

Interconnectivity in the ‘public of publics’. The example of Anti-Corporate Campaigns

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Abstract: In this article we argue for an approach to the public sphere which goes beyond dichotomised accounts of online and offline publics, and we demand to set out a more dialectical analysis in order to embrace online-/offline interconnectivity. By following such an approach we expand on the idea of the public sphere as a ‘public of publics’ (Bohman) and extend this idea to offline realms of public sphere. As this idea suggests a network character we contend that the linkages between the diverse publics are constitutive for a political public sphere. By taking digital(ised) Anti-Corporate Campaigns as an example, the article analyses how these campaigns unfold linkages 1. between virtual and physical spaces of public political communication as well as 2. between diverse publics such as campaign and (mass) media publics. The empirical findings presented in this article are based upon the research project ‘Changing Protest and Media Cultures’, wherein more than 100 transnational campaigns targeting single corporations and/or whole industrial sectors have been identified for the period of 1995 to 2005.

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Ever since Habermas' historical analysis of the "Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (1962) it is known that not only social and political changes, but also changes of media technologies contribute to the differentiation of the public sphere. Therefore it is clear from an empirical point of view that with the widespread introduction of the Internet, the public sphere might be facing further transformations. In earlier stages of Internet research various scholars formulated optimistic as well as pessimistic positions towards the interconnections between Internet technology and the political public sphere. The enthusiasts spelled interactivity and decentrality as the magic formula for a more democratic public sphere whereas sceptic positions pointed to potential dysfunctions such as the enforcement of existing power relations, increased control or fragmentation of the public sphere.¹ Current research has left the ground of pure normative presumptions and engages in empirical studies. Several studies analyse the qualitative characteristics of online publics in comparison to publics mediated by mass media; in most of the cases, print media publics are compared with online publics. The empirical findings range from more pluralistic to less pluralistic depictions concerning the actors involved and the issues negotiated. For instance, using the example of the issue of human genomic research, Gerhards and Schäfer compare the coverage in two German nationwide newspapers (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) with the online coverage in three search engines (Google, Yahoo, Fireball). Concerning the levels of issues and actors, the findings of their content analysis show that the net does not offer a more democratic or egalitarian public space than print media; in their study online communication even tends to be more one-sided and less pluralistic than communication in print media (Gerhards/Schäfer 2007: 224). By contrast, a more extensive study conducted by Zimmermann (2006) reveals that the Internet indeed offers better chances of being 'heard' for civil society actors. But still, due to steering mechanisms of attention such as search engines, governmental actors remain at the centre of public attention on the net also. Zimmermann's comparison of online coverage in two search engines (Google, Fireball) with the coverage in two German national newspapers (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) analysing seven policy fields draws the conclusion that political power relations are also structurally expressed in online publics (ibid: 31).

Similarly, research on the use of digital technology by civil society actors has recently attained the common position that virtual spaces neither provide a silver bullet for non-institutionalised actors nor entail a fragmentation of civil society into countless activist groups and counter-publics. Instead, a conjunction of online and offline structures is assumed, as

¹ For an overview see for instance Donges (2000: 258ff.).

della Porta and Mosca (2005) constitute in the context of their evaluation of computer-mediated communication used by the movement for global justice: “There is no sign that offline and online environments as alternative to each other. Since they are more and more integrated and overlapping, human activities such as protest also take place in both environments.” (ibid: 186) Comparably, Hamm (2006) introduces the term of “hybrid space of communication” in respect to the extension of street-based protest through the adoption of media techniques especially in the shape of Internet platforms like Indymedia or the Independent Media Centers. For Hamm, the linkage of online and offline practices contributes to the affective and material occupation of virtual and physical spaces and provides new scope for political action and social movements’ protests. Moreover, Surman and Reilly (2003) refer to the conjunction of online and offline spheres in terms of market-oriented protest:

“[...] successful mobilization in the Internet era does not mean the abandonment of offline protest and campaigns. In fact, there has been a close relationship between the Internet and the mass anti-corporate protests we have seen in recent years. From Seattle to Genoa to Cancun, networked technologies have played a key role in mobilization. [...] The simplistic portrayal of such protests as 'street protests' by the media, belie their true nature: a complex conglomerate of offline and online protest.” (ibid: 42)

Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of three German-based Anti-Corporate Campaigns launched in the 1960s, 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century arrived at the conclusion that in the course of changing media landscapes protest actors have modified their media strategies: While the “Anti-Springer Campaign” (1967) by the German student movement primarily targeted counter-publics in the form of street protests and pamphlets, the “Brent-Spar Campaign” (1995) conducted by Greenpeace aimed at mass media coverage, especially at TV-coverage. The most recent campaign, “Lidl ist nicht zu billigen” (“Not to approve: Lidl”)² (2005/6) by Attac, employs a mixed strategy and illustrates a certain counter-trend to the increasing centralisation and orientation towards spectacle of political protest until the 1990s. While the presence on the web plays an important role for the decentralisation of the Attac campaign, the campaign also exhibits tensions as it tries to manage the balancing act between bottom-up protest and consistent, concise media address (Baringhorst et al. 2007).

