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Digital Media and the Personalization of Collective Action: Social Technology and the Organization of Protests against the Global Economic Crisis

W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg

Changes related to globalization have resulted in the growing separation of individuals in late modern societies from traditional bases of social solidarity such as parties, churches, and other mass organizations. One sign of this growing individualization is the organization of individual action in terms of meanings assigned to lifestyle elements resulting in the personalization of issues such as climate change, labour standards, and the quality of food supplies. Such developments bring individuals' own narratives to the fore in the mobilization process, often requiring organizations to be more flexible in their definitions of issues. This personalization of political action presents organizations with a set of fundamental challenges involving potential trade-offs between flexibility and effectiveness. This paper analyses how different protest networks used digital media to engage individuals in mobilizations targeting the 2009 G20 London Summit during the global financial crisis. The authors examine how these different communication processes affected the political capacity of the respective organizations and networked coalitions. In particular, the authors explore whether the coalition offering looser affiliation options for individuals displays any notable loss of public engagement, policy focus (including mass media impact), or solidarity network coherence. This paper also examines whether the coalition offering more rigid collective action framing and fewer personalized social media affordances displays any evident gain in the same dimensions of mobilization capacity. In this case, the evidence suggests that the more personalized collective action process maintains high levels of engagement, agenda focus, and network strength.

Several broad trends are associated with the globalization of social and economic issues such as labour market inequities, trade practices, and climate change. First, government control over many issues has become both complex and dispersed, reflecting the need for social pressure to be applied to diverse national and transnational governing institutions as well as to corporations that have used global business models to gain autonomy from government regulation. Second, both within nations and transnationally, political issues are interrelated in ways that may cut across conventional social movement sectors: labour and human rights often occupy common agendas, and economic development initiatives may align with environmental causes. The resulting organizational incentives for greater flexibility in defining issues and protest strategies are magnified by a third factor involving the growing separation of individuals in late modern societies from traditional bases of social solidarity such as parties, churches, and other mass organizations.

One sign of this growing individualization is the tendency to engage with multiple causes by filtering the causes through individual lifestyles (Giddens 1991; Inglehart 1997; Bennett 1998;

Touraine 2000; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Micheletti 2003; della Porta 2005). The organization of individual action in terms of meanings assigned to lifestyle elements (e.g. brands, leisure pursuits, and friend networks) results in the personalization of issues such as climate change (e.g. in relation to personal carbon footprints), labour standards (e.g. in relation to fashion choices), or consumption of food (e.g. associated with fair trade practices or the slow living movement). This may involve individuals resisting formal membership but joining in selected actions (Bimber et al. 2005; Flanagan et al. 2006). It may also include the desire to display such personalized action publicly, what McDonald (2002) describes as the pursuit of public experiences of the self rather than of collective solidarity.

There are, to be sure, several different forms of personalization and personalized politics. Some involve relatively autonomous action, while others entail a high degree of coordination. In addition, some personalized action repertoires involve merging of multiple issues and others involve intense engagement in a single cause. Our analysis addresses some of these differences by examining how different protest coalitions employ more and less personalized communication strategies with their publics by inviting different degrees of flexibility in affiliation, issue definition, and expression. These dimensions of personalization are observed both in terms of action framing and, perhaps more importantly, in the uses of various types of digital media.

The growing demand for personalized relations with causes and organizations makes digital technologies increasingly central to the organization and conduct of collective action. Communication technologies aimed at personalizing engagement with causes facilitate organizational communication and coordination at the same time as they enable flexibility in how, when, where, and with whom individuals may affiliate and act. Greater individual control over the terms of action creates the potential for more personalized identifications than may be characteristic of the collective framing commonly associated with the protests based on organization-centred and leader-driven collective action (della Porta 2005). It also creates the potential for personal networks to play a more prominent role in a protest. Networks have long been recognized to be important in protest mobilization (McAdam 1988; Gould 1991, 1993; Diani 1995; Diani & McAdam 2003), but evidence from protests such as the 2003 global anti-war demonstrations indicates that digitally networked individuals with multiple affiliations, identities, and rich network connections are becoming increasingly central in the speed, scale, and organization of large protests (Bennett et al. 2008). The role of networks in individual mobilization, with the related capacity of 'bridging' organizational and personal level networks, can facilitate the diffusion of information and appeals between communities (Kavanaugh et al. 2005; della Porta & Mosca 2007). Indeed, the widespread adoption of digital media may be

shifting the burden of mobilization from organizations to individuals, a point supported in a comparison of different domestic and transnational protests by Walgrave et al. (forthcoming).

All of these trends suggest that the personalization of political action presents protest organizations with a set of fundamental challenges, chief among which concerns negotiating the potential trade-off between flexibility and effectiveness. For organizations trying to mobilize participants who seek greater personalization in affiliation, definition, and expression, the associated demands of flexibility may challenge the standard models for achieving effective collective action (e.g. organizational coalitions based on shared political agendas expressed through ideological or solidarity-based collective action frames). Our first task in examining these developments in collective action is to understand how efforts to establish more flexible relations with followers may infuse an organization's or coalition's public communication and, in particular, its digital communication. We define 'personalized' communication on the part of an organization or coalition as involving the following: (a) the presence of cues and opportunities for customization of engagement with issues and actions; and (b) the relative absence of cues (including action frames) that signal ideological and definitional unanimity. The problem is that public communication of this kind would seem to be at odds with the emphasis on unity and alignment conventionally associated with the communication processes of effective collective action.

This paper thus analyses three questions about digital communication in the organization of a protest, which all address the possibility that mobilizing individualized publics may come at the cost of the conventional political capacity of the resulting collective action networks. We analyse how different protest networks at the 2009 G20 London Summit used digital media to engage diverse individuals, and then we examine what such processes meant for the political capacity of the respective organizations and networked coalitions. In particular, we explore whether the coalition offering looser organizational affiliations with individuals displays any notable loss of public engagement, policy focus, or mass media impact. We also examine whether the networked coalition presenting more rigid framing of the protest and fewer personalized social media affordances displays any evident gain in network coherence, dominance, and stability according to the various measures introduced below.

Individualized Technology and the Organization of Protest Networks

This analysis is motivated by the combination of challenges associated with personalized communication and affiliation between organizations and their publics, which feed the concern that personalization ultimately undermines the political effectiveness of collective action. As noted, personalized communication in this context entails providing greater opportunities for

individuals to define issues in their own terms and to network with others through social media, thus distributing the organizational burden among participants who may look to NGOs and social movement organizations more as facilitators than as active directors of actions. As also noted, this typically entails relaxing the requirement for more unified public communication processes often associated with efficacious collective action.

Concerns about trends towards personalized political action have been expressed by social movement scholars who theorize collective identity framing as crucial to the coherence of protest actions (Benford & Snow 1988; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2004). Many observers also agree that protests in this era of relaxed individual affiliation have often been impressive in terms of speed of mobilization, scope of issues, and the ability to focus public attention on these issues in the short term. At the same time, the very features of a contemporary protest that are so impressive are also the ones that may undermine conventional political capacity such as maintaining agenda focus and strong coalition relationships (Bennett 2003). Critics doubt that loose multi-issue networks that are easy to opt in and out of generate the commitment, coherence, and persistence of action required to produce political change (Tilly 2004). Variations in these concerns have been expressed by organizational communication scholars who question the capacity of organizations that impose strong membership requirements to mobilize publics that confer legitimacy on their causes or, conversely, whether the pursuit of more independent-minded publics reduces the integrity of organization identity and mission (Bimber 2003; Bimber et al. 2005).

Viewed from these perspectives, protest organizers face two potentially contradictory challenges. On the one hand, there is the task of engaging individualized citizens who spurn conventional membership for the pursuit of personalized political action. Since such citizens may be less receptive to unambiguous ideological or organization-centred collective action frames, the question becomes how to mobilize such citizens. On the other hand, organizations continue to face the challenge of achieving conventional political goals, which requires maintaining political capacity in areas such as mobilization and agenda control. In the language of political action that has developed in modern democracies, the effectiveness of collective action has hung on what Charles Tilly described as the ability to display 'WUNC': worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (Tilly 2004). It has also involved developing relations with the targets of claims and the ability to clearly communicate the claims being made. Mustering and maintaining such qualities, in turn, have depended on sustaining a certain level of formal and centralized organization (Tarrow 1998; McAdam et al. 2001).

