The UK Anti-War Movement Online: Uses and Limitations of Internet Technologies for Contemporary Activism[1]

Kevin Gillan, University of Manchester
kevin.gillan@manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

This article uses interviews with committed anti-war and peace activists to offer an overview of both the benefits and challenges that social movements derive from new communication technologies. It shows contemporary political activism to be intensely informational; dependent on the sensitive adoption of a wide range of communication technologies. A hyperlink analysis is then employed to map the UK anti-war movement as it appears online. Through comparing these two sets of data it becomes possible to contrast the online practices of the UK anti-war movement with its offline 'reality'. When encountered away from the Web recent anti-war contention is grounded in national-level political realities and internally divided by its political diversity but to the extent that experience of the movement is mediated online, it routinely transcends national and political boundaries.

Keywords

Anti-war movement; Internet; email; hyperlink analysis.

Introduction – Connecting the 'Virtual' and the 'Real'

Internet communication has become vital to social movement organizations and 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. Actors central to the US anti-war movement, for instance, are 'disproportionately likely to rely on digital communications media' and those with close and diverse movement affiliations 'overwhelmingly received their information about the Iraq crisis through e-media' (Bennett and Givens 2006, p.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 individuals in key organizations, we see intensive use of information technologies. Activists describe their roles as both users and producers of information resources that are communicated by email and through the World Wide Web and have become sensitized to benefits and shortcomings of computer mediated communication (CMC).

The role of the Internet in social movement activities should be conceptualized 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 distinction between 'virtual' and 'real' has eroded, so the creation and dissemination of meaning through Internet technologies has been included among the core practical tasks of movement organizations. Thus,

> 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 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. (Ester and Vinken 2003, pp.669-70)

From this perspective, what is important is the way the structure and content of Internet communications influences the experience of anti-war activism for those who engage with it. The first (qualitative) data set reported below demonstrates that Internet technologies are typically adopted by activists seeking efficiency gains and the ability to work together despite being geographically dispersed and limited in time. Core activists in anti-war movement organizations 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. For instance, 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 (quantitative) set of data this paper presents examines the structural profile of the anti-war movement as it is constituted online. Examination of the hyperlink structure of key anti-war websites offers two relevant findings. First, despite geographical effects being strongly present offline, with most UK organizations focusing their mobilizing efforts and political critique primarily within the national context, the online anti-war movement appears to transcend such borders. Second, despite the fact that organizations' activities tend to cluster around particular political worldviews and strategic preferences, again the online anti-war movement appears to transcend these divisions.

Activist Uses of Technology

The material in this section is drawn from a number of in-depth interviews carried out in 2006 with committed activists within the UK anti-war and peace movements. In order to contextualize the discussion below, I will first briefly introduce the organizations from which interviewees were drawn:

- *Stop the War Coalition (StWC)* is the largest organization in Britain which arose specifically to oppose the 'war on terror'. It came into existence in expectation of a US-led military response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (911). The organization emerged rapidly from a meeting just days after 911, developing around a number of pre-existing political groups including many members of the Marxist left. The growing coalition brought in significant involvement from other groups partnerships with the Muslim Association of Britain and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In addition to the central group based in London hundreds of smaller local groups across the UK affiliated to StWC.
- *The Society of Friends (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 their Friends' Meeting Houses across the country are often familiar spaces of peace organizing. 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, promoting a range of techniques of campaigning for social change.
- *Faslane 365 (F365)* began in October 2006 and 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 encouraged local groups from across the UK to take part in one or two days of blockade at the base, with the aim of achieving a different blockade at the base every day for a year.

- *Voices in the Wilderness UK (Voices UK)* 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*, a monthly newspaper, has 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 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.
- *Justice Not Vengeance (JNV)* is a small group is based in Hastings on the south coast of England. It focuses its work on opposing both US- and UK-led militarism and encroachments on civil liberties understood to result from the events of 911. Their action focuses on collating and distributing arguments and factual materials potentially useful for other peace activists, and on the public exertion of moral pressure through small scale activities such as vigils and public readings of the names of the war dead.

