Political Protest on the Net

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1 Online Protest – Great Impact on Little Resources?

In June 2008, Kirsten Brodde, Greenpeace activist and blogger, responded to an offer made in a newsletter by the German coffee roaster and retailer Tchibo. Brodde asked the company, that had offered T-shirts with individual overprints, to send her two, one with the provocative line "Tchibo Shirts: Gefertigt für Hungerlöhne"[1] and one with "Dieses T-Shirt hat ein Kind für Tchibo genäht"[2]. The company delivered the ordered T-shirts and only afterwards asked the activist not to wear the shirts and to withdraw the photos of them from the Net (Amann 2008).

This anti-corporate act of culture jamming[3] that was reported in "Der Spiegel" on June 19th 2008 was not the first one of its kind. It bears some similarities with an internet provocation that was performed several years ago in the US. On January 5th 2001, Jonah Peretti, then assistant adjunct professor at New York University, wrote an email to Nike Corporation in response to the company's invitation to consumers to express their lifestyle identity by giving the company designing recommendations.[4] "..[A]ll they were really doing was sending instructions to cheap labour in developing

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[1] "Made for Pittances", translation by SB.
[2] "This T-shirt was stiched by a child", translation by SB.
[3] For the programmatic concept of 'culture jamming' see Lasn 2005 and
[4] The example of Jonah Perreti is also discussed in Baringhorst 2008a und 2008b.

countries" (Peretti/Micheletti 2004: 128), Peretti thought and ironically ordered a pair of Nikes with the word 'sweatshop' stitched onto them. By using the same online service that Nike used to strengthen its brand image for creating an illusion of consumer participation and personal freedom he tried to redirect the company's PR-tools against itself. The following dialogue with the customer service of Nike ended with Peretti's mocking request: 'Could you please send me a color snapshot of the ten-year-old Vietnamese girl who makes my shoes?' He emailed his little culture-jamming discussion to about twelve friends who emailed it to their peers and like a snowball virus, the exchange was soon replicated a million of times (ibid. 129). In the end of January 2001, the first offline media outlet, the San Jose Mercury News, reported the story and soon afterwards, Time, Village Voice and Wall Street Journal, and even several European papers like The Guardian, La Repubblica and Liberation followed suit. Finally, the US TV Show NBC Today invited Peretti to discuss the issue of corporate social responsibility with a representative from the attacked company (ibid 136).

The symbolic attack of the culture jammer and netizen consumer Jonah Peretti on the self acclaimed corporate citizen Nike Corporation has not only received much international mass media resonance. His confrontation of a giant corporation is also widely referred to in academic literature on the potential of the internet for the mobilization of political protest.

In the first part of this article, I will argue that his provocative online action is rightly quoted that often, as it represents many aspects of a new kind of political action based on Net-based communication. After having discussed major characteristics of this new kind of protest action, I will show that taking the resonance of his email exchange as representative for cyberactivism and the dynamic interrelation between micro, middle, and macro media (Peretti 2004) in general would mystify the actual realization of the participative potential of net communication. In terms of average use of the interac-

tive possibilities that net technology offers, empirical evidence is – at least as far as the analysis of websites of German-speaking anti-corporate protest actors shows – far less impressive than the often praised example of Jonah Peretti suggests.

2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Online-Communication for Protest Actors

Early reflections on the revitalization of the democratic potential of digital communication media have emphasized the high potential of the Internet to create a virtual political agora that would be particularly advantageous for civil society actors as it would offer new opportunities for counter public arenas as well as for the formation of deterritorialized communities (Rheingold 1993)[5]. Compared to the great expectations expressed in the last more than 15 years of intellectual debate on the impact of the Net on political participation in general as on protest action in particular, empirical evidence is still rather limited (Grunwald 2006: 169). In the following crucial assumptions and findings of research on the advantages and disadvantages of transnational protest communication on the net are discussed. In that context, my considerations mainly focus on transnational civil society actors and not on more clandestine, extremist and/or terrorist types of collective actors.

Research assumptions are summed up and critically discussed according to different social functions of mediated communication of political protest. The following functions are particularly highlighted:
- The logistic function of protest mobilization;
- the cognitive function of knowledge production and communication in Net-based publics;
- the affective function of virtual community formation;

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[5]   The following considerations are explicated in more detail in Baringhorst 2008c.

- the tactical function of using the internet as a weapon and target of political protest;
- the function of social organization in terms of an enabling of transnational network formation.

