

How can Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Support the Peace Movement? An Investigation into the Resurgence of the Peace Movement in Australia

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Abstract

This paper primarily investigates the function and effectiveness, present and prospective, of information and communication technologies in the peace movement in Australia. It also considers the nature and objectives of the peace movement itself. The research primarily draws on available literature and interviews with activists and academics orientated toward peace.

Keywords

Information and communication technology (ICT), peace movement, Internet forum, short message services (SMS)

Introduction

In late 2002, increasing concern of a brazen military invasion of Iraq stimulated resurgence in a peace (or at least 'anti-war') movement around the world, particularly in those countries whose governments supported the imminent invasion. These events occur in an epoch of information and communication revolution.

This paper primarily investigates the function and effectiveness, present and prospective, of information and communication technologies (ICT), encompassing Internet and mobile phone capabilities, in the peace movement in Australia.

Initially, this paper considers what the contemporary peace movement actually is in Australia, how it compares to its predecessors, and what it could become. Professor of Peace, Security and Strategic Studies, Joseph Camilleri, and Associate Professor of Psychology, Dianne Bretherton, contribute valuable insights. The 'peace movement', it is claimed, provides a vehicle to promote a deeper more lasting peace than 'anti-war' movements; it seeks a culture of peace in which all forms of violence are abhorred, whether they are direct, domestic, cultural or structural.

The paper then explores the uses of, and experiences with, ICT of four organisations that played central roles in the resurgence of the peace movement in Australia. These include the Victorian Peace Network (VPN); the Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition (SP&JC); The Stop the War Coalition of Sydney (STWC); and NOWAR, an anti-war organisation in South Australia.

Supplementary thoughts on the effectiveness and challenges of ICT and social movements are provided by PhD candidate Daniel Edwards who is researching this field.

The finding of this paper is that there have been many constructive, innovative and successful uses of ICT in the peace movement around Australia. The research also highlights many unrealised synergies among organisations investigated. Suggestions provided in the conclusion include that strength, endurance and creativity, as well as efficiency, may be gained from a more organised approach to the peace movement at the national level. ICT can contribute to this.

The analysis for this research draws upon a literature review and a series of seven interviews with academics and activists. The literature review includes Saunders and Ralph's very helpful text *The Australian Peace Movement: A Short History*, as well as valuable and instructive publications from the Transcend Organisation and other journal articles and contemporary newspaper reports as compiled in the references. Interviews with people in Victoria were completed in person, and those with people in New South Wales and South Australia were conducted by teleconference. Peace groups in the remaining Australian states and territories either declined to contribute or were difficult for the author to contact at the time of this research. Qualitative analysis was completed according to the model expounded by Miles and Huberman (1994).

What is the 'peace movement' in Australia?

The 'peace movement' in Australia can appear a nebulous phenomenon. It exists continuously at some levels; some proponents of peace are working constantly. However, its visibility is increased when a wider constituency can be mobilised for a particular cause. To some, it is seen as reactionary and cumbersome. As the nature of its politics is typically that of dissent toward government, it gets little formal oxygen that might create a lasting flame in the public mind.

Proponents of contemporary peace theory, such as Associate Professor Bretherton, promote an idea of creating a 'holistic' peace — of building a culture of positive peace in which people value peace for itself, and not only as an 'other' to the tragedy and waste of violence.

The 'peace movement' that sprang up in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq acknowledges that it was primarily an 'anti-war' movement. While this position was valiant (its achievements certainly illuminate prospective potential), its fire-fighting was ultimately insufficient to stop the Australian government putting a torch to Iraq.

What happened on Valentine's Day weekend, 2003?

Much could be written about the events of this weekend, but the scope of this paper permits only a few brief reflections. A month before the invasion of Iraq began, the apex of the peace or 'anti-war' movement occurred on the weekend of 14-16 February 2003. Auspiciously, on Valentine's Day, 14 February, public demonstrations against a military invasion of Iraq began in Melbourne with attendances of between 100,000 and 250,000 people. Throughout the weekend, massive demonstrations followed in cities around Australia and around the world; as many as 10 million people are believed to have voted with their feet against an invasion of Iraq (Milstein 2004). This is said to be the largest internationally coordinated demonstration by human beings in history (Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen 2004).