Activists' Uptake of Internet Technologies

The benefits of Internet technologies within anti-war activism 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. StWC, for instance, sends out a regular newsletter to approximately 20,000 people and their own estimates – according to the StWC's office manger and website developer – are that it reaches 40,000 through others' forwarding of emails. While this study cannot confirm such numbers the breadth of dissemination is clearly important in anti-war organizers' decisions to use such technology. So too is the speed with which information can be spread. 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 (Lindsey German, StWC Convener).

Email newsletters are therefore seen as an educative and mobilizing tool within the anti-war movement, for which the 'low-tech' alternative is simply impracticable.

For full-time activists, therefore, managing the receipt of email is equally important. One organizer, marshalling all email enquiries coming through the StWC national office, had during the Lebanon crisis in August 2006 been dealing with 'hundreds and hundreds and on one or two days close to a thousand emails a day' (StWC office manager and website developer). Another activist reported that with 'my personal email account, my *Peace News* email account, the two campaign email accounts that I look after, I'm getting… two or three hundred emails a day' (Ippy, *Peace News* Editor). Similarly, one F365 activist, concerned about the effects of arrest on activists work, reported that 'if you take a couple of days off you come back to about 7-800 emails' (Anna-Linnéa Blumberg, F365).

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 are commonly managed through dedicated email listserv software hosted on a trusted website. While email discussions may be used for mobilizing or information sharing (including the simple forwarding of other newsletters) they offer richer potential in political activities. One grassroots Quaker activist described these as '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' (focus group, Quaker activist). 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. However, these different uses might cause conflicts such that list managers need to recognize 'activists [can] get, brought to a standstill by being on too many lists… a key is trying to minimize the flow of traffic for the people who need that, and recognizing that some people need to have the discursive chatty thing' (Jesse Schust, Voices UK activist). The very low effective costs of setting up email discussion lists allow the tailoring of different lists to different groups with explicit group norms governing the degree of socialising possible through list discussions. So, while email can provide savings in both costs and time over non-electronic forms of communication, this requires sensitivity to the dynamics of email discussion lists.

An alternative planning and decision-making forum is the virtual meeting utilizing Internet Relay Chat or similar technologies. 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 customized piece of software and hosted it on their own website, hidden from public view. The software 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' (focus group, Quaker 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 organizer 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 'crack the dilemma of being in two places at once… [by having] two windows open on your computer and jumping between them.' This also allows instant information flow between the two groups since in the event of a query, 'you go hang on I'll check with someone… you'll go and put a whisper in to somebody who's at the other meeting…. So you can go, and come back and forward again' (Jane Tallents, F365).

In practical ways, campaign websites can function in the same way as email newsletters. One Quaker activist notes savings in 'postage mainly, paper… it means it's more accessible, and we would expect less requests from our volunteer people' (interview Steve Whiting, Quakers). Moreover, newsletters may consciously be used to increase visitors to the website. Thus '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' (StWC office manager and website developer). So, the newsletter holds potential to broaden the number of visitors to the site, and thus the potential readers of information designed to mobilize 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 binary vision of individuals' motivation to visit sites, 'people come to a website either because they want what it's got or they want to protest about what's on it' (Milan Rai, JNV). Thus, a website may focus on offering news and commentary concerning key political issues or on detailing possibilities for protest about particular issues. Milan Rai clearly sees JNV as providing the former, with its content largely being carefully constructed arguments to support anti-war activists and intended for reuse in a range of contexts. 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 mobilization:

> 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 office manager and website developer.)

More multi-purpose sites need to utilize carefully considered design methods to help readers navigate, for instance by making links to information for certain groups, such as press, highly prominent. 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 organization engages in, that is often interpreted as 'bearing witness'; 'by witness, they mean their sort of expression of their feelings about the world and how it should be' (Miranda Girdlestone, Quakers). Thus, the site offers information about relevant activities and grew in response to the invasion of Afghanistan, when 'there were a lot of vigils cropping up, people requesting [information] … we put a section on the site just to list all the peace vigils … and that grew and grew and grew' (Nik Dadson, Quakers). Another section of the site reflects the work of Turning the Tide, a part of the Quakers' work focused particularly 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, organizational issues and also offer some potential emotional support. 'if you're an activist and you're not connected to the relevant websites in your area... its possibly a lot more isolated, and there's issues of morale and maintenance which websites can help overcome. (Milan Rai)

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 (StWC office manager and website developer; Ippy). 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, wherein

> 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.(Milan Rai)

As users, therefore, activists recognize 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' (Steve Whiting).