The growing question for the organization of contentious collective action becomes how to achieve such capacity while sharing communicative control with individuals and other organizations. Communicating with publics through personalized (i.e. interactive and social

networked) digital media seemingly compounds the tension between the two challenges. Various technologies may facilitate flexible communication as described above, but the interactivity of the digital and social media also threatens to compromise organizational control over communication and action (Foot & Schneider 2006; Gillan et al. 2008).

The struggle to balance flexibility and control is often reflected in the organization's most public of faces, its website. Many organizations use their website strategically to present information about themselves, their cause, and proposed actions (della Porta & Mosca 2009; Stein 2009). Aside from posting information, they may provide signals about themselves and their cause by linking to other organizations and inviting individual connections (e.g. the invitation to join a Facebook group). In a dynamic similar to 'friending' others on social networking sites, the extent to which other actors publicly respond – for example, by linking back, becoming fans, and contributing content – becomes part of the organization's public profile (boyd & Heer 2006; Donath 2008; Kavada 2009). Like the producers of fictional transmedia narratives (Jenkins 2006), protest organizers may choose to offer various points of entry into the protest space that speak to different publics. The organization's actions both enable and constrain action in the contemporaneous protest space (Foot & Schneider 2006) and potentially establish 'sedimentary' digital structures (Chadwick 2007) such as email lists that may be re-activated or re-directed for future action (e.g. see the multiple uses of the follower lists from the Obama 2008 US election campaign). As with fictional 'fan edits', however, user contributions not only help constitute the organizational protest space but also expand it (e.g. through weblinks) and may end up diluting or contradicting the organization's messages about itself and its cause.

Three basic questions about the digital communication of organized protest thus emerge as central for assessing the general concern about whether looser organizational communication with publics undermines conventional political capacities associated with an organized protest:

- Does personalized communication undermine engagement strength (commitment and mobilization capacity)?
- Does personalized communication undermine agenda strength?
- Does personalized communication weaken organizational network strength?

The first question, about engagement strength, approaches the personalization of organizational communication from the perspective of participant mobilization in a protest. The ability to mobilize high numbers of co-present participants in an organized protest has evolved as a central means for organizations to signal the commitment of their supporters to both the targets of the protest and the general public (Tilly 2004). Early social movement framing theory underlined the importance for the mobilization process of communicating clear frames and alignment between the organization and the supporters' interpretative frames (Snow et al. 1986;

cf. Polletta 1998). Subsequent studies explored how various kinds of heterogeneity reduce the effects of particular frames (Druckman & Kjersten 2003; Heaney & Rojas 2006). If organizations, by contrast, work to personalize communication about their proposed actions, does this then complicate protest coordination to the extent that it makes turnout weak and unpredictable and more difficult to convey as a unified act of commitment? The latter issue relates to the next point.

The second question centres on another conventional measure of political capacity, the ability to communicate clear collective claims to the targets of protest and the general public (agenda strength). While new media grant protest organizers crucial means of bypassing mass media (Bennett 2003, 2005), the ability to disseminate claims through mass media is still assumed to be central (Gamson 2004). The important issues here are, first, whether personalizing communication with participants leads organizations to compromise their articulated goals (e.g. by underspecifying them), and, next, whether personalized protest messages result in incoherent noise which fails to travel well or at all in the mass media. Such problems were brilliantly illustrated in a segment in the popular US political comedy programme *The Daily Show*, which parodied the 2009 G20 Pittsburgh Summit protests as ineptly organized in terms of getting their message across. The mock reporter pointed to the success of the right wing Tea Party movement and turned to a group of its activists to offer G20 protesters advice about ‘staying on message’, developing relationships with major news channels, and organizing more coherent events (*Daily Show* 2009).

Digital communication practices, finally, highlight a third area in which questions about political capacity in the context of personalized communication become relevant: the relations between protest organizations. The stakes involved in engaging individualized citizens are heightened when large coalitions must agree on messages, communication strategies, and social technology affordances. The importance of considering relations between actors, issues, and events in complex and fluid contemporary protest ecologies (Diani 2003) is thus further underlined by the way public digital communication sheds light on organizational attempts to manage the collective action space. It invites attention to network strength, that is, the quality of the coalition’s organizational network analysed in terms of relative prestige (coherence and dominance) in the digital protest space in relation to a single event and over time (dynamics). Network strength can be measured via linking patterns on organizational websites. Linking patterns are intentional decisions that signal the public affiliation preferences of organizations. Since some organizations may link indiscriminately to others, we will adopt a tougher standard for assessing network inclusion, size, and coherence: co-link analysis, which admits an organization into a protest coalition only if it is linked to by at least two or more other

organizations. Other measures of the strength and coherence of protest networks such as the relative equality of inlinking and outlinking among organizations will be introduced below.

Questions of relative prestige and mutual recognition in the protest space touch on the possibility that communicative flexibility with individuals may undermine the coherence of the organizational network, for example, dispersing the affiliation or linking patterns away from resource-rich and influential organizations, because organizations become more entrepreneurial in their shopping for followers. Contrary to expectations, Bennett et al. (2011) suggest that this is not always the case. Arguing that narratives and their distribution may constitute structuring elements of organizational solidarity networks, their study shows how conflict over competing (personalized consumer vs. collective economic justice) narratives was reflected in a fragmented network in the US Fair Trade movement, while tolerance for multiple narratives was reflected in a more cohesive network in the UK counterpart. The associated question in the present context is whether the communication of personalized narrative opportunities pertaining to the financial crisis affects a coalition's relative dominance of the collective action space in a protest event. Variations in these questions about communication and the organization of networks may also be posed with respect to the dynamics of the networks over time (Monge & Contractor 2003; Diani 2004): do similar network structures persist in protests over time; do they appear only in campaigns related to specific protest issues; and can they be traced in stable policy advocacy networks over time independent of protests and campaigns?

This paper explores the tension lodged in the personalization of collective action from the perspective of these core questions about the organization and qualities of collective action. Our immediate case involves a related series of protests that attracted a diversity of organizations using very different mobilization communication strategies. The aim is to begin understanding whether the personalization of communicative relations with followers affected organizational and coalition capacities in terms of engagement strength, agenda strength, and network strength. The protests in question occurred in London on the eve of the G20 Summit in late March and early April 2009, marking the first in a series of protests at various world power meetings in response to the global financial and economic crises.

The case of the G20 London Summit protests is interesting in several ways. The protests involved very different organizational networks seeking to mobilize publics to send messages to the G20 (and to larger publics) about how to address the world crisis. This case offers comparisons between collective action networks employing highly personalized communication and networks pressing more conventional collective action frames on their followers. The uses of digital media both in linking among organizations and in communication with publics allowed us

to observe how relatively more and less personalized media affect both coalition structures and the general qualities of collective action strength.

Protesting the Economic Crisis

The world's 20 leading economic nations, the G20, met in London on 2 April 2009 amidst a global economic crisis. Their announced intention was to address the 'greatest challenge to the world economy in modern times' through common actions to 'restore confidence, growth, and jobs', 'repair the financial system', and 'build an inclusive, green and sustainable, recovery'.¹ The London Summit attracted a complex protest ecology involving multiple actors with different protest agendas and tactics. Several protests were planned. An earlier meeting in Paris of more than 150 civil society groups from all over Europe, including unions, student movements, faith-based, environment and development groups, had resulted in the agreement to divide the protests into two days: 28 March was to be the day of general mobilization, and 1 April (dubbed 'Financial Fool's Day') was to be the preferred day for direct action (Paris Declaration 2009). This division of the protest space into different days allocated to two large and different coalitions made a perfect natural laboratory for implementing our research design.

