New Media Effects: Do Formats Organize Networks?

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New media networks differ from old media networks in the sense that for the press, TV, and radio, the formats are more established. To old media one sends a press release, a prepared sound bite, or an edited video can. One organizes a scripted event and invites journalists in the hopes that the story eventually told adheres to the prepared text and overall narrative. But what does one send to a network? Does one send information in the "old media" formats? What does a network do with a press release? Are certain formats routinely filed away or deleted, while others tend to circulate in networks, creating "new media network effects?" The work treats formats broadly and also makes distinctions between various kinds of new media networks–social networks, issue networks, and stranger networks. In a discussion of the formats circulated and network behaviors effected by the Association of Progressive Communications—a highly professionalized civil society network actor in the field of information and communications policy—the purpose of the article is to open up avenues of thought into how different formats operate in various types of networks, and in particular, whether formats may organize new media networks and, perhaps, social movements. © 2005 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. Complexity 10: 000–000, 2005

Key words: new media; old media; networks; NGOs; information formats; social movements

1. INTRODUCTION: CIRCULATING THE OLD MEDIA FORMAT THROUGH NEW MEDIA

Greenmediatoolshed.org runs an old media spamming machine (see Figure 1) [1]. It is a database system, rented from a meta-data company (Vocus), and contains all the names, addresses, fax, and phone numbers of the journalists working for US newspapers and other media companies. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that join the Green Media Tool Shed receive access to the data-base and its accompanying machine. The machine accepts press releases and other inputs and allows the user to select the destinations for them. Press send, and one NGO statement is underway to many journalists [2].

Currently the Green Media Tool Shed would like to make the information collected and inputted into it more grassroots-based and open source, decoupling the project from the commercial meta-data. They would like NGOs all around the United States to join and to update the contact details of the journalists, including mobile phone numbers for short text messaging (SMS). Although not their official intention, they also may desire to have

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FIGURE 1

Green Media Tool Shed. Meta-data by Vocus Public Relations, http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/public/takeapeak.acs.

the NGOs rate the journalists on a friendliness scale. They may wish to have the journalists ranked or red-starred for their willingness to write about NGOs, the issues according to NGOs, and also the broader NGO issue narrative of the story, either in spirit or nearly verbatim. Should the future system keep the press releases that pass through it, analysis would be able to compare the machine inputs with the newspaper outputs. For example, one could query Google News (or other news aggregators) for the NGO press release text and analyze its treatment across newspapers [3]. With Google News scrapers, or more cleverly news (RSS) readers auto-set to the newspapers that received the press release, one could monitor not only NGO "press sense" but also newspaper "cooperation," i.e., whether NGOs know how to "play the media," and whether journalists take up the story at all, paraphrasing NGO text, or even passing it on word for word. On the basis of the brief description above, both the means as well as the purposes of dealing with old media appear fairly established. There is a chosen format for sending information to old media (e.g., press release),

and there is a way of measuring "effectiveness," i.e., getting (friendly) press [4].

If such a system were built for communications to Internet-based networks (instead of to old media), what would it look it? Which inputs would it take, and which outputs would it generate? What would be the chosen formats for sending information, and what would be the means of measuring "effectiveness"? In describing the formats put into circulation by an active civil society network (the Association for Progressive Communications) and the kinds of new media network effects they achieve, the following also provides a discussion that could lead to ideas about how one would build a new media networking machine, based on friendly formats.

2. WHAT DO NEW MEDIA NETWORKS DO WITH OLD MEDIA?

The term format most readily connotes the form of a production, and traditionally (prior to McLuhan) the form is distinct from the content [5]. New media, and especially the Web, are interesting in this regard, for traditionally there has

been only form, and requests for content. URLs are re-served, databases await data, and content management systems await content. Sites need "filling in."

Additionally, new media has been held up as an area where the form/content distinction collapses most spectacularly through practice [6]. No data can be unformatted; data can be reformatted only. There are only friendlier formats promising more compatibility. Seeing the world through friendly and less friendly formats may be one means to come to grips with networks and how they operate with new media.

The undertaking thus far has been to contrast the relative stability of old media formats (and the machines that may be made to circulate them) with the relative novelty of new media formats, inquiring into which machines may be devised to circulate them. (We are interested in ways for these new machines to measure the effectiveness of new media formats in networks, too.) One may understand a new media machine, thus, as a device that circulates friendly formats to networks, and understands what the recipients have done with the format.

Which formats are friendly? Is a format friendly when its information is shaped and communicated in a way that is liable to be passed on? Is the level of circulation of particular formats over others the means to measure effectiveness? Even if we discover friendly formats that are more likely to be passed on, do new media networks revolve around them? More radically, may the formats themselves organize networks, whereas others may not?

In preliminary work recently undertaken into formats circulating in networks, we have made a few observations. First, new media networks employ old media formats (but not only). If we were to judge effectiveness in terms of "pure" message transfer (as we would in old media, using Google News or similar news aggregating devices to understand if the journalist spamming machines and other activities are working), the NGOs do extraordinarily "well" with their networks. Networks appear to circulate press releases and such by "forwarding" or re-announcing as a matter of routine information sharing [7].

