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Organizations and the Social Networking Technology
Revolution: Patterns of Adoption across Organizational Fields**

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**Transnational Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations and the Social Networking
Technology Revolution: Patterns of Adoption across Organizational Fields**

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Transnational Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations and the Social Networking Technology Revolution: Patterns of Adoption across Organizational Fields

The nonprofit sector has frequently risen to the aid of the poor, the disposed and the disenfranchised. Nonprofit organizations have provided both aid and assistance, on the one hand, and advocacy and activism on the other. These functions are central to the nonprofit sector both within nations and in the space between them.

As globalization and internationalization proceeded, the growth of global civil society occurred and problems became international in size and scope, international and transnational advocacy also grew larger and more extensive (see Batliwala, 2002; Young, Koenig, Najam & Fisher, 1999; Warkentin, 2001). One of the principle factors facilitating this transformation was the availability of easily available and relatively inexpensive information technology and the growth and diffusion of communication networks, particularly the Internet (see Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Clark & Themudo, 2006).

In addition to facilitating international administrative operations, this type of technology has been a major factor in the transformation of advocacy and activism. We saw mainstream advocacy groups like the World Wildlife Fund; Oxfam International, Greenpeace and Amnesty International begin to use the Internet as a major part of their operations. Move On developed into one of the world's largest advocacy organizations almost completely in cyberspace. Local organizations like *Zapatista Army of National Liberation* in the Chiapas area of Mexico and *Narmada Bachao Andolan* in rural India have been successful in bringing world attention to local battles with global powers (Routledge, 2000; Garrido & Halavais, 2003; Meikle, 2002). Finally, global social

movements dealing with organizations supporting the forces of globalization, such as the G8, IMF and World Bank have used the Internet to organize resistance and mass demonstrations (Meikle, 2002).

The social and technological basis for electronic advocacy also developed. From a series of efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s (McNutt & Appenzeller, 2004; Hick & McNutt, 2002), electronic advocacy matured (McNutt & Boland, 1999) and flowered (Cornfield, 2004) in the new millennium. This became a major part of the nonprofit advocacy.

In the past few years new technology has emerged that promises to add new dimensions of interactivity, involvement and participation. Collectively called Web 2.0 (McNutt, 2007; McNutt & Flanagan, 2007; McNutt & Robinson, 2008; Addison, 2006; Bryant, 2006; Germany 2006), these new technologies are providing new and exciting opportunities for nonprofits in general and nonprofit advocates in particular. While these technologies are an evolutionary leap in web based technology and offer important capacities for nonprofits, they also have ramifications for organizational structure and strategy. Because of those implications, this is more than a straightforward diffusion issue. It is also critical because this technology is being widely adopted in the commercial sector and in government. If the nonprofit sector cannot adapt to this technology sea change, it is likely to be left behind. In general, nonprofit technology adoption has often varied by field, owing to the presence or absence of networks of resources within those fields. It is important, therefore, to consider adoption of Web 2.0 technologies from a field or sector perspective. While this is an

important development, it is too new for much research to have developed and much of what is available deals with a single technology such as blogging or social networking sites. It is important to have a baseline assessment of this phenomenon to support subsequent work in the area. This research will help fill that gap by addressing the following questions: (1) Are Transnational Nonprofit Advocacy Groups Using Web 2.0 Technology? (2) Does adoption vary by sector? (3) Do organizational factors such as size, previous adoption and age matter in explaining variations in adoption? This study addresses those issues. This research is important because it considers a range of Web 2.0 technologies, as opposed to a single technology such as blogging. It also relates Web 2.0 to organizational and sector issues.

Relevant Literature

There are three relevant streams of literature that support the present study. The literature on advocacy and international advocacy is one such stream. While this literature is both rich and extensive, the material on the professionalization of nonprofit advocacy is particularly salient. A related but distinct stream is the incorporation of technology into advocacy practice. This literature is growing and some of it deals with Web 2.0 applications. Finally, there is the literature on diffusion of innovation theory. This helps us to explain the role of organizational factors in adoption of innovation.

Nonprofit Advocacy and the Transnational Realm: Advocacy is clearly one of the functions performed by the nonprofit sector in many societies throughout the world (Salamon, 1994). Transnational nonprofit advocacy has always existed, but has grown significantly in the decades following the Second World War. This expansion has

accelerated significantly in recent decades and is now a major activity of the nonprofit sector. Part of this growth has been fueled by the capacities brought to the table by information technology.

