# Communicating Global Activism: Some Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Networked Politics[*]

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(Chapter for Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, and Dieter Rucht, eds. *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements*. London: Routledge forthcoming.)

Networks of activists demanding greater voice in global economic regimes raise interesting questions about how to organize effective political action across geographical, cultural, ideological, and issue boundaries. Protest against world development and trade policies is nothing new. For example, Rucht (1999, and this volume) has documented such action in Germany dating from the 1980s. However, the more recent period is interesting in its global scale, organizational complexity, and communication strategies. This chapter explores activist communication practices both in terms of their political effects and their implications for social movement organization and mobilization.

## Communication as a Key to Understanding Global Activism

The demonstrations against the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting in Seattle in 1999 have become recognized as a punctuating moment or turning point in the evolution of global activism. For some observers, the iconic "Battle of Seattle" (see Levi and Olson, 2000) indicates that activist networks have globalized and coalesced in important ways, including increased awareness of other players, and greater coordination

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of communication and action across networks of those players (Tarrow, 2002). Evidence of these developments comes in many forms. One indicator of the growth of networks is the expansion of a communication infrastructure, marked, for example, by the growth of the Indymedia information network ([www.indymedia.org](www.indymedia.org)) from one outlet to more than 100 in the three years following Seattle. Further evidence of the globalization of protest involves the coordination and scheduling of simultaneous events in diverse locales. For example, Seattle was simply the media focus of what turned out to be dozens of parallel demonstrations in cities around the world on the same date. Many organizations now routinely participate in constructing and sharing globally accessible web sites and calendars for planning and scheduling future protest events (Lichbach and Almeida, 2001). Finally, the observations of activists, themselves, suggest that the Seattle experience presented new challenges for creating networks and coordinating action among large numbers of diverse organizations (see on-line interviews at www.wtohistory.org).

This chapter examines the organization and the communication patterns in these dynamic global activist networks, with particular emphasis on the uses of the Internet as a public sphere for exchanging ideas often independent of much centralized, top-down mediation. At the most general level, it may seem obvious that current networks of global protest could not exist without various uses of the Internet. However, when these vast issue and protest networks are examined at different levels of analysis, and with different questions in mind, the political implications of the Internet become less clear and consistent. For example, when networks are viewed at the level of constituent organizations, the implications of Internet communications vary widely. Political

organizations that are older, larger, resource-rich, and more strategically linked to party and government politics may rely on Internet-based communications largely to amplify and reduce the costs of pre-existing communication routines. On the other hand, newer, resource-poor organizations that tend to reject conventional politics may be defined in important ways by their Internet presence (Graber, Bimber, Bennett, Davis, and Norris, forthcoming). Understanding organization and communication across complex networks present other theoretical challenges.

By reducing communication costs and enabling easy linkages across diverse organizations, the Internet may facilitate network-building based on affinities or relatively loose identifications. A common theoretical assumption is that such networks are flexible, easy to join and leave, and capable of relatively fluid reorganization following the addition or loss of organizations (Castells, 1996). Yet these same strengths of flexible networks may also reduce their ideological definition and decision-making coherence. For example, the actions of large, electronically mediated networks may be difficult to coordinate in decisive ways, whether the activity involves deciding what and how to communicate at demonstrations, or shutting a corporate campaign off when it has attained the goals of at least some of its key organizers.

Understanding various uses of the Internet may help sort out some features of a still inchoate global protest scene. However, it is important to recognize that the uses of the Internet in global activism are embedded within a larger set of social and political conditions that also define global activist networks. For example, changing social conditions within nations that are broadly attributable to globalization have undermined identification with parties and conventional political organizations, and opened the

imagination to more cosmopolitan global associations on the part of many citizens

(Inglehart, 1997; Bennett, 1998; Tarrow, 2002).  The resulting growth of a global activist

public with notably diverse identifications, causes, associations, and locations create

challenges for communication and organization. Following a brief overview of the

shifting bases of political identity, the remainder of the chapter explores how activists

with such diverse issues and identifications manage to communicate and organize protest

on a global scale.

### *Social Change and Global Politics*

To some extent the less centralized, less ideologically driven politics of

contemporary global activist networks reflect the fragmenting sociological impact of

globalization itself on institutions as diverse as unions, churches, business firms, political

parties, and families. In societies of the high-modern, pre-globalization era -- dating,

roughly, through the end of the 1960s -- civil society institutions provided the values and

authoritative bases for more coherently organized collective politics. In late modern,

globalizing societies -- roughly dating from the early 1970s -- individuals have

experienced increasing freedom to form identifications outside of dominant institutions.

Young citizens born into these late modern societies display a greater tendency to

organize political meaning, identity, and activity around what Giddens (1991) has termed

life politics, or what I have called lifestyle politics (Bennett 1998).

Lifestyle politics are characterized by emotional attachments to issues based on

their meaningful associations with social identity claims, personal and professional

networks, neighborhood relations, social trends, work and family schedules, health care

needs, sexual preferences, fashion statements, travel venues, entertainment, celebrity

cues, and other connections to lifestyle concerns. Such connections transcend easy ideological categorization, such as the linkage of songbirds to fair trade coffee, or buying products that display eco-labels as a direct personal contribution to environmental protection. Personal political choices in fashion, food, travel, investments, and social memberships permit relatively fluid movement in and out of issue networks as they touch on dynamic lifestyle values.

