

# Mobilizing for a Green World

The Use of Internet as an ENGO  
campaigning tool in the US

Substantial Research Paper

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“History might have been very different if Karl Marx had been able to send e-mails. The idea of organizing thousands of protesters across the globe would have been fanciful. But the ability to do it anonymously and beyond the reach of the conventional media has led to a new breed of protester.”<sup>1</sup>

Online Activists Plan Global Protest, BBC News, Nov. 26, 1999

## Introduction

Originating from the conservation and preservation debate in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the environmental movement in the US has kept evolving. The first Earth Day in 1970 announced the US environmental movement’s establishment in politics, following which the institutionalization of environmentalism started with an accelerating pace of environmental legislation and the establishment of environmental agencies. 40 years after the first Earth Day, the momentum of the environmental movement remains robust. Its contents have grown from conservation and preservation of the wilderness to anti-pollution, environmental justice and sustainable development. The number of environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) has increased from a few in 1960s to more than 5,000 by 2000.<sup>2</sup> Almost every US citizen is now aware of environmental issues, and environmental thought has been developed at local, national and international levels.

Many see the strong vitality of the US environmental movement as coming from its diversity and the wide public support behind it. However, as it has been pointed out by

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News, Online Activists Plan Global Protest, Nov. 26, 1999  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/537587.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/537587.stm)

<sup>2</sup> Brulle R., Turner L. H. et al. (2007). Measuring social movement organization populations: A comprehensive census of U.S. environmental movement organizations. *Mobilization*, 12, 3: 255-270

the resource mobilization theory, the resources aggregated towards the environmental movement, including public support, knowledge of environmental issues, funding and environmental professionals, are mostly gathered and mobilized by ENGOs. ENGOs are formal organizations with environmental protection and conservation as their missions. They carry out scientific research, environmental campaigns and other programs to improve the society's environmental awareness, turn resources into actions to solve or mitigate environmental problems. They are the nodal points of the polycentric US environmental movement network. ENGOs identify environmental problems, find solutions, then deliver these messages to and cooperate with other sectors of the society to solve the challenges facing the industrial world.

The network of ENGOs has expanded rapidly after the 1990s at both international and local levels. On one hand, environmental movements have sprung up in developing countries along with the process of economic globalization, and an increasing number of ENGOs with headquarters in the US have opened branches and/or cooperated closely with local ENGOs in the South during the past two decades. On the other hand, coalitions have been formed among national ENGOs and grassroots ENGOs within the US around certain environmental issues. Interestingly, this happened simultaneously with the proliferation of Internet usage in the US and other parts of the world. In the information age, ENGOs publish information on their organization websites and blogs, organize and mobilize activists via emails and bulletin boards, and build interactive communities on social media websites like Facebook and Twitter.

This paper explores ENGOs' new organizing and campaigning tool since the 1990s—the Internet. It asks the questions, how do ENGOs in the US use the Internet to promote

environmental campaigns, and does the use of Internet empower ENGOs and the environmental movement?

To answer the above questions, this paper presents a brief history of the US environmental movement, reviews existing study of ENGO's usage of Internet, and summarizes the basic characteristics of the US environmental movement in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 describes how the Food and Water Watch, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and Pew Environmental Group use direct email, blog, social media, video-sharing website and coalition website to promote environmental campaigns, and how the Earth Hour, a global environmental campaign initiated by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) uses the Internet to maximize its influences. In Chapter 3, the implications of the four cases on the research questions are analyzed and discussed. The four cases presented in the Chapter 2 are based on interviews of staff members of above organizations, and analysis of their annual reports, media releases, blogs and websites, as well as other related information published by traditional media.

Besides the four organizations being studied here, numerous other ENGOs are using direct email, social media, and coalition websites as their campaigning tools. Although different organizations may hold diverse opinions towards the role of the Internet in their work, and employ diverse online advocacy strategies, the basic functions and characteristics online advocacy tools are similar. As such, in spite of the small number, these four cases can represent the main approaches and effects of ENGOs' usage of Internet. In the meanwhile, in order to present the diversity of the environmental movement in the US, different categories of online advocacy platforms are studied in the context of different ENGOs.

Due to limited time and information, a narrative and anecdotal style rather than a systematic, quantitative approach is used for case study. Thus this research does not contribute to the quantification or measurement of online advocacy's effects on environmental campaigns or the environmental movement in the US. Nonetheless, it is an effort to fill the gap of empirical studies on ENGO's employment of Internet to mobilize the environmental movement, and a test of prior theoretical inferences about the effects of the Internet as a campaign tool for ENGOs.

Overall, this research explores the usage of Internet by ENGOs and its effects, and draws a picture of the historic and current development of the US environmental movement. For those who wish to learn more about the environmental movement and online advocacy in the US, I hope this research will be a good place to start.