We also found, however, that NGOs circulate them without "old media" care. There is less editing and checking and more verbatim transfer. The networks thus react *worse* to old media formats in another sense, too. Intervening events that would change the nature of the message may go unnoticed, as the network keeps forwarding them along. This would be one of the less beneficial sides to "viral" messaging, so-called, or the passing-it-on style from friend to friend and acquaintance, or from professional issue actor to another [8]. The finding is also in keeping with how computer viruses continue to circulate on the Internet months and months after the antidote has been announced, and software programs patched [9]. The viruses circulate *unaffected*. The software is available to

change the virus (rename it or delete it), but the virus continues to circulate unchanged. But the analogy with viruses ends there. NGO networks are not merely (socio-technical) infrastructure that "hosts" circulation of whatever is sent to it [10]. Rather, particular formats may prompt particular network behaviors.

In particular, we have found, in a case study, that there are distinctive network behaviors for particular formats. In receiving a press release, for example, the networks accord the old media format a similar, short attention span as one would suspect, historically, in newspaper reading and article spreading [11]. Once the message has arrived, network actors appear to stop passing them along in a similar way as one would throw out the daily newspaper or send someone an article from it.[1] There is a typical old media "attention span." Other network formats live longer, richer lives. Besides the press release and others like that, we inquire into formats put into play by networks that may not resemble those sent to old media. What are the network lives led by the "franchise-able event," "tool," "training module," and "prize"?

Once we have some understanding of how networks treat particular formats, there is a more important question about "format work." The crucial question is whether formats have to do with the organization of networks, whether circulating information formats may make, or routinely configure, networks [12]. Putting forward the idea that formats may organize networks is also to say that certain types of networks may not exist independent of the formats that bring them together through the circulation of carefully prepared network information interventions.

3. THE NETWORK AND THE PRESS RELEASE: APC'S STATEMENT ON THE DOWNING OF THE AL-JAZEERA WEB SITE

We introduce the research into formats with an example of the rich format work of a "network actor," the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), which describes itself as a network. We discuss two APC cases (as well as the case of a Croatian NGO participating in a network), inquiring into how the formats circulate in networks and thereby activate or bring together particular types of networks (however successfully). The APC employ the following means to communicate with its network.

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[1]The New York Times *default setting for sending an article to someone is abstract and article link, as opposed to full article in the body of the e-mail message. After some days, clicking the article link brings the recipient of the e-mail message to a paid article archive area.*

Delivered-To: apcnews@mailman.greennet.org.uk
From: Karen Higgs ⟨khiggs@apc.org⟩
Organization: Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
X-Accept-Language: en
To: APC Forum ⟨apc.forum@lists.apc.org⟩, APCNews list ⟨apcnews@lists.apc.org⟩, APC Press ⟨apc.press@lists.apc.org⟩
Subject: [APCNews] Announcing the APC Annual Report
Please circulate. Apologies for cross-posting.

APC's Latest Annual Report: Strategic use of ICTs by civil society and engaging civil society in ICT policy

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa, October 6 2003—In the course of 2002 APC focused its energies primarily in two areas: strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by civil society and engaging civil society in ICT policy processes. The use of ICTs by civil society has been central to APC since our founding and we have been working on ICT policy issues since 2000 when APC members identified ensuring internet rights for civil society as a priority. But in 2002 we started to delve beneath the surface of the challenges our communities confront and instead of responding to the symptoms, find ways to help civil society anticipate and plan for the challenges in their policy environment at home or in their use of ICTs in their workplace.

Highlights covered in the 2002 APC annual report include: APC in the run-up to the first-ever United Nations summit on the information society (WSIS), the APC ICT policy monitors in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, a new training course helped civil society organizations understand how ICT policy decisions affect their work, the Africa Hafkin Prize recognized people-centered ICT policy initiatives, tools development included a free software content management system and piloting in four continents of the Gender Evaluation Methodology for ICT and internet initiatives (GEM).

And achievements from APC members on five continents such as:

- IN-EA, Kenya: Information for drought preparedness
- BlueLink, Bulgaria: Electronic networking begins in a war-torn province as BlueLink builds bridges in Kosova/o
- Fantsuam Foundation: Local health content in Nigeria blends tradition and science
- Tau, Argentina: Non-profits and solidarity groups under pressure in Argentina's second city create an alternative information exchange
- Jinbonet, South Korea: Campaign against the revision of South Korean copyright law

Download the APC Annual Report 2002 from http://www.apc.org/books. The report will be available shortly in Spanish.

(The annual report of the APC is in PDF.) But file formats and e-mail communication protocols (with their opportunities for measuring effectiveness through download counts and other means) are only the beginning of the inquiry into information formats. Announced as well are other formats for the network: "participation" in a summit, "policy monitors," a "training course," a "prize" (announcement), "tools," a "methodology," and "membership" (announcement). This set of items is particular to APC, though APC, as a highly professional and socialized network actor, has designed initiatives that lead NGO "network work" by example. The formats also are designed to circulate, both to its members as well as to other close or more remote network actors, including governmental, inter-governmental organizations, funders and, less so, academics. As such the initiatives may be taken as network inputs for network circulation.

In our work we looked, first, into a particular old media format APC put into play: the press release. The press release concerned APC's reactions to the downing of the *Al-Jazeera* English-language Web site [13]. On 24 March 2003 *Al-Jazeera* launched its English-language, aljazeera.net. The next day the Qatar-based TV station (and Web site hosted in the United States) released pictures of American war prisoners. The site was hit heavily; one of *Al-Jazeera*'s spokesmen spoke of a distributed denial of service attack (DDoS) [13]. The site was repeatedly defaced with American "patriotic" matter, some allegedly originating from .mil e-mail addresses. There were other reactions, too. For example, *Al-Jazeera* reporters were asked to leave the New York Stock Exchange.