Reinforcing the centrifugal tendency toward decentralized issue networks is a growing perception on the part of many – particularly younger generation – activists that governments have become less trustworthy or effective as solvers of their problems. Many activists believe that labor, environment, and human rights policies of governments have been weakened by pressures from global corporations and multinational economic regimes such as the World Trade Organization. The neo-liberal drift and re-branding of labor parties in Europe and the Democratic Party in the United States offer evidence for these concerns. The resulting capacity of corporations to escape regulation and win concessions from governments has created a political sphere beyond formal legislative and electoral representation that Beck calls sub-politics (Beck 2000). The sub-politics of corporations and trade regimes first create and then exploit governmental vulnerabilities in labor markets, environmental protection, tax collection, and finance regulation.

The sub-politics of corporations and transnational economic regimes have been countered by opposition sub-politics that include the scheduling of global demonstrations, the proliferation of campaigns against companies and economic development policies, and the creation of epistemic networks to gather and publicize information on various effects of global change. These activist power tactics supplement,

and, more often, supplant pressures applied to officials and agencies through more routine electoral and interest channels. The place of government in the activists' political calculus varies from nation to nation depending on political culture, government composition, and links between issue networks, unions, churches, or parties. Tarrow characterizes this latter day global activism "….as unlikely to sustain high levels of confidence in government and may trigger less trusting attitudes in the public by demonstrating the inadequacy of governmental performance; but on the other hand, neither do they create enduring negative subcultures. Their variform and shifting organizations, their tendency to produce rapid and rapidly-liquidated coalitions, their focus on short- and medium-term issues rather than fully fledged ideologies do not produce standing activist commitments or deeply held loyalties…" (Tarrow 1999: 30).

In the context of such fluid and ideologically thin activism, the development and communication of political positions across diverse networks become challenging tasks. The continuous organization and reorganization of protest activities, from issue campaigns to demonstrations, present interesting challenges as well. The analysis that follows suggests that there may be something of a convergence between communication practices and organization-building routines in the sphere of loosely networked activist politics. In many cases, Internet-driven communication practices that serve strategic political purposes also operate as organizational resources.

## *Communication in Activist Networks: Political Strategy and Organizational Resource*

My observations of a broad array of protest activities, from demonstrations to campaigns against trade and development organizations and corporations, lead me to four

tentative generalizations about the organization and communication of global activism. (For more background on these studies, see the Global Citizen Project links at the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, www.engagedcitizen.org). The Internet is implicated in each generalization, either as a background element or a principal factor. The intriguing feature of each general characteristic of global activism is that communication practices are hard to separate from organizational capabilities, as activists increasingly operate in networks without walls, conventional leadership or membership, geographical or issue boundaries, or other aspects of conventional hierarchical organizations or formal coalitions. The patterns of communication that both reflect and reproduce the relational and conceptual fluidity of global activism are briefly summarized below, and discussed the remainder of the chapter.

- *Permanent campaigns*. Global activism is characterized by long- running communication campaigns to organize protests and publicize issues aimed at transnational organizations, corporations, and other targets. Campaigns in activist politics are surely not new, but rather than being run predominantly by established organizations such as unions or environmental NGOs, campaigns tend to be less centrally controlled, and more difficult to turn on and off. Another reason for the proliferation and the duration of campaigns is that as citizens in late modern society become less identified with centralized political organizations, campaigns themselves, provide the organizing and mobilizing structures for networks of groups and individuals.

- *Communication in diverse networks is ideologically thin*. The diversity of many campaign networks makes it difficult to achieve common idea framings or to generate new ideological formulations. One result is that campaigns transmit political messages with relatively little ideological elaboration beyond basic appeals to justice or fairness, and with a heavy reliance on lifestyle symbols as vehicles for political messages: songbirds and fair trade coffee, celebrities and debt relief, brand logos and sweatshop labor, and "culture jams" that associate images of advertising and consumption with political problems.

- *Internet use can affect the organization of global activist networks.* The ease of dynamic networking through the Internet permits organizations to come and go with relative ease, and, in other cases, to co-exist despite substantial political differences. Depending on their communicational role in networks, some organizations are even transformed by Inter-networks as they take on new functions and partnerships. For example, an organization may become captured by other organizations that transform its web site into a meeting point, or use it as a hub to expand their web presence. Organizations seeking to maintain their political identities (for example, Netaction, Global Exchange) often move from network to network, providing similar coordination or information services while avoiding longer term transformation.

- *New media can alter information flows through the mass media*. The creation of a public sphere based in *micro media* (e-mail, lists) and *middle*

*media* Internet channels (blogs, organization sites, e-zines) offers activists an important degree of information and communication independence from the mass media. At the same time, Internet search engines, e-zines, and weblogs make this discourse available to broader publics and to mainstream journalists. For example, "culture jamming" and logo campaigns initiated in *micromedia* and *middle media* have attracted surprisingly positive portrayals of activist messages in the mass media (Klein, 1999; Lasn, 1999; Bennett, forthcoming). At the same time, the relatively positive media portrayals of issue campaigns (Nike sweatshop, fair trade coffee) and particular activist organizations (Global Exchange, ATTAC) have not been matched with positive mass media coverage of protests (with the ironic exception of the Seattle WTO protest news coverage). It is true that media coverage of civil disobedience is often negative, but important exceptions suggest that activists can protest in ways that publicize their own messages (Gamson, 2001). In part, global activism struggles under the sheer diversity of its rainbow of issue networks and political framings, meaning that reporters' narratives easily default to the simplifying negative frames of "anti-globalization" and violence.

