

THE UK ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT ONLINE: USES AND LIMITATIONS OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES FOR CONTEMPORARY ACTIVISM¹

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Introduction – Connecting the ‘Virtual’ and the ‘Real’

Internet communication has become vital to social movement organisations and it seems likely that participation in the latest anti-war movements has been boosted by activists’ Internet practices (Nah, Veenstra and Shah, 2006). The more central the Internet has come to political activism, the more it has become the route through which individuals first experience key collective actors. There is some evidence that those most central to the US anti-war movement are “disproportionately likely to rely on digital communications media” and that those with close (and diverse) movement affiliations “overwhelmingly received their information about the Iraq crisis through e-media” (Bennett and Givens, 2006: 1, 17). This paper begins by describing the use made of a variety of Internet technologies by key anti-war activists in the UK. Through in-depth interviews with organisers committed to a range of organisations that differ in their histories, scales and foci, we see an intensive use of information technologies. Activists describe their roles as both users and producers of information resources communicated by email and through the World Wide Web. Internet technologies play a role in many of the organisational tasks of political activists, however, such activists have become sensitised to their shortcomings. I briefly describe some of the limitations introduced with new technologies.

It is important to conceptualise the role of the Internet, vis-à-vis other aspects of social movement activities, with some care. This paper does not consider the Internet as providing an alternative space for social movement activities, nor is the Internet understood primarily as a tool with which movements attempt to create social change. Rather, Internet activities are understood as partially constitutive of social movements. That is, as the virtual and the real have become increasingly intertwined, so the nature of social movement activity has begun to include the creation and dissemination of meaning through Internet technologies. Following Ester and Vinken it is clear that,

“The more important questions about the Internet are not about what it can do for real life or about how real life can best be mimicked with it, but about what it is as a

¹ This is a preliminary analysis, please don’t cite without permission.

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constitutive force for the identity of people who engage in it, for the way people will experience the world and for the cultural forms that will arise from this.” (Ester & Vinken, 2003: 669-70)

To the extent that it is possible to connect meaningful collective action with forms of Internet usage, therefore, it is possible to offer greater understanding of both the operation of social movements and more general, social effects of the Internet. The above quotation seemingly implies a directional effect from the use of this particular technology to new or altered forms of identity, experiences and culture. However, we must also be sensitive to the way that pre-existing structures of meaning and identity may affect the Internet itself since the relationship between technological development and other social systems is typically complex and multi-directional (Robins & Webster, 1999: 4-5). Thus, we will see that the Internet technologies rarely offer entirely new directions for anti-war activists; rather it offers efficiency gains and the ability to work despite being geographically dispersed and limited in time. Core activists in anti-war movement organisations see gains in terms of spreading information outwards from the centre, thus giving a wider range of people the resources and the impetus to take part in political activity.

The Internet is not a uniform structure wherein every point offers the same chance or quality of meaningful communication. Rather, email distribution and discussion lists are differentiated by their numbers of subscribers and by qualitative differences such as whether the list is moderated, what norms govern what may be posted, the kinds of language understood, and many more features. Differences among website profiles are readily apparent through examining the position of the site in responses to a relevant query to any major search engine. Qualitative differences between sites may vary along a number of dimensions, such as interactivity or types of media used for presentation. The second set of data this paper presents examines the structural profile of the anti-war movement as it is constituted online. Utilising an ‘issue crawler’ tool it examines the hyperlink structure of key anti-war websites. I thereby offer a brief analysis of the various sites’ centrality to that network. Two relevant findings emerge. First, despite geographical effects being strongly present offline with most UK organisations focusing almost entirely on changing the policies of the UK government, the online anti-war movement appears to transcend such borders. Second, despite the fact that organisations’ activities tend to cluster around particular political worldviews and strategic preferences, again the online anti-war movement appears to transcend these divisions.

To summarise, activists’ increasingly intensive use of Internet technologies heightens the importance of online activities; they become a key part of the experience of what it is to be a contemporary anti-war activist. However, the online experience of the anti-war movement appears more internationally and politically integrated than the offline ‘reality’.

