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Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity

ANDREW CHADWICK

This article is driven by two interrelated questions. First, is the Internet enabling organizational change among traditional interest groups and political parties, such that they are starting to resemble the looser network forms characteristic of social movements? Second, what role is the Internet playing in new, conceptually intriguing citizen organizations such as MoveOn, the U.S.-based but internationally oriented entity? I develop the concept of repertoires to argue that the Internet encourages “organizational hybridity.” This captures two trends. First, established interest groups and parties are experiencing processes of hybridization based on the selective transplantation and adaptation of digital network repertoires previously considered typical of social movements. Second, new organizational forms are emerging that exist only in hybrid form and that could not function in the ways that they do without the Internet and the complex spatial and temporal interactions it facilitates. These “hybrid mobilization movements” (including MoveOn, the example considered here) blend repertoires typically associated with all three organizational types—parties, interest groups, and social movements. Moreover, I suggest that fast “repertoire switches,” spatially—between online and offline realms, and temporally—within and between campaigns, are emerging characteristics of contemporary political mobilization.

Keywords Internet, hybridity, mobilization, organizations, campaigns, social movements, political parties, interest groups, digital network repertoires, blogs

Political scientists have long drawn distinctions between parties, interest groups, and social movements. Differences have been mapped along several dimensions, but they have usually been based upon perceived variations in the levels and foci of participation and influence. However, in the last decade or so, some authors have suggested that the utility of this distinction is in decline: Parties, interest groups, and social movements’ organizational features and policy impacts appear to be converging, and neat distinctions are rare in the empirical literature (Burstein, 1998; Burstein & Linton,

An earlier version of this article was presented to a panel on “The Internet and Political Mobilization” at the UK Political Studies Association Annual Conference at Leeds, April 5, 2005 (see <http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2005/Chadwick.pdf>). I would like to thank the conference participants and four anonymous referees for helpful comments and suggestions that have greatly improved the article. Any errors or shortcomings are, of course, my own. Some of the illustrative examples herein are covered in chapters 6 and 7 of my (2006) book, *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies* (New York: Oxford University Press).

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2002; Davis et al., 2005). In their review article, Paul Burstein and April Linton found little evidence that the classic distinctions helped us make sense of what parties, groups, and movements actually *look like* or what they *do*, because the boundaries between them have become blurred (2002, p. 12). Similarly, Doug McAdam and W. Richard Scott (2005, pp. 5–6) recently suggested that the study of organizational *structures* may fruitfully be married with the traditional social movement scholar's emphasis on looser social and political *processes*. Meanwhile, Lori Brainard and Patricia Siplon's recent study of the impact of the Internet on health care campaigners convincingly argues that interest groups and social movements are best situated on a generic continuum of organizations that mobilize (2002, p. 145). More radically, Andrew Flanagin, Cynthia Stohl, and Bruce Bimber have called for a rethinking of collective action theory, specifically a move toward "emphasizing what people are doing, how they are relating to one another, and what opportunities are afforded them, and from these examining what organization and structure fit their behavior and help facilitate collective action" (2006, p. 39).

Perhaps more helpful, therefore, is an assumption that parties, interest groups, and social movements can and do borrow from each other's typical organizational and mobilization repertoires. I want to extend these new lines of research by suggesting that the Internet, by creating an environment where rapid institutional adaptation and experimentation is almost routine, encourages "organizational hybridity."

This article is thus driven by two interrelated questions. First, is the Internet enabling organizational change among traditional interest groups and political parties, such that they are starting to resemble the looser network forms characteristic of social movements? Second, what role is the Internet playing in new, conceptually intriguing citizen organizations such as the U.S.-based but internationally oriented entity named MoveOn?

My concept of organizational hybridity aims to capture two trends. First, established interest groups and parties are experiencing processes of hybridization based on the selective transplantation and adaptation of digital network repertoires previously considered typical of social movement mobilizations first observed during the 1990s and early 2000s. These repertoires come under four principal conceptual headings, namely: creating, appealing and increasingly convergent forms of online citizen action, fostering distributed trust across horizontally linked citizen groups, promoting the fusion of subcultural and political discourses, and creating and building upon sedimentary networks.

Second, genuinely new organizational types are emerging, such as MoveOn, which I term a hybrid mobilization movement. MoveOn sometimes behaves like an interest group, sometimes like a social movement, sometimes like the wing of a traditional party during an election campaign. Such organizational types could not work without the Internet because the technologies set up complex interactions between the online and offline environment and the organizational flexibility required for fast "repertoire switching" within a single campaign or from one campaign to the next.

The concept of organizational hybridity (Chadwick, 2005) illustrates some of the differences the Internet is making to the evolution of political mobilization. My approach throughout is to try to illustrate with empirical examples what is essentially a conceptual exploration. For reasons of space, this article focuses primarily upon the national context of the contemporary United States. Even then, as we shall see, it is increasingly difficult to define what is meant by "national" when we consider that an organization such as MoveOn has around 700,000 supporters overseas.