The 28 March London mobilization was organized by Put People First (PPF), a UK civil society coalition of more than 160 development NGOs, trade unions, and environmental groups (e.g. Oxfam, Catholic Overseas Development Agency, and Friends of the Earth). Their march for 'Jobs, Justice and Climate' in the central city drew an estimated 35,000 protesters (Put People First 2009). A coalition of other more militant groups planned a series of protests for 1 April. These included a Climate Camp encampment with some 2,000 participants in the heart of London; a smaller Stop the War coalition anti-war march; and an Alternative London Summit featuring a variety of academics, activists, and politicians. The largest of these events was organized by G20 Meltdown (Meltdown), an anti-capitalist umbrella group that led a 'Storm the Banks' carnival march protesting war, climate chaos, financial crimes, and land enclosures (e.g. the Anarchist Federation, The Anthill Social, and the Socialist Workers Party). An estimated 5,000 protesters converged at the Bank of England from four different directions, each led by a differently coloured 'Horseman of the Apocalypse'. Protesters could join the Red Horse against war, the Green against climate chaos, Silver against financial crimes, or Black against land enclosures and borders (Wikipedia 2009). Our analysis focuses on two dominant protest coalitions, PPF and Meltdown, two networks that also pursued contrasting approaches to engaging individuals. We also include some measures from the Climate Camp website for comparison purposes, as climate camp represents a more radical network than PPF in terms of organizing

¹ Available at: <http://www.g20.org/Documents/final-communique.pdf> (26 July 2009).

more direct, confrontational actions, and yet it is unlike Meltdown in that it avoids collective action mandates and invites individuals with different ideas about the climate crisis to participate in these actions. Thus, its interactive media repertoire might be expected to fall somewhere between the other two networks.

Protest Coalitions and Personalized Communication

Our first task involved investigating whether PPF and Meltdown displayed differences in the ways they communicated to individuals in the mobilization process. We analysed two ways in which the organizations could personalize communication on their websites: their framing of protest themes and the opportunities provided to site visitors to use technologies for interactive communication that often enabled personal content to enter the network. Analysis of each coalition's website and related social technologies indicates considerable differences between PPF and Meltdown: the PPF coalition presented a far more personalized thematic and technological interface, enabling individuals to send their own messages to the G20, while Meltdown issued a more rigid call to collective action, including encouragement to eat the bankers and end capitalism.

The differences in the communication approaches between PPF and Meltdown are instantly signalled in the images that animate their websites. As shown in Figure 1, the PPF site featured a banner of feet wearing rather everyday middle-class footwear walking together. By contrast, the Meltdown site featured a single black horse and rider storming over the Bank of England across ominous skies (Figure 2).

As suggested by the graphics, the PPF site places the average citizen at the centre of the proposed action and invites him or her to project his or her own interpretations on the activities. The phrase that characterizes the site is truly 'Put People First'. Not only is this the protest slogan, but a statistical content analysis shows this to be the most prominent distinguishing word cluster on the site.² PPF emphasizes the priority of 'people' while downplaying the specifics of the problem or solution. 'Crisis' is the second most prominent word cluster theme on the site, and yet details about causes and solutions are kept in the background.³ PPF only requires that the reader recognize the economic crisis; it avoids problematizing or promoting one economic system over

² The keyword analysis was performed using Wordsmith, which identifies words that characterize a text by comparing a research text with a larger research corpus. By running Dunning's log-likelihood test, a cousin of the chi-square test, words are identified, which appear more prominently in the research text. This test identifies not just frequency, but similarity of word ratios. If a word appears in a statistically significant higher proportion in the research text than in the research corpus, it is marked as a keyword. This provides word clusters that are significant to interpret. The complete cluster was 'Put, people, first, putting, we, public, essential'.

³ The keyword cluster included 'Crisis, economic, economies, financial, finance'.

another. The site urges the reform of banking, finance, and trade systems, but it does not detail the direction of such reforms. The presentation instead emphasizes the detrimental consequences of the status quo for ‘people’, letting the reader identify the message and action that he or she wishes to endorse as long as it amounts to ‘putting people first’.

FIGURE 1 Put People First Coalition homepage (April 2009). Used with permission.



By contrast, Meltdown defined its concerns more narrowly and made it clear that these were not open to negotiation. Instead of associating the crisis and the summit with a plurality of problems and solutions, the reader is confronted with a dramatic larger-than-life narrative. The three primary word clusters tell the story that is underscored by the image in Figure 2. The first word cluster evokes the characters of the drama (personifying bankers as the source of the problem and Meltdown’s horsemen as the agents of change),⁴ the second cluster emphasises the crisis,⁵ and the third cluster groups around a drastic solution: overthrowing capitalism.⁶ The narrative is that a group of bankers has caused global economic catastrophe, and a group of ‘horsemen’ will come to the rescue by ‘reclaim[ing] the City, thrusting into the very belly of the beast’. While PPF only required that the reader recognize the existence of an economic crisis, Meltdown insists that the reader recognize it as a capitalist crisis. The goal to ‘overthrow

⁴ ‘Bank, bankers, financial, executives, bankthink, shareholders, shares, horsemen, wave, public’.

⁵ ‘Meltdown, crises, crisis, crunch, anniversary’.

⁶ ‘Revolution, mobilization, rescue’.

capitalism' points both to the source of the crisis ('the dominance of finance capitalism is the problem') and a drastic solution. The four themes of the Storm the Banks march provided some leeway for personalization (e.g. the encouragement to dress in costume), and yet the sub-themes are firmly ordered under collective action framework of anticapitalism. The aesthetic is often humorous, but the dramatization demands that participants either accept or reject the message as is.

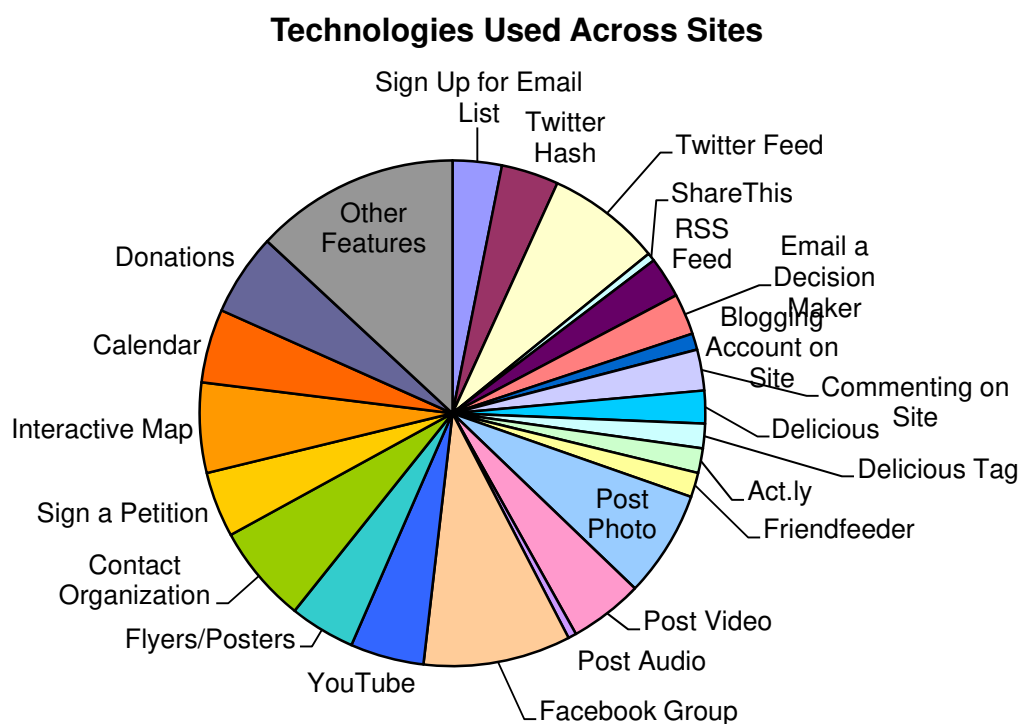
FIGURE 2 The G20 Meltdown homepage (April 2009). Used with permission.