Activist Uses of Technology

The material in this section is drawn from a number of recent, in-depth interviews carried out over the last few months with committed activists within the UK anti-war and peace movements. In order to contextualise the discussion below, I will first briefly introduce the organisations from which interviewees were drawn:

- *Stop the War Coalition (StWC)* – This is the largest organisation in Britain which arose specifically to oppose the ‘war on terror’. It came into existence in September 2001, with the full expectation of a military response to the terrorist atrocities of 9/11. The organisation developed around a number of pre-existing political groups, including many members of the Marxist left. The coalition grew during its campaign against the invasion of Afghanistan, bringing in other significant involvement, including a partnership with the Muslim Association of Britain and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In addition to the central group, based in London, dozens, and later hundreds of smaller local groups affiliated to the StWC. The organisation has maintained a focus on national campaigns against the UK government, often personalising the campaign against PM Tony Blair. However, it has widened its demands over time, opposing not only the US- and UK-led invasions, but also incursions by Israel into Palestinian territory, the invasion of Lebanon by Israel, and the reduction of civil liberties, particularly for Muslims, inherent in British anti-terror legislation.
- *The Society of Friends (Quakers)* – The Quakers are a pacifist denomination of Christianity, established in England in the seventeenth century. Quakers are notable throughout the history of British peace movements and the various Friends' Meeting Houses across the country are often familiar spaces of peace organising. Pacifism is written into the fabric of the Religious Society of Friends in the Peace Testimony. More than a particular belief, the Peace Testimony is understood as a guide to action. The Quakers' action provides the basis of a relationship with other forms of activism that have become prominent in the wider protest milieu through opposing economic globalisation. In particular, the non-violent and direct forms of action and the desire to make decisions through consensus rather than competitive democracy offers some potential alignment with the autonomist sections of contemporary social movements.
- *Faslane 365 (F365)* – This current campaign began in October 2006 and is focused on Britain's Trident nuclear weapons system. Central to that system is a submarine base at Faslane, near the west coast of Scotland. The campaign encourages local groups from across the UK to take part in one or two days of blockade at the base, with the ambitious aim of achieving a different blockade at the base every day for a year. The campaign is a response to the fact that the UK's nuclear weapons system is soon due for replacement.
- *Voices in the Wilderness UK (Voices UK)* – The UK arm of this organisation has been in existence since the mid-1990s and began with a focus on sanctions in Iraq. It has a particular focus on creating concrete connections with grassroots Iraqi groups, including taking part in sanctions-breaking deliveries of medical supplies. Its profile naturally increased in the build up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- *Peace News* – This monthly newspaper has a venerable reputation, having been in production since the 1930s. It has changed format in recent years, away from a more theoretical and international character and is currently maintaining a focus on largely British anti-war activism. It is published in print and also made available online. The *Peace News* website additionally carries a rapidly updated ‘newswire’ service.
- *Aldermaston Peace Camp(aign)* – Aldermaston Weapons Facility has been the target of direct political protest since the early 1950s and has, during that time, been at the

centre of Britain's nuclear weapons technology. In recent years a women's peace camp has been set up around the base on a nearly monthly basis. In addition to attempting to send a message to those working within the base, the campaigners also carry out much research about activities within it.

- *Justice Not Vengeance (JNV)* – This small activist group is based in Hastings on the south coast of England. It focuses its work on opposing both US- and UK-led militarism and the encroachments on civil liberties, seen as resulting from the events of 9/11. Their action focuses on the one hand, on collating and distributing arguments and factual materials potentially useful for other peace activists, and on the other, on the public exertion of moral pressure through small scale activities such as vigils and public readings of the names of the war dead. Such events are usually located outside the UK parliament.

Gathering speed and lowering costs; the advantages of the Internet

Not surprisingly, the major benefits of Internet technologies to activists are faster communication and lower costs. However, these gains are differently experienced within different groups, and depending on which technology is being employed. The larger groups particularly find the cost efficiency of email newsletters valuable, since they frequently send out very large mass mailings. The StWC, for instance, sends out a regular newsletter to approximately 20,000 people and estimate that it reaches 40,000 through others' forwarding of emails. Furthermore, the frequency of the email varies according to the political temperature of the day (StWC activist). Others refer especially to the speed with which information can be disseminated. A StWC committee member, for instance, noted, "the speed with which people respond to things... really it's astonishing how quickly so many people become *au fait* with the arguments... You've suddenly got thousands of people who say, oh yeah, haven't you seen that the translation is wrong, or no, no, no, that was refuted in the New York Times... twenty years ago politics was all much slower... it's a different world." Email newsletters are therefore seen as an educative and mobilising tool within the anti-war movement, for which there is no 'low-tech' alternative.

For full-time activists, therefore, managing the receipt of email is equally important. Those marshalling email enquiries through the StWC national office report, during the Lebanon crisis in August 2006, "hundreds and hundreds and on one or two days close to a thousand emails a day". Similarly, Ippy D, the editor of *Peace News* and a participant of Aldermaston Peace Camp(aign) deals with "my personal email and about three group email accounts, probably 2-300 mails a day" and an F365 activist reported that if she was away from email for a few days she would return to around 7-800 emails. They added that all needed to be treated as urgent because, taking particularly high-risk action, "you could get arrested any day, and then it would become unmanageable".