Against the backdrop of the sketchy picture drawn above, it becomes clear that there is no coherent line between offline and online realms as 1. the structures of political public spaces are claimed to be quite similar in online and offline spaces when it comes to mechanisms of public attention, 2. civil society actors try to deploy social practices of political protest online

² The adjective ‘billig’ (cheap) is hidden in the German verb ‘billigen’ (to approve). Therefore, Attac uses this play on words intentionally to symbolise the campaign’s main message comprising that dumping policies of discounters lead to the decrease of social welfare forms (Attac 2006).

as well as offline at the same time, and 3., related to the latter, online campaign publics are no pure alternative spaces in the sense of a counter-public but may feature various references to offline mass media publics. Taking these considerations as a starting point, the aim of this paper is to go beyond dichotomised accounts of online and offline publics and to set out a more dialectical analysis, embracing online-/offline interconnectivity. The need for further research in this field is exemplarily stressed by Schönberger (2005): “Social movements have increasingly been detecting a practice which connects political and social action in online and offline realms. This has resulted in a considerable need for research [...]” (ibid: 3, translation V.K.).³ We are going to draw on Anti-Corporate Campaigns⁴ to analyse the constitution of public spaces because protest networks as ‘extra-constitutional actors’ usually derive their legitimacy and influence essentially from the credible presentation of relevance of their concern as well as from the effective and visible mobilisation of their various supporters. They aim at public attention and persuasion in order to set their claims on the public agenda and in order to generate reactions in the field of policy-making. Thus, protesting is inevitably communicative action focused on the political public sphere (Baringhorst 1998: 327f.).

However, the development of a networked space of public communication – which can be characterised as rather multiple than as unified – is not only linked to the development of new media technologies such as the Internet but is also connected to the end of “the old dominance of state-structured and territorially public life mediated by radio, television, newspapers and books” (Keane 2000: 76) as well as to processes of transnationalisation of public political communication. Concerning the latter, Adam’s study (2007) in particular reveals various communicative linkages. By conceptualising the public sphere as symbolic network(s) and by employing network analysis, Adam is able to specify linkages within a transnational (European) public sphere. In general terms, the concept of the public sphere is increasingly facing the challenges of grasping differently-sized, overlapping and interconnected publics. Regarding the Internet, Bohman (2004; 2007) introduces the idea of a ‘public of publics’ which also suggests a network character of public sphere: “[A]s a public of publics, it permits a decentered public sphere with many different levels” (2007: 76) and embraces normative

³ „Die sozialen Bewegungen finden zunehmend eine Praxis, in der politisches und soziales Online- und Offline-Handeln verknüpft sind. Daraus resultiert ein erheblicher Forschungsbedarf [...]“

⁴ We refer to a rather narrow definition of campaigns such as Lahusen introduces: “Campaigns are usually defined as a planned, pre-organized and sustained sequence of activities and communications geared to effect (or prevent) social change, both through a reform of institutional politicise and changes in public opinion, attitudes and behaviour.” (Lahusen 1996: X) For a discussion of broader definitions see Teune 2007.

features of publicness⁵ and responsivity (ibid: 75). Starting from these considerations and going beyond the Internet, we want to stress the fundamental significance of inter-public linkages as structural conditions for both the normative features and the form of public sphere. While online publics can be characterised as encounter publics on the micro level or as issue publics on the meso level, they do not establish a networked, distributive public sphere on their own, but through their linkages, the connections they develop to the public located on micro, meso and/or macro level. Hence, these linkages are constitutive for the network character of the public sphere. Moreover, the permeability between the different publics is essential for the character of publicness as Bohman's claim of "expanding dialogue" (2004) can be also understood as means of expanding the communicative interactions beyond the Internet in order to enable citizens "to become a participant in a public sphere embedded in other public spheres" (2007: 78). Thus, online structures⁶ cannot be considered as inherent public political communication. We rather argue in line with Bohman that "for the Internet to create a new form of publicness beyond the mere aggregate of all its users, it must first be constituted as a public sphere by those people whose interactions exhibit the features of dialogue and who are concerned with its publicity [resp. publicness; J.N.]" (ibid). Bohman particularly sees potential in civil society organisations concerning their capability to ensure responsibility for publicness on the net:

"[t]hey have organizational identities so that they are no longer anonymous. They also take over the responsibility for responsiveness that remains indeterminate in many-to-many communication. Most of all they employ the Internet users; they create their own spaces, promote interactions, conduct deliberations, make information available, and so on." (ibid: 80)

As Anti-Corporate Campaigns are usually conducted by civil-society organisations,⁷ they can be considered as suitable research object for the analysis of inter-public linkages.⁸ Hence, the aim of this article is to further elaborate the idea of the public sphere as a 'public of publics' (Bohman) towards a notion of public sphere which put emphasise onto the interrelations *I*.

⁵ Bohman himself uses the term 'publicity'. As publicity may also refer to paid advertising, the dissemination of information/promotional material and public relations (Signitzer 1988: 1000) we prefer the term 'publicness' to describe the quality of a social act or state of being public and being directed to an indefinite audience.

⁶ Here we refer to the notion introduced by Foot and Schneider (2006: 18) who "[...] conceptualize an online structure as a set of features, links, and texts that provide user opportunities to associate and to act. An individual website can constitute an online structure, as can a set of features, links, and texts within a site, as well as a co-produced set that spans multiple sites" and they „[...] contend that campaigns' act of making on the Web reflect the electoral [resp. protest; J.N.] arena, existing organizational structures, and prior practices, and result in particular organizational and online structures" (ibid).

⁷ Only six percent of all campaigns in the sample are run by individuals.