## **Chapter 1 A Brief History of the US Environmental Movement and Related Theories and Literature**

### **1.1 Environmental Movement and ENGOs in the US**

Since it arose in the 1960s, the modern American environmental movement has expanded its social and political influence throughout half a century. Today it is considered more successful than the women's, nuclear and peace movements that originated in the same period (Dalton, 1994; Dunlap and Mertig, 1992). Surprised by the environmental movement's lasting vitality, scholars try to identify the sources of its momentum. Their researches have shown that it is the diversity of the movement (Silveira, 2011) and the support from the public (Hofrichter and Reif, 1990; Scott, 1990) that provide the energy sources of the American environmental movement, which has successfully facilitated environmental legislation and environmental technology development, and cultivated environmental thought and culture in the society.

The environmental movement can be defined as the political and cultural process aimed to solve the conflicts caused by environmental issues between human beings and the natural environment, between different groups, and between current and future generations through the interactions of individuals, ENGOs, government agencies and corporations. Among these actors, ENGOs are the main organizers and facilitators of the movement. They put government agencies on notice to push forward environmental legislation, organize environmental protests, educate the public about environmental problems, disclose corporations' misbehaviors, and work with the public, government and companies to find solutions. As such, it is appropriate to say that ENGOs are the backbone of the American environmental movement.

### 1.1.1 Late 19<sup>th</sup> century, wilderness-centered environmentalism

The first environmental organizations in the US, including the National Audubon Society (NAS) and the Sierra Club, were established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These organizations arose on a wilderness-centered ideology, which was formed in the 1870s when the great beauty of the wilderness in the West encountered the threats of urbanization and industrialization. Although both aimed to protect nature, the NAS and the Sierra Club adopted different approaches—conservation for NAS, and preservation for the Sierra Club. To preservationists, the wilderness should be kept intact from industrialization and urbanization, to the conservationist, the resources in the wilderness could be employed as long as they were well managed and used efficiently.

Members and supporters of these first environmental organizations then were mostly “wealthy, white, Anglo-Saxon males who enjoy outdoor activities, such as hunting, fishing and camping.”(Siliveira, 2001, p502) Far from being a social movement, the early conservationism and preservationism can be seen as “an attempt by privileged classes to preserve a place for outdoor recreation.” (Siliveira, 2001, p502) Despite its limited public participation compared with the later environmental movement, the first environmentalism led to the development of national parks and the establishment of regulations on the usage of natural resources in the US. Furthermore, conservationism and preservationism keep functioning as the basic ideologies of many environmental organizations today.

### 1.1.2 Earth Day, from recreation to politics

The modern American environmental movement started in early 1960s, when the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* drew wide public attentions to the pollution and harm caused by synthetic pesticides, insecticides and other chemicals. Compared to prior conservation and preservation work supported by the upper-middle class, the newborn environmental movement encompassed anti-pollution activities in both rural and urban areas as its new mission.

A group of major ENGOs which are still active today were founded with the rise of the American modern environmental movement, including the Environmental Defense Fund (1967), Zero Population Growth (1968), Friends of the Earth (1969), the Union of Concerned Scientists (1969), Natural Resources Defense Council (1970), Greenpeace (1971) and Public Citizen (1971). One common focus of these ENGOs in the early days was pollution and environmental justice. They spoke for the people, fauna and flora that were harmed by pollution, and asked for political, institutional, life style and cultural changes regarding the relationships between human beings and nature.

The early environmental movement reached its apex on 1970 Earth Day, when 200,000 people gathered at the National Mall in Washington DC, together with demonstrations being held throughout the country. Individuals, ENGOs, governments and even corporations joined this event to express their concerns about the environment, asking for the control and elimination of pollutants and wastes, requiring environmental policies to be formulated, demanding the business be responsible for the health of people and the

environment, and questioning the sustainability of the American lifestyle.<sup>3</sup> The first Earth Day was a tipping point, when the environmental movement entered politics. Along with increased attention being paid to pollution issues and urban environmental problems, the environmental movement has gradually gained broad support from middle-class in the society, as well as those who are involved in environmental issues in the working class.<sup>4</sup>

### **1.1.3 The institutionalization of environmentalism since the 1970s**

In response to the fully expressed public concern towards the environment on the first Earth Day, the federal government started to list environmental issues on its agenda. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established in 1970, and fourteen environmental acts were passed from 1970 to 1977, covering air, water, and solid waste pollution control, wildlife protection, natural resource management and environmental quality improvement.<sup>5</sup> With the establishment of the EPA and a series of environmental laws, regulations and policies, a set of domestic environmental institutions started functioning. Despite this progress, environmental issues still lingered on the periphery of governmental agendas, and environmental demands were often compromised when they went against short-term economic interests.

Governmental work on environmental issues slowed during the 1980s, when the Reagan administration and the Bush administration adopted an environmental deregulating approach and endeavored to create a more favorable business environment to facilitate economic growth. The backsliding from the government, however, mobilized ENGOs to

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<sup>3</sup> Adler Jonathan (1995). *Environmentalism at the Crossroads: Environmentalism in America*. Capital Research Center, Washington DC.

<sup>4</sup> Buttel, F. H., Flinn, W. (1974). *The Structure of Support for the Environmental Movement, 1968-1970*. *Rural Sociology*, 39, 1, 56-69.