While much of the traffic may consist of either email newsletter subscriptions or enquiries about the specific campaigns such activists are involved in, a bulk of received email is also constituted through email discussions. These might be technically managed through an email programme's 'reply all' function or, more commonly, through dedicated listserve software set up on a trusted website. While email discussions may be used for mobilising or information sharing (including the simple forwarding of other newsletters)

they offer richer potential in political activities. One grassroots Quaker activists noted that “Listserves: these are just so good ... it is a relief to be able to talk to like minded people. It is also very helpful to be kept in touch with what is going on both within the Society and in the world in general”. So, on the one hand, email discussions can provide social functions for dispersed groups. On the other, they can constitute much of the discursive work of a group, allowing people to make decisions, plan actions, and jointly write public texts without the need to find a common space and time for a face to face meeting. Again, therefore, email provides a saving in both costs and time (through organising rooms and travelling) over non-electronic forms of communication. Furthermore, because of the very low effective costs of setting up an email discussion list, activists can tailor lists for particular groups, for example: “there was this one group of quite young folk, and they wanted to use the list for social stuff, just chatting and joking, and others had enough email already and just wanted the work stuff... it’s easy, we just split off the social list and people could choose what they want, or have both” (Voices UK activist).

An alternative planning and decision-making forum to using email discussion lists is the virtual meeting utilising Internet Relay Chat (IRC). While activists still have to be on the same timescales, they can have a faster and more direct form of communication. Activists connected with the F365 campaign developed a customised piece of software and hosted it on their own website, hidden from public view. The software that allows for instant messaging among a group, private ‘whispers’ among attendants at the meeting, and an agenda and facilitation system to ensure decisions are made quickly but with input from every party. “The virtuals are a brilliant way of making the more straightforward decisions and plans, and mean we can meet less often, as we are spread throughout the UK, with one member in Belgium” (F365 activist). At the most sophisticated level, this use of IRC allows a blending of meetings that would simply not be possible in physical space. One F365 organiser cites occasions where it becomes necessary to hold two separate virtual meetings at the same time, with different but slightly overlapping groups. Thus, some participants follow both meetings simultaneously and if some information flow is required between the two “you can just pop over to the other meeting and send a whisper and get an answer in seconds.” (Jane Tallents, F365).

In practical ways, campaign websites can function in the same way as email newsletters. A Quaker organiser notes savings in “postage, mainly paper ... it means its more accessible and we would expect less requests from our volunteer people, oh can you send me this ... they’ll already have access to it.” Moreover, newsletters may consciously be used to increase visitors to the website. Thus one campaigner saw that “increasingly its through the [email] newsletter that we get people [to the website]... a lot of people have got mailing lists, they send it on”. So, the newsletter holds potential to broaden the number of visitors to the site, and thus the potential readers of information designed to mobilise and inform supporters.

Nevertheless, people’s purposes when visiting websites vary, and designers must take account of this heterogeneous audience while holding relatively little information about them. Some have a quite binary vision of individuals’ motivation to visit sites, “People come either because they want what its got, or they’ve come to protest about what’s on it.” Thus, the website has either a resource-based focus, or provides a strong

critique of some organisation or process and details of protests against it. Milan Rai clearly sees JNV as providing the former, with its content largely being carefully constructed arguments and downloadable leaflets and posters for to support anti-war activists. StWC alternatively sees the latter function for its web site, being primarily about encouraging protest activities such as letter writing or street-based protest. With the focus on such activities, the content put on the website is necessarily related to mobilisation: “if something big breaks on one day, then on the homepage I might quickly actually write a short piece to do with that, and links to do with that. Nearly always, given the type of campaign we are, it will be links to some activity that we’re involved in, which is the main function of our website – to actually support activity.” (StWC activist).

More multi-purpose sites need to utilise design methods to help readers navigate, for instance by making links to information for certain groups, such as press, highly prominent (Voices UK activist). Others, such as the Quakers, have complex websites that effectively have differently ‘branded’ sections aimed for different individuals. Thus the Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) site reflects the practical work that the QPSW organisation engages in, that is often interpreted as ‘bearing witness’. One Quaker worker defined ‘bearing witness’ as a “sort of expression of their feelings about the world and how it should be”. Thus, the site offers information about the relevant kinds of activities and grew in response to the invasion of Afghanistan, when “there were lots of vigils cropping up, people requesting information ... we put a section on the site just to list all the peace vigils ... and then it grew and grew and grew” (Quaker organiser). An alternative section of the site reflects the work of Turning the Tide, another subsection of the Quakers’ work, which is rather focused on non-violent direct action (NVDA) to achieve change. It therefore offers a very different content made up of resources for NVDA, strategies for change, consensus decision-making or contacts for volunteer trainers.

