Chapter IV
A Comparative Analysis of Online Peace Movement Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The use of the Internet for civic engagement by the general public is becoming increasingly prevalent, yet research in this area is still sparse. More studies are particularly needed in the area of cross-cultural comparisons of online social movements or online peace movement organizations (PMOs). While it is possible that PMOs in diverse cultures differ in their collective action frames, it is unclear whether PMOs use collective action frames and, if so, how differently they are used. This chapter describes a comparative study that examined Web sites of PMOs in Japan and Israel. Collective action frame is used as a theoretical framework to analyze 17 Web sites, identifying the similarities and differences in the ways that online PMOs frame their activities. The findings indicate that these organizations employed various strategies to develop resonance, highlighting the importance of cultural resonance in framing online PMOs in different countries.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has long been recognized for its ability to reduce initial barriers to transnational collective action, thus making it easier for the general public to participate (e.g., McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). "Digital communication networks" have expanded mobilization of movements across cultural and national levels (Bennett, 2003). The advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has become an indispensable part of daily life in the United States (Hoffman,

Novak, & Venkatesh, 2004) and other developed countries. The number of Internet users has increased from 30 million in 1995 to 900 million in 2004 (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). In particular, the Internet has contributed to our field of study by facilitating collective action through resource distribution and the organization of forces (Bennett, 2003; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003).

Collective action involves organizing oppressed populations for the purpose of making positive changes in their social situations (Gamson, 1975; Tarrow, 1998). One collective action against the war in Iraq in 2003 was organized through the medium of the Internet. On February 15, 2003, peace demonstrations against the Iraq war were organized throughout the world, involving approximately 10 million people (Boyd, 2003). Apparently, the Internet played a pivotal role in facilitating the mobilization of this massive social action (Lee, 2003; Packer, 2003).

Internet use for civic engagement has been gradually increasing and, although social and political scientists have widely studied social movements for a number of years, the role of technologies to support the activities of these movements has rarely been investigated. Historically, technology has constructively influenced social movements, perhaps most famously in the use of the printing press by European social movements in the late eighteenth century (Tarrow, 1998). With the press, social movement organizers were able to widely distribute their ideas and better coordinate their activities. More recently, telephones, direct mailings, fax machines, and e-mails have commonly been used to disseminate information as well as mobilize critical mass (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Porta & Diani, 1999). In a similar vein, ICTs have had a major impact on numerous recent social movements. While participation in social movements has traditionally been limited to so-called activists, today general citizens who may not consider themselves activists are participating in online civic engagement (e.g., Looney, 2004). Because of the wide use of the Internet, social movements are finding a way to reach the general public. As a result, it has become important for social movements to strategically frame their actions, in order to appeal to a wider audience.

Studies on the use of the Internet by social movements mostly examine a case or a single country. These studies have focused on feminist activists (Ayers, 2003); democratization activists in Burma (Danitz & Strobel, 1999) and Mexico, that is, the Zapatista Movement (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001); and environmental activists (Galusky, 2003), emphasizing the important role that ICTs play within their movements. In the case of Burma, the ICT influences were indispensable at multiple levels: connecting freedom fighters all over the world, disseminating information quickly and cheaply, and gaining international support to organize boycotts and sanctions. While deep understanding of ICT use in a particular country is important, generalizations of findings from one country to another should be made with caution. Still, not a single study reports a cross-cultural analysis of collective action frame in online activism. Our study addresses this disparity and tries to identify the similarities and differences among countries through a cross-cultural comparative analysis of peace movement organizations' (PMOs) Web sites. This study describes how online PMOs who promote a similar cause, namely peace, in Japan and Israel differ from each other in framing their activities to encourage participation from the general public. Through the analysis of Web sites in these two countries, this study provides insight into how cultural diversity influences the way online PMOs frame their activities. Peace movements were deemed particularly appropriate for this international comparison of social movements as they promote a globally shared cause.

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