Limitations of Computer Mediated Communication

While the preceding material largely suggests benefits of new technologies there are a range of potential associated problems. The sheer extent of information indicated with reference to quantities of email above may well drown out key messages in a sea of bulk email. In response activists may well reach a level of selectivity in information sources that resembles the creation of informational 'cocoons' or 'echo chambers' in which a particular ideas bounce across the Web without meeting significant challenge (Sunstein 2007, p. 217).[2] For present purposes, however, the accounts above simply indicate the necessity for activists to integrate and prioritize information technology in their everyday lives. The particular limitations of uptake of Internet technologies on which I focus below are those that emerged from interviewees' frequent contrasts of computer mediated communications with the need for political interactions to be conducted in person.

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, and one F365 activist described 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, neither an online discussion forum, nor a commenting system would be included because 'if people want to comment on it, I would rather that they did it in a letter to their local paper ... that will reach a broader audience... [and] would be a more effective campaigning tool than if it was on our website' (Adam Conway, F365). Since organizations' own websites are seen to be 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.

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 the movement organizations represented in our study 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 organized. Similarly Kate Hudson distinguished between a 'campaigning' and 'information organization'. As chair of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament she clearly prioritised the former role for their website: while 'as accurate and up-to-date as possible' it does not set out to be 'the last word in scientific information'; rather it aims to be 'the last word in campaigning effectively on nuclear weapons'.

A further issue is that lack of control of what is posted can prove problematic for an organization which seeks to present a coherent and consistent message. This problem may not be entirely averted through not hosting interactive systems, however. 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. To some extent such use of hyperlinks to general information sources (which, below, will be shown to be widespread) mitigates against the problem of online echo chambers noted above.

Two further issues relate to activists' sensitivity to the limited nature of computer mediated communication *per se*. First, 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 'electronic resources are really important in organizing.... But also it's equally important to come to meetings... where we see each other face-to-face, because it's really hard to bounce ideas off each other through emails' (Maya Evans, JNV). In terms of mobilization,

> 'the most effective thing is actually to speak to people… even emailing specifics – "dear Kevin we met once at a bus-stop and would you like to come and take part in this" - doesn't actually work, I've got to phone you up and say "hey, remember this"… and it's actually personal contact works much better to get those initial meetings together.' (Jane Tallents)

The second limitation in CMC relates to the more organizational 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 decisions made via CMC could only be simple ones. Examples included deciding on who would book a room for a meeting or event, or finding a 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 or able to use particular technologies. Second, the different timescales of email discussions would make it very difficult to know if everyone relevant to a decision had really been involved, 'there is one of our members who tends to read her emails but doesn't respond very much so someone phones and checks in with her' (Jane Tallents). 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: 'it's partly the feeling… you just don't get quite the same connection as you can get with a face-to-face… that you need for creative policy making. It is a discreet-step discussion, you don't quite get that free flowing thing.' (Adam Conway). 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.

While it is appropriate to see anti-war activism as intensely informational, uptake of the most sophisticated Internet technologies is actually quite limited. By comparison, other UK movements appear more focused on making use of the most innovative technologies. Parts of the social forum movement, for instance, have 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.[3] Growing out of the anti-globalization movement, the globe-spanning network of Independent Media Collectives have created open publishing websites which offer instantly updateable user created content that ranges from written stories to still photographs, audio and video (Pickerill 2007). Growing since 1999 these websites certainly predated the moment that 'Web 2.0' became a buzzword yet offer 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 other citizen-oriented sites such as www.faxyourmp.com; on their own organizational sites, however, the more sophisticated technologies these sites exemplify are largely absent.