This unprecedented achievement of hundreds, or probably thousands, of local peace groups working in synchronicity throughout the world portrays a glimpse of the potential power social movements might have in the twenty-first century.

How is the contemporary peace movement similar or different to its predecessors?

The enormous and simultaneous worldwide protests of that weekend in February 2003 mark a watershed moment for social movements. In a matter of less than six months, concerned groups and individuals in many countries had come together to challenge the belligerent agenda of United States President, George W Bush, and his main allies including the leaders of Australia, Britain, Italy and Spain.

This rapid mobilisation, the harnessing of millions of people in solidarity against an invasion of Iraq, sadly proved unsustainable once the attack began. While George Bush and his major allies (with the exception of Spain) continue to work closely, the social cohesion achieved in opposition to their actions has all but disappeared.

This corresponds to the model of the 'peace movement' in Australia as identified by Saunders and Summy (1986) in which great support is often harnessed by the movement in times of acute threat, danger or concern (over a specific government action). However, it drops away again as the particular stimulatory event disappears from view.

Contemplating similarities and differences between the contemporary peace movement and its predecessors, long-time peace activist, Professor Camilleri, outlines earlier approaches to thorny problems that again confront the peace movement:

"It [the contemporary peace movement] is similar in one sense that it has latched on to a particular issue which is a concern to a very large constituency around the world. It's different in the sense that the issues are not as clearly understood. For example, if we are talking about nuclear disarmament in the early 1980s — the demands were very clear — the objectives were very clear and the demands on government were very clear. Now, the

only thing that comes clearly through is our opposition to the war in general. Suppose Australia is concerned about when the troops come home. Suppose they did come home — which they will sooner or later — what next, this is not clear. I think there is much less effective strategic and tactical liaison going on between what happens in Australia and Europe and the United States and elsewhere. There is less travelling going on: we would travel — we would go and speak to their rallies and they would come and speak to ours. You wouldn't just have a group of Australian's speaking at rallies; in fact they would be in the minority. The biggest names of the movement would come across here, and that takes massive organisation and lots of lead time, that's the other difference. In the case of the Iraq War, it was imminent, hence the big rallies just on the eve of it happening, and then it has happened, and then of course there was a lot of diffusing of energy as well, but in the case of nuclear disarmament in particular, we did have to operate to a particular deadline. In other words, you were able to construct a movement in which you had the initiative of time, and the others were reacting to you as much as the other way round — here you're constantly reacting to what might be the latest American initiative" (Camilleri 2004).

How important was technology to the contemporary peace movement?

The contemporary peace movement's attempts to stop the invasion of Iraq were greatly enhanced by the information and communication technologies that are now available to many people in developed countries.

Technology extended and integrated a web of people united against an invasion of Iraq. This achievement, occurring in only a few months, would not have been possible with earlier technologies.

Who were the main organisations driving the contemporary peace movement in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia?

This paper is based on interviews with representatives of four 'peace' (or 'anti-war') organisations around Australia. While these organisations were certainly not the only groups or people working for and advocating peace in their respective states, they were the most significant.

In early 2003, Victorians, according to *The Bulletin* were considered by most activists to be running 'the best antiwar show' (Dent 2003). As early as October 2002, 45,000 people had turned up to a Melbourne rally to show their support. These sorts of numbers can largely be attributed to the Victorian Peace Network (VPN), a coalition made up of about 40 diverse affiliates (Dent 2003).

In New South Wales, the main peace or 'anti-war' organisation was the Walk Against War Committee (WAWC). In the months preceding the invasion, it also staged a number of large demonstrations against the war. Similar to the VPN, the WAWC was a broad-based coalition including church representatives, unionists, professionals and politicians (Dent 2004). In the months following the invasion of Iraq, WAWC fractured. Subsequently, two significant peace organisations existed in Sydney; the larger Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition (SP&JC) and the smaller Stop the War Coalition Sydney (STWC).