In keeping with these differences in framing the protests, the coalition sites differed substantially in the extent to which individuals were offered interactive affordances that invited them to join on their own terms. In order to make these comparisons, we first conducted inventories of every interactive digital affordance used across a collection of seven related protests during 2009, beginning with the PPF, Meltdown, and Climate Camp sites in the London protests and continuing with the protests later in the fall in Pittsburgh at G20 meetings (where two coalition sites were inventoried) and two additional UK coalitions mobilizing public demonstrations ahead of the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December. There were many bridges among these protests, including common organizational sponsorships, travelling Twitter streams, and general linking of the economic crisis with climate change issues (e.g. no economic solutions at the expense of climate action). The resulting inventory shown in Figure 3 gives us a broad

spectrum of interactive affordances that enable individuals to make choices about how to participate (e.g. sign petitions, donate money, and come to demonstrations) and/or add content to the communication network (e.g. post videos, photos, blog comments, and calendar events). Each site was examined systematically by research assistants who were instructed to search each page within the top-level domains by clicking through all the links and recording the presence of any of the inventory items. Multiple instances of a technology on each site were recorded (e.g. multiple places to post photos relevant to different coalition activities), resulting in a total of 106 features identified across the seven sites. Figure 3 shows the inventory breakdown of interactive affordances found in all seven of the inventoried sites. Figure 4 shows the numbers of interactive technologies from the inventory list that were found in the three main coalition sites from the London March–April 2009 protests.

FIGURE 3 Relative occurrences of interactive technology features inventoried in seven related G20 and Climate Summit protest sites 2009. Multiple instances of the site features were recorded. The number of total features was 106.

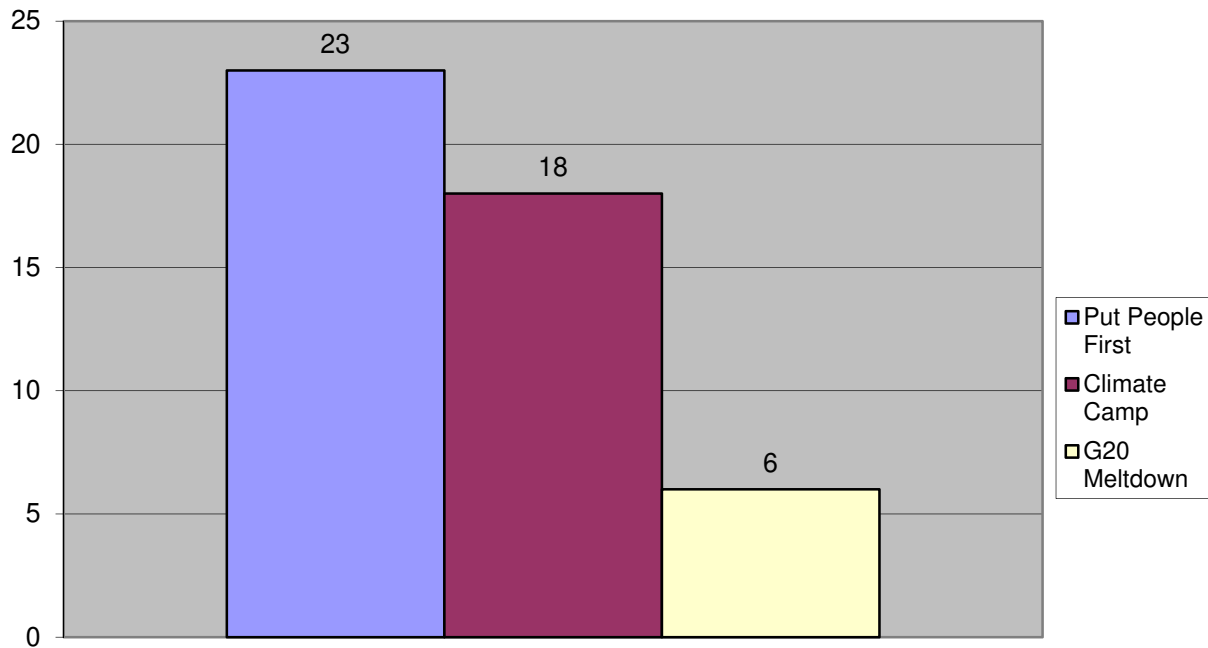


As can be seen in Figure 4, the PPF and Meltdown sites represent the two extremes, with PPF offering 23 personalized technological engagement mechanisms compared with Meltdown's six mechanisms. Climate Camp offers an interesting comparison in between. For reference, the Meltdown site offered the fewest interactive technologies of any of the seven sites in the affordance inventory and PPF had the largest number. As noted above, CC is a radical

organization that advocates direct actions but invites individuals with different ideas about the climate crisis to join these actions. Thus, Climate Camp is a network that is more radical than the PPF-centrist coalition, but less inclined to use collective action frames than Meltdown. It is worth noting that its personalized communication inventory is between the other two, but falls short of the PPF level of personalized engagement opportunities.

The PPF site offered many different opportunities for a visitor to enter the protest space. In keeping with the overall approach, the opportunity to ‘send your own public message’ to the G20 leaders appears at the centre of the first page under a photo stream of happy and diverse protestors (see Figure 1). There were several means of eliciting information (signing up to receive email alerts, Twitter and RSS feeds, and a calendar) and invitations to publicize and organize this information (through ShareThis, Delicious, Twitter, and downloadable posters). Participants were also encouraged to contribute by using the #G20rally Twitter hashtag and by posting personal photos, videos, and audios relating to the protest. Bloggers could link to the featured Whiteband initiative ‘G20 Voices’, through which 50 international bloggers were brought in to cover the Summit onsite. Aside from the classic offer to buy T-shirts, the site offered PPF widgets for users to upload to their own blogs or Facebook pages and encouraged linking to the site by providing easy-to-follow instructions. A unique feature was the ‘Obama-izer’ widget, which allowed users to spread their own ‘Obama-ized’ likeness to his classic campaign poster (signalling his signature themes of ‘hope’ and ‘change’) and to post the PPF slogan of ‘Jobs, Justice and Climate’ on their own websites or social networking sites. Visitors could also join the coalition’s Facebook group, which was linked off the main site.

FIGURE 4 Technology inventory of three protest coalitions in 2009 London G20 protests



By contrast, the Meltdown site offered only six technological points of entry into the protest space. These included a calendar, the invitation to contact the group, the opportunity to download posters about the Meltdown event, to follow the organization's Twitter feed and (YouTube) videos, and to read or join the public Facebook group. There are several possible reasons for the limited set of technological affordances. These include the lack of financial, technological, and skill resources; the possibility that being under surveillance discouraged public information exchange; or the belief that over-use of the internet may impede developing grassroots resources (Diani 2001; Stein 2009). Despite these possible contributing factors, a closer examination of the six interactive features on the Meltdown site suggests an overall tone of limiting personalized participation. Indeed, the overall focus of the site was to present information unilaterally to the visitor. Few of the Meltdown affordances allowed users to customize their interaction with the mobilization. Even when information was attributed to people submitting posts, it was unclear who had submitted them or how this could be done. The exception to this one-way directionality was the Facebook group, where users could post not only comments but also photos and posters.

The PPF website meanwhile not only invited individual contributions in several different ways, but also tolerated postings straying far from its own organizational themes. For example, although official PPF statements did not focus on events aside from the G20 Summit and their own march, various participants using the site raised other issues, such as the death of a bystander

at the hands of police at the Meltdown ‘Storm the Banks’ action on 1 April. Figure 5 shows a post to the PPF/Whiteband blog scroll, which linked to a blogger operating under the name of legofesto (<http://legofesto.blogspot.com/>), who recreated a Lego sculpture of the incident (posted on May 15, <http://www.whitebandaction.org/en/g20voice/blog?page=1>).