The presence of concerns expressed in this section may go some way to explaining recalcitrance in relation to more sophisticated Web technology. A further pertinent feature of contemporary

anti-war activism is also connected to these expressions of the limitations of CMC. Most groups involved in UK anti-war activities are primarily focused on action at the national scale of contention. To be sure, the impressive international coordination of major demonstrations – most obviously that on 15 February 2003 – has at times required organizational work across national borders. But to extrapolate from these moments to describe anti-war activism as transnational would be to ignore the typical modus operandi of activists' everyday work (c.f. Tarrow 2005). 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' (David Gee, Quakers). Yet the Quakers are one of the more international groups of the anti-war organizations 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 with other group: '[StWC] 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 office manager and website developer). *Peace News* has even made a recent shift in focus from a theoretical and internationally-oriented magazine to a newspaper focused predominantly on British activism in order to 'connect with what was actually going on' (Ippy).

To compare, again, with the period of contention against neoliberal globalization, contemporary anti-war movements may actually be less international than their precursors. Anti-globalization activists travelled from country to country, opposing the meetings of inherently transnational bodies such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund. They developed their own international organisations such as People's Global Action, which developed from meetings in Mexico, before further meetings in Spain and then India drew activists from across the globe (Wood 2005). By contrast, anti-war contention is typified by organizations mobilizing constituents at home with demands often specified in relation to their own national policies. While some international coordination has certainly taken place, no specifically transnational organizations have arisen to ensure continuity of that coordination. Naturally, these points raise some issues beyond the scope of this article (for detail, see Gillan, Pickerill and Webster 2008, ch. 5). The key purpose here is to indicate that even while Internet technologies have been taken up extensively across anti-war movement groups in the UK, these are most typically blended with face-to-face activities that are very often focused on the domestic political arena. As will be described below, viewing anti-war activism through its online manifestations offers a rather different picture.

Structuring the Anti War Movement Online

This section outlines the current shape of the UK anti-war movement as it appears online. By following a procedure to map the online anti-war network, as constructed through hyperlinks between websites, we gain two valuable possibilities for interpretation. First, we can examine the anti-war movement as it is experienced by those who encounter it online. As outlined in the introduction to this article, core anti-war activists make increasing use of Internet-based sources of information to learn about the political issues that motivate their action and the potential ways in which they might act. It is reasonable to suppose that other interested parties – journalists, security services, potential participants – also first encounter anti-war movements on the Web. As such, understanding the character of the movement as it appears online is a vital first step to understanding the relationships within which the movement is situated. Second, the structure of hyperlinks in the anti-war online network is the result of conscious decisions by anti-war website authors. Since the latter are typically anti-war activists, rather than professional web developers, hyperlinks are a way to examine the informational preferences of a relevant subset of anti-war activists. These two modes of interpretation will enable the conclusion of this article to identify the particular roles of Internet technologies within the broader processes of anti-war activism.

Describing the Online Movement

The World Wide Web is fundamentally founded on hyperlinks to connect discrete structures of information (Berners-Lee 2000, pp.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, p.2). It is on this basis that, referring to 'issue networks' rather than 'web spheres', Richard Rogers and colleagues have developed a piece of software for the analysis of linked websites.[4] The Issue Crawler programme scans a seed set of websites input by the user, logging hyperlinks at each site. It then follows each hyperlink and examines 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.

In October 2006 Issue Crawler was used in order to map anti-war movement websites. Thirty-four websites were chosen as starting points, or a seed set, that had been 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 current, having been updated in the last six months. The seed set contains only sites that (implicitly or explicitly) promote involvement in political protest. Sites containing anti-war views, but without any implication of involvement in protest, such as weblogs and news sites, were excluded. Sites that represented specifically local or regional sections of national organizations, and sites that could not be identified as UK-based, were also excluded.

The software returned a list of 100 websites that were considered core members of the issue 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, despite the fact that their focus is not directly anti-war, is likely because they are a professionally organized 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 organizations represented become quite mixed. We immediately see representation of a governance institutions (UN), a research organization 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 organizations represented at the heart of the anti-war issue network is represented throughout the broader network of 100 websites.