2.1 Logististic Advantages

Computer-mediated communication media have significantly increased the frequency and participation in transnational protest events. They have enabled collective actors to organize protest rallies at the same time in many different places, as it could be seen in worldwide protest actions against the War in Iraq, on February 15, 2003. Other examples are single events with vast numbers of transnational participants like counter summits or World Social Fora. The Net reduces transaction costs of protest mobilization due to its speed and spatial range of communication. Many argue that these characteristics are particularly beneficial for resource poor political actors like protest actors. John Street und Alan Scott (2001: 46) sum up the logistic advantage of Net communication: 'High impact on little resource'. The Net offers, they argue, particularly communicative advantages in heterogeneous networks. Dieter Rucht argues similarly: Micro-media of protest like emails, list servs and online newsletters enable individuals as well as groups to exchange information rapidly and independently from particular locations, to organize interactive processes of communication and to coordinate collective protest action (Rucht 2004: 50). Della Porta et al. have interviewed participants of G8 protests in Genoa 2001 and of the European Social Forum 2002 in Florence. Particularly foreign participants interviewed confirmed the immense importance of websites of social movement organizations and networks for information and coordination purposes. Della Porta et al. conclude the general hypotheses: "If CMC (Computer Mediated Communication, SB) is used by the organization an individual belongs to, accessing the Internet tends to

become an important activity for previously 'unwired' individuals." (della Porta et al. 2006: 98) Thus, they confirm an assumption that has been expressed already in the 1990ies by researchers of the Zapatista movements in Mexico (Cleaver 1998, Olsen 2005).[6]

Logistic advantages regarding the transnational mobilization of resource-poor protest actors should not be underestimated. However, we have to be careful with one-dimensional expectations of benefits. Using the Net presupposes a lot more resources than often assumed. Even big movement organizations or networks like Attac concede high costs of adjusting mobilization to changing protest environments despite simplified software. Additionally, the benefit of Net use is also highly socially selective. The thesis of a "digital divide" (Norris 2002 also applies for protest actors (see also Rucht et al. 2004: 90-91). Selectivity of Net access occurs according to geographical and socio-demographic factors. Centers of transnational social movement networks are mostly located in the Northern hemisphere (Katz/Anheier 2006). In all world regions, Net access is also unequal in terms of age and gender as well as education and income criteria. Apart from that, the Net strengthens the position of active citizens compared to politically disinterested and inactive citizens.

2.2 Production of Knowledge and Communication in Net-based Publics

The Net differs from former communication media in its disintermediation (della Porta et al. 2006: 93). Meso-media of protest, e.g. websites and Weblogs of protest organizations, can compensate for logistical deficits of traditional offline alternative media like most of all problems caused by low circulation figures, limited vo-

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[6] Apart from that, della Porta et al. have given evidence for the fact that organized actors use the Net more often and more extensively than not organized ones (della Porta et al. 2006: 102).

lume, fixed periods of publication and little opportunities to archive information (Atton 2002: 139).

Communities of protests can also be conceptualized as "epistemic communities" (Lipschutz 2005) and networks of knowledge production and transfer. Elaborating on cognitive practices of social movements Eyerman und Jamison define "knowledge production" primarily as a process by which social movements generate identities and meaning for themselves and their members (1991: 55). Internal knowledge of social movement actors refers to debates on action frames and agendas, slogans of rallies or theoretical and strategic writings. Knowledge producers are movement organizations or whole movements as well as individual actors like "counter-experts", "grassroots engineers" and "public educators" (1991: 104-106).

Lipschutz has shown with regard to transnational anti-corporate campaigns that even geographically dispersed and culturally heterogeneous actors use the net to mutually observe their actions and to generate shared patterns of meaning. Communicative exchange in Net-based media, Doerr and Mattoni argue (2007) with reference to the "Euromayday Parade against Precarity", does not only lead to the diffusion of shared social movement frames but also to the diffusion of shared visual codes. Particularly in linguistically diverse protest networks common visual symbols represent essential elements of transnational understanding.

The Net renders the differentiation between internal and external communication among and of social movement actors increasingly insignificant (Rucht 2004: 51). Boundaries between internal and external realms become more pervasive (della Porta et al. 2006: 93) since websites are read by movement supporters as well as journalists or even opposed political actors or companies. The same applies to Weblogs, mailing lists or other meso-media of protest. While in former times alternative media have been rather exclusive in their readership and mostly directed to a reader already supporting the moral and political issues of protest, the op-

portunity to transcend narrow communities and to address a transnational public have significantly increased. The Net offers important discursive gains in terms of powers to define and frame problems and problem solutions. It takes only little efforts to confront unfavorable press and TV coverage with more favorable movement information and pictures (Street/Scott 2001: 46).