⁸ It should be pointed out that we concentrate on the inter-public linkages themselves and neglect the question if and how public political communication is linked to political institutions which are able to formulate and implement positive law.

between virtual and physical spaces of public political communication as well as 2. between diverse publics such as campaign and (mass) media publics. The empirical findings presented in the following are based on the research project ‘Changing Protest and Media Cultures’ at the University of Siegen, Germany.⁹ Following a short outline of characteristic aspects of Anti-Corporate Campaigns and the exploration of methods and research design, the relationships between online and offline structures of campaign publics as well as between campaign publics and mass media publics shaping anti-corporate protest will be portrayed in more detail.

Anti-Corporate Campaigns – protest within the market-sphere

Against the backdrop of economic globalisation and the increasing power of multinational corporations, Anti-Corporate Campaigns aim at a shift of consumers’ attitudes and behaviour towards a more societally responsible usage of consumer power by so-called ‘consumer citizens’. They target single corporations and/or industries and thus concentrate their critique on, ‘Corporate Globalisation’.¹⁰ Employing various strategies, reaching from confrontational to cooperative communicative action, these civil society campaigns are launched in order to scandalise the negative effects of economic globalisation such as inadequate labour conditions or environmental pollution and call for alternative solutions. In conjunction with the question of global governance, Anti-Corporate Campaigns can be regarded as attempts by actors of the civil society to fill the ‘political vacuum’ evoked by missing binding rules and regulations for multinational corporate activity (Hellmann 2005). By addressing the market-sphere and further by attaching citizens’ rights and responsibilities to corporations and consumers, Anti-Corporate Campaigns result from and at the same time promote an increasing evolvment of the political and economic sphere. The transformation of the political in terms of an increasing blurring of the dividing line between political and private action coincides with an increasing digitalisation of public communication. Following Scammell, digital technology “[...] is re-writing the rules of the marketplace“ (Scammell 2000: 355). With the introduction of the Internet, the basis of information of consumer decisions has been improved immensely. Apart from these structural factors, the politicisation of consumption is also a consequence of micro-social factors related to the changing individual identity-formation. For instance, the cultural coding of protest adapts to the evolving technical possibilities and to an individual’s life-world: ideological differences among protest actors are compensated by the newsworthy focus on single corporations and by ‘branding’ strategies of protest messages such as

⁹ www.protest-cultures.uni-siegen.de.

¹⁰ Some authors like Starr (2000) even speak of an Anti-Corporate Movement.

adjusting. Since Anti-Corporate Campaigns are usually organised by broad networks and plural coalitions with different social and national backgrounds and without a coherent ideology (Hilton 2005: 2f.), they are often faced with major challenges when it comes to creating publics and contributing to the public sphere. Hence, Anti-Corporate Campaigns seek mass media coverage in several national contexts but address diverse publics like political institutions, consumers, and their associations, corporations, and industries as well as a variety of civil society actors bound to old and new social movements from both the Northern and Southern hemisphere. The chances of building broad coalitions consequently need to fulfil the requirement to integrate fragmented publics.¹¹

Analysing anti-corporate protest

Until now, research on anti-corporate protest has been mainly focused on the United States, Great Britain and Scandinavia (e.g. Bennett 2004a, Harrison 2005, Manheim 2001, Micheletti 2004, Rosenkrands 2004, Stolle et al. 2005). By contrast, the research project 'Changing Protest and Media Cultures' at the University of Siegen concentrates on campaigns with emphasis on German-speaking countries. For the years 1995 to 2005, 109 transnational¹² Anti-Corporate Campaigns which are (partially) conducted by German-speaking civil society actors or address German-speaking publics and target corporations or industries have been identified. The search was conducted via the search engine Google, websites of civil society actors (e.g. www.germanwatch.de), movement-orientated online media (e.g. www.ngo-online.de), and archives of the nationwide daily newspapers *die tageszeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. In addition, the snowball-method was applied, i.e. other campaigns the already identified campaigns referred to were added to the sample when fulfilling the selection criteria. Subsequently, the 109 identified campaigns were systematised.¹³ The classification was done with an explanation in a free-text-field and was also coded and entered in SPSS.

¹¹ Furthermore, the qualitative interviews that have already been conducted with campaign representatives show that on the national level, Anti-Corporate Campaigns also face the challenge of countering the advertisement-power of multinational corporations. In particular, local newspapers fear that corporations retract their advertisements if they are criticised.

¹² A transnational orientation can be expressed through transnational networks of actors or organisations, the addressing of transnational publics as well as through transnational discourses.

¹³ Here we distinguished the following categories: Timeframe, thematic focus (human rights, peace, labour rights, fair trade, environmental protection, animal rights, food/health, and freedom of the media), coverage by campaign organisation (national, transnational), initiating/supporting organisation(s) (member belonging to NGO, member supported by NGO, individuals, trade union, churches/religious organisation, grassroots organisation, network organisation, network), addressees (corporation, industrial sector, political institution), goals (public attention, corporate policy, legal regulation, human rights, democratisation, fair trade), discourse strategy (humanitarian/universalistic, Christian/religious, anti-capitalistic, ecological, legal/political, anti-racist,

In a following phase of research, the project is currently analysing ten transnational Anti-Corporate Campaigns in detail. In order to carry out the microscopic in-depth-analysis of case studies, the project uses a mixture of methods whereas qualitative-interpretative methods dominate. In a first step, a media response analysis was conducted which served as a basis for the campaign selection. The archives of the national daily newspapers *die tageszeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, as well as the results obtained from the online sources Google-News and Paperball, and (if possible) the press review provided on campaign websites were used for the search.¹⁴ In a second step, using the methods of frame and content analysis, campaign artefacts such as flyers and the campaign website (including all available downloads) are being analysed. Moreover, with help of the issue crawler,¹⁵ the hyperlink structures to other websites are explored. In a third step, on the one hand, semi-structured expert interviews with the national and local organisers of the campaign and online-questionnaires with the mobilised actors are conducted. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the targeted corporations are carried out. The interviews serve as a backup for the empirical results gained through frame and content analysis and/or serve a corrective function. In addition, a further analysis of online and offline media in German, Swiss, and Austrian media is conducted in order to gain more detailed insights about the media response and media framing of the campaign. The following empirical conclusions draw mainly upon the results of the complete inventory of the 109 identified campaigns but also include findings of already completed case studies.