In South Australia, the 'peace movement' was organised slightly differently. In September 2002, a group of concerned individuals reignited NOWAR South Australia, a group that actually began around the time of the Gulf War in 1991. NOWAR was the dominant group engaging in peace activities and events in South Australia. It was not a broad-based coalition or umbrella for a wider network as occurred in Victoria and NSW. NOWAR often lead, but also worked in conjunction with other peace or antiwar initiatives undertaken in South Australia.

What were the aims and objectives of these organisations?

Each of these four organisations includes a list of their aims and objectives or a charter of what they are supporting on their respective websites. Before the invasion, the broad message was clear, 'no war against Iraq'. Following the invasion, the message has become more difficult. Distinctions between some of the groups occur around differences over such challenges as nature of the support that should be given to the Iraqi resistance; and what role the United Nations should play, if any.

How were these organisations connected nationally and internationally?

While these four peace organisations were connected to national and international networks, there was no formal structure around which this occurred. The internationally coordinated events, particularly the demonstrations of 14-16 February 2003 were a product (significantly) of discussions at international meetings such as the World Social Forum. Larger groups such as those in the US and Europe made plans and Australian peace organisations followed.

On a national level, no national committee or organising body was set up, although there is some talk of a desire for such an entity presently (at least in South Australia and Victoria). 'Rolling demos' on weekends were a feature of the peace movement in Australia. Victorians had a preference for Friday nights, in New South Wales coordinators were keen to have actions on Saturdays, and in South Australia they were happy to organise demonstrations on Sundays.

What resources did these organisations have?

The peace or anti-war groups around Australia operated with varying access to resources. While some had much greater finances than others, all reported enormous inputs from volunteers working at all levels of their organisations.

What finance and infrastructure resources were available?

The Victorian Peace Network (VPN), and the initial New South Wales organisation, the Walk Against War Coalition (WAWC), were well supported and funded. They were provided with office space by the Trades Hall Council and Labour Council respectively. They received contributions from affiliated organisations and raised money at rallies.

In contrast, the much smaller Stop The War Coalition of Sydney (STWC) and NOWAR South Australia were 'quite poor', they 'had very little'.

What resources did these organisations have available for web design and maintenance?

While the budgets and resources of these organisations varied widely, each of the four organisations managed attractive, informative and efficient websites.

The VPN was fortunate to have a central member of their network who was also able to design and manage their website. Initially, it took two or three days a week get the website established with its fact sheets and associated links to other sites. Subsequently, the site only required an hour or so of maintenance each week.

The SP&JC organised their website so that it could be maintained by three or four different people who, using a security system with passwords were able to share the job. A similar type of system was implemented for STWC and NOWAR.

What information communication technologies (ICT) were used, and how?

Websites

Each of the four groups has a website acting as an 'electronic advertisement' for the messages provided by each group. Each site has links to other sites as well a range of useful materials that can be downloaded by visitors.

Email

All groups found email to be an immensely useful tool for a whole variety of communication and organisational activities. The VPN and SP&JC had about 3000 people on their email lists. STWC had between 1400 and 1800, and NOWAR had addresses for about 800 people in their database.

E-discussion rooms or chat-rooms

E-discussion rooms or chat-rooms are fully interactive, real-time places where people can go for online discussions.

Chat-rooms were not significantly employed by any of the organisations participating in this research. Through NOWAR's newsgroups it was possible to institute a 'chat'. The two main issues considered barriers to this technology were that participants needed to be online at the same time; and that a chat-room may require a moderator to implement some basic rules. STWC would have considered employing a chat-room had they have had the resources to moderate it.

E-democracy tools

Enquiry into the use of 'e-democracy' tools gave rise either to bewilderment or analogy's of people being 'e-democratic' through creative employment of email.

E-democracy software is now available, though not yet widely used. It provides a controlled and secure mechanism in which an orderly and equitable decision-making process can be effected. It requires people to go online to do this, but it can be useful for reaching decisions among multiple or diverse stakeholders.

Mobile phones and 'texting'

Mobile phones and their 'texting' facility are becoming increasingly useful for rapid communication and information diffusion.