<sup>5</sup> Wisman, P. , *EPA History (1970-1985)*, <http://www.epa.gov/history/topics/epa/15b.htm>

adopt various approaches to maintain public concern for environmental issues, including conducting environmental litigation and fighting directly with corporate polluters. From 1985 to 1990, the number of members and annual budget of the ten largest ENGOs in the US experienced significant growth, increasing from 3.3 million to 7.2 million, and from \$ 218 million to \$ 514 million, respectively. In 1965 when the environmental movement just started, the largest ten ENGOs had fewer than 500,000 members and less than a \$10 million annual budget.<sup>6</sup>

Within the community of ENGOs, divergence emerged in terms of approaches for most effective way to mobilize conservation and environmental protection. While ENGOs such as the EDF, the NRDC, the NAS and the Sierra Club took lobbying and litigation which would facilitate environmental legislation and regulation as their main strategies, organizations such as Greenpeace adopted a direct action, “bearing witness” approach, organizing protests against whaling, nuclear testing and pollution caused by the business sector, and trying to evoke public support by delivering vivid protesting pictures.

Meanwhile, environmental justice groups started to be established beginning in the 1980s, aiming to speak for the African-American, Hispanic, indigenous communities and other minority groups who were subjected to a disproportionate burden of hazardous wastes and pollutants, and were underrepresented in the political process.

The establishment of environmental laws, regulations and policies at all the federal, state and local levels formed a solid group of environmental institutions. With both the work

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<sup>6</sup> Kline, B. (2007), *First Along the River: A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement*. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., Lanham, Maryland:109

of the government and ENGOs, many citizens in the US became familiar with environmental thought by the end of the 1980s.

#### **1.1.4 After the 1990s, globalized and localized environmental networks**

The pace of economic globalization has surged since the 1990s with the end of the Cold War and the development of the World Wide Web. Along with the process of economic globalization, there is a substantial growth in transnational corporations (TNCs) and international cooperation on environmental issues.

In 1992, 172 governments, 108 state leaders and 2,400 ENGOs attended the United Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) in Rio, Brazil, building on the earlier UN conference held in Stockholm in 1972. This conference formally accepted sustainable development as the goal of a modern economy internationally, which bridged the gaps between the North and the South on environmental protection and economic development. By 2002, when the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, 12 international environmental treaties had been signed by an average of 150 governments, covering ozone depletion, climate change, toxic waste, biodiversity and wildlife conservation, desertification, and persistent organic pollutants.

Since the 1990s, the global influence of ENGOs has grown significantly as well.

Environmental problems and environmental awareness are rising in the developing world, which have given birth to local ENGOs. An increasing number of major ENGOs with headquarters in the US such as NRDC and The Nature Conservancy have opened offices in the South and/or started to cooperate closely with ENGOs in developing countries.

Another phenomenon worth noticing is that some ENGOs, such as the EDF and the

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have started to adopt a market approach towards environmental issues. They work with corporations, trying to promote changes within the business world. On the other hand, many ENGOs still follow a confrontational tradition towards corporations, seeing environmental disruptions as an inherent characteristic of business, which needs to be closely watched by the civil society.

Along with the increase of international cooperation in environmental works, there is a growth of grassroots ENGOs and groups in the US. Compared to national ENGOs who set headquarters in Washington DC and lobby legislators on Capitol Hill, grassroots ENGOs have a much smaller number of members, focus on local environmental issues and citizen participation, and often take a direct action strategy. For example, RESTORE: the North Woods focuses on forest and wildlife protection in New England, and the Alaska Community Action on Toxics aims to advocate for environmental health and environmental justice for local communities.

In the past half century, the environmental movement in the US has gone through its ups and downs. With endless efforts from citizens, ENGOs and governments, environmentalism is now a given consciousness of the American public. By 2000, there were more than 5,000 ENGOs working on local, national and international levels (Brulle et al., 2007). The environmental movement has survived and thrived because of its diversity and public support. In the meanwhile, unsolved, larger scale, and more severe environmental challenges keep the momentum of the environmental movement remain strong and robust.

## 1.2 Theoretical Background

According to Ritzer (2010), Sociological theory is “a set of interrelated ideas that allow for the systematization of knowledge of the social world.” (p5)<sup>7</sup> More specific descriptive or causal assumptions can be deduced from sociological theory, and phenomena in the social world can be explained or predicted by the theory and its deductions. Answering how social movements are formed, what is the process of mobilization and exploring the structure and organization of social movements, social movement theory offers systematic knowledge which can help us to better understand the overall structure and process of the US environmental movement, and offers theoretical support to explore how and to what extent the usage of Internet by ENGOs can mobilize the public and add teeth to the movement.

The development of theory is a dynamic process. A theory is usually being improved or abandoned due to new knowledge obtained through further studies. In the field of social movement study, different theories, including the collective action theory, the resource mobilization theory, Karl Marx’s historical materialism, and the new social movement theory, have been developed to answer questions about social movement. Since this paper focuses on ENGOs’ usage of Internet for environmental campaigns, only the indications of Resource Mobilization theory and the New Social Movement theory, which has a closer connection with the research question of this paper, are discussed here.

