The initial potential interviewees were included because of their positions as administrators of Slow Food groups on Facebook which were not affiliated with any particular locale and posted messages in English on their group pages. Other possible participants were contacted because they were suggested by the people who had already been interviewed. Twenty-three of the potential participants responded to the message and thirteen interviews were conducted. The questions were asked online through Facebook except for two participants who insisted on phone conversations instead. Some of the respondents to the initial messages on Facebook declined to be interviewed because they were going out of town, but many expressed interest in participating only to fail to make a connection or set an appointment to chat. This was after a number of attempts to schedule the interviews through Facebook messages and chat. They were happy to 'friend' a fellow Slow Food supporter but either did not understand what step to take next in order to be interviewed or were unwilling to do so for their own undisclosed reasons. The participants were asked questions concerning how often the go looking for information about Slow Food online and where. They were asked to describe what particularly interested them about the movement and whether they were official members or attended Slow Food events. The interview also included questions about their eating habits (vegetarian, organic, local, etc.) and their food purchasing habits (local farmers markets, farm-to-table restaurants) including how they found the food they choose to purchase. Participants were asked what food-related media they followed, read or watched such as blogs, books, documentary movies, television shows and magazines. The question was raised if they see a disconnect between the Slow Food ideals and its use of new "fast" media to reach people. Finally, they were offered a chance to ask their own questions, and then there was a request for suggestions of other people to interview.

All the participants acknowledged an interest in Slow Food on their Facebook profile, but the intensity of their activity in the organization, and in the group online, varied widely. Only two post about the movement every day, while others post or check online a few times per week. Five only look at the information that appears in their Facebook news feed or the email inbox. A few have their own food related blogs and many follow others' writing about Slow Food on blogs and on Twitter. All of them read food magazines and most of them are very familiar with the food literature and movies associated with the concerns of the movement. There were a number of them who do not watch any television, much less any of the food programming. The ones who subscribed to a lot of food magazines used them for ideas but also because they, or their family members, are in a food related business of some kind, such as farming, cooking or running an agriturismo (sort of a B&B/farm).

The interviewees were located all over the world, including Italy, Switzerland, India, the Netherlands, and the United States. A couple of the participants brought up the difficulty of being active in Slow Food when living abroad. They wanted to maintain their national identity but at the same time have an affiliation with the locale in which the currently live and in particular they wished to support the local food producers no matter where they currently reside. The responses from the people who either live in Italy now, or have in the past, noted that many of the people they knew through Slow Food were not official members due to the overtly political nature, and atmosphere of insider control, in the convivia there. One person living in Italy even referred to the situation as dealing with the "food mafia" because of the underlying power, politics and economics at play. All the participants who are current or former European residents mentioned that they did not have to seek out information about local food markets because they were easily found within their daily lifestyle. This was also brought up by the participant from California. Eating seasonally was considered by the Europeans and Californians to be a normal occurrence that did not require special effort or online investigation.

The tone of voice used in posts on Facebook can be used by commenters to monitor the other social media users and Slow Food supporters. Even when that tone is playful, it sets boundaries for the identity of the Slow Food group members. The comments about the meal pictures of the veal dish are examples of how the participatory nature of social media also leads to the monitoring of others food habits at the same time as it encourages a sense of community.

The online reaction to a Facebook post about the new Pizza Hut product shows us another example of the commentary limiting the voices heard on a food topic to mainly a pro-Slow Food point of view. The new product is a pizza with a hot dog stuffed crust. The comments ranged from total disgust to mocking the entire idea and even to questions about the intended target audience for the product. One man acknowledged the elitism of his reaction, but at the same time did not totally disregard hot dogs as a food option either. "ok...please forgive me if this sounds even a little bit like food snobbery, it's not, garbage is garbage.. and this is pure garbage...Pizza Hut pizza doesn't even vaguely resemble pizza, it's criminal that it can be lumped in as pizza with what pizza really is, but, I know people like it, it's very successful.. adding a hot dog into the crust now just underscores the disregard for any type of food rules… hot dogs r great, pizza is great, but combining them in the same dish is gluttony at it's best. Not a fan of extreme (the definition here being as much and as big as possible) food ever." The replies to this post followed along the same lines with expressions of shock at the idea and explanations that it was not in fact a Pizza Hut USA product. After the 10 "likes" and the 18 comments agreeing with each other and the initial poster, no one else seeing this Facebook status would dare to contradict the notion that the new product is gross or is not sensible. The Slow Food group comments support each other, their community and the ideals of pleasure derived from good food.