As with email, the functions of website transcend the practical, organisational issues and also offer some potential emotional support. Milan Rai (JNV) argued: “if you’re an activist and you’re not connected to the relevant websites in your area, then things are much more difficult in terms of your campaigning materials and your arguments and information and so on, and also I suspect its possibly a lot more isolated, and there’s issues of morale and maintenance which websites can help overcome.”

Again, as with email, activists must often be considered as both producers and users of content. Our respondents sometimes described their everyday activities as beginning with a trawl around familiar websites for the latest news. (Ippy, Peace News; StWC activist) As users, activists recognise the web as a “phenomenal resource, absolutely phenomenal, the links ... what you can do, the resources, the information you can access, the networking you can do.” (Quaker organiser) Up to date information is absolutely vital to those engaged primarily with the processes of political change, since news can be understood as the opening of an opportunity, or as something which demands an immediate response. Milan Rai described his previous campaigning against sanctions in Iraq, “for which, having the text of the UN Security Council resolutions was crucial ... and the only way we could get those was from the UN information office in London, which had to request them from New York... it would be weeks of delay before we got these Security council resolutions... foundational documents like that suddenly became immediately accessible. And it did make a really big difference to our work.”

Limitations of Computer Mediated Communication

To a degree the uptake of newer web technologies within the anti-war movement is limited. Typically, anti-war websites are used for spreading news and analyses and offering a point of contact but they are usually centrally controlled and do not allow users to comment. Interactivity rarely exists and where it does, it may be limited to signing an online petition. This may be partly due to lack of resources, an F365 activist described his ongoing work on a new F365 website that would be based on a content management system and offer autonomy to local groups taking part in the campaign to run their own sections of the site. Nevertheless, he did not see any value in offering either an online discussion or commenting system arguing that “if people want to be writing about the campaign they should write to a local newspaper”. By comparison, other UK movements appear more focused on making use of the most up to date technologies. The social forum movement in the UK, for instance, has made extensive use of wiki technology. A wiki is a form of content management system that is structured with a strong emphasis on users creating both the content and the structure of the websites and is often integrated with a commenting system; editorial control is consciously restricted.² Growing out of the anti-globalisation movement the globe-spanning network of Independent Media Collectives have created open publishing websites (Indymedia sites) which offer instantly updateable user created content that ranges from written stories to still photographs, audio and video. Growing since 1999 these websites certainly predated the moment that ‘Web 2.0’ became a buzzword yet offering many of the same functions as commercially oriented websites such as You-Tube. To be sure, anti-war activists do make use of Indymedia, in addition to citizen-oriented sites such as www.faxyourmp.com; on their own organisational sites, however, such technologies seem to largely be absent.

Exploring some of the limitations reported with Internet technologies offers a degree of explanation for the limited uptake of the more interactive potential of the Web. The F365 activist’s quotation in the preceding paragraph hints at one major reason. Since organisations’ own websites are seen to be largely oriented to provide materials and impetus to those who already largely support the anti-war movement, lengthy discussion of the issues is seen as a distraction. So, both consideration of the audience and the priorities of the websites introduce particular limits to what is applicable for certain organisations. A Quaker activist indicates that some of the depth of content needs to be limited in order to draw readers along, there is therefore a delicate balance in judging the position of the audience, “we can’t go faster than our audience; or we can go a little bit faster but not a lot faster.”

That the web might be seen as a distraction from the ‘real work’ of activism is exemplified by the slogan of the email discussion list provider, Riseup.net, which on every page implores “Get off the Internet. We’ll see you in the streets.” For many activist organisations this is indeed the primary focus. Thus, while there are campaign resources on the StWC website, these are almost exclusively downloadable leaflets, posters or petitions relating directly to the protest activities StWC has organised. In September

² Wiki technology is exemplified at www.wikipedia.org. Examples from the social forum movement may be found at www.altspaces.net and wiki.sheffieldsocialforum.org.uk.

2006, for instance, StWC organised 'Time to Go' demonstration focused on the Labour Party Annual Conference and held over 100 public meetings across the country, hosted by affiliated local groups. The website naturally focused on the major demonstration offering posters and a route map to download, as well as listing the relevant details for each public meeting.

A further issue is that lack of control of what is posted can prove problematic for an organisation which seeks to present a coherent and consistent message. This problem may not be entirely averted through not hosting interactive systems, however. For instance, StWC makes heavy use of links to news articles hosted on a range of other sites including the Guardian's open commenting section 'Comment is Free'. For instance, on 26th June 2006 the StWC homepage linked to an article by Gary Younge called 'Atrocities are the offshoot of occupation'. While the article undoubtedly took a line supported by those within StWC it immediately attracted hostile commentary, with the first response appearing shortly after the article had been uploaded and arguing a pro-US/UK case and claiming that opponents of the war were anti-democratic. By 3pm the same afternoon there were 115 comments with a wide array of opinion. To the extent that activists expect their own websites to attract hostile commentary it may be expected, therefore, that they would avoid offering interactive facilities.

