

Virtual Resistance: Internet-mediated Networks (Dotcauses) and Collective Action Against Neoliberalism

May Our Resistance be as Transnational as Capital!
Carnival Against Capital/ Reclaim the Streets Slogan

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Overview

- “Dotcauses” are transforming social movements and world politics
 - Scale and unity effect
 - Radicalizing and diversity effect
 - Globalizing effect
- Zapatismo
- World Social Forum
- Network analysis

Globalization and the Internet

- Globalization: relative deterritorialization (Scholte, 2000).
 - Erosion of space
 - But uneven
- The growth of the Internet is transforming communications and civil society, and contributing to a globalization of resistance
- The internet is “The next great frontier for ideological conflict...” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1993)

“Dotcauses”

- Advocacy network mobilized primarily via the internet
- Social equivalent of the “dotcom”
- High degree of virtualization
- Virtualization presents new opportunities as well as challenges for collective action
- Mobilization and trust building strategies

Subversive Enterprises, Int'l.

- “Who is in charge of Subversive Enterprises, Int'l.? No one. ... Each member of Subversive Enterprises, Int'l. is responsible for their own actions, and their own leadership. ...No one is higher than anyone else. No one is lower than anyone else. We are a network, not a bureaucracy. Feel free to consider yourself a member right now. The only reason this “organization” was formed, was that we hoped that individuals like yourself (-selves) might be more encouraged to take action if you knew that there were others out there like you, with similar interests and goals. You want to start you own chapter/branch/franchise of Subversive Enterprises, Int'l.? Go right ahead. We would prefer that your agendas be somewhat compatible with ours, but anything goes.”

Transnational Social Movements

- “[A set] of actors with common purposes and solidarities linked across country boundaries that have the capacity to generate coordinated and sustained social mobilization in more than one country to publicly influence social change” (Khagram et al., 2002: 5)

In Social Movements, Dotcauses

- Mobilize resources and coordinate collective action to exploit political opportunities
- Promote awareness of grievances, bypassing mass media
 - Indymedia is “a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media’s distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity.”

Struggle 1: Zapatismo

- “The first rebellion of the cyber-age” (Castells, 1998)
- Anti-Neoliberalism: Debt crisis, Structural Adjustment and NAFTA
 - “The Movement of one big NO and many small yesses”
- Fight for greater local autonomy through a global movement;
 - “Marcos is gay in San Francisco, a black in South Africa, Asian in Europe...”

- The internet helped the movement
 - Bypass the PRI political spin machinery and corporate mass media
 - Divulge unedited copies of communiques and speeches
 - Spotlight Mexican government repression tactics

Struggle 2: World Social Forum

- First meeting in January 2001
- WSF is “an open meeting place where groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism, but engaged in building a planetary society centred on the human person, come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action.”

- Growth
- Internationalization: meeting has moved in and out of Porto Alegre, to Mumbai, Bamako, Caracas, Karachi and Nairobi
- International Council

Role of dotcauses

Impacts: Scale and Unity

- Mobilization and framing diffusion
 - Attract large number of visitors
 - Today there are 52 pro-Zapatista websites, many of which are dotcauses
- Organize protests: La Otra
- Serve as online backup for EZLN
- Organizing committee of WSF

Impact: Radicalization and Diversity

- Several radical dotcauses in the periphery: zmag, alternet
- Poorly resourced groups
- Local minorities
- Radical messages
- Civil disobedience

Broader Impact

- “[I]f Seattle was the birth of this new kind of organizing, last February 15's (2003) global peace demonstration marked its coming of age. That day, some 400,000 people turned out onto the streets of New York to protest Bush's impending war on Iraq, and close to 10 million more turned out in cities across the globe. It was arguably the single largest day of protest in world history; the New York Times dubbed its participants ‘the other superpower’.” (Boyd, 2003)

Conclusion

- Dotcauses and virtualization empower the resistance against neoliberalism
- Impact on other CSOs: Radical Flank Power and identity crisis
- Globalizing effect: as Latin American struggles become globalized, do they become more powerful but less locally relevant?
 - E.g., the voice of the actual Zapatistas was both projected and lost in the “cacophony” of the internet?

