# The Social Media and Civic Engagement Matrix

**Anders Finholt**
Kalamazoo College
Kalamazoo, MI 49006, USA
anders.finholt16@kzoo.edu

**A.J. Million**
University of Michigan, School of Information
Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA
millioaj@umich.edu

**Libby Hemphill**
University of Michigan, School of Information
Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA
libbyh@umich.edu

## Introduction

- Studies of online civic engagement often focus on how it improves quality-of-life in democratic countries
- Online engagement activities may benefit communities while violating democratic norms
- We present a matrix for classifying engagement activities along two dimensions: sociality and effect

## What We Did

- We conducted interviews of nonprofit affiliates
- Some participants said civic engagement can be a negative experience
- We developed a way to classify the full range of engagement examples from our interviews while taking norm-violating behaviors into account

## The Matrix

- Classifies perceptions of civic acts and engagement behaviors
- Civic acts either improve or exacerbate quality-of-life
- Antisocial behavior violates or disregards democratic norms
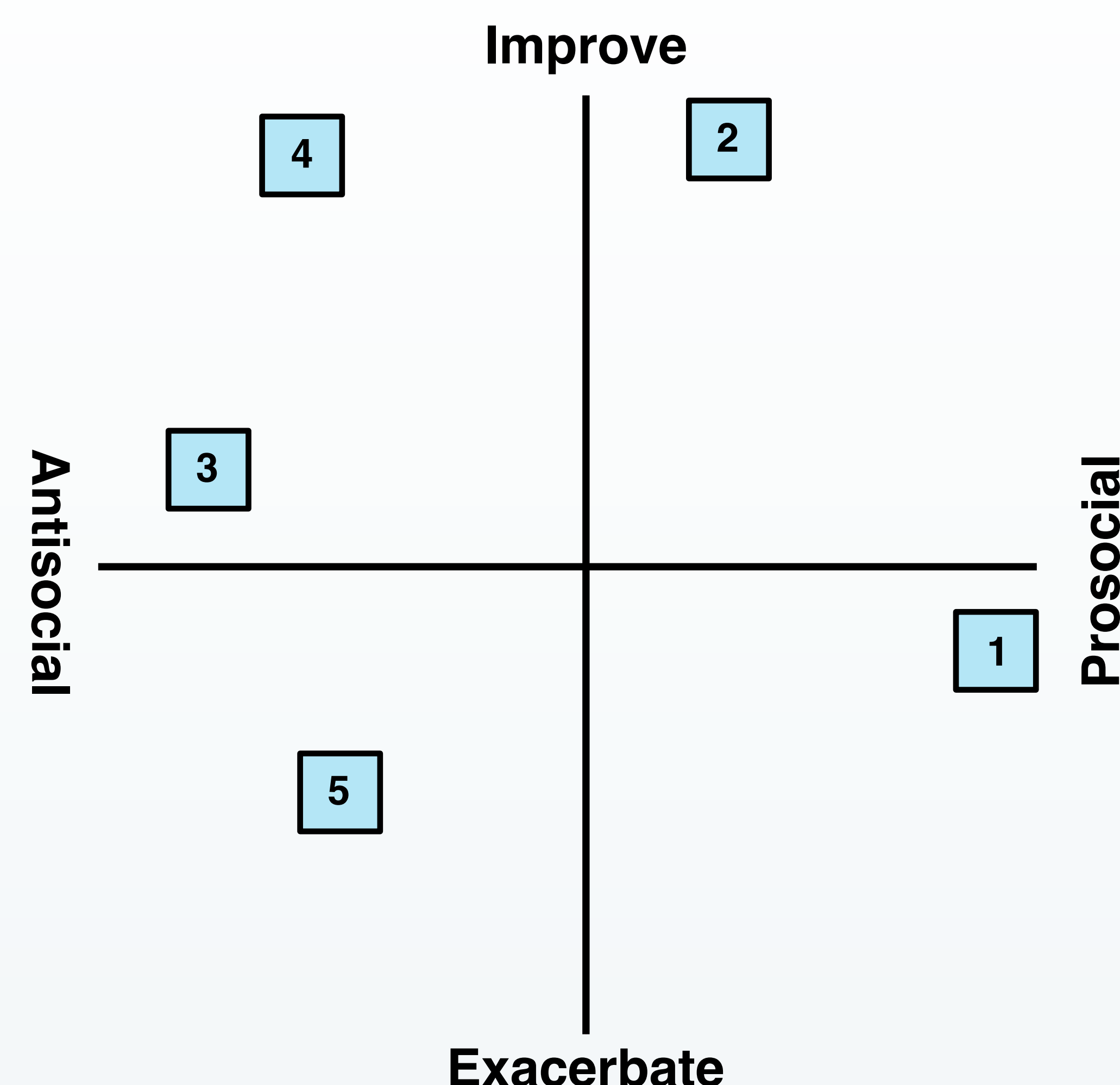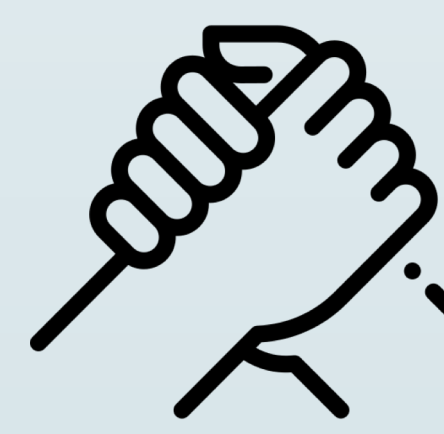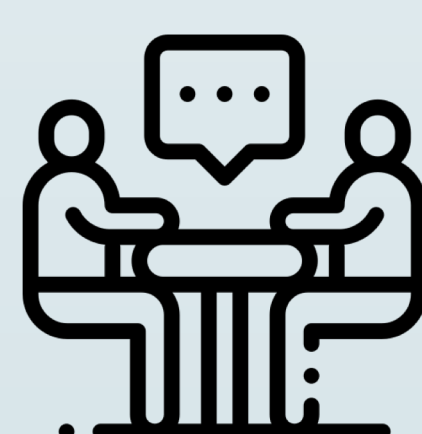- Prosocial behaviors are positive and align with democratic norms