The Slow Food International website starts its "About Us" section explicitly spelling out its desire to be "linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to their community and the environment" and that it was founded "to counter the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food

traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world "(SFI, 2012). This commitment to slowing down and taking time to enjoy food and reflect on the culinary traditions and sources of our meals is reflected in the answers from the Facebook interviews. In addition to sustainable farming and food education, one man talked about Slow Food in relation to "quality of life and goes on to say, "I believe that real food is central to that, and that meals are celebrations to be shared with friends and family. Producing our own food is enormously satisfying on many levels and a great way to relax and be outdoors more often." He also talks about gardening which is a topic that comes up in other interviews too. One woman in New York has a "very strong interest in food and farming," and another living in Italy speaks of the nutritional value of growing your own food. She notes,

> America wants to emulate the Mediterranean way of eating and living which is so good --- and Italians want to be like Americans – not seeing the health problems involved in bad diet and fast life…. And growing your own/ there is NOTHING like fresh salad/ we have a tiny garden and adore it.

The education promoted by the Slow Food organization matters more than economic concerns when it comes to food choice in this example. It is the cultural capital of wanting the exotic cuisine for the Italians she refers to, but it is the nutrition ideal that the Americans seek in her view. And from her perspective, the Slow Food idea of a sustainable home garden is a large part of that nutritional ideal and the pleasure of slowing down and understanding food sources.

The value of taking time to grow and cook the things you eat comes up again and again. Another European interviewee is a writer and blogger who remembered that

> As a child, I dreamed of living a frontier kind of life. It seemed romantic. …… The over-the-top luxury made me start thinking it was decadence, pure decadence, so I gradually

> started moving toward everything that was regional, fresh, produced according to traditional methods, which naturally led to Slow Food.

She responded to a comment about locally grown food and home cooking being both cheaper and relaxing that the alternative by saying "I totally agree, and it's also more satisfying, since you feel your nurturing yourself, and doing what is right for your body and for your society." She connected the effort to avoid fast food with better effects for personal health and the environment. This view is reflected again in the answer given by one man in India who explained that for him the interest in Slow Food is "all about good food and the community. " In fact he advised, "Don't limit your interactions with Slow Food to only this project…. food friends are the best friends to have." He was not the only participant to request that I continue to keep in touch through Facebook. One respondent in the US on the west coast wants to see more food pictures, menus and recipes posted from dinner parties, etc.

All of the participants contacted were active in Slow Food groups on Facebook and this why they were selected, but their activity in the organization frequently went further than just online communication. A little over half were official members of the organization and the same number of participants attends Slow Food sponsored events. These events include markets, tastings, the Terra Madre conferences and regional events featuring specific food items, such as fish, wine or cheese. The events educate the attendees and also celebrate the food traditions and excellent quality of locally produced ingredients.

An interviewee from Texas admitted that she has not attended any Slow Food events in person yet. Instead she only participates in the online group for her local chapter at this point. She is part of the Slow Food community, but her involvement focuses on the online communal food discussion. This raises the question of whether others are motivated to participate online primarily to create a "foodie" identity online, rather than spend time following the precept of slowing down to take pleasure in good food. There is no definitive evidence of this kind of online identity building but the home-cooked meal pictures

could be used in this manner. The interview question about how the participants eat and whether they call themselves vegetarian, local, organic, etc. feed into the notion of boundaries to create your own food identity and possible submit to peer or public pressure to join a group like Slow Food.