Before developing an analysis of the above communication principles, several caveats are in order. First, the argument here is not that communication, particularly involving the Internet, is the only or even the most central quality of contemporary

activism. Much old-style, face-to-face communication continues to define network politics. For example, one clear theme emerging from interviews with activists from different organizations in the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests is the degree to which personal contacts established among organization leaders were essential to organizing an effective large scale demonstration (see on line interview transcriptions at www.wtohistory.org). Most observers note that while protest may have globalized, the overwhelming majorities of those who turn out for various demonstrations are locals (Lichbach and Almeida, 2001; Levi and Olson, 2000; Tarrow, 2002). Second, as noted above, many longstanding labor, human rights, and environmental organizations have probably been transformed less by the uses of the Internet that have newer entrants in the global activist ranks.  At the same time, many once-dominant NGOs may have lost control of key issues due to the rise of vast activist networks. Finally, our generalizations about the importance or particular communication strategies may apply less to activists in some issue areas or national contexts than others.   For example, logo campaigns against particular corporate offenders may be more typical of the North American political repertoire than elsewhere, and some European activist organizations seem more government-oriented and less concerned about broader public relations strategies than their North American counterparts. All of this said, the four related communication patterns outlined above appear general enough to begin exploring the ways in which communication shapes contemporary global activism.


## *Permanent Campaigns and Political Organization*

It is often said that we have entered the age of permanent political campaigns, whether waged by elected leaders in order to govern after they win office, or by interest groups to mobilize publics and promote their policy agendas. The campaign as a permanent basis of political organization can be traced directly to the changing social conditions of late modern -- globalizing -- societies and their weakened group, party, and ideological bases of political organization and mobilization. Campaigns in such social contexts thus serve more than just the purpose of communicating political messages aimed at achieving political goals. They also become mobilizing and organizing devices in contexts that lack more fundamental organizing mechanisms such as strong parties, formal interest groups, or ideologically defined social movements with leading organizations.

In the American case, the model for activist issue campaigns can be traced to "corporate" campaigns pioneered by labor unions in the early 1980s. Searching for winning political strategies to compensate for steep membership declines, labor ended up supplementing traditional organizing and strike tactics with communication strategies aimed at threatening the images of corporations in the eyes of consumers, investors, journalists, social interest groups and other publics (Manheim 2001). These corporate campaigns have now spread throughout activist and advocacy circles, being adopted by environmental, health, human rights, as well as by anti-globalization and sustainable development groups and coalitions. For example, Greenpeace waged a successful campaign against the Starkist label to stop the harvesting of tuna with methods that endangered other species. A small network of NGOs stopped Monsanto's plans to develop a genetically engineered seed monopoly by waging a successful media campaign

labeling the sterile seed strain "the terminator." And the small human rights organization Global Witness successfully targeted the diamond giant De Beers, which ultimately agreed to limit the market for the bloody "conflict" diamonds that motivated mercenary armies to establish regimes of terror in crumbling African states (Cowell 2001).

Some of these campaigns resemble traditional boycotts in the sense that they are run by relatively centralized organizations or coalitions, and they can be turned off when specified goals are accomplished. However, an increasingly common pattern is for whole activist networks to latch onto particularly ripe targets such as Nike or Microsoft because their heavily advertised and ubiquitous logos stick easily to lifestyle meaning systems among consumer publics. This stickiness of logos helps activists get political messages into the mass media and through to audiences whose attention is often limited in matters of politics. Thus, another feature that distinguishes them from boycotts is that many contemporary issue campaigns do not require consumer action at all; instead, the goal is to hold a corporate logo hostage in the media until shareholders or corporate managers regard the bad publicity as an independent threat to a carefully cultivated brand image.

The success of many campaigns in getting hard-to-communicate political messages into public circulation may induce some players to continue running campaigns even after others leave a network having declared their goals met. The influx of large and unwieldy networks of activists running through political territories once occupied in more orderly fashion by a small number of rights, environmental, consumer protection, labor and development NGOs presents an interesting strategic dilemma for movement organizing. One attraction of centrally run campaigns was the ability to stop them, which

reinforced the credibility of activist organizations by rewarding the compliance of targeted companies.

The weaker central organization of networked campaigns increases the prospects for unstable coalitions, greater communication noise, lack of clarity about goals, and poor movement idea-framing. When Global Exchange left the Nike campaign after the considerable publicity successes described below, it was apparently satisfied that Nike had made a significant move away from its former position of refusing to acknowledge responsibility for conditions in its factories. Yet other players (e.g., United Students Against Sweatshop and Press for Change, Jeff Ballinger's original campaign organization) felt that the more important issue was how to create a standards monitoring system that would be sustainable and effective in the absence of reliable governmental participation (see Bullert, 2000; and Bennett, forthcoming).

Key questions about the effectiveness of campaigns both as mechanisms for change and as movement organizing devices include: who is in charge of campaigns, how are campaign goals defined, what constitutes success, and how to stop others from targeting the same corporation (beating a dead logo) after it has satisfied particular demands. *Several hypotheses can be developed around these questions. Campaigns are likely to be extended in time, and change in terms of their collections of players and goals to the extent that: a) the target is widely recognized and newsworthy; b) the target can be connected to various lifestyle concerns such as consumer protection, or to empathic public images such as endangered species, poverty, human suffering, and political corruption; c) large numbers of diverse groups can represent their issues through such images; d) coordinating and information sites emerge to create an epistemic community*

*that makes the campaign a source of knowledge about credible problems, while offering the target as an exemplar of both problem and solution.*