FIGURE 5 Artist blogger legofesto recreates the death of a bystander. Copyright legofesto; used with permission.



It is also important to note that PPF offered points of engagement that were not easily filtered by the central organization. An example of this is the #g20rally Twitter hashtag. The organization encouraged supporters to use the hashtag to create a buzz around its march. While the hashtag was predictably used by the PPF organizers to show solidarity and report on the march, it was also used by others for very different purposes. Examples of the latter included critical comments, as in a picture of protesters eating at McDonald's that was retweeted with the following text: 'RT @(person's name) & @dothegreenthing Delicious irony of #g20rally anti-globalization protesters lunching @ McDonalds <http://twitpic.com/2j2qb>'. Other users updated followers with how the news was reporting the protests: 'Just heard – #G20rally not lead story. Spat with Argentina about Falklands is set to bump it'. Such examples suggest that the PPF protest space was open to individuals acting in ways showing little programmatic affiliation with the PPF coalition.

In summary, PPF went to great lengths to encourage personalized expression on its website. Meltdown explicitly endorsed the spirit of solidarity expressed in the Paris Declaration and consequently made efforts to highlight other London Summit protest events as well as provide contact information to the respective organizers (including PPF). Yet, their own communication

stream was more one way and presented as an ideological narrative on the crisis that visitors could either take or leave. Seen in this light, it seems like Meltdown invited citizens to explore the diverse protest space around the London Summit but not to complicate the Meltdown message, while PPF encouraged personalized action within a PPF-defined protest context.

Personalized Communication and Protest Capacity

Having established systematic communication differences between the two main protest groups, we now turn to examining whether there are any notable deficits in the political capacities of organizations and coalitions implementing more personalized communication strategies. We focus here primarily on PPF, as it was the coalition that presented the most personalized communication. In this analysis, we explore the areas of engagement strength, agenda strength, and network strength outlined earlier.

Engagement strength

Did PPF's more flexible terms of communication undermine their engagement strength – as measured in terms of direct mobilization of participants, indirect communication to general publics, and sustained future mobilization capacity? One of the clearest signals of engagement strength is participation in the protest march itself. As stated previously, an estimated 35,000 people attended the PPF march, compared with roughly 5,000 who turned out for the Meltdown demonstration a few days later (Wikipedia 2009). Were this the only difference between the two coalitions, we might say that a more moderate NGO coalition is more likely to mobilize a large turnout than a more ideologically extreme coalition proposing higher risk actions. However, the size of turnout is just one of the many measures that we used to compare the two coalitions.

Another measure of engagement capacity is the diversity of turnout. While we do not have precise indicators of diversity, the photos posted by participants and sponsoring organizations on various sites clearly show a broader range of people and messages in the PPF march compared with those posted from the 'Storm the Bank' march organized by the Meltdown coalition. Contrast, for example, the photos posted by Indymedia London (2009) with those posted on the CAFOD (2009) site.

As for engaging a broader public beyond the immediate demonstration, the mainstream media coverage was also far greater and more positive for the PPF activities. This is documented below as part of the analysis of agenda strength. What this means is that in terms of secondary engagement (i.e. people who were not there, but who heard about it in the press), the PPF activities reached a far wider audience with more positive messages.

Yet, another way of thinking about engagement strength is whether those mobilized in this particular protest were also kept in the communication network for future activities. One

interesting indicator that the PPF network sustained its communication with participants was the continuing promotion by many of the same coalition organizations of future activities related to climate change and the forthcoming Copenhagen Climate Summit. We will discuss how these networks overlapped in more detail in the section on network strength, but at this point, it is worth noting that PPF continued to link to the topic of climate change and directed site visitors to the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition (SCCC). The SCCC, whose sponsoring membership overlapped considerably with that of PPF, was then coordinating 'The Wave' protest leading up to the UN Copenhagen Climate Summit. The Wave demonstrations, which took place on 5 December 2009, attracted an estimated 50,000 people.

A final indicator of the engagement strength of the PPF protest is the difference in what Chadwick (2007) refers to as sedimentary digital mechanisms that sustain histories of past events and leave behind communication links for people to organize future events. The PPF website was still up and functional at the time of this writing (a year and a half after the protests), with the 'put your message to the G20 here' box being replaced with a scroll of the messages left by people who had used that feature earlier. By contrast, the G20 Meltdown site was not updated after the summer of 2009 and was taken down shortly after that (although a Facebook group remained sporadically active at the time of this writing).

Agenda strength

The second question is whether personalized communication compromised the PPF coalition's conventional agenda strength. Our conclusion is that it did not. Despite the many invitations in the PPF environment for individuals to contribute to their digital protest space, the PPF policies and strategies were clearly presented and not up for discussion. The site presents a 12-point policy platform detailing the claims of the proposed march, which were directed at the UK government. Some of the points are more general, such as 'Compel tax havens to abide by strict international rules' and 'Work to ensure sufficient emergency funding to all countries that need it, without damaging conditionalities attached'. But other claims were more specific: for example, 'Deliver 0.7% of national income as aid by 2013, deliver aid more effectively and push for the cancellation of all illegitimate and unpayable developing country debts'. This suggests that PPF's flexibility did not unduly compromise the specificity and clarity of its public claims. In contrast, it is interesting that the Meltdown site, which signalled greater rigidity about its message, presented only broad goals directed at the system rather than a specific political target: '1. Participate in a carnival party at the Bank of England. 2. Support all events demonstrating against the G20 during the meltdown period (from March 28th onwards). 3. Overthrow capitalism'.

Another measure of agenda strength is the capacity of a protest coalition to communicate to broader publics through various media channels. A common concern about social movements

and media is that news stories typically focus on violence or civil disobedience and not on the issue agendas of the protesters. Media coverage is even more problematic for transnational and global justice protesters who typically represent multiple issues, often leaving news organizations unable to summarize the point of the protest (Bennett 2005). Worse yet, particularly chaotic protests may even be subject to comedy treatments as in the example of the Pittsburgh events that were part of the series of protests as the G20 travelled to various locations. In our case, we investigated whether PPF's flexible and personalized communication compromised the diffusion of coalition claims and coverage in the mainstream media.

We analysed reporting of the protests in all English language print news media in the week of the summit protests (27 March–4 April 2009). Of 504 relevant items, 225 articles mentioned PPF and 165 mentioned Meltdown. Most mentions of PPF reflected the coalition's own emphasis on the 'unified' and 'unprecedented alliance' of 'mainstream' diversity behind the demand to 'Put People First'. Mentions of Meltdown meanwhile highlighted the radical profile of the associated groups and police anticipation of disruptive protests. The coalition's issue claims were seldom featured in the news. The valence of the reporting was more positive for PPF: 46 per cent of the total mentions of PPF were positive, 53 per cent neutral, and 1 per cent negative. For Meltdown, by contrast, only 3 per cent of the mentions were positive, 74 per cent neutral, and 23 per cent negative. This general pattern held irrespective of the political position of the news organization (e.g. BBC, Guardian, and Times).

Network strength

Our final question concerns whether more personalized communication through digital media necessarily undermines network strength. We analysed both the PPF and Meltdown coalitions from the perspective of their organizational network strength and the dynamics of their networks over time. The coherence and stability of protest networks can be thought of in terms of levels of mutual recognition and inclusion of coalition organizations in cross-linked networks. We measured recognition and inclusion in this case through various indicators based on hyperlink patterns among organization websites and campaigns. By these measures, networks that have less strength (i.e. stability and coherence) will display higher numbers of isolated organizations that receive few links from others.

In light of the differences in the protest narratives and frames found on the two main coalition sites, it is not surprising that two very different networks were formed by organizations listed as the members of the respective coalitions. As noted earlier, the Meltdown site mostly listed anarchist and anti-capitalist organizations (e.g. Rhythms of Resistance, The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, the Haringey Solidarity Group, and the Socialist Workers Party). The

PPF core members consisted mainly of large, well-established national NGOs working in the areas of development, trade justice, and environment (e.g. CAFOD, Oxfam, and Friends of the Earth). The interesting question that moves us beyond the lists of members of the two protest coalitions is how the solidarity networks of the two coalitions were organized. What were the observable patterns of giving and receiving recognition in the two large coalitions that shared and organized the London Summit protest space? What is perhaps surprising is that the PPF coalition, which advertised the most personalized affiliation opportunities, displayed by far the stronger network, suggesting that the personalization of the mobilization process, alone, does not necessarily undermine the resilience of the collective action structure.