Two final issues relate to activists' sensitivity to the limited nature of computer mediated communication *per se*. First this relates to the issue of mobilisation. Activists frequently cited the need to speak to somebody in person, or at least via telephone, in order to ensure commitment to action. Similarly, others described that "we might start with finding connections via the web ... but now we offer speakers and try to get to other groups meetings, its so important to meet in person" (Maya Evans, JNV) or that "you can do all the emails you like, but you really need to 'phone someone up, or go and meet them, so you know they'll take part" (Jane Tallents, F365). A Voices UK activist explained that "you can actually get something going over the 'net, but I like to go out flyering a lot too, you get a personal connection with somebody and they're much more likely to come along."

The second limitation in internet communication relates to the more organisational functions we saw in relation to email discussion lists and IRC chat rooms. Almost without exception, every activist that described the benefits of such facilities also qualified this by explaining that such decisions could be simple ones. Examples included deciding on who would book a room for a meeting or event, or getting someone to volunteer to print some materials. Nevertheless, face-to-face meetings were considered to be the only suitable location for difficult policy or strategy debates. A number of reasons were cited. First, some members of the group were less willing and/or able to use particular technologies, "so I've got one friend, who whenever they want to send an attachment needs to phone me up so that I can talk them through it ... they just can't seem to remember that sort of thing" (Jane Tallents, F365). Second, the different timescales of email discussions would make it very difficult to know if everyone relevant to a decision had really been involved. "Some people just don't reply to many emails, and some people are swamped with them, so you don't know whether they've read and agreed to a point, or not got the message or what" (Jane Tallents, F365). Third, debates are seen as potentially never ending, becoming circular and without resolution because of the difficulty of determining an end point. Fourth, face-to-face is seen as a more creative way of discussing and deciding on

issues, “You get a buzz between the group, and you can brainstorm and all that stuff... you tend to come up with better ideas.” (F365 activist) Some, but not all of these limitations are overcome within the F365 group with a carefully described structure for online decision making, that imposes on anyone who wants to introduce an issue for debate the onus of ensuring that it is clear what is being asked, and how long is allowed for a decision to be made. Thus rules are set up as a way of coping with the particularities of online communication.

Indeed, the notion of coping with information is more widely spread within the anti-war movement. Core activists appear constantly to be on the edge of an information overload yet find ways to utilise technology to manage these problems. As producers this involves limiting the application of the technology, so as to avoid creating excessive material, “you have to stop and think, do they really need this information” (Voices UK activist). As users, this might involve narrowing one’s focus of concern so that one only subscribes to email lists and visits websites directly relevant (Ippy, Peace News). Alternatively, it might involve a process of selecting news sources by trust and “my own antennae” (StWC organiser). Such techniques, in addition to utilising the more advanced features of email programmes and Web browsers characterise the sophisticated use of information needed by contemporary activists.

Structuring the Online Anti War Movement

With the importance of information and information technologies established, this section outlines the current shape of the UK anti-war movement as it appears online. Using an online web crawling tool for systematically investigating hyperlinks between sites I identify a core ‘issue network’ of 100 websites connected to the movement. There are two interesting features of this network. Despite setting the web crawl from a position that biased UK sites focused on contentious action, a much broader set of websites are involved in the anti-war ‘web sphere’. This shows that, first, the boundary between UK and non-UK websites is continually transgressed suggesting a continuous information environment across both national boundaries and levels of governance. Second, the boundary between peace sites oriented to contentious street protest and those oriented to institutional lobbying is also frequently transgressed. Again this points to a continuous information environment regardless of a group’s tactical orientation.

Describing the Online Movement

The World Wide Web is fundamentally founded on the notion of ‘hypertext’, which in turn is founded on the hyperlink to connect discrete structures of information (Berners-Lee, 2000: 17-33). This is a valuable feature for those seeking to map the Web since hyperlinks may be both identified and followed by computer programmes. Doing so may lead to the identification of a ‘Web sphere’, defined as “bounded temporally and by a shared object-orientation, [which] offers a unit of analysis that enables examination of both the structure and substance of hyperlink networks” (Foot *et al.*, 2003: 2). While we cannot make any detailed assumptions about the relationship between hyperlinked pages (a hyperlink may indicate either an endorsement or a critique for instance, *contra* Park & Thelwall, 2003, p. 13) the ‘shared object-orientation’ is enough information to make analysis of structures of hyperlinks possible. Indeed, referring to ‘issue networks’ rather

than 'web spheres', Richard Rogers and colleagues have developed a piece of software precisely for the task of exploring hyperlinked structures of websites.³ The Issue Crawler programme will scan a set of websites input by the user, searching for hyperlinks from those starting points. It will then follow each hyperlink and examine each destination page for further hyperlinks. This process is repeated a number of times, each time potentially getting further away from the starting points of the search. However, any of the hyperlinks discovered at any of the websites may, of course, link to pages already visited. Thus, it becomes possible to count the number of in-links a website receives from other members of that issue network and thereby rank the sites identified according to their centrality within the issue network or Web sphere.