Beyond their many applications in issue activism, campaigns also serve to organize protests by creating and mobilizing networks that may lack strong central leadership organizations. Viewed in one way, the organization of the Seattle World Trade Organization protests resembles many past protest campaigns, with organizing coalitions emerging, and leaders from established organizations (unions, churches, public interest organizations) becoming coalition builders (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Dolan interview www.wtohistory.org). Yet the impressive capacity of the Internet to broaden the scope of protest suggests that global protest campaigns entail an important Internet presence that enables the coordination of larger scale protests across both time and space. Lichbach and Almeida (2001) note that on the dates of the battle in Seattle, simultaneous protests were held in at least 82 other cities around the world, including 27 locations in the United States, 40 in other "northern" locations including Seoul, London, Paris, Prague, Brisbane, and Tel Aviv, and 15 in "southern" locations such as New Delhi, Manila, and Mexico City. Not only were these other protests not organized centrally by the Seattle campaign coalition, but information about timing and tactics was transmitted almost entirely through activist networks on the Internet.

In addition to extending the global reach of single protest events, Internet campaigns also enable activists to create and update rich calendars of planned demonstrations. Lichbach and Almeida (2001) discovered wide Internet postings and network sites for no fewer than 39 scheduled protests between 1994 and 2001. This suggests that Seattle was just one of many events in a permanent protest campaign

organized by different organizations in the global activist network. (The fact that Seattle became something of a media icon is another story, to which we shall return in the section below on activist communication in the mass media.)

The point here is that sustained issue and protest campaigns on a global scale cannot be explained by leadership commitments from centralized organizations with large resource bases or memberships. We must turn, instead, to the rise of fluid communication networks, in contrast to more centralized organizations or coalitions, which mark the second distinctive feature of the new global issue activism. In keeping with our "strengths and vulnerabilities" theme, the next section suggests that while networked communication may help sustain the campaigns that organize global activism, networks may undermine the thematic coherence of the ideas that are communicated through them.

## *Communication in Diverse Networks is Ideologically Thin*

As globalization touches larger numbers of people in different societies, the sheer numbers of organizations and individual players with different points of view also grows. Global networks have long existed in areas of human rights, labor standards, environment, development and humanitarian relief, but they often operated independently from one another, with different issue sectors under the leadership of established non-governmental organizations, or NGOs (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Those NGO issue networks both gain a measure of power and incur limits on their political action by establishing links to juridical transnational civil society organizations such as the United Nations (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

This picture of NGO single issue activism appears to have become complicated in the recent period by the entry of organizations (e.g., Global Exchange in the United States, and ATTAC in several European societies) and individual activists with broader "global politics" agendas that cut across traditional NGO issue sectors. While the growth of direct action and "permanent campaigns" may present greater political containment problems for corporations and targeted trade and development organizations, the rise of an activist public extending well beyond old line policy-oriented NGOs may complicate, and even undermine their prerogatives of setting political goals and coordinating action.

Loosely organized networks allow different issues and political perspectives to co-exist without threatening organizational coherence as directly as such differences might threaten more centralized, face-to-face coalitions. On most days, conservative Senator Orrin hatch and consumer activist Ralph Nader would not find themselves in the same political universe. Yet they have been comfortably occupying network space together for years in the anti-Microsoft network, with only a few degrees of separation between them. The board memberships, legal representation, financial support, authorship of reports, and appearances at conferences that establish the network of opposition to Microsoft includes businesses such as Sun and Oracle, consumer protection organizations, Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, and the Government Accountability Project, among many others. An important hub in the anti-Microsoft network was Netaction (www.netaction.org), created initially for the Microsoft campaign as an Internet-based networking and information-providing organization. The richness of Netaction reports and papers suggest the rise of an epistemic community linking ideas of consumer protection, business innovation, and open source Internet architecture. (More

complete accounts of the Microsoft network can be found in Manheim, 2001 and Bennett, forthcoming).

"Strange bedfellows" have always emerged in coalition politics. In the early 1990s, the coalition in the U.S. fighting against the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (NAFTA and GATT) became known in the White House as the "Halloween coalition." It included, among others: Ralph Nader, Pat Buchanan, Ross Perot, Jerry Brown, small business associations, unions and environmental groups (Lichbach and Almeida 2001: 33). Yet these old style coalitions tend to develop and dissolve quickly as particular policy fights are won or lost. Coalitions in global activist networks may be just as diverse, and yet remain in networked association as long as campaigns continue to run, as indicated in the Microsoft coalition above.

While networks can reduce the costs and conflicts often associated with bringing diverse players into issue and protest campaigns, they also may harbor intellectual contradictions that ultimately limit the growth of ideological or even intellectually focused movements. Rather than pushing toward ideological commonalities, activist networks more often function more as pragmatic information exchanges and mobilization systems. In some cases they may also serve epistemic communities by building and sharing impressive information bases about global warming, rainforest decimation, labor conditions in Export Processing Zones, or the flow of bloody diamonds from bandit regimes to corporate diamond giant De Beers.

These intellectual limits may even operate within single organizations that adopt network designs consciously as means of promoting member equality or minimizing

bureaucracy, as indicated in Le Grignou and Patou's analysis in this volume of the French organization ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens). ATTAC defines itself largely as a citizen education organization aimed at publicizing information about economic development problems and just solutions. It even boasts a central Scientific Council to guide the production of high quality information (which, as Le Grignou and Patou point out, raises questions about the organizational goal of equality of information exchange). The commitment to the autonomy of local chapters based on relatively open network design has resulted in the posting of diverse documents and concerns from the ATTAC activist network. Le Grignou and Patou conclude that the easy communication of local interests quickly broadened the organizational agenda by bringing "together, on one singular page, different issues like Commander Marcos, the "Mad Cow disease", human rights in Tunisia, and the Danone employees."