Three participants warned of the danger of focusing too much on Slow Food when general food education, especially to children, is very important to supporters of the movement. In fact, one woman is deeply involved in the Edible Schoolyard program in California. Teaching kids and adults more about the sources of their food is part of the Slow Food focus on preserving traditional food and production practices and taking the time to understand and teach others about their food and the impact it can have on the local community and the whole world. This educational emphasis for the participants can be found in their comments about their main interest in Slow Food overall. One woman in Italy states that, "I think the individual stories are what interest me what small farmers & artisans do to preserve the history of a particular bean for ex." And one participant here in Georgia cites "supporting food culture and traditional small producers as a means of "control over sources."

Another local participant added a new element to her list of reasons not previously mentioned in the other interviews. She explained that as a chef "My biz is really geared towards a lifestyle of clean eating (without chemicals) and bringing people back to the table at the end of the day...its more than just the nutrition, it's an overall health thing-family, physical, and emotional." This citation of an emotional side to food choices touches on the Slow Food commitment to "linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to their community and the environment" (SFI, 2012). However the unexpected result from the interviews is that none of them mentioned animal rights, or specifically environmental impact issues. Only one spoke of an anti-globalization agenda by declaring that Monsanto is evil.

The participants often stressed support for local farmers, better nutrition, control of food sources, preservation of traditions and food education. Most of the participants said that they try to eat

local and organic but are not fully vegetarian. However, a few noted how little meat they currently eat and that this was a conscious decision of their part to do so. A few noted that they eat what is available – even if it is not the organic or local products they would prefer. They do not want to be isolated into only the Slow Food choices when there are so many new foods to try, old foods to help preserve and when life gets in the way of having the time or access to fresh local ingredients.

A couple of the European residents talked of the resistance to forming Slow Food convivia for ex-pats and English speakers in European countries despite the interest of those people in forming their own group together. Interviewees speculated that politics, economics and elitism within the movement got in the way. However, there is still the possibility of this group forming online. As Shirky (2009) points out – the web is a great way to give people a chance to "act on their desire for autonomy" (p.95) and create their own connections.

When asked about finding any disconnect between the Slow Food ideals and its use of new media to reach the public, the interviewees all responded no. Four did not give definitive answers but their comments explained their views of new media as a means to an end in supporting Slow Food. Most of them had a lot to say about the advantages of using new and social media to publicize the movement and to organize events. One pointed out the lack of activity by some members of the organization in social media networks but she still thought that "social media is definitely the fastest way to promote." She points out that often most of "the local members are volunteers with real jobs, so they have so little time to do what they do." Much like the interviewees say that they don't have a lot of time to surf the internet for food information and follow blogs, they also find that the speed of new media can be an advantage to get as much knowledge to the public as possible.

They like the direct access to information afforded by the web and that it gives independent voices a chance to express their views on food related issues. They admitted that it can be a bit too much at times to keep track of all the different flows of information out there but that the educational

and connective value outweighs the drawbacks to online dispersal of knowledge. However, some respondents found many websites to be too general and not connected enough to the particulars of local conditions or geared to people who are not already steeped in the terms and topics covered by Slow Food and its campaigns.

The final theme that came through in the interviews was how much all of the participants loved talking about food. They did not mind taking the time and energy to be as one put it 'an ambassador for Slow Food' and discuss the topics related to the movement which they considered to be the most important. Over and over again the concepts resurfaced of slowing down to appreciate what we eat and to enjoy the company of those with whom we are eating. When responding that they did not see a problem with Slow Food using new media, one man pointed out that "using technology to reach and audience with a purposeful message is a very good thing" and he goes on to connect this issue to time spent on what he considers to be more valuable endeavors.

> Slow food doesn't mean go back to living in the dark ages… it means, think local, think relaxed, think made with your own hands perpetuating a tradition, your heritage, or creating something new using good ingredients and sitting back and taking time to enjoy these gifts around us. Using the web and social networking /media to get this point across to me doesn't betray those values.