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<sup>7</sup> Ritzer, G.(2010). *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics*. 3rd editions. St. Louis: McGraw-Hill: 5

### 1.2.1 Resource mobilization theory

Resource mobilization theory defines a social movement as a set of opinions, beliefs, and actions in a population that represents preferences for structural changes in a society.

While the social movement theories developed before resource mobilization theory take the sudden increase of shared grievances and general beliefs about the causes and solutions that can reduce the grievances in a society as the main factor of the generation of a social movement, resource mobilization theory stresses that it is the adequate aggregation of resources by entrepreneurs and organizations make a social movement possible. According to resource mobilization theory, grievances exist in any society, and can be “defined, created, and manipulated by entrepreneurs and organizations.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, a social movement delivers collective goods, which are non-excludable in use, thus few individuals are willing to full bear the cost of pursuing them.

The organization that aggregates and mobilizes resources for a social movement is called a social movement organization (SMO), which “identifies its goals with the preferences of the social movement” and “attempts to implement these goals.”<sup>9</sup> Resources such as legitimacy, money, facilities and labor (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) needed by SMOs come from individuals or other organizations in the society. To achieve their goals, SMOs have to mobilize resources, and to translate resources into action. McCarthy and Zald have categorized potential resources for SMOs as adherents, constituents, bystanders and opponents. Adherents are those individuals and organizations who agree with the goals of the SMO, and constituents are those who provide resources for the SMO.

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<sup>8</sup> McCarthy J. D. and Zald M. N. (1977). Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6 , 1212-1241: 1215

<sup>9</sup> See id. At 1218

Thus the resource mobilization task of a SMO is to convert adherents into constituents, and turn non-adherents to adherents so as to maintain and expand its resource pool.

McCarthy and Zald also distinguished individuals and other organizations as potential beneficiaries who would benefit directly from the goal of the SMO, and “conscience constituents” who provide resources to the SMO out of moral concerns, personal beliefs and values but would not benefit directly from the SMO’s goals. In conditions that potential beneficiary adherents of a SMO lack resources, the goals of the SMO can only be reached if it can garner resources from conscience adherents. Since most social resources are controlled by a minority of individuals and organizations in the society, and often those who have rich resources are less likely to benefit directly from the goals of a SMO, some SMOs rely heavily upon conscience constituents, and the importance of conscience constituents in social movements is increasing.

According to resource mobilization theory, the resources available for a SMO depend on its ability to mobilize potential beneficiaries and conscience adherents. This includes the capacity of the SMO to develop programs or campaigns that could bring incentives to create and/or increase “group solidarity and commitment to moral purpose” (Jenkins, 1983, p537), and the existing social infrastructures which could be utilized by the SMO to accumulate its resources, such as means of communication, transportation and the current political system. Thus as Jenkins has pointed out, resource mobilization theory indicates formally structured professional SMOs “are more typical of modern social movements and more effective at mobilizing resources and mounting sustained challenges than decentralized, informal movement structures; the success of movements

is largely determined by strategic factors and the political processes in which they become enmeshed.”<sup>10</sup>

### **1.2.2 New Social Movement Theory**

New social movement theory explores the root causes, participants and structure of contemporary social movements. It is called “new social movement theory” because it argues that as products of post-industrial age, contemporary social movements are fundamentally different from those “old” social movements in industrial societies, which often started by the working class and aimed for economic redistribution. Contemporary social movements such as the feminist movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement and the homosexual movement focus on life-style concerns, values, autonomy and culture. As such, the social construction of collective identity around the central issue of the movement is important for their success.

After World War II, the power of states, market economy and the mass media is expanding in contemporary societies. Mouffe (1984) pointed out that the state’s intervention into all fields of social production, the mass media’s capacity to reshape collective identities, and the society’s dependence on market for satisfaction accelerates the process of bureaucratization, cultural massification and social life commodification in contemporary societies. The deepening domination of state, market and mass media intrudes into the civic sphere of social life with their wide and inescapable effects, which arouses resistance from the civil society.<sup>11</sup> Thus the new social movement stresses “the importance of processes that promote autonomy and self-determination instead of

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<sup>10</sup> Jenkins J. C. (1983). Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1983), pp. 527-553 : 528

<sup>11</sup> Pichardo N. A. (1997). New Social Movements: A Critical Review. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 23 (1997), pp. 411-430: 420

strategies for maximizing influence and power,” and “underscore symbolic action in civil society for the cultural sphere as a major arena for collective action alongside instrumental action in the state or political sphere.”<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the participants in new social movements are based on their common values and/or common concern towards certain social issues, which are often socially constructed rather than structurally determined. Tactics such as direct action, public participation, symbolic politics and the decentralized structure of new social movements also reflected their anti-institutional orientation.