Le Grignou and Patou explain that the "click here" logic of the Internet at once makes connections between such disparate ideas possible, and at the same time creates an intellectual dilemma for the organization. As one ATTAC officer they interviewed put it, "the main problem for ATTAC today concerns the unification of the movement and the way to give it a more unified content." In short, the low cost of networking also introduces a low threshold of idea expansion. This makes networked activism at once less centrally controllable and less able to develop core ideas, which may contribute to churn, confusion, and communication difficulties that may inhibit the maturing of a movement.

*Several related hypothesis emerge from this analysis. In particular, levels of ideological discourse and more generally, idea or agenda convergence, are inversely*

*related to: the number and diversity of groups in a network; the churn, or turnover of links in a network; the equality of communication access established by editorial and access protocols on hub sites in the network; and the degree to which network traffic pertains to campaigns promoting issues or demonstrations.* This analysis suggests that it is not so much the Internet as the network structures established through it that shape the qualities of information content in those networks. However, the design and uses of the Internet may have important effects on activist organizational structures, both inside member organizations, and in terms of overall network stability and capacity.

## The Internet as Organizational Process

An important area of future research involves discovering what kinds of organizations --occupying what sorts of network roles -- are most likely to be transformed by their Internet-based interactions. It is by now common to hear cautionary words about the direct effects of the Internet on political organizations or their capacity to achieve goals. Philip Agre (2001) argues that in most cases the Internet is subordinated to the existing routines and patterns of the institution using it, and that Internet applications mainly amplify and economize areas that already define the institution.  One observer has even gone so far as to assert that "the Internet is less applicable [to] the creation of new forms of democratic public spheres than [to] the support of already existing ones" (Buchstein, 1997:260, paraphrase by Agre, 2001: 21).  The problem with this and dozens of other "minimal effects" accounts of the Internet and politics is that they all look at how established political institutions and organizations adapt the Internet to existing routines. The uses of the Internet may be largely subordinated to existing organizational routines

and structures when absorbed by the goals and practices of hierarchical organizations such as parties, interest associations, or election campaigns. However, as noted in the last section, the fluid networks of global issue activism enable the Internet to become an organizational force shaping both the relations among organizations and in some cases, the organizations themselves.

Because easy Internet linkages can create openness to new players, along with unpredictable traffic patterns, organizations may rise quickly from relative obscurity to become central organizing hubs in networks. For example, Jubilee 2000 began in the mid 1990s as a one person web site, rather crudely but endearingly dedicated to economic development driven by spiritual values. The site was soon discovered by religious oriented organizations concerned with debt relief and ethical development. By the time of the Seattle WTO protests, Jubilee had been transformed into an important wing of the network organizing the protests.  The Jubilee coalition led the first large march on the evening of November 29, 1999, drawing an estimated 10-15,000 activists, and setting the stage for the even larger labor-led actions the next day. Although Jubilee continues to appear in protest organizing networks, the organization has transformed away from its protest hub status of the Seattle period, and now exists as several different organizations in different nations, with less central roles in protest organizing networks.  Following Seattle, new umbrella protest networking organizations have come and gone, yet the network of protest organizing remains strong despite (or perhaps because of) the transformation of many of the organizations within it.

The capacity to create Internet umbrella organizations for campaigns or protests enables new protest actions to take on their own direction, often with new configurations

of hub organizations, and with capacities for innovation that might not exist if the same lead organizations or coalitions attempted to run successive protests or campaigns (as has often been the pattern in other social movements). For example, the A16-2000 umbrella organization that coordinated the demonstrations at the Washington, D. C. International Monetary Fund meeting in April of 2000 used its web site to announce a constantly changing roster of participants, and enabled new organizations signing up electronically to post their own rallying messages at the top of the site (A16-2000Network\A16The Network List.htm). The emphasis in this Internet organization was on the political diversity of groups and their amazing number of different political reasons for opposing the IMF. The daunting list of hundreds of endorsing and participating groups (692 and still growing at the time I captured the site) was facilitated thanks to automated Internet registration, which was then indexed by geographical location so that organizations in different locales could be viewed on the same page. A different page of the site revealed an equally diverse core group of demonstration sponsors:

- 50 Years Is Enough Network - Washington DC
- ACERCA (Action for Community & Ecology in the Rainforests of Central America) - Burlington VT
- Alliance for Global Justice - Washington DC
- American Lands Alliance - Washington DC
- Campaign for Labor Rights - Washington DC
- Continental Direct Action Network
- Global Exchange - San Francisco CA
- Mass Earth First! - Montague MA
- Mexico Solidarity Network - Chicago IL
- National Lawyers Guild
- Nicaragua Network - Washington DC
- Rainforest Action Network - San Francisco CA
- Solidarity - Detroit MI
- Washington Action Group - Washington DC
- Witness for Peace - Washington DC

In contrast to the diversity of the A16 organization, the umbrella site for the FTAA protests in Montreal in April of 2001 (NAFTANet - International Day of Action - Stop the FTAA.htm) had a much more focused agenda aimed at mobilizing people in localities and training them in direct action and street theater tactics before they arrived in Montreal. The emphasis on local and face-to-face training and mobilizing around a "carnival" theme for this protest reveals a different set of lead organizations that those involved in the IMF protests the year before, with Ruckus featuring prominently in the local mobilizing, and the Montreal Anti-Capitalist Convergence clearly identified as the lead organization at the protest site. The focus on protest themes, training, and coordinating reflected much different organizational strategies than the unstructured group-to-group dialogue facilitated on the A16-IMF site.