The alternative news network "Indymedia" represents and often quoted example for online based alternative news production. It has been set up in 1999, during the preparation of transnational protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle. The process of production follows the open source principle of open publishing. It is mainly characterized by transparency, collective production and publication under the 'Creative Commons-License 2.0' that protects contributions against commercial use, modification and distribution. According to the self-conception of many Indymedia Centres (IMCs) 'Everyone is a witness, everyone is a journalist'. Every reader can contribute his or her own reports, videos or photos, comment on contributions of others as well as on decisions of edition that others have taken. Everyone who is interested may take part in discussions on issues of content and organization on mailing lists or in open chats. Indymedia perceives itself as a new social form of a collective non-commercial media practice. Functional dedifferentiation is a typical feature. It lacks the differentiation between journalists and readership/audience as well as the differentiation between object and subject of news coverage, indispensable for professional news reporting. The new type of online alternative journalist could also be depicted as 'activist reporters', 'native journalists' or 'grassroots journalists' following the self conception of the British social movement journal SchNEWS (Atton 2002: 112). The structural and professional dedifferentiation corresponds with a spatial dedifferentiation between place (street protest) and space (cyberspace) on the level of

news production as well as on the level of protest action.[7]

Net communication does not only alter the relation between protest action and mass media, but also between protest actors and national governments controlling public communication particularly in autocratic regimes like China (Paltemaa 2006, Damm 2005). The Internet extends the autonomy of political protest actors even if state censorship and control is trying to catch up with the subversive activities of critical netizens. As mentioned in the beginning, the literature on protest communication on the Net often refers to snowball effects of connectivity between online micro- and meso-media on the one hand and their resonance in macro- or mass media on the other hand, thus underlining the discursive gain of Online protest. It also emphasizes a tendency of individualizing protest communication, the grown independency of individual protest actors like the before mentioned Jonah Perreti from organized collective actors (Meikle 2002: 14-24).

2.3 Strong or Weak Ties?—Protest Communities on the Net

The extent, to which Net communication contributes to the formation of communities, is still debated. Some authors argue that the Internet is not able to generate social capital and community ties necessary for democratic political communication (Jarren 1998: 18).[8] To

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[7] Apart from functional and spatial dedifferentiation Indymedia journalism is characterized by a marked presentism. Indymedia's obsession with collective presence (John Jordan, quoted after McKay 1998: 11) results from fetichising collective moments of global events. Sven Engesser and Jeffrey Wimmer argue that alternative journalism like Indymedia may offer a higher degree of participation, but that this gain has to be outweighed against the costs of a limited reach of participative media (Engesser/Wimmer 2009: 43).

[8] See also the empirical findings of In der Smitten (2007).

their mind, virtual communities like all other forms of communities presuppose a shared cultural code, a shared topic and shared rules of interaction. With regard to the global justice movement, Charles Tilly (2004) has argued that Net-based protest networks would not be able to generate strong organizational ties and a strong intensity of moral obligations among network members. According to Bennett et al. (2004: 29), however, it is still unclear whether characteristics concluded from the analysis of traditional social movements – that is movements acting exclusively offline – would and should be applicable to movements that increasingly act in Net spaces. Are demands for sustainability and identity building generalisable features of social movements or are these conditions only characteristic of protest movements with a national cultural and institutional focus? The deterritorialisation of transnational global-justice-movement, Bennett argues, is accompanied by frame extensions, a thinning of protest issues as well as a general weakening of collective identities among supporters. "[…] the degrees of ideological discourse and identity framing in a network are inversely related to: the number and diversity of groups in the network; the churn, or turnover of links; the equality of communication access established by hub sites in the network; and the degree to which network traffic involves campaigns." (Bennett 2003: 144). Based on the results of a survey among participants of rallies against the military intervention in Iraq in several countries, Bennett et al. plead for the development of new models of social organization and identity in which "inclusiveness and inter-organizational permeability" are considered to be crucial elements of movement sustainability and effectiveness (Bennett et al. 2004: 30).

The case of Jonah Peretti, summed up in the beginning of this article, illustrates that Net based communication renders individual actions in the context of the global justice movement far more effective than it would have been perceivable in former social movement activities. Support action like writing standardized

electronic protest mails to scandalized corporations or boycotting certain brands is easily to integrate in everyday practices and thus follow the general trend of individualization and "Veralltäglichung"[9] of political protest that Dieter Rucht considers to be characteristic for changes of political protest culture in the last decades. A moral case-related contextual identity seems to be sufficient, based on weak ties among members of an action network. Particularly in transnational protest networks, members do not have to meet and develop strong emotional bonds or community feelings. Like in the more recent political consumerism movement, images of scandalized brands serve – aside from the image of the main scandalizing NGO advocacy networks or direct activist networks – usually as the sole provider of collective identity among protesting citizen consumers.