### **1.3 Fitting the US Environmental Movement in Social Movement Theory**

It is easy to tell from the brief history of the US environmental movement that it is a dynamic process which evolves over time with diverse participants, SMOs, ideologies and tactics. Although the characteristics of the US environmental movement vary in different time periods, new social movement theory and resource mobilization theory are useful tools to understand the main theme and overall structure of the movement.

As a new social movement, the US environmental movement challenges the existing route of industrial production, requires introspection into the human-nature and human-human relationships, and proposes new paths to a sustainable production style and lifestyle. Even with the institutionalization of the environmental movement, including the establishment of governmental environmental agencies, environmental laws and regulations, environmentalism still represents constant critiques of the existing social and economic system. It questions the market mechanism which ignores the limits of natural

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<sup>12</sup> Buechler S. M. (1995). New Social Movement Theories. *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 441-464: 442

resources, the expanding power of corporations, consumerism, and the disproportional environmental burdens posed for the less privileged and the poor.

NGOs are the SMOs of the environmental movement. They are professional, specialized organizations staffed by paid employees. Their goals and targets represent the environmental movement's preferences of social change. NGOs compete with other organization in the society for resources, including material capital, human capital, public attention and public support to maintain their survival and to realize their goals. As such, NGOs reach out to the public, governmental agencies, private firms and other institutions to maximize their adherents and constituents, so as to mobilize resources which are necessary to the organization itself and the environmental movement as a whole.

There are numerous strategies and tactics for NGOs to mobilize resources, but all of them fall into three categories:

- 1) Building public attention, grievance and support through disseminating information on environmental issues and environmental ideologies;
- 2) Building organizational image and brand through delivering to adherents and other individuals and groups its goals, expertise, achievements and ongoing programs;
- 3) Raising funds from organization members, other citizens, foundations, and governments based on their support for the environmental movement and the organization.

A successful social movement relies on the accumulation of the resources it can employ, but it also depends on the efficient transformation of resources into effective actions. Similarly, although a large number of environmental campaigns have been employed by ENGOs, their goals can be generalized into categories below:

- 1) To facilitate environmental legislation, by targeting actors who are political representatives and/or governmental agencies;
- 2) To stop or alleviate environmental destructive behaviors, and/or to promote environmental friendly practices, by targeting actors who are corporations and other institutions
- 3) To cultivate environmental ideologies and to promote sustainable lifestyles among individuals and communities.

In terms of structure, the US environmental movement is polycentric and networked (Gerlach, 1999).<sup>13</sup> The environmental community is a big family constituted by members who care about various issues, such as conservation, anti-pollution, corporate social responsibility, food and agriculture, and environmental justice. The scales and missions of ENGOs vary a lot. Some focus on one specific issue such as forest conservation in New England, while some big international ENGOs work on the conservation of ecological hotspots around the world. Not one or a small group of ENGOs can lead the direction of the movement or represent the whole community. All of them share some

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<sup>13</sup> Gerlach L. P. (1999). The Structure of Social Movements: Environmental Activism and Its Opponents. In Freeman J., Johnson V. (eds.). *Waves of Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield: 85-98

basic values and beliefs, connect to each other through a loose network, and as a whole shape the big picture of the environmental movement.

#### **1.4 Literature Review**

As has stated in the introduction, the research question of this paper is how ENGOs in the US use the Internet to promote environmental campaigns, and whether this has empowered ENGOs and the environmental movement. When looking into the literature related to this question, I found most of it affirms the strength the Internet has added to ENGOs.

Henderson (1974) explored the function of information in the environmental, peace and social justice movements in the Western countries in 1960s and 1970s. According to Henderson, the dissemination of new or restructured information alters public perceptions of reality, and challenges the rationality and legitimacy of accepted behavior, value, regulation and institution. He concluded that the most critical strategy of new social movements is to “manipulate information and, in turn, to change prevailing views of what is rational.” Based on Henderson’s assumption of the importance of information in mobilizing social movements, Kutner (2008) argued that the Internet empowers grassroots ENGOs via expanding their capacities to “access, use, create and disseminate information,” (p181) to reach the audiences and to get connected with those who are beyond their social, political and geographic boundaries.

Like Kutner, other scholars looking into ENGOs’ internet usage for environmental education, environmental advocacy, internal and external communication agreed that the Internet has increased ENGOs’ capacities to reach the public, policy makers and

traditional mass media, to build public relationships, and to put environmental issues on the social, economical and political agenda (Yang and Taylor, 2005; Xie, 2008).