The four groups investigated report using mobile phones heavily, but predominantly in traditional ways. That is, they use it for 'one to one' conversations and texting. See suggestions later in the paper for innovative ways to use mobile phones, the 'Smart Mob phenomena'.

STWC reported a high degree of reliance on mobiles as they operated without an office (they do not have the resources to support an office), and they were reluctant to utilise their home phone numbers for security reasons. The VPN weren't certain that whether actually requested mobile phone numbers when acquiring supporter details. SP&JC reported some problems with mobile phones collapsing or overloading at the larger rallies.

Faxes

Fax machines are among the older of the information technologies being used. The STWC used them particularly for faxing media groups. Daniel Edwards found that fax machines 'are as popular as they were 10 years ago' (Edwards 2004).

E-news

Electronic news operates like an online newspaper. In addition to putting information on your website, it is prudent to compile information of interest into attractive documents and forward it via email to your members; thus saving them the effort of having to go your site to check for updates and events.

The VPN sent out an email bulletin once a week. NOWAR employed two 'news groups'. These are news bulletins that other people, for example, your members or affiliates can contribute to; you can moderate this content if you desire.

A tabular summary of ICT employment in the resurgence of the peace movement

Table 1 broadly summarises the importance that a range of ICT had in each organisations operations. The level of importance could be high, moderate, or low. Where a technology has not been employed, 'not used' is inserted.

Table 1. Information and communication technologies used by peace organisations

	VPN	SPJC	STWC	NOWAR
Websites	High	High	High	High
Email	High	High	High	High
Internet forums (or message/discussion boards)	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used
Weblogs (or blogs)	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used
E-discussion or Chat rooms	Not used	Not used	Not used	Low
E-democracy tools	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used
Mobile phones and 'texting'(one to one)	High	High	High	High
Mobile phones and 'Smart mob' phenomena	Low	Low	Low	Low
Faxes	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
E-news	High	High	High	High

The research highlights:

- the strong use of websites as 'electronic advertisements', email and mobile phones for one-to-one communication
- the negligible use of ICT for constructive and enduring electronic dialogue between constituencies
- some consideration of, but little employment of mobile phones technology to facilitate rapid and fluid one to many communications
- an omission electronic democracy tools in decision-making
- the reasons some ICT were either not or negligibly employed, including:
 - the urgent nature of the peace movement in reaction to the government's bold transition to war may have favoured more familiar technologies and strategies

- o untried ICT initially can have an alien nature. It is not always apparent how ICT can supplement and shape existing strategies
- o actual or perceived expense, capacity and expertise constraints also act as barriers to the absorption of ICT into organisational strategy.

The final section and the conclusion of this paper consider manners in which the increased employment ICT may advance the peace movement.

What challenges do ICT present to the peace movement?

While ICT provide immense opportunities for the peace movement, they also present challenges.

Email issues

Some groups strongly acknowledged the importance of using their email lists 'constructively'. They are careful about the volumes, quality and relevance of information they send; they attempt to mitigate the risks of recipient fatigue or annoyance:

Technology's chill

Very real challenges are posed by technologies difficulty in communicating feeling. Have you ever pondered about how to 'sign off' an email? Professor Camilleri recognises a 'loss of closeness' within political movements as they increasingly move to e-mail and text messaging:

"Email just gets information across. You can't get passion across. It is very difficult to convey determination, passion, commitment, and intensity of the situation. These sorts of things need to be supplemented by the spoken word, including face to face encounters" (Camilleri 2004).

What are the main challenges facing the peace movement?

The VPN responded to this enquiry from a broad perspective:

"The biggest single challenge facing the peace movement anywhere around the world is becoming relevant to the discussion about peace.

I think we need to have a strategy: what do we do about 'Saddam Hussein's' if we don't invade? How does the peace network change the world in a peaceful fashion?" (Deller 2004).

The initial response from South Australia's NOWAR was more operationally focussed:

"I think it is trying to develop these networks; including local, regional and national and linking in with international" (Lucas 2004).