Repertoires

The approach here is situated in the context of an established tradition in social movement literature of thinking about repertoires of collective action. The concept refers to how the organizational form and tactics of an organization, such as the way it makes decisions, appeals to its supporters, and campaigns, have elective affinities with its broader goals (Tilly, 1978; see also Traugott, 1995; Tarrow, 1998; Melucci, 1989, pp. 206–207). Consider Charles Tilly's original concept of repertoire:

The word *repertoire* identifies a limited set of routines that are learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice. Repertoires are learned cultural creations.... People learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, and organize special-interest associations. At any particular point in history, however, they learn only a rather small number of alternative ways to act collectively.... The existing repertoire constrains collective action; far from the image we sometimes hold of mindless crowds, people tend to act within known limits, to innovate at the margins of existing forms, and to miss many opportunities available to them in principle. That constraint results in part from the advantages of familiarity, partly from the investment of second and third parties in the established forms of collective action. (Tilly, 1995, p. 26; 1986, pp. 390–391)

Repertoires play a role in sustaining collective identity. They are not simply neutral tools to be adopted at will, but come to shape what it *means* to be a participant in a political organization. Values shape repertoires of collective action, which in turn shape the kind adoption of organizational forms.

Different political organizations adopt different repertoires depending upon their position and goals within a political system. Parties use repertoires associated with the goals of national government formation. Their mainstream respectability derives from their broad adherence to electoral and parliamentary rules, established norms of hierarchical organization, election campaigning, and conduct in office. Typically, to belong to a party and campaign as a party member or representative constrains the types of behavior in which it is considered acceptable to engage. Interest groups typically use repertoires that enable them to exert pressure on mostly national, sometimes transnational, policy elites, usually without the need for mass mobilization. Their acceptance derives from hierarchical organizational models and adherence to parliamentary rules and established norms of conduct relating to lobbying, consultation, and often policy implementation.

While it has been suggested that it is impossible to generalize about the organizational forms and repertoires adopted by social movements, there is some degree of consensus that they have been characterized by democratic experimentalism (McCarthy, 1996) and, more recently, transnational coordination (Tarrow, 1998 pp. 176–195). Social movements typically eschew hierarchy, and depend upon mass mobilization to achieve their aims because they have usually been excluded from participation in mainstream channels or because they have deliberately sought to work outside the system to avoid cooption. Typically, participants in social movements have encouraged methods of organization and decision making that are self-consciously nonhierarchical, consensual, and participatory. Some recent research suggests a symbiosis between such democratic experimentalism and

Internet technologies in, for example, transnational environmental movements (Pickerill, 2003, 2004). For the participants in such movements, the way they structure their political action has elective affinities with their ideological goals; repertoires reflect the organization's values, and the "medium is the message."

Starting from a different perspective, others suggest that it is not so much the affinity between ideology, technology, and organization as it is the blurring of boundaries between private and public forms of action. Individuals now create loose networks based upon public information goods such as online forums, blogs, and databases without initial reference to specific goals. They publicize resources such as e-mail distribution lists or group chat logs that were first created in essentially private or semiprivate contexts (Bimber et al., 2005, p. 377). The key point here is that traditional theories only account for part of what it means to participate in collective action repertoires in the Internet era. As Andrew Flanagin, Cynthia Stohl, and Bruce Bimber (2006, p. 30) argue:

Instances of collective action that might be labeled "classic" in a theoretical sense, such as joining interest groups or voting, are accompanied now by a variety of new kinds of actions. These include self-organized protests and political actions in the absence of an interest group or other central coordinators, affiliation with a wide array of online organizations outside of formal "membership" procedures and incentives, and a vast scale of personal, voluntarily contributed informational goods for public use through the creation of web content.

The outcome is that some political organizations now simultaneously exhibit quite diverse ways of organizing and mobilizing, mashing together online and offline efforts, combining narrowly channeled actions with looser ones, and crossing national boundaries while organizing town square fundraisers. This renders them "hybrid organizational types" (Chadwick, 2005, p. 8). In the recently published lexicon of Flanagin et al., political organizations are now blending modes of engagement on a continuum from "entrepreneurial" (without hierarchy and central direction) to "institutional" (with hierarchy and central direction), with modes of interaction ranging from "personal" (face to face) to impersonal (mediated). As such, they occupy relatively large and conceptually intriguing "footprints" in what they term the "collective action space" (2006, p. 39).

We need, therefore, to think about what I term digital network repertoires of collective action.¹ Digital network repertoires, first developed during the social movement mobilizations involving an online element in the 1990s and early 2000s, are now being adopted by more staid interest groups as well as those involved in party election campaigns.

I want to suggest that traditional interest groups and parties are experiencing Internet-fueled increases in grassroots influence in ways that social movements now take for granted as part of their nonhierarchical, "medium is the message" approach. Social movements, particularly the anti-globalization movement, in many respects pioneered using the Internet for mobilization and coordination during the mid-1990s. But, increasingly, there are signs that traditionally more hierarchical, less "innovative" organizations—interest groups and political parties—are beginning to adopt (and adapt) these digital network repertoires. In addition, potentially even more radical organizational types are emerging, such as MoveOn, which blends repertoires or quickly switches from one set to another. When it comes to Internet-enabled collective action, imitation is a part of innovation. The outcome is best conceptualized as organizational hybridity.

Digital Network Repertoires as Drivers of Organizational Hybridity

What are digital network repertoires and how are they driving organizational hybridity? I suggest that this may be understood in four principal ways: creating appealing and increasingly convergent forms of online citizen action, fostering distributed trust across horizontally linked citizen groups, fusing subcultural and political discourses, and creating and building upon sedimentary online networks. Throughout the discussion that follows, I attempt to show how social movements' digital network repertoires are increasingly finding their way into interest groups and parties.