Organizational websites are stable platforms for organizations to manage information flows and to constantly communicate to their stakeholders (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007), and online conversations between ENGOs and their stakeholders help to build beneficial and long-term collaboration (Yang and Taylor, 2005). In countries where mass media and civil society are under strict government control, such as China, disseminating information, organizing discussions, activities and mobilizing volunteers via email, mailing-list, electronic newsletters and bulletin boards is an effective way for ENGOs to overcome political constraints (Yang, 2005).<sup>14</sup>

Rather than study how the Internet facilitates ENGOs' work, Brunsting and Postmes (2002) asked whether the Internet is transforming collective action, and if so, how the internet functions. Basing on literature research on the social psychological perspectives on online action and an empirical study of the motives to participate in online versus offline collective action for environmental protection, Brunsting and Postmes reached the conclusion that by endowing "activists the power of mass communication", and "opening up of new avenues or reinforcing existing forms of activism", the internet does change collective action profoundly. Meanwhile, they point out that the Internet's anarchical structure increases people's ability to express behavior and identities, which being

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<sup>14</sup> Kutner, L. A. (2008). Environmental activism and the internet. In Gupta, K.R., Jankowska, M. A., & Maiti, P (Eds.), *Global environment: Problems and policies volume 2* (pp. 181-192). Delhi, India: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd.

exposed to online information and free of restrictions mobilize peripheral group members and outsiders who would not normally be part of the movement to take action.<sup>15</sup>

The above studies show how the Internet as both the tool and forum for communication is playing an extremely important role in ENGOS' work nowadays, however, empirical studies on the use of internet for ENGOS to mobilize conservation and environmental protection is very rare. The shortage of empirical studies impedes our in-depth understanding of the role of Internet in facilitating the environment activism, and makes the theoretical studies unchecked deductions. Thus, there is an urgent call for empirical studies on the latest usage of Internet in environmental campaigns, which will add to a better understanding of how the Internet contributes to the vitality of the environmental movement, and to help build a solid foundation for further research.

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<sup>15</sup> Brunsting, S., & Postmes T. (2002). Social movement participation in the digital age - Predicting offline and online collective action. *Small Group Research*, 33(5), 525-554.

## **Chapter 2 Four Cases on the Use of Internet as an ENGO Campaigning Tool**

In this chapter I present the readers four cases of ENGOS' using the Internet to publish information, facilitate dialogues, mobilize public supports and build politic momentum.

The Internet mediated advocacy tools employed by ENGOS are generalized into three categories: direct email; interactive Internet mediated communication including blogs, social media and video sharing websites; and coalition websites. Although there are numerous ENGOS in the US working on all above Internet mediated advocacy tools, in order to give an in-depth description of ENGO's employment of these tools as well as to present the diversity of ENGOS in the US, I chose to study Food and Water Watch's using of email newsletter and email alert, the Natural Resource Defense Council's using of a staff blog, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, and the Pew Environmental Group's use of a coalition website. The fourth case, the use of Internet in the Earth Hour campaign is a showcase of how the Internet made the world's largest voluntary environmental action possible, and transformed it from a symbolic action to real change.

### **2.1 Food and Water Watch—Direct Email**

Established in 2005, Food and Water Watch (FWW) is a young ENGO dedicated to promoting sustainable production and consumption of food and water. Starting from a team of 12 people based at Washington DC, it has grown within six years into an organization with more than 60 staff and 13 field offices in 10 states and Washington DC, watching corporate and government accountability towards sustainable food and water production, as well as and the public's accessibility to safe water and food.

During the past 6 years, FWW has successfully carried out dozens of campaigns guarding the safety and accessibility of food and water. For example, FWW made Starbucks

promise to stop using dairy products produced with recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH), which is an artificial hormone used on cows to increase milk production and is linked to human infections and increased cancer risk, and gathered public support for halting the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s approval of genetically modified salmon.

### **2.2.1 Main campaigning strategies of the FWW**

The advocacy work of FWW mainly focuses on two fields: one is sustainable food production and food safety, which includes but is not limited to anti-factory farms, anti-genetically engineered foods, and anti-food irradiation; the other is about safe and accessible water, which includes but is not limited to water conservation, anti-bottled water and anti-water privatization.

Funded fully by donations from members, individual donors and foundations, FWW works as a watchdog of corporate behavior and takes a confrontational approach towards business. Through conducting research and publishing related reports, factsheets and press releases, FWW lobbies policy makers and educates the public with scientific findings on food and water issues, mobilizes both online and offline advocacy for policies which ensure the soundness of the food, water and the environment, and presses business to abandon unsustainable practices.

Born in the time with Internet as a necessary operating and campaigning tool for ENGOs, FWW is actively employing almost every form of Internet-mediated communication, including websites, blogs, direct email and social media to promote its campaigns, among which email newsletters and email action alerts are the main strategies to send

campaigning information to its members and email subscribers, as well as to collect activists' signatures for electronic petition letters.

### **2.2.2 Direct email as a major tool to promote FWW campaigns**

The first free Internet emails were offered by a few companies in 1996 (Left, 2002).<sup>16</sup> By 2010, the number of worldwide email accounts reached more than 2.9 billion, and the number of emails being sent and received daily by a corporate user is around 110 (Radicati, 2010). Email is an effective communication channel to reach thousands of people within a second regardless of the distances between the sender and recipients.