Given our limited access to participants in these protests, we could not assess network relationships in a fine-grained ethnographic sense (e.g. who regularly calls whom to coordinate actions and what organization leaders or members attend meetings together). More importantly, a finer grained ethnographic analysis would make it extremely challenging to piece together the extended solidarity networks of hundreds and even thousands of organizations that help communicate the messages of the core organizations and drive participants to their mobilizations. What we are seeking for the purposes of this analysis is a rough assessment of the qualities (e.g. size, organizational composition, and density of relationships) of the extended networks surrounding the core coalitions responsible for organizing the G20 protests. We can get a preliminary understanding of these network properties by assessing one of the most visible ways in which recognition is given or withheld in contemporary protest spaces: through the exchange of links on websites. For explanations of why intentional web linking patterns constitute reliable indicators of network structure in cases like ours, see Rogers (2004) and Foot and Schneider (2006).

It is also important to recognize the limits of the methods that we employ here. Networks, do not, of course, reveal all of their dimensions through linking patterns. Neither Al Qaeda support organizations nor candidates in the US Congressional elections can be expected to link to their funding sources or to their covert strategy advisors, two important node clusters in their networks. However, web crawls of such disparate organizations may reveal insights into their support and resource networks (e.g. mosques or influential clerics involved in recruitment, in the case of Al Qaeda, or endorsements from respected public officials and organizations in the case of the Congressional candidates). More appropriate for our case is that social movement and NGO policy coalitions may signal who their close partners are or where people can go and what they can do to advance mutual goals. Just as importantly, organizations can choose not to link to others in public even though they may share some agenda overlap. For example, the Meltdown site linked to PPF, but that recognition was not returned, signalling that PPF wanted its public image

to be cleanly associated with a financial reform programme and not linked to a blatantly anti-capitalist message.

More generally, then, the way organizations link (or do not link) to others signals various kinds of relationships in networks, such as influence (the degree to which an organization links out to others) and also prestige (the degree to which other organizations choose to link to an organization). Through this giving and receiving of links, we can detect things such as the numbers of isolated organizations in coalitions, the density of co-linking among organizations, and the relative equality in the distribution of links among organizations in a network. In order to find out how organizations in our main coalitions positioned themselves in relation to each other through intentional website linkages, we conducted web crawls to assess the co-linking patterns of the two protest networks using a set of starting points that each coalition site defined as core actors. The list of starting points for the Meltdown group was a large one (63 organizations), taken from the 'Who's Who' page on the site.⁷ The PPF starting set was much smaller, taken from the list of the 14 organizations authorized to speak to the media on behalf of PPF.⁸ Given the differences in the political nature of the two coalitions, there was no obvious way of finding comparable numbers of starting points. PPF clearly signalled its lead organizations, while Meltdown (perhaps reflecting its anarchist ethos) categorized all coalition members equally. More importantly, the relative number of starting points is not as critical as their representativeness.

⁷ The Labour Party (actually, the alternative labour party), The Alternative G20 Summit, The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, Climate rush, Climate Camp, Stop the war coalition, Campaign for nuclear disarmament, Rising tide, London Action Resource Centre, People & Planet, Earth First, Radical Anthropology Group, Haringey Solidarity Group, Hackney Solidarity Network, London Coalition Against Poverty, Day-Mer, Aluna, Transition Towns, People's Global Action, Hands off Venezuela, Radical Activist, SchNEWS, noborder network, Network to End Migrant and Refugee Detention, Roadblock, AirportWatch, Climate Crisis Coalition, Plane Stupid, Transport 2000, Airport Pledge, Permaculture, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Post Carbon Institute, Campaign Against Climate Change, Greenpeace, Zero Carbon City, Corporate Watch, Corpwatch, The Heat is Online, The Centre for Alternative Technology, The World Alliance for Decentralized Energy, Biofuel Watch, Carbon Trade Watch, Platform, Simultaneous Policy, International Union of Sex Workers, IFIwatchnet, The Last Hours, Socialist workers party, Government of the dead, Rhythms of resistance, Barking bacteria, Strangeworks, People and planet, Whitechapel anarchist group, Stop arming Israel, Anarchist federation, Class War, The Anthill Social, Reclaiming Spaces, The Land is Ours Campaign, New Sovereignty, People in Common, Project 2012, the Student Occupation.

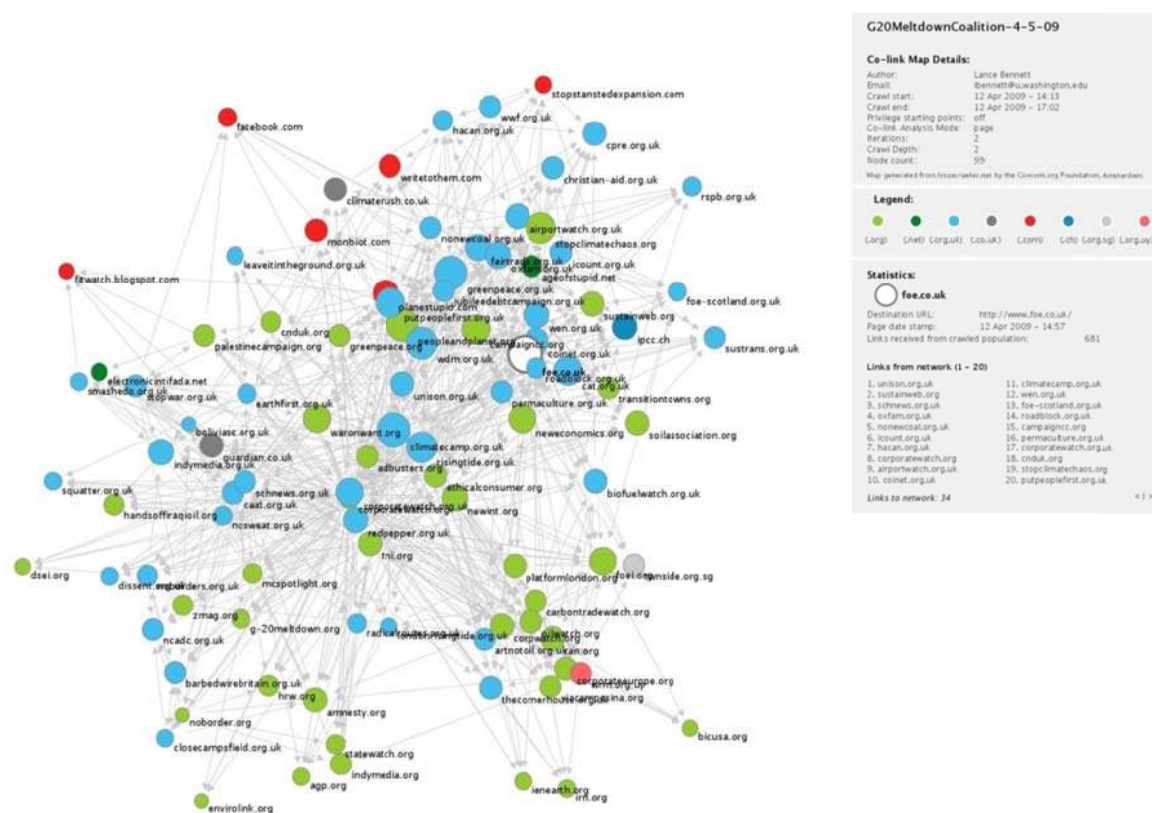
⁸ Available at: <http://www.actionaid.org>, <http://www.cafod.org.uk>, <http://www.foe.co.uk>, <http://www.neweconomics.org>, <http://www.oxfam.org.uk>, <http://www.progressio.org.uk>, <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk>, <http://www.stopclimatechaos.org>, <http://www.tearfund.org>, <http://www.tuc.org.uk>, <http://www.waronwant.org>, <http://www.wdm.org.uk>, <http://www.whiteband.org>, <http://www.worldvision.org.uk>.