About 10 days later, on 4 April 2003, the APC issued a press release (in English), later followed by versions in Spanish and French [14]. The header and the first two paragraphs read as follows.

Statement by APC Opposing Actions Against the Online Presence of Middle East News Agency, Al-Jazeera

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay—APC opposes actions against the online presence of Al-Jazeera. The Internet must be allowed to freely perform its unique and vital role as a promoter of "freedom of expression" and content diversity, especially in times of conflict.

APC opposes censorship on the Internet and states in its Internet Rights Charter[1] that "the Internet must be protected from all attempts to censor social and political debate". The Internet Rights Charter argues that "the Internet is an ideal space for the recording and promotion of culturally and politically diverse content."

According to Karen Higgs at the APC, the press release (or statement) was sent to the 1300 e-mail address from three APC lists: APC Forum ⟨apc.forum@lists.apc.org⟩, APC News ⟨apcnews@lists.apc.org⟩, and APC Press ⟨apc.press@lists.apc.org⟩. After a request to the members for an endorsement, 19 (of the 32) members complied (see Table 1; **T1**

TABLE 1

19 of 32 APC Members that Endorsed the APC Press Release about aljazeera.net, 4 April 2003

LaborNet, USA: www.labornet.org

Jinbonet, South Korea: www.jinbo.net

TAU, Argentina: www.tau.org.ar

Wamani, Argentina: www.wamani.org.ar

ComLink, Germany: www.comlink.org

GreenNet, UK: www.gn.apc.org

APC Women's Programme (APC WNSP): www.apcwomen.org

Institute for Global Communications (IGC), USA: www.igc.org

Fantsuam Foundation, Nigeria: www.fantsuam.com

ChangeNet, Slovakia: www.changenet.sk

RITS, Brazil: www.rits.org.br

LaNeta, Mexico: www.laneta.apc.org

Colnodo, Colombia: www.colnodo.apc.org

Third World Institute (ITeM), Uruguay: www.chasque.apc.org

Pangea, Spain: www.pangea.org

Econnect, Czech Republic: www.ecn.cz

StrawberryNet, Romania: www.sbn.ro

c2o, Australia: www.c2o.org

BlueLink, Bulgaria: www.bluelink.net

K. Higgs, Association for Progressive Communication, personal communication, 29 October, 2003).

To ascertain what happened to the press release (in terms of its circulation in and beyond the various APC networks), researchers and I in late October 2004 (some 6 months after the release) queried a series of search engines (Google, Altavista, Alexa, Alltheweb) for this string: *Internet must be allowed to freely perform its unique and vital role*. To control, we also sought APC *and Al-Jazeera* (or its non-boolean equivalents and spelling differences across the engines), in order to seek nonverbatim referencing. We looked at the organizations returned in the engine results, and the posting dates of their pages, in an effort to ascertain the extent of at least its Web-based circulation [15]. In particular we were interested in the life of the press release around and beyond the event. We also concerned ourselves with whether the press release organized networks, however temporarily.

Networks are divided in this inquiry into social, issue, and stranger networks—into those actors one would consider to be in one's broader social network, those NGO and intergovernmental actors formally working on the issue and those outside that known and specific issue-professionalized sphere–"strangers" who may or may not be working directly on the issue (of media freedom, in this case) [16, 17].

In terms of its resonance on the Web, there was no reference to APC and Al-Jazeera, independent of verbatim usages, and the intact string was picked up and reformatted by about one-third of the members of APC's network. (The release was translated by network actors into three additional languages: Brazilian Portuguese, Slovak, and Japanese. The translation into Slovak does not appear to have been picked up by other online publications beyond use by APC's own member in the Czech Republic.) Beyond the APC network, certain known actors picked up or cited the string (Table 2). These actors may be characterized as known issue-oriented NGOs and media, without the intergovernmental component. The BBC Online and IPS were the only larger formal media organizations that picked up the story; Oneworld is another the NGO news aggregator. All three are said to be part of the APC "press network."

The following actors are not personally known, and picked up or cited the string. (Because they are unknown, they have longer URLs (Table 3).

The press statement was picked up by strangers, although almost all are perhaps one degree of separation from APC members. (Collectively, they had "heard" of all of them.) We found quotes and references from a freedom of expression group from Russia (a branch of GILC), a list of journalists from Southern India (Sarai/de Waag), an information and technology group of some 2000 Bangladeshis (using Yahoo groups), a Spanish women's portal, the Swiss and Paris Indymedia, and a quarterly newsletter from a trade union from Minneapolis, MN. It was the "most read article on information rights" in the online library of the Argentine government's Secretariat on Human Rights secretariat. (The APC researcher was pleased with this finding.) It also provided the sole penetration in the governmental space.

In terms of circulation, significantly, we found that it resonated and moved about in the first 10 days after the press release. The network treated it with the attention span normally accorded to a press release in old media. We noticed a familiar "press attention bell-curve" (Table 4).