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

Website URL	Website Name	Rank	In-links[5]
cnduk.org	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	1	32
stopwar.org.uk	Stop the War Coalition	2	22
caat.org.uk	Campaign Against the Arms Trade	3	22
un.org	United Nations	4	21
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
networkforpeace.org.uk	Network For Peace	10[6]	18
voicesuk.org	Voices in the Wilderness UK	11	17

Diversity within the Issue Network

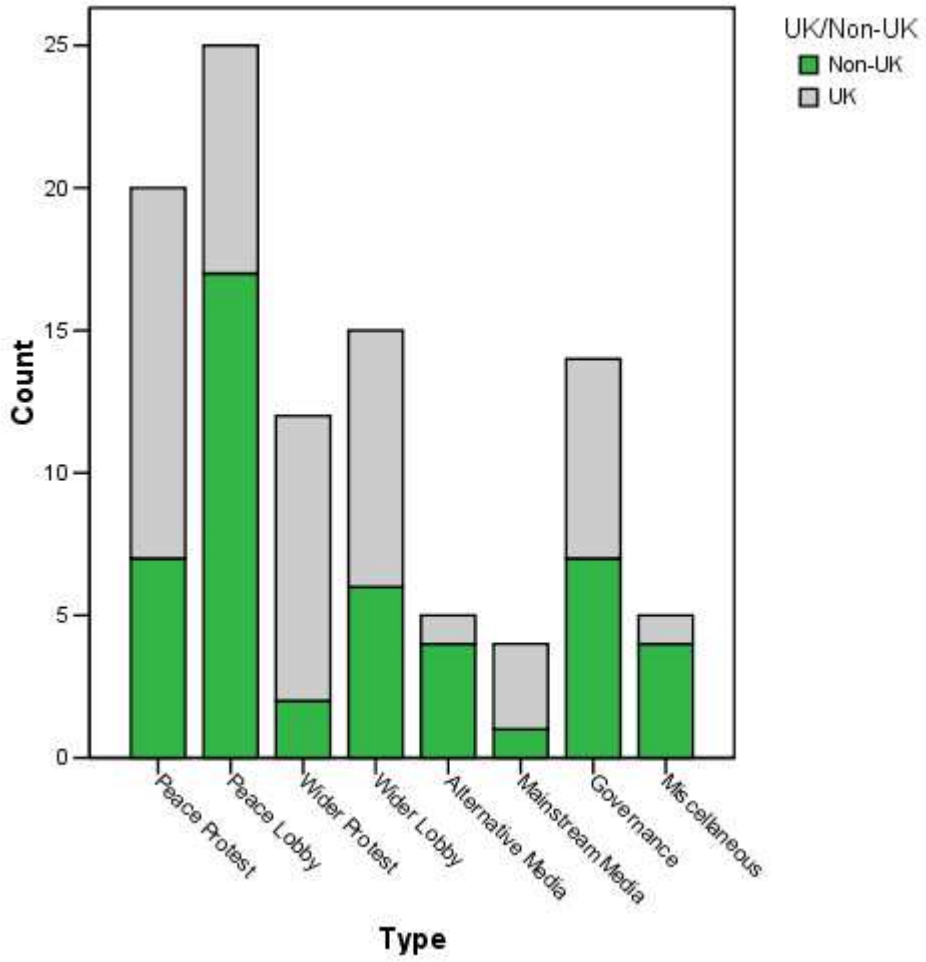
The content of each site in the issue network was manually coded as to its apparent purpose and its geographical focus. For present purposes geographical focus is divided simply into UK and non-UK. The latter category includes sites that are clearly international in their focus and those that focus on 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 offers definitions of these four key terms. In addition, there were many non-movement sites in the issue network, and these were categorized as being involved in governance, mainstream media, alternative media or were assigned to a small 'miscellaneous' category.