2.4 The Net as Weapon and Target

There is still not much research done on the impact of Net use on the performance of a "new repertoire of collective action" (Cardon/Granjon 2003) and the importance of application of Net technologies as weapons of political protest. Practices of civil disobedience play a significant role in the action repertoire of social movement actors. There are many examples of cyberactivism and the use of the Net as weapon and target of transnational resistance (Jordan 2004). The action repertoire of actors of the transnational global justice movement shows a plethora of recombination of online and offline forms of political protest. Most widely known and used is the online adaptation of traditional articulations of petitions in e-petitions (della Porta et al. 2006: 102). While cheap due to its standardization, e-petitions are often said to be less effective than offline-protest actions that demand from individual supporters a higher

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[9]   "Transformation of political protest to everyday events", translation SB.

degree of involvement (Rucht 2004: 51). An inflation of e-petitions may lead to a moral fatigue and even disinterest in moral and political issues with users (Voss 2007: 184). Low cost but low impact – we could object the theses of "high impact on little resources" – put forward by Street and Scott.

Virtual protest in terms of online-rallies or Net strike actions are less known and used. The latter, also called denial of service attacks, asks users to go to a specific website defined as the symbolic target of protest at a certain time, in order to blockade its use. This denial of service attacks are mobilized via chats and mailing lists. Parallel actions are often organized offline in order to mutually reinforce the impact of online and offline actions (Jordan 2004). An often cited example from German social movement actors is the denial of service attack on the online order website of Lufthansa as part of the Deportation Class Campaign in 2001, organized in order to scandalize the practice of deportation of refugees by the airline (Libertad 2006).[10] Mail bombing actions have a similar effect. Users send a vast amount of emails to a defined website or server in order to create a temporary overload.

Cyberactivism can be mobilized faster and in a territorially expanded space. Participant rates of online actions are often higher than of comparable offline actions. However, due to the anonymity of Net users online action lacks the trustworthiness of offline actions.

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[10] Organized by the Deportation-Class-Campaign, the "Tag für den Kranich" (the "Day for the Crane") was launched by a network called "Kein Mensch ist illegal" ("No Human Being is Illegal") consisting of antiracist groups and the prisoners help organisation Libertad in order to raise public attention on the contribution of airlines to the inhuman treatment of asylum seekers. The action was successful in so far as it was supported by 150 organizations, unions and NGOs. 13.000 participants partially blockaded the possibility to order Lufthansa flights on the Net for two hours during the shareholder assembly on June 20, 2001. However, due to the fact that the action plan was known by Lufthansa beforehand the company could take preventive action to limit the damage.

Another disadvantage is the low level of discursivity that is combined with actions like e-petitions or Net strikes (Gurak/Logie 2003: 45).

The effectiveness of Net actions is disputable and depends from their context. While Rucht assumes that Net-activism is most often ignored by the targets of protest, a research project on political consumerist campaigning on the Net, carried out at the University of Siegen[11], comes to the opposite conclusion. Companies that have been the object of online resistance don't suffer much financial loss due to online protest. However, they take their opponents very seriously and carefully observe their Net environment and design potential counteractions in order to be able to react instantly on any offence on their image.[12]

Net-based protest action is able to put significant pressure on targeted companies. However, compared to offline actions they are less effective in creating a sense of social belonging and solidarity among supporters. Organizers of the Net strike against Lufthansa critically conceded: "Es ist eben nicht möglich, durch einen Rundumblick einen Eindruck über die Anzahl oder über die Geräuschkulisse einen Eindruck über die Stimmung der Teilnehmenden zu erlangen. Dies ist aber für das subjektive Erleben einer normalen physisch stattfinden-den Demonstration mit entscheidend. Es wäre arrogant zu behaupten, einen Ersatz hierfür bei Onlinedemon-

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[11] Research project A6, part of the research network on "Media Upheavals" financed by the DFG (German Research Foundation); see www.protest-cultures.uni-siegen.de. The research design was threefold. In the first phase a current campaign organized by the NGO Attac targeting the German discounter Lidl has compared with the 1960s Anti-Springer campaign and the 1990s Brent-Spar campaign. In a second step a complete inventory of anti-corporate campaigns was developed, encompassing 109 campaigns that were initiated between 1995 and 2005 and that were addressing amongst others German speaking publics and showing a transnational dimension in their communication. In a last step in-depth-analysis of ten selected cases was conducted.

[12] See also Köhler 2006.

strationen schaffen zu können, und das kann auch nicht gewollt sein"[13] (Libertad 2006: 77).