Despite the considerable differences in inter-group organization and protest theme framing in the two Internet spheres, the later FTAA protest site referred to the A16 and other events in terms that located the entire calendar of demonstrations squarely within a larger global activist movement. For example, the Montreal site posted the earlier IMF Internet organization in its calendar of past and future protests. In addition, the Montreal organization prominently featured links on its front page to several current issue campaigns against corporations (e.g., Nike and Monsanto) that needed support. Also posted were news reports from activists who had attended the recently concluded first World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Like the A16 Internet site, the FTAA site was an Internet organization representing a moment in movement time that would soon dissolve and reemerge somewhere else in a new organization and constellation of players. Despite the unique

organizational structure and framing of the FTAA Internet campaign, some basic indicators of a larger global social movement were imbedded within its unique organizational moment: references to global action networks, an expanding calendar of protests, the importance of ongoing issue campaigns, and the prospects for a global civil society formation in the WSF gathering all came together under an organizational format that was uniquely created on the Internet.

Beyond its impact on organizations created (or, as in the case of Jubilee, adapted) for particular issue campaigns or demonstrations, the Internet may also affect the development of many organizations that have both memberships and sustained presences on the global activist scene. In their study of ATTAC in France, Le Grignou and Pattou (in this volume) make the following observations about the central organizing role of the Internet:

> Till January 2001, no one represented local groups at the administrative council… The structure of the association gives them a total autonomy, which sometimes verges on isolation. Local leaders happen to be in touch with National Attac only through the Internet, while others hardly ever receive news from Paris. The electronic offer is sometimes the only link between local groups and other branches of the association, be it through discussion lists (*Attac talk*), work lists (*Attac local*), mailing lists (*Grain de Sable* or *Lignes d'Attac*), or electronic secretaries (site on the WTO or current campaigns). For these groups, the Attac site is then a means to get information, to learn about what is happening to other groups (through electronic publications), to know about current campaigns or international

developments. More generally, it is the main vector of connection between these groups and Attac. For instance, one can find on the Internet very thorough accounts of national administrative councils, and one can express one's thoughts. In this respect, 27 % of the documents put on the Net concern the association, its way of functioning, and the changes affecting it....Internet is so seminal to the association life that Local Electronic Correspondants (CEL) have been created, as connected members would "chaperon" non-connected members.

An implication of the capacity of Internet communication to transform organizations is that organizations providing coordinating or information functions in campaign networks may adopt a strategy of periodically "moving on" to new networks in order to prevent being transformed by their membership in a particular network. For example, Netaction (www.netaction.org) was created as an information and publicity site for the campaign against Microsoft. It has since gone on to coordinate other campaigns in the area of Internet open source architecture, privacy, and regulation. Its role as information archive and "virtual activist training" organization remains roughly the same as Netaction moves from one campaign to another, joining different partners in different causes.  Netaction's "move on" strategy seems to protect it from Internet transformation, while (potentially) shaping new activist networks by introducing its capacity as a network hub.

*Based on this analysis, we can propose an organizational model of the Internet in global issue activism. An obvious hypothesis to test is the proposition that organizational*

*change in a networked organization (measured by the expansion of goals or functions over time as listed on web sites) is a combined function of: the length of time an organization belongs to a network, the degree to which the organization's political agenda is channeled through the network, the diversity of organizations (measured by their issue agendas) in the network, and the organization's centrality as an information or action coordinating hub in the network. Another prediction is that the stability, effectiveness, and strength of member identification with complex (multi-issue, multi-goal) campaigns increase with the emergence of network coordinating hub organizations that use email and web news to keep dynamic networks in communication over time.*
Many such hub organizations now exist, and they often coordinate campaigns across traditional issue and interest areas. For example, the WTO protests in Seattle were facilitated by networking organizations such as One World, Public Citizen, Jubilee 2000, and Global Exchange, as well as by web consortia that co-sponsored information hubs and event announcements.

The link patterns of networks present another fruitful, if puzzling, area for empirical inquiry. At present, little is known about the stability or action mobilizing potentials of densely linked versus sparsely linked networks. According to a study of organization web sites that were most often linked to by other organization sites at the time of the Seattle protests, the official WTO site was the link leader (2129 recorded links), followed by several protest hubs with impressive network links: One World (348); Institute for Global Communications (111), Seattlewto.org, the sponsored site of the NGO coalition (92); and Corporate Watch (74), among others (Smith & Smyth, 2000). Various accounts of the Seattle protests (www.wtohistory.org; Levi & Olson, 2000)

suggest that one could not easily derive the key mobilizing coalition players from these link patterns. Nor are the densities of link patterns a good measure of the political similarities of the linked organizations or the thematic coherence of a network, as indicated in the chapter by Van Aelst and Walgrave in this volume.

Another puzzling issue is whether linkage density or the centrality of organizations in a network may affect their likelihood of achieving prominence in the mass media. At this point, I suspect that neither the size of networks, nor the centrality of particular organizations in them necessarily affects recognition patterns in the mass media. As indicated by the Van Aelst and Walgrave analysis, many activist network organizations do receive media coverage, but it is not clear what drives that coverage. As discussed in the next section, there is an important degree of crossover information flow from digital to mass media, but the logic of that flow may depend more on the publicity strategies of individual organizations in networks, along with the capacity to generate communication codes that travel well along "viral" paths that join the Internet and the mass media.