Virtualised Anti-Corporate Campaigns

The comprehensive thesis of a connection between online and offline realms is empirically substantiated by the findings of the overall campaign research. As a selection criterion, the selected campaigns had to feature an online dimension either in terms of their own web presence or at least in terms of the announcement of certain statements, appeals to action, etc. on the websites of related actors or issue-platforms. About 90 percent of the analysed campaigns have own web spaces at their disposal – approximately half of them in the shape of an independent website and half of them in the shape of one or more sub-domain(s) of the

anti-imperialistic, anti-monopolistic, referring to animal rights), media use (print, audio-visual, audio, Internet, emblems), on- and offline offers of participation (information, donation, membership, signature, protest letter, boycott, buycott, demonstration/action), way of linking up (online and offline, campaigns, internal actors, external actors), and hyperlinks (Internet presentations of the campaigns).

¹⁴ We would like to thank Christian Hensel for his support.

¹⁵ The issue crawler is a tool for online network analysis and visualisation provided by the Govcom.org Foundation, Amsterdam, and its partners. For the software tool see <http://www.issuecrawler.net/> [03/04/2007] and for information see http://www.govcom.org/scenarios_use.html [03/04/2007].

coordinating organisations. Analysing the campaigns with regard to their offers for participation and their attempts to create public spaces, we could ascertain that the full sample also comprises the offline dimension as all campaigns call for activities in physical spaces.

A campaign's degree of virtualisation depends on the one hand on its media use: does the campaign exclusively or predominantly make use of the Internet in order to inform or does it also publish print brochures or produce audio-visual transmissions beyond the net? On the other hand, virtualisation can be measured by means of offers for participation. Do campaigns call for letters of protest to corporate representatives, a certain shopping behaviour, or the attendance at demonstrations in front of department stores? Or is mobilisation focused on web-based protestlike online petitions, e-mail bombings, or denial-of-service attacks? Evaluating the campaigns on the basis of these criteria, we can differentiate between campaigns with dominant online structures, campaigns with dominant offline structures, and campaigns with a balanced proportion of online and offline structures. A campaign is classified as 'dominant online' if information as well as participation offers are almost exclusively provided through online structures, i.e. the campaign does not actively disperse information outside the Internet and does not organise campaign activities in physical realms. In contrast, campaigns are classified as 'dominant offline' if they concentrate predominantly on offline spheres, i.e. online information about the campaign is not provided in a systematised and bundled way and is often only available through third parties. Furthermore, these campaigns do not call for online participation. The 109 campaigns were classified as follows: Ten campaigns are characterised by dominant online structures, nine feature dominant offline structures and the prevailing number of 90 campaigns operate to a similar extent in online and offline environments. When looking at the categories in more detail, it can be stated that dominant online structures can be found especially within campaigns initialised by individuals or smaller groups of persons whereby the thesis is confirmed that the Internet empowers actors who lack financial or human resources (e.g. Marschall 1999: 122f.). Moreover, these campaigns often represent boycott platforms which collect and bundle information about certain corporations or industries and call for a boycott but without connecting their appeal to an active coordination and enforcement of the boycott action itself. Examples are several campaigns focussing on the war on Iraq in which US-based corporations are targeted because of their direct or indirect support of the US-government or the war industry (e.g. "Consumers against war" or "Boycott den Kriegstreibern"¹⁶). Furthermore, dominant online structures are associated with Internet-oriented claims such as freedom of

¹⁶ "Boycott the Warmongers!".

information in the digital age. Thus, the “The Microsoft Boycott Campaign” has the purpose to “return real choice to the computer industry by defeating Microsoft and its chokehold that destroys innovation and competition” (MSBC undated) and the campaign “Boykott der Musikindustrie” (“Boycott the Music Industry”) confronts the attempts of the national and international music industry to prevent the digital duplication and exchange of media (Chaos Computer Club e.V. undated). Campaigns with dominant offline structures on the other hand have partly been conducted at earlier stages of the survey period. For instance, in 1995, Greenpeace called for the boycott of companies directly involved in French nuclear testing or partly owned by the French state in the “Campaign against Nuclear Testing” (Damjanov 1995). In 1999, the German environmental NGO, Robin Wood, targeted the Swedish furnishing house Ikea with the slogan “Achtung! Elch im Tropenwald” (Attention! An Elk in the Rainforest) in order to prevent the selling of products made of non-certified tropical wood (Robin Wood 1999). As both NGOs are also represented in the sample with campaigns that strongly adopt Internet technology, it can be assumed that in these cases the predominance of offline structures can rather be attributed to yet undeveloped infrastructures than to the rejection of digital technology. Furthermore, dominant offline structures can be discovered in cases where online structures are not assumed to contribute significantly to the campaign’s realisation. By this means, a couple of campaigns initialised by old social movement actors concentrate almost exclusively on historically developed internal structures and traditional patterns of mobilisation and participation. Examples are a campaign against the closing of a factory in Nuremberg, Germany, producing for the Swedish corporation Electrolux, organised by the trade union IG Metall or the campaign “Produzieren für das Leben – Rüstungsexporte stoppen” (“Producing for Life – Stop Armaments Export”) which is conducted by an association of several Christian organisations. Likewise, campaigns that focus their mobilisation attempts mainly on local realms partly leave online structures aside (e.g. campaigns of the association “Ohne Rüstung leben”¹⁷ which are primarily carried out around Stuttgart). However, the mentioned characteristics of campaigns featuring dominant online or offline structures are not invertible, i.e. not all campaigns conducted by individuals can be characterised by dominant online structures just as old social movement actors are not only represented in campaigns showing dominant offline structures. With regard to the large number of campaigns operating to a similar extent in online and offline spheres it has to be pointed out that there is gradation, of course – neither do campaigns make use of online structures in exactly the same way as they do of offline structures, nor is the proportion of