- Prosocial-effective actions include registering voters and raising money for a charitable cause
- Antisocial-improve actions are disruptive but effective due to the conflict they create or reveal
- Prosocial-exacerbate actions follow social norms but have little impact
- Antisocial-exacerbate actions violate norms and make life worse

"There's this greater system that's oppressing people, which has left a lot of people not wanting to be civically engaged or having those conversations."
- Kalamazoo Interview Participant 16

"I think most of the time [civic engagement] has a positive intent, but it can go wrong."
- Kalamazoo Interview Participant 13

"Civic engagement would be… working as a community to fight for something."
- Chicago Interview Participant 14

"I see people share a lot of articles, but then that's all they do."
- Chicago Interview Participant 12

## Social Media and Civic Engagement Matrix

Matrix with axes: Improve (top), Exacerbate (bottom), Antisocial (left), Prosocial (right). Points plotted: 4 (upper-left/antisocial-improve), 2 (upper-right/prosocial-improve), 3 (left/antisocial), 1 (right/prosocial), 5 (lower-left/antisocial-exacerbate).

## Engagement Examples

1. Changing a Facebook profile picture as a show of solidarity for the survivors of a natural disaster rather than donating to relief efforts.

2. Registering citizens to vote via social media.

3. Posting stolen emails to WikiLeaks to prevent the election of a candidate with a history of supporting unilateral military action.

4. Teachers striking and students protesting schools closures.

5. Harassing individuals associated with a social movement you disagree with.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

- Online engagement activities may violate social, democratic norms
- We presented a framework to classify an expanded range of online engagement activities
- This matrix decouples the sociality and effectiveness of various actions
- We plan to test the matrix by collecting and analyzing data about citizen attitudes related to a range of online activities

## Further Reading

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