As advocacy has grown it has also changed. At one time, advocacy groups were membership organizations. They represented their members on issues important to them. These organizations invested a great deal of effort in preparing their members to function within the policy environment.

In the past few decades there was a shift in the composition of many, but not all, nonprofit advocates. This change was a move toward more professionalized advocacy groups. These organizations were smaller with professional staff guiding the advocacy process. Members were less relevant and often left out of all but the most general decision making. These organizations are generally smaller and support their activities with extensive fundraising. Mass Media was used where possible.

Berry (1999; 1977) argues the merits of this arrangement. He observes that this type of organization can advocate for post material causes (such as civil rights, the environment and so forth), that traditional membership could never develop consensus about. This of course leads to the idea of message control over member inclusion.

Berry's optimism is countered by Putnam (2000) and Skocpol (2003). They argue that these organizations damage social capital and civil society by preventing ordinary citizens from, participating. This implies that civic skills are not developed and that the networks and relationship needed for an effective political system are not created. Both cite evidence that this is occurring in the form of voter turnout,

involvement in associations and so forth. Norris (2002) wonders if the participation is there but has taken other forms, such as participation over the Internet.

In any case, this process is part of the trend toward professionalizing politics. Political professionals and consultants have replaced volunteers in many political campaigns and races. These groups spend a great deal of effort on message development and message control. Debate and deliberation are discouraged.

It is likely that remaining membership based organizations will be older and more established. Newer organizations will tend to be more of the professionalized politics approach. Certainly, there will be exceptions to this general rule.

Advocacy and Technology: Technology, principally Internet based technology has had a major impact on nonprofit advocacy. Starting small with e-mail, newsgroups and bulletin boards, electronic advocacy grew during the 1990s.

Much of this technology paralleled traditional advocacy operations in the new public interest groups that Berry (1999) identified. While more interactive than mass media, webpages and email could be used without much danger of sacrificing control over advocacy messages. In fact, many groups merely plastered their print material on webpages and other new media—a practice referred to as “Brochureware”.

In the past five or so years, a movement toward a new set of technologies was afoot. These technologies came to be known as Web 2.0. These technologies put a premium on interactivity and participation and most allow users to generate or use their own content. These technologies allow people to not only consume content but to produce content as well. It also allows people to pool their knowledge and expertise.

While some have raised the question about how unique Web 2.0 actually is, the growth of this type of technology has been enormous. It has been adopted by organizations in business and public administration. The news media has fallen in love with Blogs, Wikis and YouTube and discussions about Social Networking Sites fill the airways. Web 2.0 has had tremendous impact on political campaigning (Trippi, 2004; Cornfield, 2004; German, 2006). Blogs, Video and social networking sites are part of all the major campaign efforts in the 2008 Campaigns in the United States and have begun to emerge in other nations as well.

While new technologies continue to develop, a set of Web 2.0 core technologies exists. The major components are:

- **Blogs:** Blogs or Weblogs are on-line posts that readers can post comments about. This has become a form of journalism and Bloggers are given press credentials at major political happenings. The Dean Campaign made good use of a Blog called Dean for America [now Blog for America] (Trippi, 2004).
- **Wikis:** A Wiki is a set of webpages that can be edited by readers. The strength of a wiki is that it can take advantage of the expertise of a group. Wikipedia is one example of the use of a wiki. Readers can remove erroneous information and add new resources.
- **Social Networking Sites:** Social Networking sites provide users with a profile and the ability to network and communicate. The most popular sites, in the US are Facebook, MySpace and Friendster. There are many other possibilities throughout the worldⁱ. While most of the social networking sites are created by

individuals as extensions of their social lives, others are created by organizations or for them by supporters.

- **Social Bookmarking:** Social Bookmarking sites allow users to benefit from the bookmarking activity of other users. Users do a search and bookmark a site. The system aggregates the behavior of all of the users and makes the results available to all. One of the more popular sites is Del.icio.us.
- **Image Sharing Sites:** These sites allow users to upload pictures and search and download pictures that others have posted. Flickr is a well known example. Some advocacy organizations have used these sites to give their supporters a way to upload images of environmental destruction, corruption and so forth.
- **Videosharing Sites:** These sites allow users to upload digital video and watch videos that have been provided by other users. Channels provide users with the ability to view series of videos. YouTube is a well known example of video sharing sites. Advocates have used these sites to highlight issues and expose wrongdoing. US Senator George Allen's Macaca speech is a good example.
- **RSS and Feeds:** RSS (Really Simple Syndication) allows users to subscribe to a site and receive updates when new information is added. For an advocacy organization, this keeps the organization's message in front of potential supporters.
- **Mapping:** On-line mapping allows users to place data on a map and to manipulate that data in some way. Google Earth and Google Maps are two examples of this type of technology although many systems exist. This is

different from Geographic Information Systems in that users can manipulate the data.