¹⁷ “Living without Armaments”.

online and offline structures identical in comparison of different campaigns. We can rather speak of a continuum which comprises campaigns employing the net extensively, e.g. making multiple offers for online participation, and campaigns focusing more on physical spaces. Nevertheless, a more precise quantitative classification in 'rather online' or 'rather offline' structured campaigns would not come up to empirical reality as there is great variation between the campaigns. Thus, it appears more fruitful to concentrate on qualitative analysis and to elaborate recurring patterns of the relationship between online and offline realms of campaign publics.

Shaping online and offline realms

Looking at the use of online structures in offline dominated campaigns and the use of offline structures in online dominated campaigns already sheds some light on the interaction between virtual and physical spaces. Thus, the Internet is employed by campaigns which primarily feature offline structures to distribute calls for action, press releases, or general information about the campaign via websites of involved organisations or independent platforms. By contrast, online dominated campaigns reach beyond virtual spaces by their reference to unconventional forms of political participation located in physical spaces like boycott action (although usually online dominated campaigns do not further coordinate or enforce physical protest). These findings can be validated with a view on campaigns that emphasise both online and offline structures. Here, distinctions can be drawn along the levels of information and participation: The differentiation between information and participation derives from political theory as theories which accentuate representative elements of democracy (e.g. Schumpeter 1950) highlight the importance of informed citizens whereas theories of participatory democracy (e.g. Barber 1984) stress the role of an informed citizen who is actively involved in the political process. Moreover, deliberative democracy theory attaches importance to an active informed citizenry; though, as a demarcation from participatory democracy theory, the realisation of deliberative politics is not regarded to be realised by a citizenry capable of acting collectively but by the institutionalisation of appropriate procedures. Hence, we define information and participation as categories for our analysis in order to meet the different normative claims. Concerning participation, we further distinguish performative (e.g. demonstrations, boycott) and supportive (e.g. petitions, donating) unconventional forms of participation in delineation from Lengfeld et al. (2000). They differentiate between protest actions which are characterised as demonstrative in a collective manner (e.g. demonstrations, boycotts) and actions which are demonstrative in an individual manner (e.g. petitions, donating). We refuse the terms collective/individual as for example

repertoires of political consumerism which are characteristic for Anti-Corporate Campaigns make this dichotomy appear to be rather fuzzy. Thus, Micheletti (2003: 25) speaks of political consumerism as “individualized collective action”. Likewise, Beetz (2007: 35) stresses difficulties to distinguish between individual and collective aspects of political consumption. Against the backdrop of virtualised campaigns, the dichotomy between active and passive (which differentiates between low-threshold and high-threshold participation) remains blurred, too, given that ‘click to protest’ indicates a rather low-threshold in the realm of active forms of participation such as demonstrations. For these reasons we differentiate between performative forms of mobilisation and supportive forms of mobilisation as this distinction stays valid regardless of whether the form of participation is performed on- or offline.

In terms of information, we can state a widespread use of Internet technology. Nearly all analysed campaigns provide their supporters with background information via the Internet thereby using various possibilities the technology provides. Hence, information is structured and edited with databases (e.g. the “Index of Landmines” on the website of the “International Campaign to Ban Landmines”) or presented with help of slide shows, Flash presentations or interactive surfaces. This information frequently goes beyond the oversimplified communication that campaigns are often criticised for (e.g. Schulz 1996: 63f.) as can be illustrated with the example of the “Kolumbienkampagne” (“Columbia Campaign”) targeting Coca Cola for collaborating with the Colombian paramilitary system and preventing unionisation. The campaign substantiates its claims with several dossiers broaching the issues of neo-liberalism, war, and militarism. Connections of online and offline spheres can especially be found where the Internet has become the central platform for the distribution of former ‘offline materials’. In addition to the merchandise of books, surveys, brochures, etc., campaigns often offer these documents as free download on their websites. Likewise, campaign newspapers (which normally are of low-circulation due to financial restrictions) are published on the net to outreach the limited radius of the print publication. Finally, campaigns link online and offline realms of information when publishing corporate responses to their claims on the net. For instance, the campaign “Klimasünder ausbremsen” (“Thwarting Climate Sinners”) publishes the reactions of BMW, DaimlerChrysler, Porsche, and Volkswagen to the campaign’s demand of abandoning their suit against a Californian law for climate protection. Connected to the publishing of the answers is the deconstruction of corporate action as a strategy of evasion. Altogether, concentrating on online structures of information facilitates the reasoning of campaign demands, broadens the radius of the distribution of information, and accelerates the dynamics of conflict.