2.5 Technological and Social Net Structures

Changes of social organization of protest movement in the 1980s and 1990s usually followed assumptions of Weber and Michels on the development of modern organizations. New Social Movements were characterized by tendencies of institutionalization, professionalization, bureaucratization and the creation of oligarchies. Contrary to that, more recent descriptions of social movement organizations assume a particular analogy between the specific technical structure of the Internet and a network-like structure of social organization of protest actors. Apart from "globalization" and "transnationalization", "network" has become the most prominent term to characterize current social movements. The Internet is not a simple distribution network. Its technicity is defined by its multilateral backward channel capacity. Due to its anarchic structure it evokes hopes to technically enable the establishment of an organizational alternative to the top-down structure of professionalized social movement organization.

According to Naomi Klein, one of the most famous representatives of the global justice movement, "the Net is shaping the movement on its own web-like image" (Klein 2002: 16). Similarly social movement experts like Castells (2005), Bennett (2005), Smith (1997), Diani (2001, 2005) Tarrow and della Porta (2005), van de Donk et al. (2004), Warkentin (2001), Langman (2008) have argued that the Internet has altered the organiza-

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[13] It is simply not possible to gain by an overview on participants an idea of their number or by the ambient noise an impression of their emotions. This, however, is crucial for the subjective experience of a normal, physically happening rally. It would be arrogant to assume that one could create a substitute for this through online-rallies, and this cannot be intended, also (translation SB).

tional structure of protest politics. Interactive tools of the social web support the spread of a decentralized and flexible structure of transnational protest networks that cannot be controlled by territorially bounded nation state actors.

Net-based network formations are characterized by a horizontal and vertical integration of actors. A plethora of actors from diverse social movements like women's, environmental, labour, farmers', or indigenous peoples' movement are to be integrated in protest networks. Apart from that actors from different spatial levels of organization—the local, national and transnational level—are to be connected (Diani 2005, Keck/Kikkink 1998). Generally, two main types of transnational networks are to be distinguished (Bennett 2005: 213-216): First, "transnational advocacy networks" (Keck/Kikkink 1998) aim at linking actors from developing countries with more empowered actors in the so-called First World, assuming that they have greater influence on the dynamic of the global economy. Organizational coalitions connect diverse working-class and middle-class based civil society organizations: most of all trade unions, church groups, North- and South-NGOs. NGO-centered issue networks are usually rather homogenous. They share a common action frame advocating mostly single protest issues, deploy fracture lines along their organizational identity, and restrict the influence of members on strategic decisions. Secondly, loose polycentric direct activist networks are structured by weak ties, relying—like Peretti's protest against Nike—most of all on new ICTs for collective self-organization. They are considered to be characteristic for the Global Social Justice Movement targeting WTO, IMF or large corporations. They advocate multiple issues and pursue goals of individual empowerment and spread across diverse networks.

The Internet facilitates not only a transnationalization and loose connection of protest actors. Many optimistic authors also assume that it supports a more egalitarian internal communication and a stronger participa-

tion of individual activists in movement organizations and networks (Warkentin 2001; Dennis 2007; Fuchs 2008). The Siegen research project on anti-corporate campaigning, however, shows—as will be discussed in the following—that the potential for a more egalitarian internal communication among social movement organizations and activists is confronted with an enduring counter-tendency that forces protest actors to develop hierarchical social structure in order to adjust to mass media selection filters.

3 Online/Offline Protest Campaigning – Tensions between Egalitarian and Hierarchical Tendencies

Much research is still needed to give empirically valid evidence on the role of ICTs concerning the diverse functional advantages and disadvantages. Drawing on the results of an analysis of websites from anti-corporate campaigns and interviews with campaign organizers and activists, I want to highlight some of the problems connected with the impact of Internet communication on two major functions of protest campaigns[14]: Firstly, the need to frame protest issues so as to create resonance in a wider public; and secondly, the already discussed need to horizontally and vertically integrate diverse social actors on various territorial levels of action.

By discussing the contribution of the Internet for these campaigning functions, I would like to stress the particular tension between mass media-related cam-

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[14] Protest campaigns can be defined as strategic collective actions aiming at causing cognitive, behavioral or evaluative effects in more or less clearly defined target groups. In order to achieve their goals, they usually aim at gaining media, most of all mass media, resonance (Röttger 2006: 10). Mobilizing target groups and getting mass media resonance are closely intertwined; high media resonance and high resonance of addressed target audiences necessitate each other (Baringhorst 2008d).

paign logic and a network logic that results from the network structure of protest organizations and their aim to enhance political participation of campaign supporters. This tension between mass-media campaign logic and network logic is characterizing all protest campaigns launched and supported by civil society actors. On the one hand, civil society actors want to attract a wide public awareness in order to be able to put pressure on powerful corporations and/or governmental actors. This is usually only realized through mass media attention for the issues they raise. On the other hand, they want to incorporate as many citizens as possible in their collective actions and organize their actions according to egalitarian and democratic norms in order to gain as much legitimacy for their claims as possible. While the Internet supports the network logic by facilitating a more decentralized, egalitarian and direct participation of activists, the success of collective protest action still also depends on a mass media logic that requires a more centralist approach to politics, aiming at mass media audience based on the mobilizing power of large, professionalized and well-known civil society organizations.