Creating Appealing and Increasingly Convergent Forms of Online Citizen Action

There have been important shifts in the online political environment since the early days of the Internet's diffusion in the mid-1990s. The online environment now provides citizens with opportunities to organize their offline engagement in campaigns through physical attendance at rallies and fundraising events, but it also provides a potentially rich number of solely online political actions: e-mail, chat, discussion forums, blogs, instant messaging, content management, quick fire donation drives, ratings systems, and other forms of "social software" (Schneider & Foot, 2002).

The majority of these online actions did not emerge out of thin air but are descendants of the transnational social movement mobilizations of the 1990s and early 2000s. These typically went beyond the simple "brochureware" approach to Web presence dominant at the time. Campaigns such as the global network supporting Mexico's Zapatistas, the protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle, and the J18 anti-globalization protests in 1999 not only used Web sites to provide basic information, they also attempted to create active networks of supporters. They used discussion forums, prototype blogs, e-mail lists, instant messaging, online donations, and volunteer audio and video to organize but also to demonstrate commitment to a participatory ethos that went against the slick and controlled presentationalism of emerging mainstream media and government Web sites. They also encouraged "hacktivism" through software tools such as Tactical FloodNet, which allows individuals acting in concert to bring down Web servers by bombarding them with multiple page requests (Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Vegh, 2003). The do-it-yourself nature of these campaigns created a range of different opportunities for citizens to match their real space meetings and marches with online equivalents.

A key point here is not only that the qualitative distinction between being a citizen offline and online has started to erode, but also the ways in which it is possible to be a citizen online (technologically) are increasingly similar, across what would normally be seen as quite different organizational types.

Environmental Defense, set up as the Environmental Defense Fund in 1967, provides a good example of how interest groups are now encouraging citizens to use a wide range of digital network repertoires. In 1998 it had a staff of 170, a membership of 300,000, and an annual budget of \$24 million. Until recently, it specialized not in citizen mobilization but litigation and congressional lobbying. The old Environmental Defense Fund was certainly not a social movement organization (Bimber, 2003, p. 138).

In recent years, however, the group has reinvented itself to capitalize on the Internet's capacity for recruitment and mobilization, augmenting its strategies with one more typical of a social movement. In 1999, the group's leadership launched a new Web site and radically slimmed down its core staff to just 20–25 full and part timers, effectively becoming a grassroots organization with a Web-based goal of information gathering and dissemination,

together with a new concept of membership. The group used its Web site to find out what its members and other nonmember supporters perceived to be high-priority environmental concerns and then focused its activities around a set of core themes such as clean air and pesticides.

Rather than focus solely on its full members, however, the group used the Web site to reach out to citizens wanting information on a specific issue as well as those who were only willing to volunteer help on specific campaigns. This quickly led to a reassessment of what it means to be a “member” or a “supporter” among the broader environmental movement. Now, as Bimber puts it, most environmental groups are “operating with two distinct classes of membership”: New cohorts of “affiliate” members sit alongside traditional dues-paying members. The new cohorts are not required or even expected to make financial contributions but are drawn upon for specific online campaigns. The reduction in membership revenues was thus balanced by the reduction in the costs of mobilizing support on specific issues. Environmental Defense is now able to use its database to target specific groups of traditional and affiliate members (Bimber, 2003, pp. 144, 146). It also has a more pluralistic approach to mobilization, and it tends to downplay formal organizational participation in favor of asking those who have expressed an interest in a particular issue to respond to calls for action, as in 2001, when it requested that a carefully selected group of 8,000 of its 130,000 affiliate members lobby the White House in protest of new proposals on carbon dioxide emissions. In the same year, the group generated 12,000 faxes and e-mails to the Environmental Protection Agency in response to a successful call for action against proposals for relaxing rules on diesel fuel.

In a similar vein, MoveOn asks for volunteers and donations in its e-mail newsletters and occasionally uses the term “member” to refer to its supporters, but there is no fixed annual membership fee nor is there a formalized local branch structure to maintain. An online Action Forum—a cross between a blog, a discussion board, and an online rating mechanism—provides activists with a loose, decentralized but still credible forum to discuss issues and prioritize future campaigns.

The 2004 U.S. presidential campaign also revealed a new willingness among party strategists to use a wider range of interactive Internet technologies (Chadwick, 2005). They went beyond the simple brochureware approach of previous elections and used the Internet to foster collaboration and interaction between the grassroots and the leadership. The primary and presidential candidates used the net to bring people together in offline meetings, largely through a once-obscure Web site called Meetup.com. The purpose of Meetup was very simple. Rather than using the Web solely to bring people together in virtual communities, the plan was to get them to also meet in physical locations. Individuals could register their names and locations on the site and establish local Meetup groups based on their interests. Scott Heiferman, the company’s founder, who had been inspired by Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* thesis (2000), saw Meetup as a way of using the Internet to create real world social networks (Wolf, 2004). In February 2003, no more than a few hundred attended five meetups. But within a month, political blog sites had started to publicize the campaign. In March 2003, there were 79 meetups in 14 cities across the U.S. (Dodson & Hammersley, 2003). By the end of the year, the Dean group on Meetup had 140,000 members, there were 800 meetings scheduled for the month of December (Wolf, 2004), and around 2,000 comments a day were being posted to the official Dean blog (Gillmor, 2004, p. 97; McCullagh, 2004).