- **Games:** Games can be powerful learning and advocacy tools. In Web 2.0 they can be used to persuade, to teach and facilitate within an on-line environment. The Dean Campaign in the United States created the Dean for America Game to teach campaign workers how to canvass for votes (<http://www.deanforamericagame.com/>).
- **Collaborative Tools:** These are web based tools that allow people to collaborate through the web. They include applications like Google docs and spreadsheets. Meet Up (www.meetup.com) is another collaborative tool that creates face to face meetings through the Internet.
- **Virtual Worlds:** These are programs that create simulated realities that users can experience through the web. Second Life is a popular example. PETA (www.peta.org) has a second life space. Second life and other virtual environments are often useful for demonstrating the nature of the problem.

Web 2.0 is definitely a moving target and new technologies are constantly being created (Madden & Fox, 2007). While some of these technologies are new, others are created by combining elements of existing technologies. These combinations are called “Mash Ups” and account for many of the most innovative technologies (McNutt, 2007a).

Web 2.0 technologies would create issues for an organization that sought to control message and eschewed member or public involvement in decision making (see

Germany, 2006). In this case, technology would not support the organization's goal of making decisions that are free of deliberation.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory: Some organizations take longer than others to adopt new technology. A wealth of social science theories seek to illuminate the reasons behind the variations among organizations in their use of different technologies.

One of the most durable theories is Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory (see also Strang & Soule, 1998). This will sustain the organizational component of the theoretical framework for this study.

For Rogers (2003), innovations are communicated to a succession of groups (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards) via channels or networks of communication. While considerable attention is given to the transmission of the idea of the innovation, implementation requires shop floor knowledge as well (Robinson, Swan & Newell, 1996). This may be one explanation for the dominance of environmental organizations in the use of technology. They have better access to scientist and engineers than many other advocacy organizations because of the subject matter of their advocacy efforts.

A number of factors determine organizational receptivity to innovation. Size (bigger organizations are more likely to be innovative), structural configuration, leadership, degree of centralization and formalization, interconnectedness, presence or absence of slack resources and degree of system openness. In Rogers' (2003) work, however, many of these dimensions are subsumed by organizational size. He also notes that studies attempting to relate these factors to later innovations have had difficulties

demonstrating significant associations. In our work here, this would mean that larger organizations will be more innovative than their smaller counterparts.

Previous experience with technology would suggest that organizations are already innovative and technology is inside their experience. Rogers (2003) argues that compatibility is a determinant of innovation acceptability. It would also suggest that the other preconditions are there for similar innovations to be adopted.

Given this discussion, we would expect that older organizations would be more willing to adopt Web 2.0 as part of their strategy on-line. We would also suspect that size and use of older technology would be important predictors of Web 2.0. Given these propositions, we can advance the following hypotheses:

- 1) Older Organizations will adopt Web 2.0 at a higher rate than newer organizations;
- 2) Larger organizations will adopt Web 2.0 at a higher rate than smaller organizations.
- 3) Organizations with higher previous use of technology will adopt Web 2.0 at a higher rate than organizations without that experience.
- 4) Organizations from the environmental sector will adopt Web 2.0 technology at a higher rate than human rights organizations.

Methodology

This is an exploratory study of the use Web 2.0 technology by international organizations. The dependent variable is the degree of Web 2.0 adoption and the predictor variables are age, size (Staff size is used as a proxy) and previous technology use.

Subjects: *The Yearbook of International Associations, 2006-2007* (Union of International Associations, 2006) was used to select the organizations. A stratified systematic sampling strategy with replacement was employed yielding a reasonably large ($n=172$) sample stratified into environmental organizations and human rights organizations. Intergovernmental Organizations, Instrumentalities of international treaty organizations and business trade organizations were excluded. The sections on human rights organizations and environmental organizations facilitated the stratification. The final sample had 78 Human Rights Organizations and 94 Environmental Organizations. All continents were represented in the final sample.