Concerning appeals for prevailing supportive protest actions, neither a strong tendency towards online or offline structures nor a significant interconnectivity between virtual and physical realms can be constituted. Supportive forms of unconventional participation are mainly expressed through donating, signing of petitions, or writing letters of protest and can be performed either online or offline. In fact, most campaigns make parallel use of online and offline realms in order to gain support. Thus, several campaigns have established the possibility to donate via the e-commerce system Pay Pal in addition to the traditional ways of payment via cheques or bank transfers. In view of signing petitions or writing letters, the amount of campaigns enabling those types of support on the net is approximately the same as the amount of campaigns which seem to prefer supportive protest in offline realms.¹⁸ On the one hand, the traditional way of collecting signatures in physical spaces as well as writing individual letters to corporate representatives can be traced back to the widespread assumption that ‘real’ signatures and individually composed letters are more authentic and credible (e.g. Rucht 2005: 81f.). On the other hand, the Internet offers various possibilities to enhance supportive action in quantitative and qualitative terms. The individual signature or e-mail may cause a lower impact because only ‘one click to protest’ is required; but the number of signatures or e-mails a campaign website may evoke is much higher and thereby constitutes a potential threat for corporations. Consequently, the campaign “Make Trade Fair” for example is able to attach the following explication to their call to “join the Big Noise”, i.e. sign an online petition: “[...] Join more than 20 millions of others who have signed up to The BIG NOISE to Make Trade Fair!” (Make Trade Fair undated). Moreover, protest e-mails offered on campaign websites often contain preset phrases but can be adapted individually in order to give potential protesters the opportunity to connect a personal element to the low-threshold protest. To sum up the different aspects of supportive protest, a coexistence of online and offline structures rather than the conjunction of both spheres can be stated. Nevertheless, this coexistence underlines the multiplex and networked character of campaign communication as different channels of participation are used for different aims.

By contrast, we can state a strong linkage between online and offline spheres with regard to performative participation like demonstrations or boycotts. Our campaign analysis shows that physical realms play the decisive role for performative campaign action but online structures contribute directly to this action. About 90 percent of the sample makes use of classical protest action in the shape of demonstrations, manifestations, or different consumer related

¹⁸ About 30 percent of the campaign sample calls for the signature of online petitions and about 40 percent call for offline signature, letter of protest, or e-mail of protest.

activities like the public ‘branding’ of certain products with protest marks in the context of a call for boycott. Only ten percent of the campaign sample relocates campaign action entirely or partly into virtual realms. Examples are virtual demonstrations like in the case of the Greenpeace campaign “Stop Esso”¹⁹ within which supporters could provide their own digital photographs with (precast) speech balloons to express their disapproval. Those statements were bundled and sent to Esso (Stop Esso undated).



Figure 1: Digital photographs with speech balloons, Stop Esso, undated.

Another well-known example is the denial-of-service attack in the context of the campaign “Deportation Class” which has been criticising Lufthansa for carrying out deportation flights. The campaign called for action against the Lufthansa booking page that was heavily interfered on 20 June, 2001 by the combined access of protest actors (amplified by special software). But even those creative ways of employing Internet technology for protest action are largely linked to physical protest as the case of “Deportation Class” illustrates. The date for online action was chosen deliberately to complement protest at the shareholders’ meeting on the same day (Libertad undated). The outstanding importance of performative protest action in offline realms indicates that physicality is still regarded as a decisive factor for a campaign’s success. Nevertheless, Internet technology has established new dimensions of anti-corporate protest – even though less in terms of the protest action itself but more in terms of preparing and reinforcing campaign activities, thus connecting online and offline structures. About 80 percent of the sample uses online structures to prepare protest action in offline realms. For instance, contact details of local groups are published on the net to ease the involvement of new supporters. Likewise, campaign websites are used to call for physical action (e.g. to

¹⁹ Greenpeace blames the company for sabotaging international climate change negotiations and blocking agreements that would lead to greenhouse gas emissions reduction (Greenpeace undated).

participate in demonstrations, corporate annual meetings, or boycott action). Furthermore, campaigns provide their supporters with activist tool-kits which contain e.g. models for flyers and posters as well as ideas and checklists for local activities. Of particular importance, however, is the adoption of Internet technology to establish public spheres beyond local spaces. On the one hand, this may be the case in the run-up to local action. Here, the campaign “Gendreck weg” (“Away with Genetic Crud”) can be mentioned which is based on acts of civil disobedience. Once a number of at least 250 supporters has signed a public declaration of intention, a so-called “Feldbefreiung” (“field-liberation”) is conducted by which a certain field is ‘freed’ from genetically modified crops. The public character required for acts of civil disobedience (e.g. Habermas 1983: 35) is achieved by publishing a declaration of intention (containing name and residence of the supporters) as well as time and place of the field-liberation on the net (Gendreck weg! undated). On the other hand, online structures are widely used to reinforce campaign activities following local action. Nearly all analysed campaigns publish reports and picture galleries of past action or a complete chronology on their websites. Especially with regard to widespread activities of small local groups, the website is used to bundle and merge those activities. Hence, the campaign “Lidl ist nicht zu billigen” which criticises the German discounter Lidl because of deficient labour and trade conditions, records more than 60 local activities on the campaign website (Attac undated). Within the interplay of online and offline structures, Internet technology is applied to support protest in physical spaces, i.e. to enlarge the extent and duration of protest action and to create issue publics. With regard to the thesis that issue publics need to be connected to larger publics to display societal processes of deliberation and that public spheres – also in transnational contexts – created by mass media still contribute significantly to these processes (Kolb 2003) the question arises how and to what extent issue publics of Anti-Corporate Campaigns are linked to mass media coverage.