Joe Trippi, Dean’s campaign manager, purchased software tools from Convio, an Austin, Texas, company that specializes in “online constituent relationship management,” essentially database and messaging technologies aimed at nonprofit organizations. In early

2003, many nonprofit groups started to notice sizeable increases in their online donations (Hardy, 2004). The Dean campaign wanted to capitalize on what it saw as a new willingness by people to donate money, contribute to discussion, and keep informed about campaigns through more interactive methods, particularly e-mail lists and discussion forums. Borrowing methods from nonprofit groups to mobilize support for a Democratic party primary candidate, in addition to using Meetup, were the first inklings of the hybrid organization that the Dean campaign was forming.

Dean failed to secure the nomination and the campaign was always an uneasy combination of top-down “war room” style management and bottom-up “netroots” mobilization. The shift away from the netroots in the lead-up to the first primary caucus in Iowa in January 2004, exhibited by the fact that the vast majority of the online donations were spent on television advertising, points to some of the risks of borrowing social movement repertoires from the perspective of seasoned “television-era” campaign professionals. Nevertheless, the new style of campaigning did have some impact during the remainder of the campaign. By the end of the primary voting season, the other main Democratic contenders, especially John Kerry and John Edwards, had borrowed many features from Trippi’s Internet strategy. They had blogs and a presence on Meetup, and started to bring in online donations—many from former Dean supporters. Once Kerry secured the party nomination, through the spring and summer of 2004, the bloggers rallied, the online discussion forums on his site proliferated, and the general intensity of online campaigning increased—as did the campaign funds.

Indeed, probably the most significant online citizen action during the 2004 presidential campaign was fundraising. For example, the day following Al Gore’s public backing of Dean in early December 2003, the Dean Web site placed a button on its home page asking supporters to “thank Al” by donating money. In 4 days, that site feature alone raised half a million dollars (Dodson & Hammersley, 2003). Gathering accurate data in this area is very difficult, but there is evidence to suggest that Dean secured large numbers of small donations (McCullagh, 2004). It has been calculated that at one stage 280,000 individuals had contributed to a \$40 million running total (a Democratic party primaries record), which made the average contribution \$143 (Singel, 2004). Some \$82 million of Kerry’s funds—more than a third of his individual total—was raised online (Justice, 2004a, 2004b). During just one day in late July 2004, Kerry raised \$5.7 million via Internet donations (Justice, 2004b).

Fostering Distributed Trust Across Horizontally Linked Citizen Groups

Since the mid-1990s, Internet mobilization has often taken a distinctively transnational form (Bennett, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005; Van de Donk et al. 2004). The globalization of public policy concerns, whether perceived or real, has opened up new spaces for nongovernmental actors to press for change in an increasingly fluid spacial and temporal environment. In this kind of context, collaboration among disparate networks of groups and social movements has necessitated a syncretic strategy: Loose alliances of groups are often able to use the Internet to link up and simultaneously mobilize and focus their efforts on different levels of politics, seamlessly shifting from the national to the transnational (Bennett, 2003a). A rich and expanding collection of social movement literature is based around the discussion of collective action frames, or how, in the words of Robert Benford and David Snow, “signifying work or meaning construction” takes place (2000, p. 614). Of relevance here is the concept of “master frames” (Snow & Benford, 1992), or how “actors must not only

organizationally link and coordinate a heterogeneous set of groups, but also integrate them ideologically” (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992, p. 574). However, ideological coherence is not always as important for mobilization as networks that provide basic “linkage to external recipients” (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992, p. 583).

Consider the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC), which summarizes this organizational approach as follows:

The creation of the “international movement for democratic control of financial markets and their institutions”... forms a network, with neither “hierarchical” structures nor a geographical “center.” Pluralist, it is enriched by the variety of its components and makes the common action easier without limiting it in any way.... It aims to reinforce, to link and to coordinate, at an international level, the contribution of all of its partners who see themselves as fitting within the structure of its platform. In the same way, it wishes to reinforce its cooperation with all the other networks whose objectives converge with its own. (ATTAC International, 2006)

In their analysis of the 1999 “Carnival Against Capital” protests, Alan Scott and John Street (2000) use the term “organized spontaneity” to capture the role played by new media in a paradoxical blend of coordination and decentralization—almost leaderless and often temporary forms of organization that nevertheless display what popular science writer Steven Johnson (2001) has termed the “collective intelligence” of a united, purposive group.

Using the Internet to mobilize seems to require building online issue networks that consist of timely and credible sources of information. Such visible signs of online deliberation increase the trustworthiness of an organization because they give the appearance of collaborative endeavor and openness. In many cases of online mobilization, the information that builds trust is much less likely to be the product of a single, authoritative source. Instead, what emerges is what I have in the past termed “distributed trust”—a by-product of the discursive context of the issue network itself (Chadwick, 2005, pp. 15–17). Formal hierarchical means of mobilization in pursuit of specific goals are being augmented by forms of behavior. Examples include posting messages to online forums and collaboratively maintaining data repositories, e-mail lists, and blogs in which the information and communication resources required for mobilization are “happy accident” outcomes of countless small-scale individual contributions that may, when they were first produced, have had little in common by way of concrete goals. These activities have generally been obscured by the assumption within traditional collective action theory that individuals must consciously choose to organize in public and must usually be subject to bureaucratic organizational discipline to achieve specific goals. Such “second-order communal goods” (Bimber et al., 2005, pp. 371–373), often the product of individuals sharing “private” resources in the searchable public realm, are increasingly important for understanding how we theorize collective action in the Internet era. Digital network repertoires that seek to build distributed trust upon second-order communality are now moving into interest groups and parties.