Since the network crawling method that we selected explores all the linking relationships from a set of starting points, network patterns will emerge as long as the starting points are broadly representative of the domain being investigated (in this case, two distinct protest coalitions).

The two respective sets of URLs were placed as starting points, or as a ‘seed list’, into Issue Crawler, a tool made available by Richard Rogers at the University of Amsterdam (for a detailed account of this tool, see http://www.govcom.org/scenarios_use.html, and Rogers 2004). The Issue Crawler identifies networks of URLs and locates them in a relational space (which we will refer to as a ‘network map’) on the basis of the co-link analysis. A co-link is simply a URL that receives links from at least two of the starting points for each iteration (or ‘click’) as the crawler moves out from the starting points. Thus, suppose we begin with Site A, Site B, and Site C, and crawls of the inlinks and outlinks for each turned up site D, which has links from sites A and C. Site D would be included in the network map as co-linking from two of the starting points. Suppose that on the second iteration or click of the crawl, the crawler finds that site D also links to site E, which, in turn, supplies an inlink to Site B from our list of starting points. However, site E receives no other links from the members of the expanding network. Under the chosen inclusion method, site E would not be included in the network map. The decision to use co-link analysis simply provides a test of whether networks are more constrained than, say, a snowball or single-link method, which would include more weakly tied organizations such as site E. As with most methodological choices, there are theoretical implications. Thus, we set a somewhat higher bar for network inclusion than other mapping methods would create. The rationale is that since we are interested in comparing networks in terms of density of linking and structural stability, the co-linking criterion puts the spotlight on organizations that emerge in more tightly connected networks.

We set the reach of the crawl at two iterations (or hyperlink clicks) from the starting points. This is the procedure that Rogers (2004) recommends for deriving a solidarity network that includes links among organizations extending beyond a particular issue focus and into support networks for larger categories of concern. For example, in this case, we wanted to capture the solidarity networks surrounding our two clusters of economic justice organizations. This opening to the solidarity network enabled the inclusion of more climate change organizations that advocate linking economic and climate justice causes, because global warming impacting already impoverished nations most severely. The question now becomes whether the coalition displaying more personalized engagement opportunities lost network strength in the bargain.

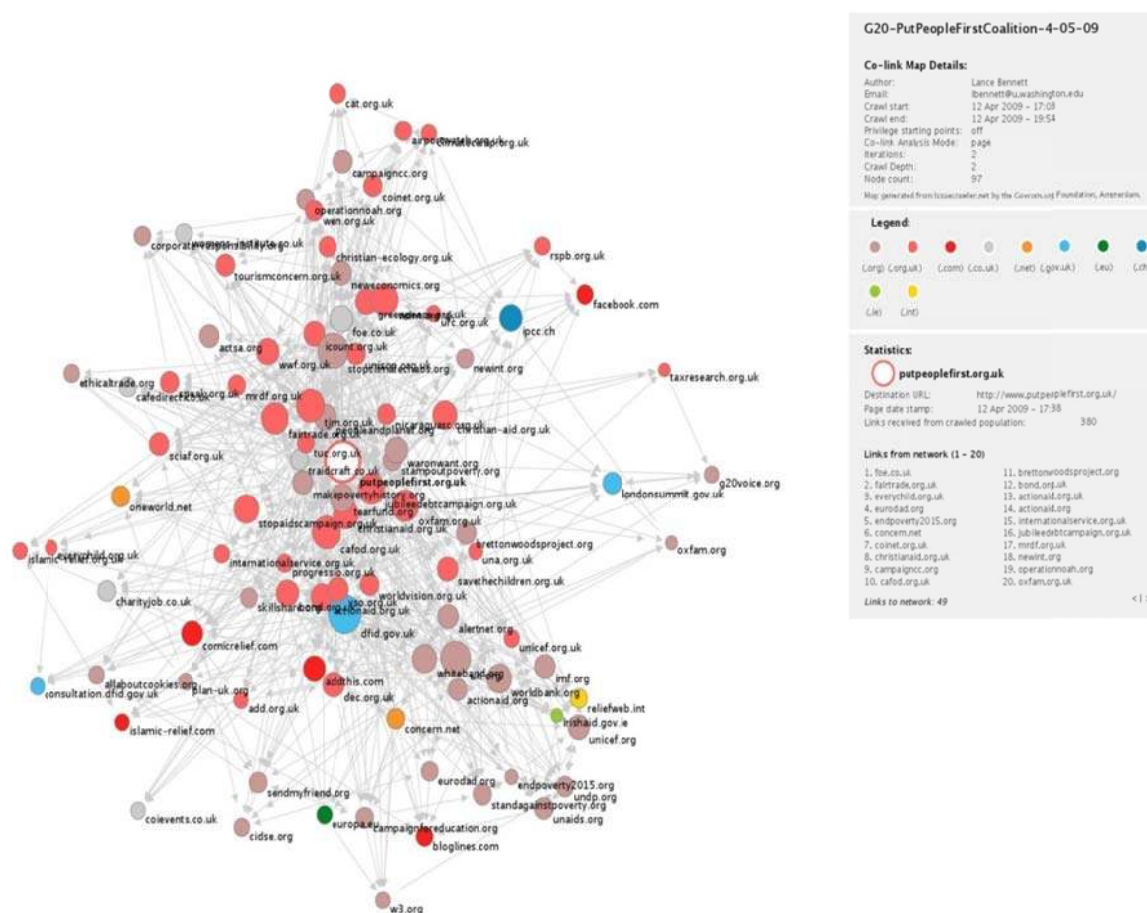
FIGURE 6 Core solidarity network of the G20 Meltdown coalition, with nodes sized by relative numbers of inlinks that organizations received from the network. Used with permission: Issue Crawler (govcom.org).



Despite its more personalized appeals to individuals, PPF turned out to have a much more coherent organizational network than Meltdown with its more rigid collective action frames. The crawler visited more than 2000 URLs in each crawl and rendered a map and a co-link matrix (including directionality of links) consisting of the top sites sharing co-links in each network. The maps of the two networks are shown in Figures 6 and 7. The sizes of the nodes correspond to the relative numbers of the inlinks that a site received from other organizations. At initial inspection, both networks seem superficially similar, with the crawler returning the core networks of 97 organizations for PPF and 99 for Meltdown. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the networks are vastly different in terms of which of the coalition members ended up in them and the linking patterns among the core network members. The most dramatic observation is that many members of the Meltdown coalition dropped out of the network, because few of them were recognized by at least two other members. Even more interesting is that many of the organizations receiving greater recognition from the Meltdown members turned out to be the core players in the PPF network, suggesting that actors in the more centrist coalition represented some important levels of

prestige (perhaps based on valuable information or other resources) for many of the Meltdown groups.

FIGURE 7 Core solidarity network of the Put People First coalition, with nodes sized by relative numbers of inlinks that organizations received from the network. Used with permission: Issue Crawler (govcom.org).



Inspection of the linking patterns shown in Figure 7 reveals that PPF centred on a tightly knit group of core organizations, including most of those listed in the media contact list. Indeed, most of these PPF starting points remained prominent in the core network, meaning that they received recognition from multiple other members of the network. By contrast, many of the organizations from which we launched the Meltdown crawl dropped out of the network, meaning that they did not receive widespread recognition from fellow members of the organizing coalition list. The contrast is dramatic. Only one of the 14 starting points dropped out of the PPF network, because it failed to receive links from two or more organizations in the crawled population. By contrast, fully 30 of the original 63 starting points dropped out of the Meltdown solidarity network

due to lack of recognition among other coalition members. This, of course, raises the question of who the organizations populating the Meltdown solidarity network are, if not primarily the original coalition members. As noted above, a number of prominent organizations associated with the PPF network emerge as a tightly linked group in the Meltdown network as well. In fact, a dominant cluster of most inlinked organizations in the upper half of Figure 6 turn out to be organizations that also appear prominently in the PPF network in Figure 7. In particular, six organizations appear near the centre of both networks: Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, People and Planet, World Development Movement, and SCCC. People and Planet and SCCC appear in both the PPF sponsor list and the Meltdown Who's Who list from which the crawls were launched. However, the other four were PPF sponsor organizations that did not appear in the Meltdown starting points.