Most ENGOs in the US use email newsletters and email alerts to enhance the relationship between the organization and its supporters. Email is the main tool to circulate latest campaigning information, to develop membership, to raise funds, and to get people to take advocacy actions. Compared to other ENGOs, FWW sends information more frequently and offers a greater variety of news to its email subscribers. While NRDC delivers its electronic newsletters monthly, Greenpeace International contacts its email subscribers weekly, an FWW email subscriber receives as many as 14 emails per month if he or she chooses to receive all categories of emails. Six email lists are offered by FWW, including FWW Highlights which asks recipients to sign electronic petition letters, Goodfood covering the latest news on food issues, Take Back the Tap on water issues, Wild Oceans on ocean aquaculture, Special Blog Outreach Unit asking recipients to take on rapid advocacy actions, and FWW Europe reporting news from Europe.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Left S. (2002), Email Timeline, Guardian  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2002/mar/13/internetnews>

<sup>17</sup> Food and Water Watch website, <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/email-sign-up/>

Taking FWW Highlights as an example, it lists the information about a controversial food or water issue, and asks the recipients to sign petition letters regarding the passage of a related bill or urging the responsible governmental agency to take appropriate action. A click on the highlighted link in the email alert will lead to the petition webpage at the WFF website, where the activists' signatures are collected. FWW Highlights covers almost all the organizations lobbying campaigns, such as supporting the Congress to pass the bill to ban genetically modified salmon, urging the Environmental Protection Agency to review certain synthetic chemical used in food production, and asking the US stop water privatization.<sup>18</sup>

In the open letter which Starbucks addressed to FWW promising to stop using dairy products produced with rBGH, the increasing number of petitions Starbucks had received from its customers is listed as the reason for Starbucks changing attitudes towards rBCH dairy products.<sup>19</sup> According to the information listed on the FWW website, other major success campaigns supported by activists' petition letters include:

*February 10, 2011 FWW Activists sent over 23,000 messages to Congress to stop GE salmon. "Frankenfish" bill to ban GE salmon introduced 1/31/11.*

*January 10, 2011 Over 11,000 letters from FWW activists helped stop a Secretary of State Corporate Responsibility Award from going to Fiji water.*

*January 04, 2011 With the help of over 15,000 letters from FWW activists to their representatives, the Food Safety bill passed with small farmer protections.*

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<sup>18</sup> Email alerts from FFW

<sup>19</sup> Starbucks letter to FWW, FWW website, <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/foodsafety/dairy/starbucks-campaign/starbucks-letter-to-fww/>

*November 22, 2010 FWW activists submitted over 90,000 comments to the FDA opposing the approval of genetically engineered salmon.*<sup>20</sup>

Thus we can see, although it is difficult to know the number of subscribers of FWW's email list due to limited information and to separate the effects of email from other Internet-mediated campaigning tools such as social media, it is fair to say that email is a stable and cost effective way to engage a large number of supporters. The activists' voice delivered in petition letters is a major factor accounting for many of FWW's successes.

## **2.2 Natural Resources Defense Council—Blog, Social Media and Video-sharing website**

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is one of the ENGOs established at the very beginning of the US environmental movement. Founded in 1970 by a group of law students and attorneys with a grant from the Ford Foundation, NRDC started its work on litigation and legislation regarding environmental pollution. NRDC had helped to write the Clean Air Act, won the lawsuit requiring cities to improve public transportation and reduce reliance on cars, and sued power plants for discharging pollutants without taking appropriate pollution control measures in 1970s. During the following 40 years, NRDC survived through the ups and downs of the US environmental movement, and environmental litigation remains one of its main strategies to hold the business and government accountable for their environmental responsibilities.

With 1.3 million members, NRDC has grown into one of US's largest ENGOs. It has more than 300 staff members in six offices located in New York City, Washington DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing, among which the New York office is its headquarters. Its working areas have also grown from preventing pollution to wildlife

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<sup>20</sup> Victories, FWW website, <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/victories/>

conservation, countering climate change and developing clean energy, ensuring water safety and water accessibility, as well as fostering the development of sustainable communities.

### 2.2.1 Main campaigning strategies of NRDC

According to Jacob Scherr, the Director of NRDC's Global Strategy and Advocacy who has worked at NRDC since 1976, NRDC is a results oriented organization with the mission to safeguard the well being of people, animals, plants and the earth's natural environment. Started as a public litigation firm, one of the core strategies of NRDC is to foster effective enforcement of current environmental regulations, as well as to promote the enactment of new environmental laws and regulations. In spite of taking laws and regulations as their weapon, NRDC has also developed strong capacities in environmental science, public policy and advocacy.

In both the 1989 “the great Alar alarm” campaign which aimed to stop the using of Alar, a synthetic chemical gives apples a longer harvest period, and the early 1990s New York city bus campaign which aimed to reduce bus exhaust, NRDC employed scientific findings and media coverage to mobilize public supports. In the “the great Alar alarm” campaign, the harms of Alar on human health was reported by the CBS news program “60 Minutes”<sup>21</sup>; for the New York city bus campaign, an advertisement was put on buses saying “Standing behind this bus could be more dangerous than standing in front of it.”<sup>22</sup>

A significant amount of public attention was received in both campaigns, and using

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<sup>21</sup> Adler J. (1995). *Environmentalism at the Crossroads*. Washington DC: Capital Research Center

<sup>22</sup> Adams J. H. (2010). Our New BOOK offers a Roadmap for Making Change and Protecting the Environment. NRDC Switchboard.