The social function of framing, in terms of the development of organized patterns of meaning and shared action programs, asks for a rather centralist attitude towards protest action. The Net is helpful as Intranet and email communication reduce transaction costs of campaign organizers: Communication is cheap and fast, and collective action can be relatively easily organized by a top-down circulation of dates, places and modes of protest action. Protest actors can strategically use accelerated communication processes to improve conflict dramatization and put attacked adversaries under pressure. In order to place powerful political and/or commercial opponents in a defensive position and outmaneuver their PR machines, protest organizers have to plan actions secretly and cannot discuss them on Net forums and mailing lists, as these are already part of the everyday observation procedure of large companies.

Companies are learning organizations and adapt quickly to any changes of collective action repertoires. Many of them already have dark websites in their virtual drawers in order to be able to respond immediately to any anti-corporate attack by giving counter-information. As conflict opponents become ever more professional in monitoring all kinds of Net communication in order to anticipate criticism and political consumerism action, successful protest campaigning can hardly afford to fully use the participative potential of the Net and discuss action plans among a wide range of participants. Thus despite of the fact that the Net structurally enables a more egalitarian approach to action planning, the necessity of successful campaigning limits the realization of this potential.

Aiming to focus public attention on selected issues and generating public pressure through moralization and protest dramatization – oriented to the news factors of mass media news production – is running against the more decentralized and egalitarian network logic of the Internet. Although it has to be noted that independent media platforms like Indymedia as well as websites of anti-corporate advocacy networks or single NGOs have become relevant sources of information for journalists, they usually only shift into focus after an action network has successfully gained mass media attention due to direct action in the physical realm of high streets and shopping centers. An analysis of a more recent and still running campaign against the discounter Lidl in Germany illustrates the difficulties for large heterogeneous action networks to communicate their diverse messages to a mass media journalists operating on the selecting filters of news factors, most of all by the journalistic need to provide strong visuals. The discounter Lidl has been and partly still is scandalized on the one hand by the German services union ver.di, on the other hand by an action network consisting of Attac Germany, WEED, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft,

e.V.[15], BanaFair and the Aktion Selbstbesteuerung e.V.[16] An analysis of the mass media resonance of this diverse anti-corporate coalition of union, global justice actors, environmentalists and farmers shows a marked asymmetry of media representation. After one year of protest campaigning, campaigners from Attac admitted 2006 in an internal evaluation that they had great difficulties to get their messages across to the mass media. Journalists widely reported on the dismal working conditions scandalized by the services union, but hardly mentioned the global social and environmental issues added by the advocacy action network to the frame propagated by the unions.

Although the Internet had facilitated the cooperation among a wide range of network organizations, in most cases successful framing still demands an internal hierarchy and power structure that supports mass media concentration on one or only a few protest representatives and messages (Baringhorst/Kneip/Niesyto 2007). A similar tension between network structure and mass media requirements characterizes the more recent controversy in the World Social Forum movement, which so far has resisted the demand from mass media to speak with only one voice instead of many voices.

However, gaining mass media attention in order to put ruthless and unethical companies or political actors in the public pillory is not the only strategic intention of protest campaigning. Social movement activists do not only publicize political criticism of scandalized actors but often aim at forcing them to enter a dialogue with activists on the amelioration of procedures and decisions. To what extent the Internet helps to develop this more dialogical and discursive approach to political protest is still unclear. Campaign organizers can pressurize opponents and force them to react by simply spreading critical background information on scandalized issues like environmental production risks or poor

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[15] A farmers' organisation.
[16] An organisation for self-taxation.

working conditions on campaign Websites or Weblogs and by encouraging campaign supporters to spread critical facts on chats and forums, or by writing protest emails to a scandalized opponent. In all of these forms of action, Internet and email can be extremely helpful. While mass media communication tends to strengthen binary moral coding, more discursive forms of conflict interaction are very difficult to communicate via television or even print media. Due to the opportunity to convey long and differentiated reports and comments on the Net it enables netizens to develop more dialogue-oriented forms of interaction. However, when it comes to direct communication with scandalized opponents, face-to-face communication still seems to be essential in order to create the basis of trust necessary for a fruitful dialogue.