Connecting publics

‘Connecting publics’ goes beyond a transition from micro (e.g. email, lists) and middle (e.g. blogs, organisation sites, e-zines) to mass media (Bennett 2004b: 131). Thus, we aim for a multiplex description of inter-public linkages which can, but do not have to be unidirectional. On the one hand, linkages between media publics and campaign publics can be provided by the campaign actors themselves: The large amount of information provided on most campaign websites is not only addressed to (potential) supporters but also to representatives of the

media system. Agnes Schreieder, one of the organisers of the “Lidl-Kampagne”²⁰, describes the role of the campaign website as follows:

“[...] it is not only a possible resource for active supporters, i.e. professionals and volunteers [...] in addition, we know that a lot of people, journalists as well, which are in turn multipliers, can consistently refer to it [...]” (Interview conducted by Veronika Kneip on 23 October, 2006; translation V.K.)²¹

Similarly, one initiator of the already mentioned campaign “Gendreck weg!” stresses the importance of the campaign website when it comes to getting in contact with journalists as

“[...] journalists beginning their search for information about us or have heard something about us or come across us naturally do this first of all through our website.” (Interview conducted by Johanna Niesyto on 6 March, 2007; translation J.N.)²²

The fact that campaigns actively try to encourage media response through online structures also becomes apparent when the press releases many campaigns publish on their websites are scrutinised.

Apart from this, inter-public linkages are established by media coverage which provides access to the campaign’s issue public for mass media publics. A comprehensive look at media attention towards the campaigns of the sample sheds some light on the criteria for the building of these linkages. After having searched for the names of the campaigns in the archives of three German newspapers (Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, die tageszeitung) and in the search engines Google-News and Paperball, we can conclude that the coverage of the 90 campaigns with mixed online and offline strategies differs between none and about 30 references. Most campaigns with dominant offline structures show slightly above-average coverage whereas campaigns with dominant online structures almost exclusively feature below-average coverage. This result validates the already mentioned relevance of a campaign’s connection to physical spaces. Apparently, issues which are exclusively initiated on the net scarcely find their way into wider public spheres.

Finally, with regard to inter-public linkages it has to be mentioned that not only mass media picks up input provided by campaign communication. Campaigns vice versa reflect mass media coverage and extend inter-public linkages by composing press reviews. Thereby, they

²⁰ The campaign has been initialised by the German trade union ver.di with the aim to achieve better working conditions and a higher level of integration of workers’ councils at Lidl branches.

²¹ “[...] es ist nicht nur eine mögliche Ressource für die Aktiven, also Haupt- und Ehrenamtlichen [...] darüber hinaus wissen wir, das zahlreiche Menschen, auch Journalisten, die wiederum ja auch Multiplikatoren sind, sich immer wieder darauf beziehen können [...]].”

²² “[...] Journalisten, die sich jetzt selbst anfangen zu informieren über uns oder irgendwie was von uns gehört haben oder auf uns stoßen, bei denen passiert das natürlich immer über die Website erst mal. ”

reflect the external discussion about the campaign within the issue public of the campaign website. This reflection of the ‘outside’ discussion is also enhanced by references to online sites of established news media. Here, the Nikeground campaign’s²³ online network²⁴ (see figure 2) serves a prime example as the website of one of the supporting organisations (named “t0.or.at” on the map) refers rather to various websites and articles of established online print media (“derstandard.at”, “krone.at”, “kurier.at”, “lecourrier.ch”) and radio (“fm4.orf.at”) than to alternative online media such as “at.indymedia.org”.²⁵

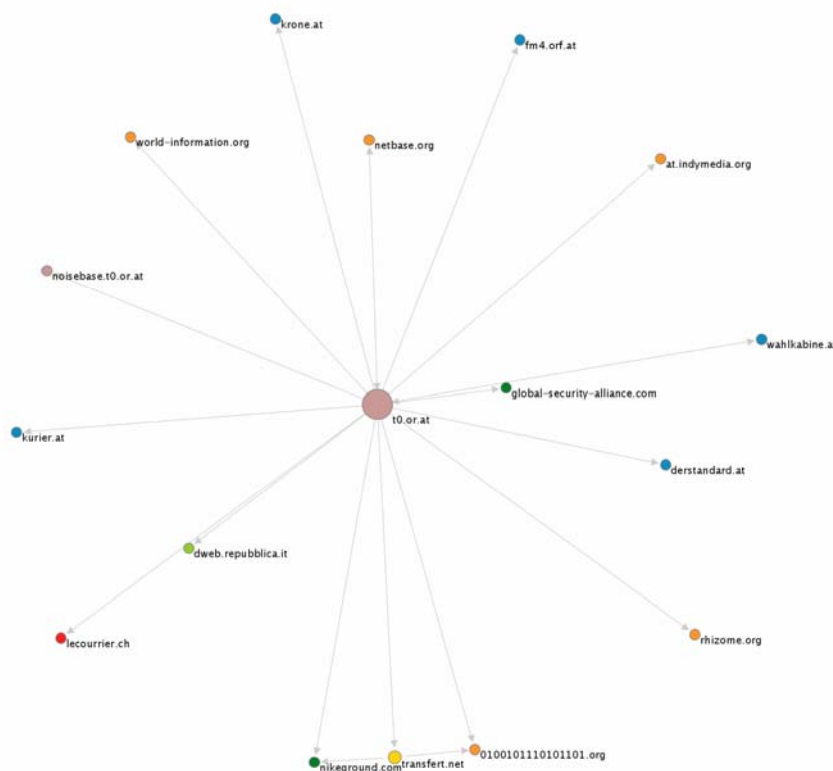


Figure 2: Nikeground’s online network as of 24 March, 2007, source: authors.