Consider again Environmental Defense’s Internet-fueled organizational reinvention in the late 1990s. This made coalition building with other organizations much easier to achieve. In 1999, the group played a central role in the launch of a new Save Our Environment Coalition (Bimber, 2003, p. 147). Consisting of 16 national environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, and the World Wildlife Fund, the coalition

began by pooling its supporter databases and establishing a Web site, the Save Our Environment Action Center (Save Our Environment Coalition, 2004). The site takes the new model of “affiliate” membership to new heights. Citizens can join the network to receive information about campaigns by e-mail newsletter, or be called upon to sign petitions or write to their representatives, but the coalition only exists in a virtual, distributed network form. This illustrates how traditional, even staid, groups are changing their internal organization and building loose networks in previously untapped reservoirs of citizen support—in other words, the behaviors more often associated with social movements. It suggests the ways in which Internet technologies facilitate the bridging of organizational boundaries, often in very short periods of time, for the sake of a particular campaign. By reorganizing their efforts in this way, some groups are able to reduce costs and increase their operational flexibility. This allows poorly funded groups to behave as if they have greater resources than they in fact possess. They are able to build networks using e-mail and Web sites rather than pay for permanent official staff in central offices. They also blend, in hybrid fashion, the advantages of institutionally organized hierarchical modes of activity, both online and offline, that continue inside some of the constituent organizations with the looser, distributed networks that occur solely online (Flanagin et al., 2006, p. 43).

In many respects, this explains the impact of blogger networks in the 2004 U.S. presidential contests. The Dean campaign excelled at generating distributed trust (Chadwick, 2005). While blogs provided forums for political debate, they also served to galvanize existing supporters by giving the impression of a genuine grassroots campaign that differed from establishment party politics, or what Clay Shirky, in an attempt to capture its “beyond-party” nature, called “Deanspace” (Shirky, 2004).² This was not so much about the policies and persona of the candidate as it was the creation of “peer-to-peer politics” (Suellentrop, 2003): a range of online venues loosely meshed together through manual referral and automated linking technologies.

The Dean campaign was also adept at linking with other political groups and positioning itself in existing online political networks. Dean was supported by an extremely large network of bloggers. Foremost among these was Markos Moulitsas Zúniga’s *The Daily Kos*. By the spring of 2004, *The Daily Kos* was attracting 150,000 visitors per day (Zetter, 2004). These online volunteers banded together to form the “Dean Defense Force,” whose role was to send quick fire rebuttals to TV and newspaper editors accused of misleading coverage, and to establish some of their own autonomous and devolved mini-fundraising campaigns that fed into the central appeals at headquarters. The campaign team recognized early on that it could not possibly retain central control over the Meetups, and largely devolved this to Internet activists and local organizers. Dean said of Meetup: “They built our organization for us before we had an organization” (Wolf, 2004).

There is a broader point to be made about the recent turn toward greater citizen-to-candidate and citizen-to-citizen interactivity through blogs, online discussion forums, and so on. While the types of interaction and the quality of deliberation vary greatly, it is possible to generalize about the overall effects of such devices. A series of exchanges in a deliberative environment is likely to produce a more elaborate explanation and defense of policy than a simple presentational Web site (Stromer-Galley, 2000a). In a campaign that deliberately attempts to reach out to supporters through looser online networks, candidate responses are much more likely to be carefully interrogated. Turning a party campaign into a “space”—a loose network of supporters with potentially disparate interests and identities—is high risk.

One way of dealing with this risk of losing control of news management is to simply exclude discussion forums from an organization’s site (Stromer-Galley, 2000b). But how,

then, do we explain the proliferation of forums, candidate blogs, and real time chats that has recently occurred? It is possible that a different strategy for dealing with the loss of control also presents itself in the form of distancing—or “passing the buck” to participants in online deliberative environments. For example, in the 2004 presidential race, John Kerry’s site contained a relatively lively (though still moderated) online forum. Subdivided along policy lines, the forum contained a section on women’s issues that was dominated by discussions on abortion. Kerry’s position in the 2004 campaign was “pro-choice” though the details of his stance were rarely elaborated upon: a prime characteristic of candidate strategies on this issue in contemporary U.S. politics (Stromer-Galley, 2000a). At the same time, however, in the women’s issues discussion forum, supporters and opponents of Kerry were busy arguing among themselves in ways that revealed myriad positions, including discussing the technical requirements of the law. Kerry’s online team was, consciously or unconsciously, defusing the issue by allowing a genuine debate to take place on the Kerry site, but in such a way that did not jeopardize the official stance. Thus, what appears at first glance to be a high-risk strategy can actually work in a candidate’s favor; Kerry could give the impression of encouraging debate while still retaining his overall position. The costs of “losing control” may therefore be exaggerated. The Kerry blog turned the candidate’s campaign into a “venue”—a node in a trusted network rather than a single authoritative source. In this sense, it achieved its purpose as a repertoire for encouraging a perception of transparency and deliberation. The medium becomes the message, without jeopardizing the official policy stance.