While the functional requirements of successful framing speaks in favor of a more hierarchical and professional campaign organization, the integrative function of campaigns asks for a more participatory protest culture that could highly benefit from Internet and email. Although in technical terms political participation could be facilitated by using the Internet, not all civil society organizations and action networks make use of it in the same way. Mario Diani suggested a useful distinction between organizations or – we could add – action networks that rely on "professional resources" and those that rely more on "participatory resources" (Diani 2001: 122f.). Organizations with a strong grassroots-orientation are usually organized less hierarchically and thus could benefit more from digital communication technology to improve internal communication and participation. Organizations that are – like Greenpeace – more hierarchically structured and ask little more from its members than membership fees and donations are less likely to discuss action programs with members. On the campaign Websites analyzed in the sample of the above mentioned research project at the University of Siegen protest actors provide a plethora of means of participation. Activism is promoted by provid-

ing campaign kits, online handbooks and activism guides, and daily updates on events. Individual supporters are encouraged to download information, to sample fliers, to subscribe to newsletters, to sign standardized electronic petitions or to write standardized protest emails. While all of these forms of action reproduce a rather asymmetrical relationship between campaign organizers and supporters, there are also various modes of participation that contribute to a more symmetrical structure of protest action. In that respect, individual contributions to fair trade or ecological consumer guides and to databases on goods, services and companies are interesting means to strengthen the active participation of supporters. The German branch of Greenpeace had for instance established an "Einkaufsnetz" (shopping net) where users are invited to register as gene detectives, market activists or cyberactivists. The German NGO Foodwatch offers a similar opportunity to build up consumer agency by asking users to guard and patrol shelves in supermarkets and report their findings to the organization under Regalpatrouille@foodwatch.de. Cyberactivists within political consumerism are not necessarily only market activists. Often crucial information on norm violations by companies is revealed by current or former employees. Particularly this rather vulnerable group of labour activists is encouraged by the anonymity of the Net to leak company secrets like the threat of plant closures or controversial foreign investments, or environmental production risks.[17]

As Net communication has become more and more visual, political protest campaigns also increasingly make use of digital photos documenting the operations

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[17] An illustrative example of this labor based anti-corporate criticism by company employees on the Net is the website of Alliance@IBM, the official national site for the IBM Employees' Union CWA Local 1701, AFL-CIO www.allianceibm.org/. Campaigns against poor labor conditions in discounters like Lidl often draw their information on former or present employees, as for instance the Lidl-Weblog of the services union ver.di shows.

of companies as well as protest actions. The extensive documentation of mass media resonance on campaign websites serves a significant motivational function, indicating to users the growing relevance of the moral value stake as well as giving credibility and attributing capability to campaign organizers. Visual or even audio-visual documentations play a significant role in the rather difficult process of collective identity formation in the movement. Empirical evidence of the Siegen research project generally supports the above mentioned thesis of Lance W. Bennett that current campaign politics only presuppose weak ties among supporting consumer netizens. However, it is plausible to assume that the more campaigns become permanent and institutionalized, the more they'll rely on a continuous support of protest actors, which again is dependent on some sort of emotional bonding or collective identity.

Within political consumerism, these bonds are constantly reproduced by the dramatization of the moral failings of the opponents accused and by focusing symbolic protest action on parodying and deconstructing the scandalized actors. Thus the identity of campaign supporters significantly relies on the reputation of the scandalized opponent. The analysis of German-speaking anti-corporate campaign websites shows that nearly all campaigns use some sort of culture jamming as part of its symbolic politics. They also frequently offer local support groups the opportunity to illustrate local activities by uploading digital photos and videos to the Net. These visual documentations of picket lines in front of shops or other more spectacular local events function as crucial links between the virtual and physical sphere of protest campaigns. As mentioned above, discursive participation on the Net is usually rather limited and activities of consumer netizens are mainly reduced to standardized virtual protest actions like writing emails and signing electronic petitions, and to contributing to consumer guides and background information; more radical forms like hacking or blocking Websites are rather rare

exceptions in the repertoire of German consumerist campaigns.