In October 2006 Issue Crawler was used in order to map anti-war movement websites. Thirty-four websites were chosen as starting points that the research project had already identified as relevant to the anti-war movement, and appeared to be of sufficiently high profile that they were likely to be linked to by other members of the anti-war movement. I ensured that all of these websites appeared relatively up to date, having been updated in the last six months. Not all of these websites necessarily represent a significant anti-war organisation, but they do contain significant content that relates to anti-war arguments or activities. The initial list does not contain sites that do not at least imply involvement in contentious political activities, however, such as blogs and news sites. Sites that represented specifically local or regional sections of national organisations, and sites that could not be identified as UK-based were also excluded.

The software returned a list of one hundred websites that were considered core members of the issue network, and a further loosely connected group of 113 websites in the periphery of the network. Table 1, below, displays the ten websites that appeared most central to the network. The top results in the table above reflect what even a cursory examination of the UK anti-war movement would reveal. CND and StWC were jointly responsible for all of the largest national demonstrations since 2001. It seems, therefore, that online, as well as offline, CND and the StWC are central players. The inclusion of Campaign Against the Arms Trade at the third highest rank is slightly surprising since their focus is not directly anti-war and they tend, in their publications at least, to be highly focused on their own campaigns. Nevertheless, they are a professionally organised NGO with wide ranging support and lots of useful resources that those in the anti-war movement might link to. From the fourth position in the network, the organisations represented become quite mixed. We immediately see representation of a governance institutions (UN), a think tank that does not overtly engage in protest activities (Oxford Research Group) and groups that are not focused on the UK but internationally (Human Rights Watch) or on the US (United for Peace and Justice). As I shall demonstrate next, this diversity of organisations represented at the heart of the online issue network connected with the UK anti-war movement is represented throughout the broad core of 100 websites.

³ For a description of the software project, see Rogers (2002). For examples of applications, see Rogers and Marres (2000).

Table 1 – Ten Websites at the Centre of the Online Anti-War Movement

Website URL	Website Name	Rank	In-links⁴
www.cnduk.org	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	1	32
www.stopwar.org.uk	Stop the War Coalition	2	22
www.caat.org.uk	Campaign Against the Arms Trade	3	22
www.un.org	United Nations	4	21
www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk	Oxford Research Group	5	20
basicint.org	British American Security Information Council	6	20
hrw.org	Human Rights Watch	7	19
unitedforpeace.org	United for Peace and Justice	8	18
www.networkforpeace.org.uk	Network For Peace	10 ⁵	18
www.voicesuk.org	Voices in the Wilderness UK	11	17

Diversity within the Issue Network

Each site in the issue network was coded as to its apparent purpose and its geographical focus. For present purposes geographical focus is divided simply into UK and non-UK. The latter category includes sites that are clearly international in their focus and those that focus on other nations (the US in all but one case). The apparent purpose of sites reflects both the issues they focus on (divided between peace and wider issues) and the kinds of action they promote (divided between protest and lobbying). Table 2, below, offers definitions of these four key terms. In addition, there were many non-movement sites in the issue network, and these were categorised as being involved in governance, mainstream media, alternative media or were assigned to a small ‘miscellaneous’ category.

⁴ ‘In-links’ refers to the number of links that website has received from within the core of the network and is thus far lower than the total number of links that site receives. According to Google on 29/09/06, for instance, approximately 500 indexed pages contained links to the homepage of the CND. The figure for the homepage of the Stop the War Coalition was over 1,800 seemingly confirming that organisation’s higher profile outside of the immediate issue network online.