The press release also was taken up verbatim by the sources. It was packaged and ready to go. It was precisely this verbatim circulation that led us back to our thoughts about old media, about its standard formats (press releases), and about the means by which we may judge effectiveness—verbatim use of the press release in the story. The networks were extremely friendly toward the press release for they took it over verbatim and passed it on.

One observation troubled us. The press release circulated in an editor's vacuum, in its own trajectory space, in the sense that its re-posters circulated the press release without adding that the *Al-Jazeera* site went back up on 6 April. The 6th of April (a Sunday) was the day when the

TABLE 2

Actors, Known by the APC, that Cited the APC's Press Release about aljazeera.net, 4 April 2003

www.arabdev.org

www.labornetjp.org

www.crisinfo.org

www.comminit.com

www.kubatana.net

www.ctrlaltesc.org

www.cidadania.org.br

www.isiswomen.org

www.wsisasia.org

www.fma.ph

www.jca.apc.org

www.fitug.de/atlarge-discuss/0304/msg00197.html

www.bbc.co.uk

www.oneworld.net

www.ipsnews.net

TABLE 3

Actors, not Personally Known by the APC, who Cited the APC Press Release Concerning aljazeera.net, 4 April 2003

groups.yahoo.com/group/bangla_ict/ (Bangladesh ICT Group)

lists.jammed.com/politech/2003/03/0081.html (D. McCullagh)

mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/ (Sarai)

nuke.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/ (Argentine Gov't Human Rights)

paris.indymedia.org/article.php3?id_article=2598switzerland.indymedia.org/fr/2003/05/8619.shtml

www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2003_0411_01.htm (Philippine media freedom group)

www.e-leusis.net/noticia.asp?id_noticia=786 (Spanish women's portal)

www.flora.org/nowar/forum/old-2448 (Anti-war list)

www.goanet.org/pipermail/goanet/2003-April/001083.html (Latin Cyberfeminists)

http://www.hro.org/editions/alert/7-3/15.htm (Russian GILC)

http://www.laborbeat.org/3/uppnet_spr03.pdf (U.S. Labour Union Producers and Programmers)

http://www.lafil.org/ (French media freedom group)

press release about reactions to its downing was circulating the most. The network appeared too busy networking to add that piece of information. The old media format circulated without intervention by editors.

Finally, in October 2003, there was the first emergence of network memory, of a life beyond the specific story space. The language of the press release was picked up in an NGO story about World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003/Tunis, 2005), where APC's characterization of the Internet was put back into play. (APC is an active participant in the WSIS civil society project.) The actor was outside the APC network.

4. CALENDRICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL FORMATTING WORK FOR (ISSUE) NETWORKS

Because the press release did not appear to organize significant networks beyond the social, albeit with one indication of network memory, we would like to put forward some thoughts of how particular formats organize networks, by beginning with an illustrative story. In particular, we treat how terminological as well as calendrical work may organize not social but "issue networks."

Some years ago researchers and I undertook a project with a Croatian women's group, called B.a.B.e (Be active, Be emancipated). B.a.B.e was involved in organizing events, locally in Zagreb, surrounding the more global "Sixteen Days of Activism

against Gender Violence." B.a.B.e. wanted to know whom to invite. They defined the ideal participants as those network actors (analytically and practically speaking) who remained together in the same network space when inter-governmental actors (IGOs) and donors were removed. We devised a method to ascertain these "authentic" actors, whose authenticity (to B.a.B.e.) was based on their independence from IGOs and donors, in network terms. We made a series of "gender violence" issue-network maps, with the Issue Crawler software, where the two most significant ones were (a) map of gender violence activists, IGOs and donors; and (b) map of gender violence activists, without IGOs and donors [18–20]. Among other things, we found that the Croatian group (and its Serbian colleague groups) as well as the women's group in the United States (based at Rutgers University, and initiators of 16 days) fit the description [21].

While doing the research, I also became particularly interested in how the groups had arrived at "sixteen days," instead of the more conventional day, week, month, year, decade. Where the gender violence calendrical work is concerned, arriving at "sixteen days" was a network project. I would like to argue that sixteen days was an "issue network" project—a formatting project to allow an issue network to configure around gender violence.

TABLE 4

Network Resonance of APC Press Release concerning aljazeera.net, 4 April 2003

Date	Network Mentions
April 4	3
April 5	5
April 6	8
April 7	4
April 8	3
April 9	3
April 10	2

Here is how the sixteen days calendar is currently filled in, with the seminal beginning and ending dates, with two intervening dates that also require attention.

November 25 is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This day commemorates the politically active Mirabal sisters who were brutally murdered by the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in 1960.

December 1 is World AIDS Day. The twin pandemics of HIV and AIDs are decimating communities globally. Women are more susceptible to infection and are infected at a faster rate than men.

December 6 marks the anniversary of the "Montreal Massacre," when a man shot and killed 14 women engineering students for "being feminists."

December 10 is recognized as International Human Rights Day. In 1948, on 10 December, governments acknowledged the human rights of all to "life, liberty, and the security of person…without distinction of any kind," as they signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [22].

I would like to provide some perspective of when each of these days become part of the larger "sixteen days" calendar, and why (in issue network and other network terms). In 1981 the 25th of November was declared "Day to End Violence against Women" by the first "Feminist Encuentro" for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Bogota, Colombia (18–21 July). In 1991 the Rutgers University women's group (CWGL) reformatted the one day as "sixteen days," to make a bridge from the 25th of November to the UN Human Rights Day on 10 December (a day in existence since 1950) [22]. It also brought World AIDS Day on 1 December and a "lesser" day from an intergovernmental point of view into the fold (the Montreal Massacre).