Research Strategy: The websites of all subjects were accessed using either the URL specified in the Yearbook or a search engine. Pages were examined using a set of categories developed for previous studies (McNutt & Robinson, 2008; McNutt & Flanagan, 2007). Data on Founding Year and Staff Size were obtained either from the Yearbook entry or the organization's website. In some cases, American nonprofits were checked against Guidestar (www.guidestar.org) and other standard nonprofit resources when needed information was not found in either on the website or the Yearbook. Data was collected in the late spring of 2008 over a two week period of time. Two raters collected the data. The inter-rater reliability was .82 over the 10% overlap.

We created two composite variables for Web 2.0 technology and Traditional Technology. Sector was coded "0" for Environmental Organizations and "1" for human rights organizations.

Results

All data gathered were coded and cleaned. Of the 172 organizations that we studied, 78 (45.3%) were classified as human rights organizations and 94 (54.7%) were classified as environmental organizations. The classification was based on the cataloging in the Yearbook.

There is a great deal of variation in staff size. The mean is 60.06, the Median 7 and the Standard Deviation is 275.11. The largest organization has almost three thousand employees while there are a number of organizations with no employees. Some of these organizations are coalitions and others are housed in academic units.

There is also variation in the ages of the organizations. The mean age was 24.7, the Median was 19 and the Standard Deviation was 17.6. The youngest organization is two years old while the oldest is 136 years old.

Technology Used: Our first issue was the types of technology used by the organization. We divided technology into first generation advocacy technology and later, second generation or Web 2.0 technology. Since having a website was a sampling criteria, all of these organizations have a least some experience with technology. The results for older technology are presented below:

Table 1: Older Technology Usage

Technology	N	%
E-Mail List/Newsletters	111	64.5
On-Line Fundraising	68	39.5
Representative Look Up	2	1.2
Volunteer Recruiting	48	27.9
Petition	9	5.2
Database	42	24.4
Member Recruiting	48	27.9
Streaming Video	38	22.11

On-line fundraising is the most popular technology, followed by a newsletter/action alert e-mail, member recruiting and a database. On-line petition and representative were the least frequently coded. Many of these organizations placed a substantial number of working papers, reports and communications on their websites. There were also training resources and curriculum materials available. There was a considerable variation in the graphical quality and sophistication of the websites.

Web 2.0 Technologies were examined next. Table 2 reports the results:

Table 2: Web 2.0 Technologies

Technology	N	%
Blog	28	16.3
Video Blog	11	6.4
Wiki	5	2.9
Social Networking Sites	12	7.0
RSS	30	17.4
Podcasting	12	7.0
Image Sharing	8	4.7
Video sharing	16	9.3

Bookmarking	9	5.2
Games	4	2.3
Collaborative Tools	15	8.7
Mapping	11	6.4
Second life/Virtual World	1	0.6

Blogs and RSS Feeds were the most popular tools, while Wikis, Games and Virtual worlds were the least popular. Many of these organizations appeared to be using a content management system such as Joomla or Drupal. These systems facilitate the creation and management of web content.

Looking at the composite variables, the mean for older technology is 2.1686 technologies per organization the Median is 2, with a standard deviation of 1.83. Web 2.0 technologies the mean is .9419, the median is 0 and the Standard Deviation is 1.85. The number of sites coded as having no older technology is 34 or 9.8% and for Web 2.0 is 108 or 62.8%.

Regression Analysis

In order to address the hypotheses, an OLS Regression Equation was fitted to the data. All variables were entered simultaneously into the equation. The model specified that adoption of Web 2.0 Tools was predicted by sector, previous use of technology, age and size. The zero order correlations are presented below.

Table 3: Zero Order Correlations

	Sector	Old Tech.	Web2.0	Size	Age
Sector	1	0.63	-.191	-1.00	.026
Old Tech		1	.558**	.067	.026
Web 2.0			1	.206**	.098
Size				1	.088

Age					1
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* Sig .05 ** Sig. .01

The dependent variable is significantly related to all of the predictors. The strongest relationship is between older technology adoption and Web 2.0 Technology Adoption.

The sector variable is coded "0" for environmental organizations and "1" for human rights organizations. There is a significant negative relationship between newer technology and being a human rights organization.

Regression Analysis: All predictor variables were fitted a single OLS regression model.

