The Restructuring and Re-Orientation of Civil Society in a Web 2.0 World: A Case Study of Greenpeace

Kiru Pillay, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Manoj Maharaj, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how civil society organisations strategically deploy Web 2.0 technologies for transnational social advocacy and the impact of this technology adoption on civil society organisations' roles, structure, and orientation. The global environmental justice organisation, Greenpeace is used as a case study. Greenpeace advocates for changes in environmental policy and behaviour, has been at the forefront of environmental issues, and has used the mass media as an effective campaigning tool. The key findings that emerged was that social media has become a key ingredient of Greenpeace’s campaigning strategy and has been embraced at both a strategic and operational level. The emergence of a collaborative communications paradigm has necessitated a level of organisational introspection evidenced in both changes in the organisation’s strategic planning processes and changes to the organisational structure.

Keywords: Advocacy, Civil Society, Public Sphere, Social Media, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has evolved into the de facto technology platform for civil society organisations (CSOs) and other spontaneously forming social movements, from which to challenge oppressive regimes, repressive governments, kleptocracies and powerful corporates. A report by the United Nations (United Nations, 2011) states:

.... the Internet is one of the most powerful instruments of the 21st century for increasing transparency in the conduct of the powerful, access to information, and for facilitating active citizen participation in building democratic societies.
In the last two decades CSOs have effectively engaged with the Internet in order to circumvent obstacles that exist in both national and transnational advocacy campaigning. The Internet, according to Hara & Shachaf (2008) allows CSOs to run sustainable campaigns that transcend geographic considerations and cultural sensitivities, which in turn makes it easier for the general public to become active advocacy participants and collaborators.

The late eighties saw an increase in use of technology by CSOs, which was at first limited to the use of email and newsgroups (Pickerill, 2006). These initial attempts at assimilating technology were largely the work of a network of tech-savvy volunteers in what Deibert & Rohozinski (2008) term ‘basement operations’. However the obvious advantages of a technology-centric approach meant that by the end of the 1980’s CSOs had begun developing communication strategies that saw technology, and the Internet in particular, at the centre of their advocacy campaigning. According to Nugroho & Tampubolon (2008) the reinvention of global civil society is in large part due to the advent of the Internet and other technological advances.

The Internet facilitates meaningful interactions between geographically dispersed CSOs and individuals and also simplifies the networking and mobilising functions of CSOs (Montanari & Saberi, 2010; Selian, 2002). Furthermore, the structure of the Internet provides CSOs the opportunity both for communication within organisations and also the ability to craft a more nuanced message to the public. The current emerging expressions of global advocacy are almost always aligned with an Internet presence, which in turn projects freshness and innovation.

**CONTENTIOUS POLITICS ON THE NET**

As far back as 1992 Waterman (1992) used the term ‘Fifth International’ to describe emerging computer-mediated activism that was qualitatively different from anything that had gone before; fast-forward to 2010 and Waterman (2010) states:

*Information and communication technology (ICT) is not simply a tool (a hammer, a sickle, a gun, a vaccine), nor simply an existing community (The Hague, the Andes, trade unionists, women, Marxists). It is also utopia – a non-existing but desirable place or space to be constructed by those interested and capable. The Web is where capitalism increasingly lives and governs, and where increasing radical-democratic struggle occurs.*

Many social activists cite the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as being the first successful exploitation of the Internet by CSOs, which resulted in fundamental improvements in organisational and networking capabilities (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2008). The formal conference was mirrored by an alternate informal conference called ‘the Global Forum’, enabled by the extensive participation of geographically dispersed global civil society groups, which was part street fair / trade show and part political demonstration (Parson, Haas & Levy, 1992). The Global Forum provided a platform for a diverse mixture of activists and activism to flourish, all of which served to deepen and strengthen activist networks. Hass (1992) contends that is spite of twenty years of civil society involvement in UN conferences, the Rio summit was a catalyst for the most sophisticated level of civil society activism ever seen till then.

While the Earth Summit is recognised by many as a watershed moment in technology-based activism, other civil society activists trace their technology roots to the 1994 campaigns against the Mexican government by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Based in Chiapas, southern Mexico, the Zapatistas occupied several Mexican cities as part of a broader land restoration and human rights campaign for the indigenous community. Although outnumbered and militarily
Cyberspace as a Complex Adaptive System and the Policy and Operational Implications for Cyberwarfare

The Improved LSTM and CNN Models for DDoS Attacks Prediction in Social Media
[www.igi-global.com/article/the-improved-lstm-and-cnn-models-for-ddos-attacks-prediction-in-social-media/224946?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/the-improved-lstm-and-cnn-models-for-ddos-attacks-prediction-in-social-media/224946?camid=4v1a)