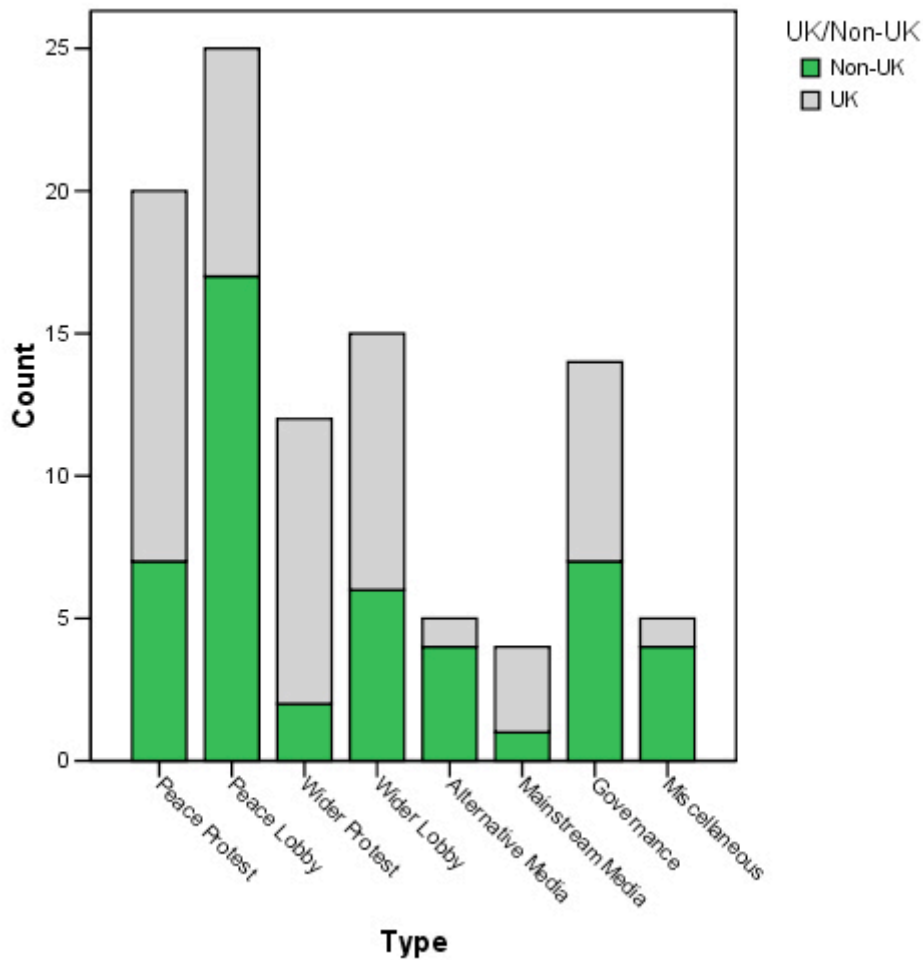
⁵ The ninth ranking website appeared as Locata, which, at the time of the crawl represented a generic web services company. However, examining the out-going link data for key websites suggested that this was the result of redirects from another website that had recently ceased to exist.

Table 2 – Key Coding Definitions

	Protest	Lobby
Peace	<p>‘Peace’ websites espouse values on peace, anti-war, nuclear disarmament, anti-arms trade and so on. Such issues are deeply interconnected in anti-war movement discourse.</p> <p>‘Protest’ websites were those that either described the authors’ involvements in non-institutional political activity, such as mass demonstrations or direct action. Or, they promoted such activities.</p>	<p>‘Peace’ websites were defined as left.</p> <p>‘Lobby’ websites either described the authors’ involvements in more institutional forms of political activity, such as directly lobbying institutions of governance, writing letters to elected representatives, collecting petition signatures and so on. Or, they promoted such activities.</p>
Wider Issues	<p>Websites that had broader foci than ‘Peace’ as defined above were included in this group; notably this included organisations primarily oriented to issues of environment and development.</p> <p>‘Protest’ websites defined as above.</p>	<p>Websites with broader foci, as defined left.</p> <p>‘Lobby’ as defined above.</p>

Figure 1, below, gives us an idea of the structure of the anti-war issue network. Surprisingly, while we began with predominantly UK based, protest oriented websites, we have ended with a diversity of sites. To be sure, peace protest and peace lobby sites are the largest categories and together make up 45% of the sites. This leaves the majority of sites in the network as focusing primarily on something other than peace/anti-war issues, including many that are not oriented to social movement activities at all. Further, we can see that there is an almost equal split between UK and non-UK sites (52:48) although that ratio does vary across site categories. For instance, while most peace protest sites are focused on the UK (13 of 20), most peace lobby sites are focused on the US (17 of 25). This comparison also highlights that the largest single group of sites, by locale and purpose, is the US peace lobby sites, thereby outnumbering the UK peace protest sites that were our initial bias when setting up the issue crawler software.

Figure 1 –Locales and Purposes of Websites within the Anti-War Issue Network



In addition to simply providing a count of the different types of website in the anti-war issue network, it is also possible to examine their distributions with respect to centrality. The Issue Crawler software examines centrality via the number of links each site received from the other sites within the core network and ranks them accordingly. We can examine the distribution of websites through comparison of the average rank and in-link count for websites grouped within each geographical focus (Table 3) and each purpose category (Table 4) with the average for the whole network.