Another person also mentioned that new media is part of the progress of communication outlets and networks. He notes that the same ideas promoted Carlo Petrini in speeches 5 years ago are the same but now you can view them on YouTube videos. It is the same message but conveyed in a different medium. All the interviewees like to read about food both in print and online and love to get together with others to cook and eat food which is local, organic and seasonal whenever possible.

One of the participants from the local Atlanta Slow Food group had the most to say about the disconnect question. She likes the direct access to information online which takes power away from major media outlets. She acknowledged that it can be overwhelming to keep track of how much data is out there but that it leads to a choice to tune out and slow down when you do log off and spend time cooking and eating with family and friends. She says that stopping to learn about your food and adapt the information, even if it is not in-depth knowledge, is part of the Slow Food ethos. She likes the ability to connect online with other Slow Food supporters and also with local food producers.

4 CONCLUSION

The online presence of the Slow Food movement includes ties to traditional media, particularly through Twitter posts. However, the content on the websites and on Facebook tends to exist largely separate from the movement's presence in published and broadcast media. Slow Food supporters use new media in different ways than they do other media in relation to food topics. They like to read about food in all media, but feel that the links to people in new media and in person are very important aspects of the movement. In particular, those who are active on social media in relation to the organization link to the communal aspect of the groups they join on the national and local levels.

The dominance of the English in the online discourse at the international level leaves the movement open to criticism. Some have perceived Slow Food to be elitist based on language concerns as well as the need for computer access and literacy in order to engage in the online discussions and community. The economics of access to computer technology, education and transportation mean that only those with a certain level of means and knowledge can participate in the organization on any level. I made a particular point of asking the interview participants about their attendance of Slow Food events in order

to get a better idea of their off-line involvement. As Jeffery Juris (2005) points out "Internet use has complimented and facilitated face-to-face coordination and interaction, rather than replacing them" (p.196). Talking in person and over the phone are still important ways to convey nuances in conversation that are not picked up readily via email. While the new and social media hold the promise of open access for all – it is not there yet. Not everyone has a computer and not everyone is looking at the same sites, and self-interest may lead to looking for information but not acting on it to help society (Howley, 2007). The abundance of information available through both traditional and new media outlets facilitates the natural tendency for the audience to filter out opposing views. With new media, much of the burden to verify the credibility of the news and information falls on the audience itself. In order to reach the audience it seeks, it is important for activists to keep trying to find the right combination of new and traditional media and that mixture will evolve as the goals of the activists change over time.

Activist groups also need to recognize the difference between attending events and online discussion and then adjust accordingly (Howley, 2007). Perhaps this why Slow Food continues to publish books and magazines through Slow Food Editore and there is such emphasis on attending their sponsored events, markets and conferences. The impact of physical things and places is part of the space-based and time-based communication needed for the political economic power of the movement. The "existence of overlapping public spheres" leads to a connection of identity under the umbrella of Slow Food for many groups (Howley, 2007). Often the posts about food online appear to be primarily self-promotion of cooking achievements and personal status updates rather than messages designed to advance the ideals of the movement or get more of the public involved.

The sheer amount of information, and in particular that without authentication, can be a problem despite the extended network already in place through traditional media and official new media. Social media does not create a conflict with the Slow Food ideals because it functions as a space-based, administrative-helping medium. The monopoly of knowledge stays within the connected network of members, producers, consumers and supporters of local foods and Slow Food groups. The multiplicity of information available to them and to the general public is too large online to be useful unless you already know for what and where to be looking.

This knowledge is also rooted in the time-based media of location. When searching for Slow Food online, there are countless groups but almost all are specific to a locale – nation, region or city. Even if not named that way, the members choose to take part in those groups based on association with a place central to their lives. While still an international organization, Slow Food is tied to the land on which its member and supporters reside and eat. Its media presence is connected to those locations too. New media provides a network to connect them under the Slow Food movement but the local level remains very important. Emphasis is on community support while thinking about the global impact of food in the long run.