The asymmetric inclusion of the PPF members in the Meltdown solidarity network does not mean that the two networks were the same. Although many PPF organizations appear in the Meltdown network, they do not dominate the network. Fully 14 of the top 20 most linked-to sites in each network were different. What accounts for this puzzling quality of the Meltdown network that it excludes many of its own coalition members, while affiliating in a solidarity neighbourhood that goes beyond PPF to include other organizations as well? Although environment organizations were a minority of the largely anti-capitalist starting points, they were disproportionately likely to associate with each other and with an extended string of environmental advocacy organizations to provide the core strength of the Meltdown network. Indeed, the top six most linked-to organizations in Figure 6 are environmental orgs: climatecamp.org.uk – (receiving 33 links from the 99 other organizations in the core network); foe.co.uk (28); campaigncc.org (24); risingtide.org.uk (24); greenpeace.org.uk (23); and peopleandplanet.org (23). Indeed, the top 20 most recognized organizations in the Meltdown network included 17 devoted entirely or importantly to climate change and environmental sustainability issues. Another member of the top 20 was an information network (Indymedia) that carried news and personal accounts from the protests and received 19 formal links from other members of the network. This means that only two core organizations in the Meltdown solidarity network ended up being focused mainly on the economic justice issues that were at the centre of the protests, and these were overlapping core members of PPF (Oxfam and World Development Movement).

This suggests that the formal Meltdown coalition focus on anti-capitalism quickly melted away if we consider the overall network strength of the coalition, which turns out to lie primarily with a subset of environment organizations and their extended network. Without this strong network built around the secondary environmental theme of the protests, there is a real possibility that the Meltdown coalition would have failed to reveal a coherent or stable network at all. In

other words, when it comes to network strength, the economic justice wing of the Meltdown network suffered a bit of a meltdown.

Enough Meltdown member organizations pointed towards the PPF members and/or environmental organizations to morph the network in surprisingly different directions than one might have been imagined just from examining the tone and membership of the coalition site or even from exploring all of the member websites. Perhaps, the most striking indicator of the low network strength of the original Meltdown coalition membership (in terms of observed relations among its economic justice organizations) is the fact that even the Meltdown coalition site sits outside the centre of its own network (appearing in the lower left of Figure 6). The Meltdown site ranked 27th out of 99 nodes in the network in terms of inlinks received from other organizations (13). By contrast, as shown in Figure 7, the PPF coalition site is the centre of its network, ranking first in recognition with inlinks from 38 other organizations.

The network strength pattern is clear: recognition clearly flows outward from the Meltdown coalition members towards a mix of environmental organizations and the dominant organizations in PPF. The reverse was most certainly not true, with the PPF members assiduously not linking to enough Meltdown organizations to include many of them in their network. Indeed, the Meltdown coalition site does not even appear in the network map of the PPF network.

This analysis seems to make it clear that conventional ideological or collective identity-based collective action framing of public activities is not a prerequisite for network coherence (inclusion and density of relationships) among coalition members. One case surely does not establish a general law, and we expect to see a good deal more variation in terms of ranges of outcomes on the collective action framing side of the equation. That is, one suspects that there will be many scenarios under which collective action frames do produce more coherent networks than in the case of this largely anarchist and anti-capitalist Meltdown coalition that demonstrated relatively low network strength. However, the main point here is about the other case, PPF, where we have a fairly typical coalition of advocacy NGOs that shunned collective action frames and personalized their digital media engagement affordances without suffering evident loss of network strength.

Conclusion

The fact that the organizations in the Meltdown Who's Who list displayed relatively low levels of public recognition in their web links while a group of core PPF organizations appears prominently in the Meltdown network suggests the greater dominance of the PPF network in this protest space. This may reflect their resource advantage in terms of providing information, logistical coordination, and a better online communication infrastructure. In addition, the minority of the

environmental organizations in the Meltdown coalition also turned out to dominate the network in ways that distinguished it from PPF, pointing, in particular, to the Climate Camp demonstration among the G20 activities and towards future protests leading up to the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen at the end of the year. Thus, the Meltdown network was not without some distinctive structure, but it was a structure that notably did not include the majority of economic justice organizations in the coalition.

By contrast, the dominance of the PPF coalition was clear in terms of network inclusiveness, density of relationships, and prestige of the core organizations. There was a pronounced asymmetry in the levels and nature of recognition between the two networks. For example, the Meltdown coalition publicized (and encouraged participation in) the PPF march, but there was no discernible return publicity from PPF for the Meltdown event. Moreover, it was clear from the Indymedia feeds and photos that the Meltdown supporters joined the PPF march without disrupting the peaceful tone, which was a marked contrast to the more confrontational tactics employed by these groups in the later Storm the Bank event. This asymmetrical capacity of the PPF network ended up serving well in terms of getting its message out, both across internal digital networks and in the mass media, which generally gave more and more positive coverage to the PPF activities.

In addition to these network dynamics that helped define the G20 protest space and the activities within it, there were also clearly many directly brokered arrangements and understandings that operated beyond the bounds of our observations. For example, the strategic mutual decision reached by the respective coalitions to divide the protest space into different activities and different days clearly enhanced the clarity of the PPF activities. Orchestrating separate protests and defining them clearly on the coalition sites and their associated social networks may have appealed to the greater propensity of people to turn out for peaceful demonstrations while contributing to favourable news coverage of a more clearly communicated message in the absence of disruptive noise from more anarchic demonstrators. At the same time, the asymmetry of the networking relationship structures also reinforces these divisions of the protest space and the communication structures that helped organize participants.

Perhaps, the most interesting finding in these data involves the clear evidence that the coalition that adopted more personalized communication strategies still maintained the strongest network. PPF was open to highly personalized affiliation, but it did not seem to have sacrificed much organizational control or political capacity in the bargain. The PPF coalition not only dominated the immediate protest space, but also provided clear pathways for people to join future actions (such as the later climate protests). While the Meltdown site soon disappeared, PPF left various sedimentary structures such as the coalition website as living memories of the G20 action,

complete with the messages and photo galleries created by the participants themselves. Thus, the personalization of participation invited citizens into shared environments where they created important content and established interpersonal relationships both online and offline. At the same time, this individualized communication took place in the context of established messages and action opportunities defined by coalition members whose network relationships indicated strong levels of mutual recognition of action frames and agendas. In short, the PPF coalition opened the floor for varied individual perspectives (recall Legofesto), but the overall effort remained managed and focused. This does not mean that traditional ideological vanguard coalitions have lost their place in collective action scenarios. The Meltdown coalition mobilized a substantial number of participants who engaged in a highly orchestrated action repertoire of confrontation and disruption of London public spaces. Moreover, the Meltdown plan clearly respected the PPF action, with many Meltdown activists participating in the PPF events without disrupting them. The ability of two such distinct coalitions to mobilize a broad spectrum of participants within the same protest ecology, yet to remain distinctive in terms of messages and actions, suggests a refinement of both strategy and communication.

These findings point towards a richer understanding of communication technologies in the organization of contentious collective action. Our analysis may help balance perspectives that have emphasized collective action framing, mass media, and more formal organizational memberships when thinking about conditions of effective mobilization. While other conditions surely produce weaker and less focused protests, it appears that organization networks can harmonize their agendas around message frames that are broad enough to invite diverse individual participation and coordinate this participation through fine-grained digital media applications that result in coherent collective action.

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