The overall R=.625 with an R² of .390 and an Adjusted R² of .375. The F-Test (f=26.294) was significant at the .01 level. The regression coefficients are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.181	.250		-.721	.472
Size	.001	.000	.141	2.299	.023
Age	.008	.007	.076	1.257	.211
OLDTECH	.552	.060	.560	9.223	.000
Sector	-.775	.220	-.214	-3.518	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Total Web 2.0

Old technology and sector have the largest Beta Weights. Old technology, size and sector are significant. This analysis suggests that older technology, size and sector are important considerations and that age is less of a consideration.

Discussion

Throughout the world, organizations are using technology to improve the lot of the poor, the dispossessed and the downtrodden. We began this research with four hypotheses:

- 1) Older Organizations will adopt Web 2.0 at a higher rate than newer organizations;
- 2) Larger organizations will adopt Web 2.0 at a higher rate than smaller organizations.
- 3) Organizations with higher previous use of technology will adopt Web 2.0 at a higher rate than organizations without that experience.
- 4) Organizations from the environmental sector will adopt Web 2.0 technology at a higher rate than human rights organizations.

The results support, to some extent, all four hypotheses. There is less support for organizational size as an explanatory factor.

We argued that older organizations would be more accepting of Web 2.0. This is not supported by the results. Interestingly, the relationship between Web 2.0 and age is stronger than the relationship with old technology and age. This could have occurred because of Web 2.0's popularity with youth and youth efforts. It is also possible that newer organizations have more technology expertise than older associations. This parallels our earlier finding with US Environmental Groups (McNutt & Flanagan, 2007).

The impact of size is supported by the data. This is not surprising given that size is rather consistently associated with adoption in much of the nonprofit informatics literature (Cortes & Rafter, 2007) and would be predicted by diffusion of innovation theory. Organizational size might matter less because many, if not most of the Web 2.0

tools are available free or at very low costs. On balance, the personnel costs of using new technology might be more easily negotiated in a larger organization.

Environmental groups do appear to more readily accept Web 2.0 technologies. This suggests that sector does matter, at least in this case. Traditionally, this has always generally been thought to be true for environmental activists (Zelwietro, 1998). It also supports diffusion of innovation theory because of the networks involved.

Finally, previous use of technology predicts acceptance of Web 2.0 technology. This is not surprising giving the learning curve for technology adoption. It also means that the sunk costs that an organization must invest in order to use technology has already been made. This would also be predicted by diffusion of innovation theory.

This research should be seen in terms of its limitations. The sampling design has drawbacks. The sample cannot be considered representative of all human rights and environmental NGOs. Many smaller grassroots organizations are not included and these groups may have different experiences than the more established international groups. The issues involved in creating samples of these organizations are well documented (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; 2005). There are also limits to the data collection procedure. We can ascertain if a technology is present but not how or if it is used. We also have access only to public areas of the organization's website. We cannot evaluate what is being done internally. There is also missing data in some of the secondary data. Perhaps the major drawback is the nature of the phenomenon itself. Web 2.0 is clearly a moving target, changing constantly as it grows and develops. This

means that the coding scheme will continue to evolve at a much faster rate than that experienced in other types of research

There are some implications for future research. Studies of networks of organizations and their complementary use of Web 2.0 technology are needed. Studies of Web 2.0 technology effectiveness are also needed. One of the most pressing needs is the use of Web 2.0 Technologies in smaller, grassroots organizations.

The relative lack of technology sophistication in the nonprofit sector has lead to a situation where technology strategy does not always coincide with other aspects of organizational strategy. This clearly can happen in the advocacy arena. Adopting Web 2.0 technology can push organizations that are strongly committed to message control and top down decision making in ways that they don't want to go.

The Web 2.0 direction in technology has important ramifications for nonprofit organizations and nonprofit scholarship. This technology promises to support many of the things for which nonprofit scholars advocate. Previous technology was less of a proper fit.

On balance, maybe they should reconsider their strategy. The 2007-2008 American Democratic Presidential Primaries are instructive (see Garofoli, 2008, June 6). Former US First Lady Hillary Clinton ran a top down traditional campaign with a professional staff and a significant advantage in name recognition and position. Barak Obama, on the other hand, ran a bottom up grassroots campaign and made significant use of Web 2.0 technologies. On June 7, 2008, Clinton conceded the nomination to

Obama. In many ways, Web 2.0 captures a style of politics that is very attractive at this point in the world's evolution.

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Endnotes

ⁱ A visual representation of social network site popularity is available at <http://csserver.ucd.ie/~mfarrugia/>.