World AIDS Day hales from 1988. A UN press kit summarizes its purpose, in issue network terms (if we were to remove the reference to "individuals everywhere") [23].

The day was envisaged as an opportunity for governments, national AIDS programmes, nongovernmental and local organizations, as well as individuals everywhere, to demonstrate both the importance they attached to the fight against AIDS and their solidarity in this effort.

December 6th, the "National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women," was declared by the Canadian government in 1989. Both 1 December and 6 December were named in a timely fashion (from the point of view of the founding of sixteen days in 1991) and were also calendrically interesting. One other day in that period was considered less so, but may be in future. The 3rd of December is the International Day for the Disabled, but thus far falls outside the Sixteen Days calendar format.

In 1999 the UN finally acknowledged the NGO's early calendar work (from the 1960s to the 1990s) by calling the 25th of November the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Symbolically and calendrically, it left no doubt about the UN's participation in an issue network that now includes the inter-governmentals.

In terms of NGO formatting work for networks, "Sixteen Days" is an effort to move the activists' network into a more classic issue network configuration that would include the inter-governmental organizations, and eventually have the inter-governmentals include them.[2] The meaning of the B.a.B.e authenticity research project occurred to me only later. B.a.B.e. wanted the event back into the hands of the activists, with IGOs (and donors) removed, or marginalized.

Sixteen Days was an important terminological formatting project. WomenAid (writing in 2002) describes one of the problems before terminological standardization.

Previously, 25 November was observed in Latin America and a growing number of other countries around the world as "International Day Against Violence Against Women". With no standard title, it was also referred to as "No Violence Against Women Day" and the "Day to End Violence Against Women" [24].

The standardization also changed the word "women" to "gender," making the issue space more expansive, inclusive (as well as academic). Violence against men and women of homosexual, bi-sexual, and trans-sexual persuasion could be covered (and studied), as would transvestites, although this has been slow to develop in observed discursive practice.

Sixteen Days, perhaps most importantly, provides a decent calendrical window for event organization. It is also "fran-

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[2]It is simultaneously a North-South (NGO network) unification effort, where South American murders by right-wing governmental paramilitaries as well as North American domestic violence and the murders of lone gunmen are unified in the same "violence against women" issue space.

TABLE 5

Sites/Organizations, Unknown to the APC, Reposting the Hafkin Prize Announcement

http://server.africapolicy.org/docs02/ict0211.htm

http://spore.cta.int/spore96/esporo46_brief.html

http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/elecnet.html

http://www.123africa.com/fr/index.php3?cat_id=249&page=2

http://www.adital.org.br/asp2/

http://www.africaonline.com/site/fr/africa/internet.html

http://www.afrique-info.net/page/index.php?num=22&p=3

http://www.biodiversidadla.org/article/articleview/2485/1/15...

http://www.bu.edu/africa/about/alumni/index.html

http://www.cads-sierraleone.org/civicsupdates165.htm

http://www.digitaldividend.org/digest/digest_01.htm

http://www.dti.gov.za/saitis/Initiatives/List_current.htm

http://www.esnet.be/communs/e-nx/e-nx17.html

http://www.gsdi.org/docs/SDIA/sdiav1n3.txt

http://www.iafric.net/benin/histong.htm

http://www.macommune.be

http://www.mail-archive.com/gainsnet

http://www.malilink.net/archive2002-1/1416.html

http://www.nilebasin.com/discus/messages/20/5446.htm

http://www.osiris.sn/article323.html

http://www.refer.sn/.

http://www.schoolnet.na/news/archives.html

http://www.seul.org/edu/report83.html

http://www.woyaaonline.com/linksfr/PAYS/

http://br.groups.yahoo.com/group/proarteclipsPORT/message/90

http://br.geocities.com/inations/pworld.htm

http://lists.copyleft.no/pipermail/fair_software/2002-November/000012.html

chise-able," by which is meant that one can do it locally. One can create or download "kits," "tool-boxes," "methodologies," and other contributions to fill and contribute to the days (all of which are major NGO network formats). With them one can do the event, locally, with more global formats, and also export local contributions to the larger network. In hosting the local, globally connected network event and contributing formats, there is also the added incentive that one's presence and well-known-ness can grow in network terms. Instead of relying on the press, the network becomes the means of distributing

"celebrity" for one's issue and organization. That is, networks would distribute individual and organizational celebrity through the network circulation of the kits and the announced events made possible through franchising. In all, these are the formats that may lead longer, richer lives in new media, issue-oriented networks.

The other format analyzed is the prize (or, more specifically, the prize announcement). One could discuss the APC's Hafkin prize (announcement) as a geographical formatting activity in issue network terms. Its theme—ICT policy in Africa—fits with a focus in donor and intergovernmental circles, as Soros and others now expand their activities into the African space. The prize (announcement) is in keeping with that expansion, not only in the sense that APC, as an established actor in the African NGO issue space, would like to reassert its presence in that space. But more importantly it desires perhaps to be the major player in the organization of new ICT-related issue networks that have to do with Africa.