## New Media Can Alter Information Flows through Mass Media

It is important to understand that the public spheres created by the Internet and the Web are more than just parallel information universes that exist independently of the traditional mass media. The growing conventional wisdom among communication scholars is that the Internet is changing the way in which news is made. In the early stages of an event or a campaign, new media provide alternative communication spaces in which information can develop and circulate widely with few of the filters,

conventions and editorial standards of the mainstream (and even the alternative) press. The gate-keeping capacity of the traditional press is weakened when information appears on the Internet, often in breathless fashion, with fewer reliable sources, and little time to decide on its validity before pressures to publicize it in mainstream channels become intense. The icon of this crossover from new media to old is the Monica Lewinsky story. The scandal that consumed the media in the last years of the Clinton administration broke in the Matt Drudge Internet gossip sheet.  What followed was the irresistible sweep of the story through the mainstream press, with few of the editorial safeguards that ordinarily would apply to a story of such magnitude.

An example of micro-to-mass media crossover in global activism occurred in the culture-jamming episode involving an e-mail exchange between Jonah Peretti and Nike. Peretti responded to a Nike web-based marketing initiative inviting customers to order shoes with a name or slogan of their choice on them. He submitted a request for the term "sweatshop" on his custom Nikes. The various exchanges between Peretti and the company-- all ending with Nike's refusal to put any of Peretti's requests for custom political labels on its shoes-- became grist for rounds of email and list-serves that swept through the global sweatshop campaign network, and beyond. Peretti sent the original exchange to a dozen friends, who forwarded it to their friends, and so the exchange spread in viral fashion. An Australian journalist who eventually received the E-mail back-tracked through lists of forwards and CCs and developed a simple model of the forwarding patterns. She estimated that several million people in far reaches of the planet received, commented upon, and forwarded the story, which spread across the global Internet and generated high levels of buzz in a few weeks. (Mackin, 2001)

As Peretti observed, based on the flood of responses he received, the message first circulated in the die-hard activist community, then the culture jamming community, and then, "…something interesting happened. The micromedia message worked its way into the mass media…" (Peretti, forthcoming). First it reached middle media sites such as weblogs (*slashdot*, *sheynet*, *plastic* and others) where is began to resemble news. From there, it was picked up by more conventional middle media journals such as *Salon*. At that point, it was a short journalistic step to *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, NBC's *Today Show*, various European papers, and other mainstream news outlets. Canadian media consultant Doug Miller was quoted in *The Financial Times* as saying "I visit 75 boardrooms a year and I can tell you the members of the boards are living in fear of getting their corporate reputations blown away in two months on the Internet." (Mackin, 2001)

In the Microsoft campaign (Bennett, forthcoming), underground (Internet) terminology for Microsoft and its embodiment in Bill Gates easily crossed over into mainstream reporting. Derogatory terms and comparisons leaked out of Internet chats, networked campaign sites, and partisan webzines, and surfaced in mainstream news accounts reporting what opponents were saying about Microsoft: that the goal of the company was to "crush competition," that it was known by opponents as "the Seattle Slasher," and that Bill Gates was the latter day incarnation of Robber Baron icon, John D. Rockefeller.

A more elaborate case of information moving from new media to traditional news organizations comes from the Nike sweatshop campaign. Countless stories of worker abuse and bad conditions in Nike factories had long circulated across the Internet,

providing an authenticating context for publicity organized by Global Exchange after it entered the campaign as the central coordinating hub organization in 1996 (indicating once again the organizational capacity of Internetworks to accommodate the dramatic entry and exit of central organizations). The Global Exchange communication strategy combined Internet mobilization (turning out activists for rallies with touring Indonesian factory workers at Niketown locations) with traditional public relations techniques such as press background briefings, press conferences, well-produced rallies, and other pseudo-events designed to fit news values. The result was to connect Indonesian workers with journalists around America in ways that produced dozens of repetitions of a detailed story about heroic workers battling a mean-spirited company. The result was a huge boost in national press coverage of the Nike scandal on terms dictated largely by the activists and the workers themselves (Bennett, forthcoming; Bullert, 2000).

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of such campaigns is that they challenge the conventional wisdom that activist messages have trouble getting through the news gates in positive form without first being legitimated by government officials or high status news sources (Bennett, 2003). Part of the explanation for this success is that logos are already big news. Media organizations are increasingly tuned to the consumer interests of their audiences. Celebrity titillation and so-called "news you can use" increasingly fills the news space with health, fashion trends, new products, investment tips, celebrity confessions and gossip, glamorous lives of the CEOs, and other lifestyle features. Thus, "trouble in logo-land" becomes an irresistible spin on corporate stories that are already followed by consumers, investors, and other attentive publics. Packaging politically challenging messages in the context of these consumer values seems to provide positive

media access for radical messages that might not even have been admitted through the news gates in an earlier era (or, if they where they were let into the news, they were more likely to be linked to leftists, radicals, environmentalists, or other more easily stereotyped political sources).