Fusing Subcultural and Political Discourses

A common thread running through many of the earlier Internet mobilizations is the fusion of subcultural and political discourses (Bennett, 2004). Probably the best historical example of this aspect of digital network repertoires is the now famous case of MIT graduate student Jonah Peretti and his personal e-mail campaign against sportswear manufacturer Nike in the late 1990s (Peretti & Micheletti, 2004). The Nike sweatshop e-mails drew upon strategies that had been popularized by other cases of Internet “culture jamming.” In the late 1990s, privacy campaigners’ action against Intel’s decision to include unique hardware identifiers in the design of its Pentium III chip involved turning the company’s “Intel Inside” logo into one that read “Big Brother Inside.” Anti-Coca Cola “subvertisements” were created by a transnational group of media and advertising sector activists known as the Adbusters Media Foundation. Culture jamming has developed into an important subcurrent of social movements’ online strategies, not least because the activists involved are often drawn from the new media, graphic design, or advertising industries. Spurred on by the rediscovery and 1999 updating of the *First Things First Manifesto*—a statement by 1960s graphic designers critical of the ethical neutrality of the advertising industry—a number of anti-commercial campaigns such as “Buy Nothing Day” and the “Black Spot Sneaker Campaign” have been launched to skillfully tap into and subvert current advertising industry branding goals (Adbusters, 2004; Lasn, 2000; Meikle, 2002, pp. 131–134; Soar, 2002).

Of course, cultural politics are not only the preserve of progressive movements. In the U.S., the militia movement was an early innovator in such Internet campaigning repertoires. In Germany, the far right presents itself as a countercultural movement, and uses the net to appeal to youngsters. Neo-Nazi Web sites sell celebratory books, T-shirts, DVDs, CDs, and video games and host mp3 files produced by White supremacist musicians (Chroust, 2000, p. 116; Whine, 2000, pp. 239–242).

This fusion of online subcultural and political discourses is increasingly finding its way into party campaigns. Dean and MoveOn consistently used satirical graphics, audio, and video that attempt to tap into subcultural trends, such as the widespread sharing of “Photoshopped” pictures; humorous animated MPEG, Quicktime, and Shockwave Flash cartoons via e-mail; and personal “home movie” documentaries highlighting local policy issues. An excellent example is MoveOn’s “Bush in 30 seconds” competition, which asked supporters to submit cartoons and acted home movies lambasting the president. The movement was swamped with entries, and eventually decided on a list of winners but placed the top 150 online (MoveOn.org, 2004). These forms of political expression display similar characteristics: Low-level, individual forms of activity quickly blossom into widely known viral campaigns due to the speed and the ease with which visual forms like logos, photographs, and video can be manipulated and distributed in the digital realm. The targets and the ideological content may differ, but the techniques associated with culture jamming are now an integral part of citizens’ political expression. Most recently, these techniques have been used to great effect in the campaign against retailer Wal-Mart, which involved filmmaker Robert Greenwald soliciting thousands of volunteer home movies describing the local economic impact of the supermarket chain (Greenwald, 2006).

Creating and Building Upon Sedimentary Online Networks

Some scholars have questioned the permanence of Internet enabled forms of political mobilization (Lin & Dutton, 2003, p. 132). But while levels and intensity undoubtedly fluctuate, of more importance in the long term are what we might call the “sedimentary” traces of high-profile events. These exist in the form of loose but integrated communication infrastructures and, despite the absence of obvious leaderships, seem to persist over time (Bennett, 2003a, 2003b).

While it is often rehearsed as an example of online mobilization, the Zapatista uprising nevertheless neatly crystallizes the changing nature of political action in an increasingly Internet-mediated, transnational environment. The Zapatistas’ supporters constructed an elaborate, decentralized but influential global network, enabling activists to engage in electronic and direct civil disobedience or to lobby their own governments to take action at the international level (Castells, 2004, p. 84). By demonstrating the potential of Internet technologies, the Zapatistas arguably created a long-term shift in global social movement politics. What Harry Cleaver (1998), an admittedly partisan commentator, labels the “Zapatista effect” is still being felt over a decade after the initial uprising. This may be understood principally in terms of the continued centrality of Zapatista-related Web sites for a global network of NGOs, ranging from women’s groups to health-related campaigners and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. A webmetric analysis, which maps the links between different Web sites and seeks to identify important nodal points in a network, demonstrates that the Zapatista cause “binds together” hundreds of global NGOs (Garrido & Halavais, 2003, p. 181). In this sense, the Zapatistas’ use of the Internet has not only assumed symbolic importance as one of the first examples of an online movement; it also has material significance for the continuation of a global network of NGOs, allowing these disparate groups to “see” one another, and others to make sense of how their causes are related.

The influence of the Zapatista uprising radiated around the world during the late 1990s, leading other movements to adopt many of its strategies. On June 18, 1999, the hundreds of thousands of protestors located in dozens of cities who came together virtually

and physically in the “Carnival Against Capitalism” represented a diverse array of causes, including human rights, environmentalism, labor activism, feminism, animal rights, socialism, anarchism, and the anti-war movement. The largest events, in London and San Francisco, had been planned well in advance by groups such as Reclaim The Streets and Earth First, using e-mail and the Web. A somewhat cryptic Web site, j18.org, had been set up to provide information on meeting places, as well as updates on events throughout the day.

Since “J18,” Web sites that parallel “real-world” demonstrations have become commonplace, and are woven into the fabric of most international gatherings. The most infamous example occurred in November 1999, when protests at the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle were largely coordinated through cell phones, e-mail, bulletin boards, and chat rooms. Of equal significance is the fact that protests were held simultaneously in over 80 major cities in dozens of countries. The timing and character of these were coordinated using the net (Rheingold, 2002, p. 161). Jackie Smith’s (2001) analysis of the protests demonstrates that a sophisticated division of labor was rapidly established. Local and national protestors engaged in the physical acts of mobilization on the ground, while those groups with transnational links used their positions to frame the meaning of the events for the mainstream media and those protestors outside the U.S. Research on Internet audio piracy reveals a similar capacity for creating lasting organizational effectiveness out of relatively meager but networked resources (Cooper & Harrison, 2001).