The results of the Facebook interviews confirm that the participants subscribe to the Slow Food philosophy of taking the time to learn about your food and to enjoy meals with family and friends. They spend time growing fruits and vegetables as well as shopping at local farmers' markets and through these activities they feel that they are supporting their community. The speed of new media is means to spread information about food and to connect with others within the movement. Online communication often takes time away from the people in their lives, but it also frees up hours in the aggregate for other pursuits such as cooking and gardening and therefore leaves more time for sharing meals and experiences with others.

Limitations and future research

This study does not examine how the different local groups vary in organization and in use of new media. Maybe the lack of current information on the Slow Food Atlanta website was a reflection of solely this one chapter and their lack of an official webmaster. A member of the Atlanta chapter told me that they are looking to bring in people better versed in communication and public relations to help design a better plan to reach out to supporters and new members. While the international website was the best organized of the three studied – it also has been in existence the longest and most likely has the biggest budget for maintenance and innovation. Access to Facebook groups depended on the frequency of responses by the admins of those groups. The participants in this study varied widely in how often they logged in showed that many people do not constantly update their social media contacts. There were also many groups, blogs and Twitter posts who did not use English and therefore were left out of this project.

One limitation discovered within the findings of this research turned out to be a limitation in methodology. Some of the difficulty in recruiting participants and conducting the ethnographic interviews is related to the answers given to questions about the amount of time spent and frequency of visits online, particularly on Facebook, seeking Slow Food news. For many of the people interviewed, the time allotted for looking at food discussions on Facebook and other social media was very low. This in turn meant the time available to contact and to interview them online was very small too. Furthermore, the interview timing also had to be adjusted to the time difference based on their respective locations around the world.

Future research could also look into the use of smartphone applications, tablet-based cooking information and training, and other social media sites like Pinterest. It was not included in this study because it is still relatively new and trendy. The longevity and usefulness of Pinterest to Slow Food has yet to be determined. Also, not included in this research was YouTube. This study did not go into in-depth

analysis of video texts in traditional media like television and film, or in new media. This study would turn into a book if it used all kinds of social media and included interviews with Slow Food supporters from other media sites and even in-person at local farmers markets and Slow Food events. In fact, a book version could expand to include quantitative information about the new media use of the movement and supporters and content analysis of the online texts. The large amount of texts available in multiple languages and on so many media leaves the pubic searching for information and provides lots of potential discoveries to be made by scholars as well.

Slow Food and "fast" new media

The supporters of the Slow Food movement who are active online seem to have overcome the tension between the idea of slowing down to take pleasure in food and the idea of using fast media to connect with other supporters by recognizing that the real time saved can be devoted to the cooking and eating and enjoyment of community in person. However, the interviews do highlight a difference between a Slow Food perspective on time and real-world time management.

Since the Slow Food organization promotes community and building relationships between consumers and producers, the participatory nature of social media is a good fit. The dialogic conversations allowed by media such as Facebook and Twitter enable communal discussions about food-related topics, instead of a more traditional top-down transfer of information originating from the organization itself. The Facebook groups show a balance between those who want to be a part of the elite by setting boundaries for a Slow Food related identity and those who reach out to share and educate everyone they encounter.

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6 APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions for Online Informants :

- How often do you go online for information about Slow Food?
- Where do you most often go for online food information - Facebook, websites, Twitter, Slow Food related blogs, etc.?
- Are you an official member of Slow Food?
- What about the Slow Food movement particularly interests you?
- Do you eat vegetarian, vegan, local, organic, etc?
- Do you attend any Slow Food related events?
- Do you go to local farm markets and how did you find out about them?
- Do you use new media sources to find restaurants that use local food sources?
- How often to you post on Facebook about Slow Food or about food? How often do you comment about food on your personal page or that of your friends? Post pictures of foods/meals?
- Do you have a blog? Do you write about food or post food pictures on it? Share recipes?
- Do you read/watch any of the food related traditional media – books, magazines, television programs, documentary movies?
- Do you find any disconnect between the Slow Food ideals and its use of new “fast” media to reach people?
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask?
- Do you have any suggestions of other people I should contact or interview next?