The undertaking here, however, concerns whether the prize (announcement) is able to organize a third type of network, beyond the social and the issue. Building stranger networks may be described as the new media equivalent of "getting out the vote," "building a social movement," encouraging people "to join the demonstration," or, lately, the "sms loop" [25]. The difference is that "strangers" in our network terms are more likely to be organizations than individuals.

The brief research project into stranger networks concerned the circulation of the prize (announcement), using the same method as the research into the press release about the downing of the *Al-Jazeera* Web site. We sought the name of the prize across a number of search engines, inquiring into its uptake by organizations beyond the ken of the APC. Intriguingly, we found a diverse set of organizations picking up on the prize announcement, perhaps more than half of which were beyond one degree of separation from the APC (Table 5).

Hafkin Prize 2002

Theme: People-Centred Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy in Africa

Criteria:
1. People-Centred and Mobilises Participation
2. Raises Awareness and Builds Capacity
3. Africa Driven and Developing Africa
4. Positive Community Impact

Our preliminary conclusion is that a chosen format indeed may organize a distinctive network. In particular, we

FIGURE 2
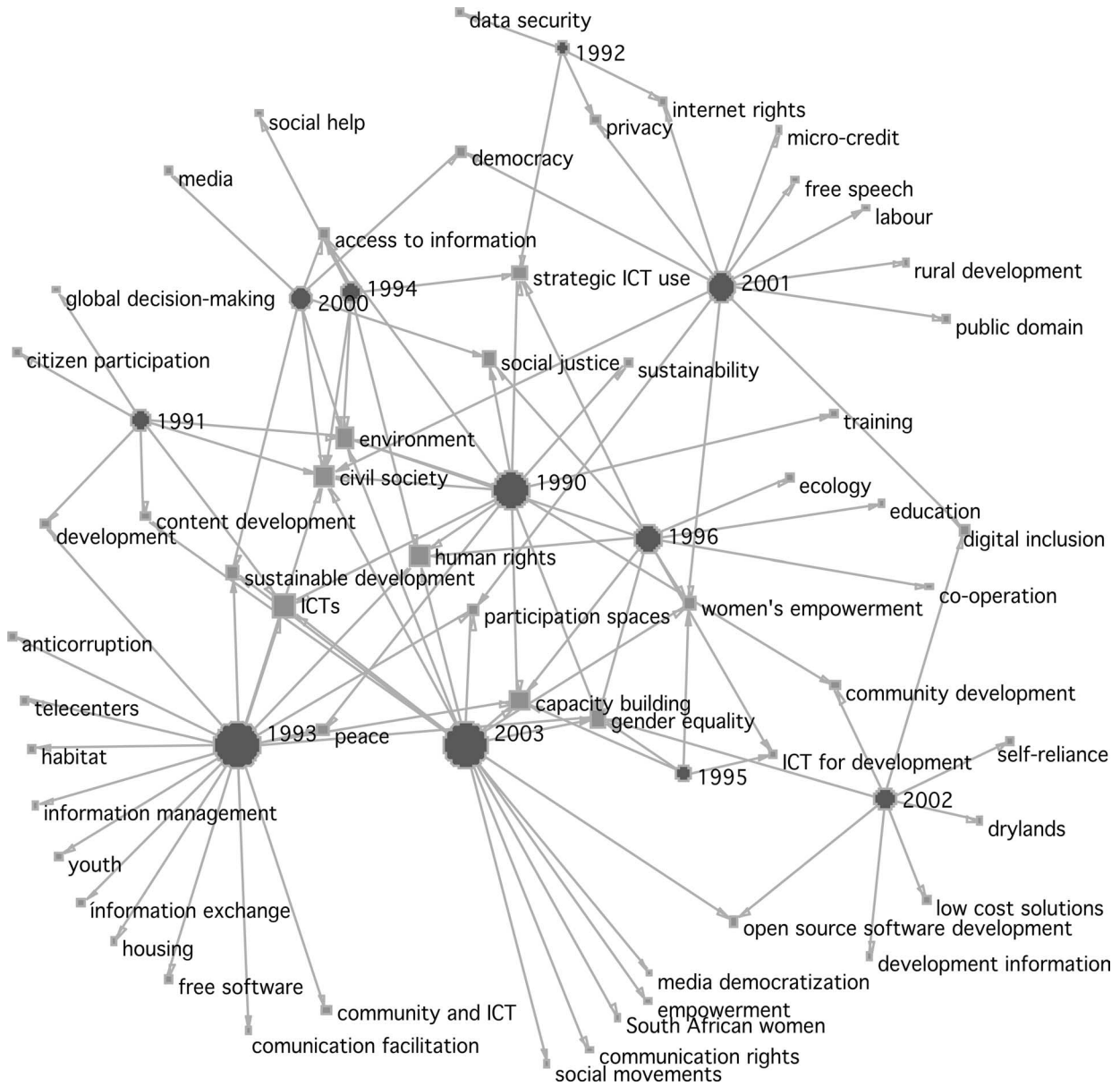
APC members' most significant activities, organized by year. Activities appear to "revolve" more significantly than "evolve." Co-occurrence analysis of relationships between member activities and years of activity, using Réseau-Lu by aguidel.com.