Table 2 – Key Coding Definitions

	Protest	**Lobby**
Peace	'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. '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.	'Peace' websites were defined as left. '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.
Wider Issues	Websites that had broader foci than 'Peace' as defined above were included in this group; notably this included organizations primarily oriented to issues of environment and development. 'Protest' websites defined as above.	Websites with broader foci, as defined left. 'Lobby' as defined above.

Figure 1 gives us an idea of the structure of the anti-war issue network. While we began with predominantly UK based, protest-oriented websites, the process resulted in a diversity of sites. Peace protest and peace lobby sites are the largest categories and together make up 45 per cent 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 (thirteen of twenty), most peace lobby sites are focused on the US (seventeen of twenty-five). 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 examines in-degree 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 websites and those with either an international or US focus has very little effect.

By utilizing 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 network more often than the others. The gap between this figure and that for 'Alternative Media' sites is explained partly by a small number of peace protest organizations with very high in-link counts at the top of the list (CND, thirty-two; StWC, twenty-two; and CAAT, twenty-two) 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 thirteen 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 summarize this finding, a small number of 'Alternative Media' sites are linked to by many other sites related to the anti-war movement. Additionally, the relative positions of 'Mainstream Media' and 'Alternative Media' in the list show, within the online anti-war network, a markedly more concentrated set of preferences for the latter.

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

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

In general, Table 4 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.

Overall, this description of the structure of the anti-war issue network online offers a better understanding of activists' informational preferences. When creating hyperlinks, web authors make significant use of more general informational sites, including those that may contradict their own groups' views. In comparing news sources there appears to be a marked preference for a small set of alternative media sites, which tend to be those focused on oppositional political activities. In linking to potential allies represented on protest and lobby group websites there is little distinction made between different groups' apparent political strategies or their geographic locus of action.

Conclusions

Anti-war activists' day-to-day lives 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 organizations that are politically diverse and geographically dispersed. To a significant degree, this contrasts with the organizational structures of the relevant groups.

Demonstrating this contrast between off- and online structures of relationships allows two key conclusions. First, following Ester and Vinken's contention, quoted in the introduction, that the important questions about the Internet concern its ability to constitute the way people experience the world, we must be aware of the differences in experience represented off- and online. These are not, to be sure, entirely separable arenas. Nevertheless, the material presented above demonstrates that for those encountering the anti-war movement first and foremost on the web, it appears more transnationally composed and politically integrated than for those encountering it offline. Second, this contrast indicates precisely what additional benefit may be gained by the uptake of Internet technologies. Many of the benefits cited by activists are, as described early in this article, essentially concerned with gaining efficiency in carrying out traditional social movement tasks. However, the uptake of Internet technologies clearly offers some new potential. Even where expending resources on maintaining concrete collaboration across boundaries of space or strategy may be impracticable or undesirable, online connections offer informational links across these borders. The hyperlink practices of anti-war website authors clearly display a preference for the creation of such links, with the result that an alternative information environment is constructed around anti-war issues that is broader in composition than that typically encountered in the physical spaces of anti-war activism. What is new about the uptake of Internet technologies for anti-war activists is, therefore, precisely this ability to cross borders.

Endnotes

1. This paper draws on the research project, Internet Activism: Anti-War Movements in the Information Age, being carried out with Prof. Frank Webster and Dr Jenny Pickerill. The project is funded by the ESRC (RES-228-25-0060). Further information is available at http://www.antiwarresearch.info.

2. For a full discussion of the dangers of information overload and informational cocoons, and the strategies anti-war activists have developed to cope with them, see Gillan, Pickerill and Webster (2008, ch.6).

3. Wiki technology is exemplified at www.wikipedia.org. Examples from the social forum movement include the alternative website of the third European Social Forum (http://www.altspaces.net), which was born from a critique of the non-inclusive nature of the event's official website and the Sheffield Social Forum Wiki (http://wiki.sheffieldsocialforum.org.uk) which has long outlived the existence of the group that set it up. Wiki technologies have been integrated into the ESF process through the collaborative website OpenESF (http://openesf.net).

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

5. '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.

6. The ninth ranking website appeared as 'Locata', which 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.

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