Unity of the movement

In New South Wales, where a split developed over issues such as how much support should be given to the Iraqi resistance movement, this challenge is very real:

“Yes it is an issue. We already have two coalitions working in Sydney, unlike in the other cities. When we made the split we said we should talk to each other down the track about what our experiences were, but that hasn’t happened yet” (Murphy 2004).

In South Australia, while support for the movement has diminished since the war began, deep divisions have not occurred within the remaining members of NOWAR.

Maintaining support

The decline in support since the war began has been more confronting for some than others:

“There have been aspects of despair because what we’ve seen over the last year is a very notable decline in support for the anti-war movement” (Samson and Kennedy 2004).

Professor Camilleri addressed this challenge:

“I think the serious challenge is finding people who are able to make a long-term investment. A hundred thousand might turn up to a rally; that is the easy part. The hard part comes after when the things you have called for don’t materialize. One of the biggest things in the peace movement is how to avoid this problem. As a planner you have got to work on that strategically right from your first campaign. When we are having campaigns we would all be saying suppose nothing were to be achieved in the first six months; how do you maintain morale? And what if it doesn’t happen in two years — what tricks do you have up your sleeve” (Camilleri 2004).

Professor Camilleri suggests reasons why it is difficult for peace groups to endure:

“What I am saying is — where you are left on your own in the Australian or Victorian context, it becomes very hard, but if you are part of an international organization you are sustained by that to some extent. Even in lean times; or hard times. And I think that this is one of the problems. That there haven’t been enough groups that have got this international input, to help sustain them; to help set the agenda etc. So, the internationalization of the movement is terribly important for ongoing success” (Camilleri 2004).

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War are a good example of such an enduring organisation.

How could technology be better employed to assist the peace movement?

Establishing inclusive, broad-based, enduring spaces for dialogue

ICT presently provide a variety of tools for establishing dialogue. These tools are effectively an extension of more primary means with which web pages and email has been employed. There are at least three distinct means of establishing online dialogue: internet forums, weblogs and electronic discussion rooms.

All create a space for people to communicate where they cannot necessarily meet in person. These tools are not intended to replace in person human interactions, but to supplement and enhance them.

While these tools were not used significantly by the organisations investigated in this research, they are increasingly used by political, media, government and commercial institutions around the world.

Internet forums

Internet forums, also known as message boards or discussion boards, are a form of web application for online discussions. An Internet forum typically exists as part of a website and invites users to initiate topics and discuss issues with one another. Generally, many users are able to contribute topics (sometimes referred to as 'threads') facilitating a form of 'many to many' dialogue (Wikipedia 2004).

Internet forum software typically allows an administrator to define several forums (or fora), which act as containers for topics or threads started by users. Other users can contribute replies to topics and start new ones as they wish (Wikipedia 2004).

Internet forums are divided between those requiring registration and those allowing users to contribute anonymously. In the former, users choose a username and password, and may be required to submit an e-mail address for confirmation. An administrator may grant certain users moderator privileges. These can include the ability to delete contributions and topics, move topics to other forums, edit contributions, or other mechanisms designed to keep the peace and uphold the rules set out by the administrator (Wikipedia 2004).

Weblogs (or Blogs)

A weblog, web log or simply a blog, is a web application where someone keeps an online diary, or posts their thoughts periodically. It can be similar to a newspaper opinion piece, but appearing on a website. Many of these sites allow visitors to respond to the information that is posted. Though these sites have become increasingly popular, they remain in the control of the person who controls the 'blogging' (not the respondents). Blogs are distinct from Internet forums

in that they are often a 'one to many' dialogue — the opportunity for the many to contribute is typically limited.

Weblogs are frequently updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the Web, often with comments, and to onsite articles. A weblog is kind of a continual tour, with a human guide [whom] you get to know (Wikipedia 2004).

Electronic discussion rooms (or 'chat rooms')

Electronic discussion rooms allow real time discussion between parties that are online at the same time. These can be useful for specific dialogues occurring at pre-arranged times. Unlike Internet forums and blogs, the record of the dialogue is typically not retained once a session is complete.

Mobile phones — 'Smart Mob' phenomena

The power and possibilities of mobile phone technology is increasingly being realised and it provides a great tactical tool for the peace movement.