Even though many issue campaigns and sponsoring organizations have secured favorable media coverage based on a communication hybrid of Internet mobilization and conventional publicity strategies, mass demonstrations have generally not succeeded in getting their messages into mass media reports. The exception may have been the iconic Seattle protest, which received (at least in North American press) more favorable coverage than is generally accorded to chaotic demonstrations (Rojecki, 2001). The reasons for Seattle coverage containing a high degree of protester messages, and relatively low levels of dismissive stereotypes, include: the recognition of valid activist concerns by president Clinton, the prominence of credible media sources such as unions and churches as protest leaders, and the specter of police overreaction and unreasonable use of force against many protesters.  However, since the battle of Seattle, a more familiar press pattern has appeared in both U.S. and European media: portrayals of protesters as violent, anarchistic, and in some cases even equated with soccer hooligans. Above all, the predominant news framing of most post Seattle news coverage seems to be "anti-globalization."

Not only does the characterization of anti-globalization bury the various substantive messages of the protesters, but in the view of many prominent activists, this characterization is also misleading.  Many activsts are very much globalized themselves, and seek greater democratic voice and representation in the globalization process. Susan

George, one of the founders of ATTAC in France said this about the common media labeling of the movement as "anti-globalization: "To the increasing irritation of the people concerned, the media constantly refer to them collectively as NGOs or, worse, as 'anti-globalization'….The label 'anti-globalization' is at best a contradiction, at worst a slander." (George, 2001). She also explains what this media framing covers up by way of important movement frames: "The movement itself is, however, multi-focus and inclusive. It is concerned with the world: omnipresence of corporate rule, the rampages of financial markets, ecological destruction, maldistribution of wealth and power, international institutions constantly overstepping their mandates and lack of international democracy." (George, 2001).

In short, many activists might prefer news narratives indicating that they are seeking greater participation in guiding the globalization process. This point came through in a rare news report that actually let an activist frame the story:

> "It's clear that globalization is here to stay," said John J. Sweeney, the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s president who is attending the Waldorf meeting. "We have to accept that and work on having a seat at the table when the rules are written about how globalization works." (Greenhouse, 2002)

This message passed through the media gates because it came from an established labor leader in the context of a staged publicity event (a press conference with a Guatemalan factory worker following a union demonstration in front of the Fifth Avenue flagship store of the GAP during the 2002 annual gathering of the World Economic Forum).

For the most part, when confronted with choices between complex, hard-to-report angles (e.g., George's list of movement themes above), and simple dramatic frames (e.g.,

"violent, anti-globalization demonstrators") most reporters and news organizations will choose the latter. The important question is why has a movement that has learned to secure good publicity for issue campaigns and the agendas of their sponsoring organizations not developed more effective media communication strategies for protests? The answer is beyond the scope of this paper, but one factor may be due to the tendencies of Internet communication to promote organizational diversity. It is surely true, as George indicates, that inclusiveness and diversity are hallmarks of this movement. Yet, there may well be meta-ideas that could draw diverse networks of activists together: for example, greater democratic accountability or representation in international economic decision-making. While this precept is very close to the surface of much activist discourse, there appears to be little promotion of it as a common movement frame, either in the web spheres of campaigns to organize demonstrations, or in the messages of particular issue campaigns.

## *Conclusion*

The Internet is implicated in the new global activism far beyond reducing the costs of communication, or transcending the geographical and temporal barriers found in other communication media. Most importantly, as noted above, the Internet uniquely facilitates the loosely structured networks and affinity ties of this brand of global politics. In other words, the Internet is not only a communication medium for networked groups, but the fluid patterns of electronic communication, down to the difficulties of centrally

controlling actions, reflect the dynamic qualities of the new (networked) politics.  Recall

here some of the examples discussed in the above analysis:

- Issue campaigns have had remarkable success bringing bad corporate and
  governmental conduct to public attention, while experiencing the characteristic
  problems of networked organizations in controlling the course of those campaigns
  and setting clear goals.

- In the area of movement coalition-building, networks grow and expand rapidly
  with little central coordination or hierarchical authority, yet those networks and
  many of the organizations in them can be transformed in the process, often with
  little clear direction or design.

- In a movement favoring decentralization and local autonomy, the Internet is more
  than just a communication medium, it becomes (as the ATTAC example
  indicates) an organizational principle.

- Finally, the cascade of media layers now available for two-way communication
  enables information to be generated from micro-to-middle-to-mass media (from
  desktops, to webblogs, to webzines, to the nightly news), giving activists
  unprecedented communication channels to bypass conventional journalistic gate-
  keeping in getting messages to larger publics. Yet the same Internet flows that
  often bring irresistible focus to specific issues and causes seem to resist the

broader definition of common cause that might give large gatherings (from

protests to world forums) clearer message frames to present to the mass media.

Thus, the ultimate dilemma of a globalization movement with the Internet as a

backbone may be an incapacity to transmit some positive sense of its common cause to

broader publics. Perhaps the problems of communicating common themes will be

mitigated somewhat by the rise of activist information organizations that offer convincing

alternatives to mainstream news and scholarship both for activists and for anyone else

(e.g., mainstream journalists, students, concerned citizens) who may find them in an

information search. See, for example, the Independent Media network

([www.indymedia.org](www.indymedia.org)), which has pioneered live activist-produced event coverage, a sort

of digital CNN for the new global citizen movement.

The rise of various electronic public spheres may ultimately become the model for

public information in many areas of politics, whether establishment or oppositional. It is

clear that conventional news is withering from the erosion of audiences (more in

commercial than in public service systems), and from the fragmentation of remaining

audiences as channels multiply (Bennett 2003). Perhaps the next step is a thoroughly

personalized information system in which the boundaries of different issues and different

political approaches to them become more permeable, enabling ordinary citizens to join

campaigns, protests, and virtual communities with few ideological or partisan divisions.

In this vision, the current organizational weaknesses of Internet mobilization may become

a core resource for the growth of new global publics.

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