The transnational “Zapatista effect” also has analogies at the national level. Early examples of e-mobilization in the U.S. illustrate the importance of sedimentary networks. Those established by privacy campaigners in the Lotus MarketPlace protest of the early 1990s were later used in the mid-1990s struggle against the “Clipper Chip,” and the threads could be picked up again in the late 1990s during the anti-Intel privacy campaign (Gurak, 1997; Gurak & Logie, 2003; Leizerov, 2000).

Sedimentary networks are important because they make it much more likely that older organizations will be revived or existing ones reconfigured on the fly, in response to new demands or a perceived desire to shift focus to new issue areas. They are characterized by an absence of centralized control and relatively autonomous but highly connected subunits.

MoveOn is an excellent example of how sedimentary online networks can function. The movement’s initial Web site, set up at a cost of just \$89, contained an online petition requesting that Congress pass a simple censure motion rather than go through impeachment hearings, and “move on” to more pressing policy issues. Within a month of its launch, the petition had amassed over a quarter of a million signatories and MoveOn had recruited over 2,000 volunteers. Also in its first month, these volunteers distributed 20,000 paper comments to politicians and presented hard copies of the petitions to some 226 representatives (Brown, 1998). By Christmas 1998, the number of signatories had grown to 450,000 (Clausing, 1999).

MoveOn’s quick and spontaneous mobilization is significant in itself, but the way in which the movement metamorphosed once the Lewinsky scandal died down illustrates the ease with which Internet-mediated political organizations can engage in rapid repertoire switches. Once a decision was reached to carry on the movement, MoveOn diversified its operations, effectively transforming itself into a transnational anti-war movement. In 2001 a Peace Campaign was launched by a Maine student, Eli Pariser, which took the form of an online campaign and petition. MoveOn then blossomed into a key coordinator of the U.S. anti-war protests in early 2003. In alliance with other groups, it played a major role in funding an anti-war coalition (Win Without War), disseminating anti-war information, organizing over 3,000 simultaneous candlelight vigils in 122 countries, and publicizing

real-world demonstrations such as the huge protest marches in hundreds of cities on February 15, 2003 (Hickey, 2004; Kahn & Kellner, 2004, p. 88).

A further illustration of repertoire switching came during the summer and fall of 2003, when the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced proposals for relaxing restrictions on the ownership of broadcasting companies. Groups such as the Consumers Union spearheaded the campaign, but an estimated three quarters of a million U.S. citizens fed back to the FCC using e-mail, fax, letters, and petitions, and the vast majority were opposed to any relaxation of the ownership rules (Calabrese, 2004, p. 108; McChesney, 2004, p. 282). Many of these were mobilized by MoveOn, this time acting as a more narrowly focused domestic lobby group, which also launched a targeted phone and petition campaign aimed at key members of Congress (Krim, 2005).

MoveOn was also able to make the switch from transnational mobilization to involvement in the more prosaic aspects of U.S. electoral politics. It staged an unofficial Democratic online “primary” vote in June 2003, during which it also asked party members to make donations, volunteer, and provide their e-mail addresses to their favored candidate. In 2 days, 317,000 members voted online (Hickey, 2004). The e-mail addresses of 140,000 supporters were passed on to the Democratic candidates’ campaign teams. Howard Dean’s team received a large proportion of these. This alerted them to a reservoir of Internet support upon which they were able to capitalize later in the primary campaign (Hickey, 2004).

The movement has also focused on the local level. For example, in 2003 it held a number of simultaneous public meetings with members of Congress in their districts (Hickey, 2004). These were used to exert lobbying pressure on behalf of a number of progressive causes. More controversially, MoveOn also runs an ancillary political action committee to selectively fund raise and mobilize support for liberal candidates, its intention being to “encourage and facilitate smaller donations to offset the influence of wealthy and corporate donors” (MoveOn Political Action Committee, 2004). With Eli Pariser in charge, the MoveOn PAC supported John Kerry’s 2004 presidential campaign. It focused on combining Internet fundraising and localized efforts, often with success. On a single Saturday in May 2004, for example, a MoveOn mass “bake sale” (“Bake Back the White House”) saw half a million Americans raise over \$750,000. Yet in keeping with the hybrid type, it also funded hundreds of traditional television advertisements.

MoveOn can undertake repertoire switches because it focuses so much of its activity in the online sphere and because it lacks the bureaucratic structures that make rapid change difficult for traditional organizations, such as a permanent administrative staff and physical headquarters. While it would be a gross exaggeration to say that the forms of mobilization considered here are “leaderless,” it is nevertheless the case that remarkably successful ad hoc online fundraising drives during the 2004 presidential contests often emerged through “a dynamically shifting aggregation of individual decisions” (Rheingold, 2002, pp. 176–178). And, as we saw above, MoveOn was able to build networks that formed the sedimentary bedrock of its diversification into new campaign areas, including the anti-war protests, the FCC petitioning, and the Dean campaign. Similarly, the online networks constructed during the Dean campaign provided virtual foundations for the eventual Democratic nominee: Two thirds of the “Deaniacs” went on to work for Kerry (Pew Research Center, 2005, p. 2).