The opportunity to visually document local protest action does not make up for the general lack of dialogue on aims and overall strategies of campaigns; however, it gives local supporters a feeling of significance: Political activists who are willing to spend much of their spare-time marching on the street and organizing local events have become rare. Thus protest actions have become increasingly mass media oriented. On many photos we only see three or four activists bravely holding banners in front of entrance doors to local retailers and branches of scandalized corporations which could indicate that there are only few supporters in each town. However, the impression that a whole gallery of digital action photos creates is much different and seems to tell a 'we are many' story, showing a great number of activists spreading campaign messages over many different places. Another element of identity building is the formation of support campaigns in libel cases, as the success of the often quoted McSpotlight website illustrates (www.mcspotlight.org). Although, US-based anti-corporate campaigns often focus their mobilization on lawsuits that often attract a lot of mass media attention, it seems that European and particularly German companies have learned from US experiences and try to avoid lawsuits even if they would have the legal system on their side.

The Internet facilitates networking of a more decentralized kind than the practice of national or transnational advocacy networks currently shows (see also Voss 2008; Brunauer 2009). With regard to the organizational structure of political protest protest campaigns have not become fundamentally more democratic or more egalitarian due to the use of internet tools. Internet specific modes of articulating political or social protest that would prove a greater input of individualized protest actors are not preferred by net users compared to more traditional offline-based forms of protest action. Asked to give marks to specified forms of protest action, boy-

cott and local rallies got significantly higher grades than protest Emails, E-petitions or other net based actions. Preferred media of protest coordination are still face to face meetings and communication via phone. Even if the discussion deals with general protest issues, group meetings are still preferred to online-based communication media like emails, mailing lists or forums. Apart from that: anti corporate consumerist campaigns are still quite centrally organized. Particularly those campaigns that received the most mass media resonance were initiated and coordinated by a known NGO – like the campaign by Greenpeace against Müller-Milch – or the anti discounter campaigns against Schlecker, Lidl, and Aldi. The latter were and still are either mobilized by the German Services Union ver.di or by a network organization like Attac or a network of different NGOs and Unions like the Clean Clothes Campaign.

The fact that the large majority of campaigns in our sample are organized by advocacy networks gives evidence of the still dominant role of NGOs in protest campaigning. In that respect, the often quoted success of Peretti's individualist and direct network approach illustrates the potential of Net communication. However, it seems to represent the exception to the rule not the rule.[18] Mass media attention can be acquired through the linkage of individual micro- to macro-media of national press and TV corporations. Nevertheless, NGOs and their professionalized knowledge on the dramatization of street action as well as on meso-media management often provide the crucial link between individual net media use and mass media attention.

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[18] This is not only true for NGO campaigning on German-speaking websites but also for NGOs based in the U.S. Linda J. Kenix concludes from a survey of 688 non-profit Internet decision-makers and web users in the U.S. that 'the Internet appeared to be primarily a tool for gathering and providing information for non–profit organizations, rather than contact with members, fund–raising or promotion. This runs counter to much earlier research espousing limitless potential for connectivity' (Kenix 2008: 1).

4   Outlook

The literature on the political potential of the Net tends to exceed its capability to transform the political culture of representative democracies in terms of strengthening responsive and interactive modes of political participation. Great hopes to democratize political and social systems through technological changes have meanwhile turned into sobering experiences. Net-based campaigns and alternative news platforms can contribute to a transnationalization of the public sphere and create resonance for the violation of universalistic moral norms.

The Internet is a "contested terrain, used by left, right, and center of both dominant cultures and subcultures to promote their own agendas and interests" (Kahn/Kellner 2005). It offers protest actors as well as established actors of representative democracy new options to improve their reputation and to maximize their support among the citizenry. Protest actors can particularly benefit from the Net when it comes to gather and spread information on and collaborate with other netizens. However, the interactive side of Internet use is still underdeveloped, at least as far as the evidence of German anti-corporate campaigns is concerned.

A strength of online-based protest politics lies in its compatibility with the network structure of new social movements. The Net facilitates individual and organizational collaboration beyond sectional borders of new and old social movement actors as well as beyond spatial limitations. However, the heterogeneity also results in problems of visibility and political influence as the debate within social forums shows. Wide-ranging networks of diverse actors lead to new problems of representing protest issues in the wider public. Who speaks for whom in network-based politics? What are the common goals beyond "relaxed frames" of social and ecological rights? These questions are not only strategically important. Giving preference to high profile campaigning or horizontal networking and political participation of activists is also a crucial question of politi-

cal legitimacy of intermediary actors of national and transnational civil society. Expertise, experience and credibility of NGOs as well as their accountability towards members and sponsors are crucial resources of legitimacy of NGO-based campaigns. Direct activism in horizontal networks widens the scope of public participation; however, it doesn't make campaign activists more accountable towards a wider public. Neither high profile campaigning nor horizontal networking solves the problem of representation, which is a crucial question of liberal democracy. Although this article cannot give an answer to this problem, by discussing the tension between the mass media logic profile campaigning and the logic of horizontal networking it has opened a fruitful analytical perspective for future research.

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