Table 3 – Average Ranks and In-links Counts by Geographical Focus of Site

	Cases	Rank		In-links	
		Mean	Median	Mean	Median
UK	52	50.79	52.5	12.35	12.00
Non-UK	48	50.19	49.00	12.12	12.00
Total/Average	100	50.50	50.50	12.24	12.00

In Table 3 we can see that neither rank nor in-link count vary greatly from the average for the sub-groups according to geographical focus. It confirms, therefore that not only is there a nearly equal split between the sites focused on the UK and the sites focused elsewhere, but these sites are quite evenly distributed in terms of their ranking and in-link counts. This finding relates to the boundaries of the issue network. In terms of hyperlink creation practices at least, the boundary between UK web sites, and those with either an international or US focus has very little effect.

By utilising the rank numbers and in-link counts, we can also get a view of any trends in the centrality of categories of site to the core network. Table 4, below, shows the relevant figures broken down by category. I have arranged the categories in descending order according to the mean in-link count. So, 'Peace Protest' websites tended to be linked to by other sites in the core more often than the others. The gap between this figure and that for 'Alternative Media' sites is explained partly by the small number of peace protest organisations with very high in-link counts at the top of the list (CND, 32; StWC, 22; and CAAT, 22) which has the effect of 'dragging up' the value of the mean. As the median score shows, the majority of 'Peace Protest' sites, like the 'Alternative Media' sites, were actually distributed around a median score of 13 in-links. Indeed, the lower mean and median rank scores (with the lowest scores representing the highest ranking) for the 'Alternative Media' category suggests that the bulk of those sites actually appeared slightly more central to the network than the bulk of the 'Peace Protest' groups. To summarise this finding, a small number of 'Alternative Media' sites are frequently linked to by other sites related to the anti-war movement. Additionally, the relative positions of Alternative and 'Mainstream Media' in the list show a marked preference, within the core network, for references to 'Alternative Media' sources.

Table 4 – Average Ranks and In-link Counts by Category of Site

	Cases	Rank		In-links	
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>
<i>Peace Protest</i>	20	39.30	37.00	14.45	13.00
<i>Alternative Media</i>	5	37.60	32.00	12.80	13.00
<i>Peace Lobby</i>	25	46.00	41.00	12.48	12.00
<i>Governance</i>	14	54.93	57.50	11.57	11.00
<i>Wider Protest</i>	12	56.50	54.50	11.08	11.00
<i>Wider Lobby</i>	15	61.93	78.00	11.07	9.00
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	5	62.60	73.00	11.02	10.00
<i>Mainstream Media</i>	4	59.25	65.50	10.50	10.00
Total	100	50.50	50.50	12.24	12.00

In general, this table shows that the differences between the numbers of links received by websites within the various categories were actually quite small. While sites focused on peace tended to get slightly more links than sites with wider political issues, the differences between sites oriented to protest and those oriented to lobbying are almost negligible. That is, despite our initial bias towards peace protest websites focused on the UK, there are no strong boundary effects that differentiate protest and lobby sites, and only a small effect between peace and wider issue groups.

Conclusions

The everyday lives of activists are awash with information and communication via email and the Web. Core activists frequently find themselves in roles as both producers and users of such information and apply relatively sophisticated techniques to cope with the inherent limitations of the technologies. As such, their activity both structures, and is structured by the web. Through their hyperlink creation practices, the authors of UK peace protest websites connect with a large number of other organisations that are politically diverse and geographically dispersed. To a significant degree, this contrasts with the organisational structures of the relevant groups. For instance, one Quaker activist notes that “the idea of working internationally together, all the Quaker agencies ... doing international campaigns is a good one, but the opportunities for that aren’t very big, because the way the decisions are made at a national level ... so it actually makes more sense to have a national campaign.” Yet the Quakers are one of the more international groups of the anti-war organisations described above. As we saw, some campaigns such as F365 are inherently focused on the UK. Others, such as StWC have strategically chosen a UK focus partly because of political differences, for instance, “We wouldn’t have done what some parts of the anti-war movement in America has recently done which is... they met representatives from what we regard as a puppet government in Iraq” (StWC organiser). *Peace News* has even made a recent shift in focus from an internationally oriented magazine to a British focused newspaper.

So, we may further suggest that border-crossing nature of the online movement implies a notably different network experience of the anti-war movement when mediated through the Web. If one enters the movement through its physical instantiations, at demonstrations or public meetings, one will usually become connected primarily to other individuals and groups with the same national focus, and engaging in more or less the same range of activities. Practically, while United for Peace and Justice, the BBC or the UN might come up in conversation at a demonstration in central London, one cannot access those organisations’ resources, discourses and networks. Yet, as indicated in the introduction, the Web is becoming increasingly important for individuals to find a point of entry to social movements. In summary, this finding suggests a qualitative shift in what it is to experience a social movement, and therefore, what a social movement is.

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