Short Message Service (SMS) permits a text message to be sent to multiple mobile phones simultaneously. The message can be sent either from a mobile phone, a website or an email system.

While it has been used by some parts of the peace movement, it was not a tool fully utilised by the organisations investigated.

Daniel Edwards provided an insightful account of how this technology can be used:

"The notion is one of a very rapid mobilization of protesters prior to an event that has little administrative organizational structure behind it. That's what we saw actually on the day of the Iraq war beginning. I think the scenario I remember was the announcement came that the bombs were dropping over Iraq at 3pm. Now the actual arrangement prior to that was that we would have a protest at 5pm on the day the war started. But this is happening at 3pm and we literally have 2 hours to mobilise tens of thousands of protesters. This is where mobile phone SMS really came to the fore. And they're also very useful at the moment of protest. A lot of marshals and legal advisers within a protest will speak to each other by mobile phone and try to co-ordinate activities that way.

...In the old days you'd just have I presume a PA system, and a lot of people shouting at each other. But if you go to protests these days a lot of these guys have mobile phones and they're texting each other and now you can actually send group text messages out which is extremely useful for that. So coordinating event's, becomes easier: we're going

to move to Swanston Street; you then text it out to the marshal and they herd the protesters that way” (Edwards 2004).

Electronic democracy tools

These tools now facilitate more subtle consensus-building online. These could become increasingly popular for organisations with dispersed constituencies who cannot come together frequently.

Conclusions

The research indicates that a wealth of opportunities exist for the peace movement at this time. The idea of pursuing a ‘holistic’ peace is very powerful. It creates values and ideals around which enduring and transformative strategies can be constructed.

Development of a national movement would strengthen the peace movement by:

- constructive sharing of ideas and resources
- generating political action at a national scale
- facilitating dialogue and coordination with international groups.

Existing ICT have already been powerfully employed by the peace movement. It could be argued however that the real power of ICT is still yet to be seen. Technology could be used as a tool to enhance many aspects of a strategic approach to peace. For example:

- Educational outreach should become much faster; reach further into new places; and be more targeted for diverse audiences.
- ICT can nurture pluralistic, wide-ranging and constructive dialogues. These can help build bonds of common understanding and cohesiveness amongst wide and disparate constituencies. Internet forums and weblogs, as discussed, are the most powerful means. Electronic discussion rooms provide a useful tool for more instantaneous dialogues. Websites that promote dialogue will potentially attract new parties and enhance existing visitation.
- The ‘smart mob’ phenomena should be explored. Great potential exists for creative new actions, and for providing support and intelligence to larger events through better coordination of marshals and legal advisors.
- Other technology strategies that may be useful nationally include interactive sites where people can register opinions about prospective actions or ideas; where they can reply to a suggestion by clicking in a box, etc. to affirm or disagree, or alternatively they may make a comment.
- E-news produced at a national level may be more interesting because a more diverse range of material could be included. It could also be produced in more arresting but efficient ways through a system of resource and idea sharing.

- Similarly, information points [somewhere where someone can pose a question] and or the moderation of a national chat-room would be easier if there were some sharing or pooling of national resources.

Any technology strategy must, however, be designed with the sensitivities of its users in mind. They will not want to receive overly large amounts of information that is not of real value to them. Tactics like including statements like 'click on this link if you want to be removed from mailing list' helps reduce anxiety for people plagued by volumes of email.

Increasingly intelligent communication software packages now exist for secure/confidential, flexible, democratic online communications. An example of such software is 'Info-Share', produced by Sanjana Hattotuwa in Sri Lanka to aid conflict transformation in that country. Such a tool includes spaces for ongoing multiparty dialogues; it is secure — accessible only to those who have the software and are 'included' into a group; and it provides a range of intelligent services such as electronic democracy tools for reaching decisions amongst diverse or multiple stakeholders (Hattotuwa 2004). Such software could help support healthy multi-stakeholder coordination at the national level.

These are some of the ideas prompted by the research undertaken. As I look around at the way multinational organisations harness the power of ICT in long-term integrated strategies, I think why not the peace movement?

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