AQ: 1

are interested in the "demographics" question that has concerned social movement builders, that is, whether NGO networks are able and willing to organize publics as opposed to other NGOs and intergovernmental organizations (with donors included) [26]. Indeed, there appears to be a choice between formats to organize a social, issue, or stranger network. Our impression was that APC organizes social networks well, and also strives to organize issue networks, though the chosen old media format of a press release (in the particular case studied) was not successful.

5. IS APC A SOCIAL NETWORK OR AN ISSUE NETWORK?

Attending the APC's 2003 annual meeting (in Cartagena, Colombia) afforded us the opportunity to look into how to characterize the APC network. Is it most significantly a social network, issue network, or stranger network (or one or more),

FIGURE 3
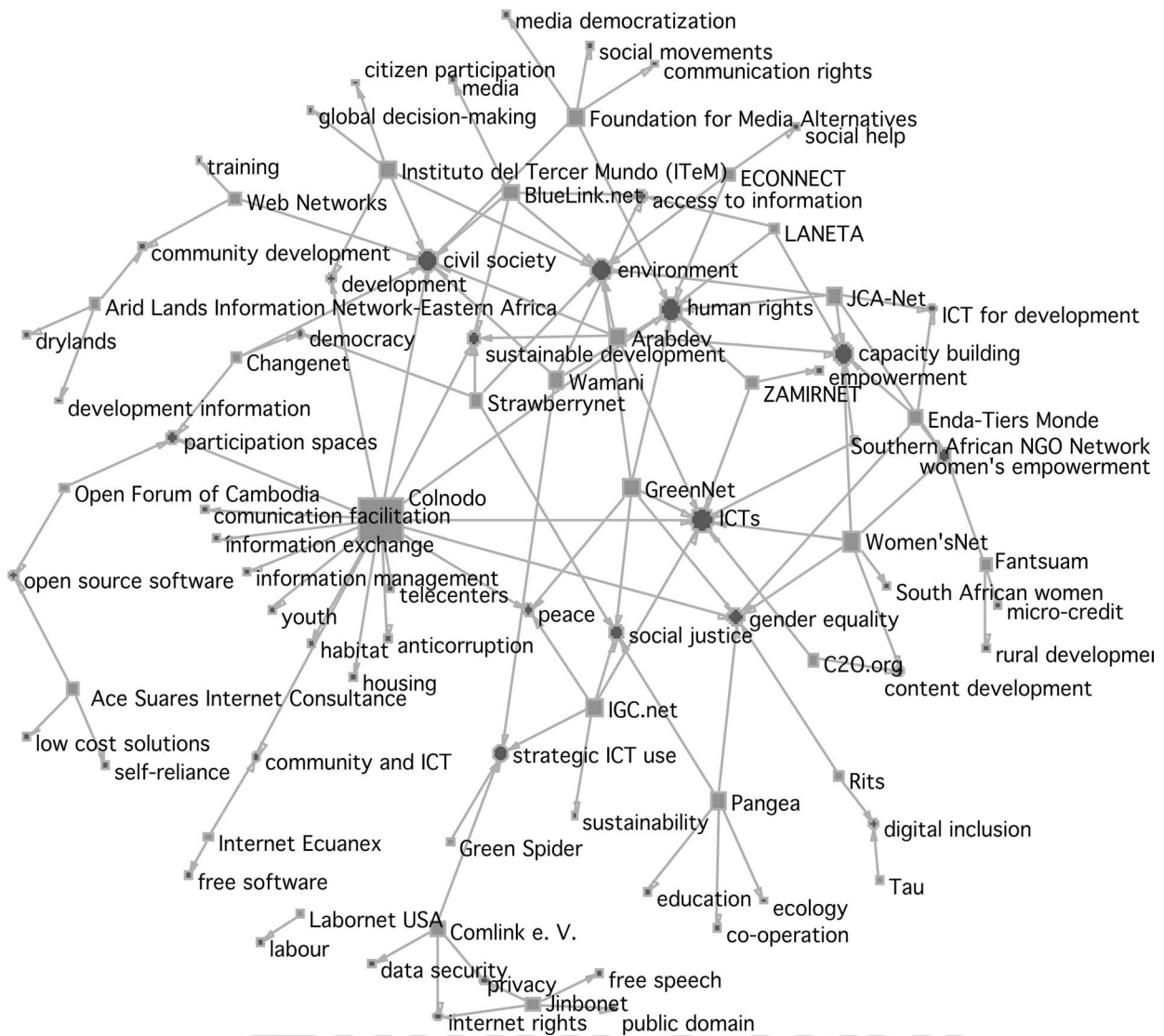
APC Members clustering around member activities, per October 2003. Co-occurrence analysis of relationships between members and activities from survey results, using Réseau-Lu by aguidel.com.

whereby joining it and being able to work within it has most to do with getting to know each other well (social), with doing professional work on the same issues and in the same forums without knowing each other well (issue), or having only affinities to the work, with the prospect of building a larger network, or perhaps a movement (stranger).

In order to come to an initial understanding of the APC network, two methods were used. The first was the drafting of a questionnaire, sent to all its members with the request of immediate response. (How to format the questionnaire as well as how to phrase the request for immediate responses were matters of some discussion. Once these issues were settled, APC showed its networked-ness by accomplishing response rates unknown in social science. We return to this.)

The second method of determining the nature of the APC network was a physical exercise. With all annual meeting attendees gathered in the room, we asked everyone to get up off their chairs and stand with the people they know best. The APC members first briefly divided into three groups. As the members glanced at people in the different groups, they all began to cluster together into one group. They all appear to know each other rather well (or at least perform a social network really well).