²³ The Nikeground campaign realised in 2003 aimed for initiating a public discourse about the interrelations of symbolic and real space at the example of a fake which announced the renaming of the Karlsplatz in Vienna into Nikeground.

²⁴ All online networks presented in this article were generated by using the issuecrawler which conducts and visualises co-link analyses. Due to the operational mode of the programme dyadic network relations are excluded. Hence the map can serve as a first but not overall picture.

²⁵ The Nikeground campaign was based upon concepts of communication guerrilla, mainly by operating with fakes pretending to be true actions and communication of the corporation Nike. In the first article also Indymedia bought into the fake, in subsequent articles the protest was connected to political (net) art although Indymedia was not informed by the campaign organisers (Becker in an interview conducted by Veronika Kneip on 26 February, 2007).

However, our first in-depth-analyses suggest a varying intensity of inter-public linkages as some organisations might rather use the technique of hyperlinking for the practice of networking²⁶ within the campaign’s issue public. In addition, considerations of keeping the website user’s attention on the campaign website might be an explanation. For instance, the networks of the Lidl Campaigns by Attac and the German trade union ver.di only refer to one online published article of a national newspaper (“zeit.de”).²⁷



Figure 3: Lidl campaigns’ online network as of 11 July, 2006, source: authors.

Nevertheless, it can be said that in some cases, (media) reports are contextualised with others and become visible beyond the borders of a single public. Furthermore, campaign actors become able to reassure themselves and to compare the inner and outer perception of the campaign’s claims and activities, and to engage in a discursive responsivity on the part of the campaign actors.

²⁶ For a systematisation of techniques and practices applied by Anti-Corporate Campaigns on the net see Baringhorst et al., forthcoming).

²⁷ Attac does link to several online articles whereas ver.di does not. This is not reflected on the map because – as outlined above – dyadic relations are not visualised by the issuecrawler.

Outlook

It should have become clear that diverse publics refer to each other through communicative and technical linkages. Our analysis reveals that campaign publics are able to contribute to a broader public sphere, particularly if they are rooted in offline space. This is also reflected by the finding that most of the analysed campaigns have built up a balanced proportion of online and offline structures. Beyond it, particularly performative forms of participation in physical space play an outstanding role for attracting attention in both, the campaign and the mass media public. On the level of inter-public linkages, Anti-Corporate Campaigns refer communicatively as well as through the online practice of hyperlinking to media publics. We can conclude that due to their hybrid orientation towards public attention and participative involvement of supporters, not only the journalistic system but also Anti-Corporate Campaigns are able to mediate between online and offline publics and between media and issue publics. By unfolding linkages between different publics and/or levels of public sphere going beyond the Internet, Anti-Corporate Campaigns provide offers for political participation on various layers. At this point, a need for deeper investigation arises: Is the framing of issues transformed when reaching other publics or levels of public sphere and if yes, how is it transformed? In other words, what kinds of interrelations exist between the infrastructure and the issues negotiated in public spheres? However, the Internet serves as an important infrastructure against the backdrop of democracy theories as public spaces are generated therein which embed single events and provide fora of common reflection among mobilised actors, create publicness and set themselves in a responsive manner within the broader context of mass media publics.

Given the fact that the public sphere also underlies transformations due to globalisation processes the question arises of whether Anti-Corporate Campaigns contribute to the rise of a transnational public sphere defined as a network consisting of numerous interrelated, overlapping issue and (national) media publics. The first research results of the in-depth analysis confirm the assumption that communication strategies of Anti-Corporate Campaigns can contribute to a denationalisation of public spheres as they are able to establish online and offline structures of protest reaching beyond the nation state: They create spaces for a critical debate on the violation of norms of global justice by scandalising corporate practices and the revelation of the negative effects of 'corporate globalisation' but the nation state seems to remain an important point of reference in the sense of "domestication" or "cooperative transnationalism" (Imig/Tarrow 2001: 17). In addition to this discursive dimension, they employ the online practice of hyperlinking and the offline practice of common collective

action in order to connect different local and national initiatives and public responses though discursive references seem to be of higher significance at our current state of research. This might be due to the fact that the analysed campaigns still strive to generate mass media attention on the national level. Further research is needed in order to trace relations among media publics and campaign publics as well as among online and offline publics on the transnational level as at the moment, we only have first evidence that linkages are rather established between on- and offline realms within campaign publics than between campaign and international media publics.²⁸ Likewise, we can presently assume that for the transnational level the technique of hyperlinking predominantly serves the function to demonstrate the transnational and/or global dimension of a campaign in the sense of ‘weak ties’.

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²⁸ Here the map of Nikeground campaign shown above seems to be rather an exception.

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