Conclusion

The convergence of previously distinct organizational repertoires is a thread running through the examples discussed above. Under the influence of the Internet, interest groups

and parties are increasingly borrowing and adapting digital network repertoires previously considered to be typical of social movement organizations, especially the transnational movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s. At the same time hybrid organizations are emerging, for which the Internet is central and which exhibit combinations of behaviors typically associated with parties, interest groups, *and* social movements.

Consider, finally, the question of how we make sense of a hybrid mobilization movement like MoveOn. Is it national, transnational, an interest group, a social movement, or simply the progressive wing of the Democratic party? It is all of these things. While its “membership” amounts to around 3 million (including some 700,000 living outside the U.S.), its core staff is tiny. In the middle of 2003, it had just four paid employees (Von Drehle, 2003). Even at the height of the 2004 presidential campaign, the MoveOn PAC had just 20 staff nationwide. In aggregating millions of small donations, the basic secret of the organization’s success is not new. But it is categorically not a traditional membership-based interest group that has simply “discovered” the Internet. Although it obviously draws most of its support from progressive activists, it represents no single, easily identifiable sectional interest or discrete social constituency. When it organizes meetings with members of Congress, often on highly specific pieces of legislation, it behaves a little like a Washington lobby group. It also avoids outright alignment with the Democrats. The MoveOn PAC exploits the 527 loophole in U.S. finance regulations allowing independent or quasi-independent groups to campaign “indirectly” in favor of a candidate. Of the funds it raised in 2004, about half were earmarked for Democratic party candidates. A further sum was used for a series of MoveOn advertisements aimed at voters in swing states, while the remainder was used for a voter registration drive (MoveOn Political Action Committee, 2004). Time will tell if it maintains this course or undergoes another switch. In early 2005, the movement launched a campaign focusing on social security. At the time of this writing, it has subdivided into “MoveOn Civic Action” and the MoveOn PAC (MoveOn, 2006). It is not hyperbolic to state that this type of organizational hybridity and repertoire switching was unimaginable before the Internet emerged.

Similarly, the Dean campaign’s use of Meetups, blogger networks, “viral” house meetings, genuine discussion forums, quickfire donation drives, and its linkages with other entities such as MoveOn often went beyond the repertoires used in previous U.S. elections. Some, though not all, of these were arguably borrowed from social movement organizations’ repertoires from the 1990s and early 2000s.

It is clear, however, that digital network repertoires are not always a source of strength. For example, Dean’s now-famous “scream” of defiance—a reaction to defeat in the Iowa caucus vote—was digitally encoded as an MPEG video file before being virally distributed to hundreds of thousands in a matter of hours. Joe Trippi also complains about the lack of experience among the Dean supporters, a factor that hindered him when among those primary voters who did not necessarily share the Internet evangelism (Trippi, 2004, p. xii). And, as mentioned above, the Dean campaign arguably returned to the war room, professionalized model of what Trippi terms “television era” campaigning when it became clear that the primaries might be lost. A further problem—one that still hangs over all attempts to use the Internet for political campaigning—concerns its suitability for reaching out to undecided voters. The fervor of the “Deaniacs” turns out to have been based partly on self-reinforcement and may have created a false sense of security among supporters (Shirky, 2004). Winning elections, especially when the race is close, usually rests upon mobilizing undecided voters in key marginal districts. It seems clear that the traditional war room style is being augmented but not transformed by participatory digital

network repertoires that may currently be of secondary importance in comparison with amassing simple “push-button” donations.

The Dean campaign’s methods, its grassroots networks, and its *temporary* suspension of the professional campaign model require ongoing empirical investigation. Organizational hybridity has potentially significant implications for citizen engagement, especially when we are faced with reports that, for 42% of Dean activists (and 66% of those under 30), entering “Deanspace” was their first active involvement in a presidential campaign (Pew Research Center, 2005, p. 2). Though we have little hard data on the typical characteristics of MoveOn’s supporters, there is impressionistic evidence suggesting it has mobilized many young, previously politically disengaged individuals. We need to ask if Internet enabled hybridity is going to continue to open up traditionally hierarchical organizations, especially political parties. One scenario is that it will, and that most organizations will become a more complex combination of hierarchical and nonhierarchical, online and offline, forms of action (Flanagin et al., 2006, p. 49). Another possibility is that groups and parties create and develop subunits that exhibit social movement style digital network repertoires but such subunits are sealed off from the main campaign decision makers, or are strategically channeled toward specific societal groups perceived as receptive to looser forms of political engagement.

The Internet is creating new opportunities for political organizations to diversify their repertoires. Perhaps we should not be too surprised; political actors are constrained by their recent history and their immediate environment. It is understandable that they will seek to appropriate techniques that are used by cognate organizations. When the Internet started to diffuse during the mid-1990s, there were many optimistic accounts of online political action. By the early 2000s, pessimism had set in, and it seemed that the best we could hope for was “reinforcement.” This article has tried to sidestep this dichotomy and paint a different picture—one of innovation based on organizational hybridity arising from the adoption and adaptation of digital network repertoires.

Notes

1. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting that this phrase best captures my intention.

2. In much the same sense as Shirky (2004), though with less pessimism, I use “Deanspace” as a metaphor to try to capture the sense of how the Internet renders a campaign a node in a wider network—a venue rather than a singular, leader-driven event. But readers should be aware that “Deanspace” was also the name given to a suite of server software tools based on the open source Drupal content management platform. This provided a free Web-site package for Dean groups to build blogs, forums, shared calendars, file repositories, and so on. The project has now morphed into Civicspace (<http://www.civicspacelabs.org>).

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