Appendices:

- Marcos in Queretaro

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNPaI7Tan7Y>

Network Analysis

- Hyperlink analysis (Jackson, 1997; Rogers, 2002)
 - Similar to “snow balling”
 - Mimics offline structures (McNutt, 2005)
- Followed by an analysis of the content of websites for identification of dotcauses and ideological position
- Crawl seed: Enlace Civil and Forum Social Mundial

Attributes

- Node size proportional to inlinks: authority
- Network composition
- Centrality degree: number of direct connections a node has
- Betweenness: broker role between two otherwise unconnected constituencies
- Ideological content

Virtualization Opportunities

- Cheapness and low entry barriers
- Erosion of distance and very large audience
- Speed
- Enables larger participatory, flat structures
- Anonymity
- Weak regulation environment

Virtualization Challenges

- The “Trust Problem”
 - Lack of face-to-face interaction
 - Anonymity and accountability
- Visibility
- Free riding
- Digital (and Cultural) divide

Virtual Mobilization Paradox

- At high levels of virtualization,
 - Extensive opportunities, e.g., cheapness
 - Extensive challenges, e.g., low trust
- Examine dotcauses to understand how these highly virtual organizations manage this paradox: trust building in virtual communities

Trust Building and Visibility Strategies

- Linking
- Reputation
- Patronage, formal governance structure and transparency
- Radical message
- Street carnivals
- Affinity groups and federated mobilization

Free Riding

- Non-hierarchical structures
- Participation is power in ATTAC
 - “Membership equals participation, and participation equals decision-making power. There is no elite group of lobbyists supported by passive members, and no bureaucracy to deal with. Members of local groups organise whatever events and campaigns they'd like to see happen, as long as the topic is consistent with ATTAC's platform.”

Managing the Paradox

- Strong mobilization, reach, flexibility and civil disobedience potential
- Various levels of virtualization
- The digital (and cultural) divide remains a formidable barrier

Park

- SNA is a set of research procedures for identifying structures in social systems based on the relations among the system components (also referred to as nodes) rather than the attributes of individual cases (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981; Richards & Barnett, 1993).
- hyperlink-based network analysis is a strong approach for studying the representation and interpretation of the web communication structure.

- Computer-mediated Network:
- A specific type of communication network in which individuals are interconnected by computer systems
- In particular, through a hyperlink, an individual website plays the role of an actor who could influence other website's trust, prestige, authority, or credibility (Kleinberg, 1999; Palmer, Bailey, & Faraj, 2000; Park, Barnett, & Nam, 2001), that is, POWER.

McNutt

- The key attribute of random networks is that each node has an equal opportunity of connecting to another node, which produces a normal distribution curve that stops at the horizontal axis. In contrast, scale-free networks are characterized by a preponderance of scantily connected nodes and a restricted minority of highly connected nodes, which tend to grow throughout the life of the network (Watts, 2003). Preferential node attachment results in clustering and nonuniform, continual network growth suggesting some nodes will possess a higher number of linkages within the network (Barabási and Albert, 1999).

- The face that hides itself to be seen
- The future that is harvested in the past

- To locate an online community 'seeds' or initializing nodes (URLs) are entered into the Issue Crawler, which then begins mapping the Web graph from the outgoing links of the seeds (Rogers and Marres, 2000; Rogers, 2002). Bi-directional links or shared links ($a \leftrightarrow b$) originating from the seeds are used to determine the community's population. The engine crawls two layers of hyperlink text, beginning with the pages derived from the seeds and tracing two more levels there after.

Wiki

- Filling structural holes gives nodes power as they broker relationships between two otherwise unconnected networks
- Position as change agents or gatekeepers
- Centrality Degree: The count of the number of ties to other actors in the network.
- Eigenvector centrality is a measure of the importance of a node in a network. It assigns relative scores to all nodes in the network based on the principle that connections to high-scoring nodes contribute more to the score of the node in question than equal connections to low-scoring nodes.
- The clustering coefficient is a measure of the likelihood that two associates of a node are associates themselves. A higher clustering coefficient indicates a greater 'cliquishness'.

- The so-called rule of 150, asserts that the size of a genuine social network is limited to about 150 members (sometimes called Dunbar's number). The rule arises from cross-cultural studies in sociology and especially anthropology of the maximum size of a village (in modern parlance most reasonably understood as an ecovillage). It is theorized in evolutionary psychology that the number may be some kind of limit of average human ability to recognize members and track emotional facts about all members of a group. However, it may be due to economics and the need to track "free riders", as it may be easier in larger groups to take advantage of the benefits of living in a community without contributing to those benefits.

- DeSanctis and Monge (1999:693) define a virtual organization as “a collection of geographically distributed, functionally or culturally diverse entities that are linked by electronic forms of communication and rely on lateral, dynamic relationships for coordination.” The nature of virtual organizations defined in this way means that they are rather malleable, with processes, relationships, and structures among partners changing as shared goals and needs change. The malleability of virtual organizations means that they could be formed between partners for short periods to achieve specific, shared goals, and then just as rapidly disbanded.