The second part of the physical exercise was to ask all present to separate into issue areas. First, we thought they would be able to self-organize, but subsequently we decided to call out: gender over there! Development over here! We thought that if the one mass did not separate when asked the second question, APC is a social network. If they reconfigure (significantly), APC is an issue network (as well).

Remarkably, something similar happened in the second exercise as in the first. They were able to separate into issue areas, but these were not as distinct as we would have thought. Over a very brief period of time, all present slowly began to cluster together (without creating precisely the same mass as before—there were small differences!).

One explanation (that we found in the analysis of the questionnaire results) is that APC is a specialist in issue-hybridization, a form of terminological formatting (discussed above), with ICTs being the activity that allows them to break into issue areas (gender and ICTs, development and ICTs, human rights and ICTs, etc.), and re-mass anew. The re-massing, we thought, would occur most likely when an issue area subsumes ICTs, thereby no longer requiring hybridization. In this sense, APC pioneers issue hybridization over and again and almost needs new issue areas to which ICTs may be safely attached (after other issue areas swallow ICTs into it). There is also the scenario whereby ICT becomes an issue in itself, whereby APC would be able to play the role of hybridizer anew. ICTs only? No, there's also ICTs and gender, ICTs and human rights, etc.! This is what transpired in APC's participation in the civil society group of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, December 2003) [27]. From the physical moment, we concluded, in a preliminary fashion, that APC is a social network that is able to give life to issues (in networks) through terminological work that infuses ICT with issues. Should ICT be the issue itself (as at the World Summit on the Information Society), then APC would be able to rehybridize ICTs into issue areas that would be seen by the summit as unrelated to ICTs in the first instance. Thus APC's networking also relies on its opening and closing of (re-sizable or re-label-able) Chinese boxes, if you will. The largest is ICTs, the next one is gender, the next sustainable development, and onwards. (See Figure 2 for a view of how issue hybridization has played out over the past 10 years. APC attaches ICTs to issues, leaves the new issue hybrid for a few years, and subsequently returns to it.)

In the other method to ascertain the nature of the APC network (Figure 3), we formulated a questionnaire. A methodologist and I sat down one evening and devised a simple set of questions, including organization name, mission statement, issue areas, activity key words, current project partners, and prospective project partners. (With this last question, we used the term "hopeful" partners.) Our question format diverged from the APC's. The APC person responsible for sending the questionnaire, and asking for rather immediate responses (given the short time frame of our inquiry), found some of the wording inappropriate and also stressed how busy NGOs are. It is inappropriate to speak in terms of groups with which one would like to work (hopefully). Importantly, no questionnaire would be answered that took longer than seven minutes! Below is the questionnaire sent to all 34 members of the APC.

At 10:09 PM 10/28/2003, you wrote:

Dear people

One of the workshops here in Cartagena where APC members are gathering for a face to face meeting hosted by Colnodo is working on mapping networks and issues.

As part of this we are working on a project to map the APC community (members and those we work with closely).

PLEASE help us by answering the questions below. We will share what we learn with you. The purpose of this exercise is to help us understand our network and how we can expand and strengthen it.

THANK YOU

Please can you get this back to us . . . well . . . I am embarrassed to say this . . . but more or less immediately :)

Thanks again . . . and, if people don't have the time to fill in all the questions we will understand and still appreciate even an incomplete response.

Warmest regards from Cartagena

Anriette, Zoltan, Misi

Survey

Name and email of survey respondent:
Please respond in English.
1. Organization Name
2. URL(s)
3. Mission Statement
4. Key Words (Main Issues)
5. Key Words (Main activities/issues)
6. Geographical areas of activities (countries, regions)
7. Network (five main partners/collaborators/funders) [please circle/bold type of relationship]

Partner/Collaborator/Funder 1
Organization name
URL
Project name
Project key words (issues/activities)
[editor's note: The above was repeated four more times]
8. Potential Network (partners/collaborators/funders that you are not working with, but would like to work with)

F2

F3
AQ: 2

For each partner/collaborator/funder that you would like to work with:

Potential partner/collaborator/funder 1

Organization name

URL

Key words (issues/activities)

[editor's note: The above was repeated four more times]

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APC Forum is a meeting place for the APC community—people and institutions who are or have been involved in collaboration with APC, and share the APC vision—a world in which all people have easy, equal and affordable access to the creative potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve their lives and create more democratic and egalitarian societies.

apc.forum mailing list; apc.forum@lists.apc.org

http://lists.apc.org/mailman/listinfo/apc.forum

We received 31 responses from 34 survey recipients within 24 hours! Most intriguingly, the NGOs were not able to fill in any information for "potential" network, reformulated from "hopeful." If we are able to discount the survey effect of the item appearing last (which given the seven-minute time prescription may be difficult), one could argue that the networks (and actors) beyond the ken of APC members are either all rather uninteresting or unknown. We leave the question open whether stranger network location exercises, thereby, become futile or more urgent. As APC appears to be a social network actively engaged in being a part of (as opposed to necessarily organizing issue networks), the stranger demographic remains an elusive network subject. Although remaining only a hypothesis for now, NGO networks, employing formats found to be unsuitable to organize strangers, may be distinguished from social movements [28].

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