[http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/jhadams/our\\_new\\_book\\_offers\\_a\\_roadmap.html](http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/jhadams/our_new_book_offers_a_roadmap.html)

media reports and public support to influence advocacy targets were established as an important campaign strategy of NRDC.

When Internet based communication tools became available, NRDC successfully developed its online advocacy toolkit— an effective combination of main website, email, blog, social media and social network.

### **2.2.2 NRDC as a publisher with its Switchboard, social media webpages and Youtube channel**

The biggest merit of the Internet is its openness for of information publication and information exchange. While NRDC's main website and email list make the organization its own publisher, its staff blogs, social media web pages are the places where the followers can learn about the latest news, express and exchange their opinions, take actions, and get directed to more detailed information published on the NRDC main website by a simple click.

Started from 2007, NRDC's Switchboard maybe one of the most active ENGO staff blogs. More than 100 lawyers, scientists and policy experts put on Switchboard their comments on environmental issues, personal environmental stories and analysis of environmental regulations and policies. Articles are organized by contributors as well as issues categories. There are discussions about the 2011 US federal budget, the 2010 BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill, climate change, California's Marine Protected Areas, and so on . It is a place where NRDC staff members share their working experiences and thoughts, and hear about the voices of those who care about the same issues. Below the title of each article there is a “share” icon, by clicking which one can post the website address of the

article on social websites; there is also a “Flike” icon that shows how many people on Facebook like this article.

If the Switchboard is the platform for NRDC staff members to publish their opinions and communicate with their blog audience, the NRDC Facebook page and Twitter page are where the organization interacts with its hundreds of thousands of followers, members and activists. There are 153,000 people who follow NRDC on Facebook, and more than 22,700 NRDC followers on Twitter.<sup>23</sup> Compared to articles on the Switchboard or media release on the NRDC main website, news published on the NRDC Facebook and Twitter pages are much more concise, often within 50 words. However, these short version messages get more responses from the public, due to the interactive platform building within the design of social media websites. For example, news published on the NRDC Facebook page has an average of about 200 people saying “like it” and dozens of comments, while the number of comments for an article on the Switchboard is often less than ten. Furthermore, since a person’s Facebook homepage show the actions of that person and his friends, the dissemination of information within the Facebook is exponential. Hundreds of “like it” marks could present the information to thousands of people. In the meanwhile, NRDC can learn about the click rate of the published news and basic statistics about the viewers such as location, based on which NRDC can improve their communicating strategies.

With its main website, Switchboard and web pages on Facebook and Twitter, NRDC becomes its own publisher. Other than information released in the form of articles, NRDC also has a channel on Youtube. Since 2006 when the channel was launched, the

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<sup>23</sup><http://www.facebook.com/nrdc.org>, <http://twitter.com/#!/NRDC>, accessed May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

videos published on Youtube have been watched by more than 11 million audiences.<sup>24</sup> Apparently it is the Internet rather than print media that provides the richest information source about NRDC and its work. More importantly, due to the existence of the Switchboard and social media, the organization moves beyond releasing news, videos and reports on its website to really interact with its supporters at a daily basis and know their opinions about the organization and the things it is fighting for.

### **2.3 The Pew Environmental Group— Coalition websites**

Founded with more than 80 staff members and operating revenue of more than \$70 million in 2007, the Pew Environmental Group (PEG) is the conservation branch of the Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew). In addition to working on environmental issues, the Pew Charitable Trusts also hosts the Philanthropic Partnership Group, the Pew Center on the States, the Pew Health Group, and the Philadelphia Program and Information Initiatives.

In 2007, the PEG was established after the National Environmental Trust (NET) merged into the Pew Environmental Program. Pew has been working on public land and wilderness protection, clean energy promotion and marine conservation for about 20 years. It supports environmental scientific research, funds environmental work of other ENGOs, and builds collations of international, national and local ENGOs across the US. The NET, on the other hand, was founded in 1994. With field staff in 18 states of the US, the Washington DC based NET worked to advance environmental policy in the US and the development of international environmental treaties, and aimed to “localize the impacts of national environmental problems and highlight opportunities for Americans to

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/NRDCflix>, accessed May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

engage in the policymaking process to promote change.”<sup>25</sup> The establishment of the PEG is a combination of the scientific and financial strength of the Pew environmental group, and the policy, advocacy and campaign expertise of the NET.

### **2.3.1 Main strategies of the PEG**

Focusing on the conservation of public land, wilderness, marine life and the development of clean energy, the PEG staff members work in the US, Canada, Australia, the UK and other parts of the world at all the state, national and international level. Backed with strong scientific support from the Pew Research Center and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, the PEG endeavors to facilitate effective environmental policy and regulation at both the state and federal level within the US, build synergies among ENGOs, and conserve the world’s forest, ocean and the climate under the guidance of solid scientific findings. In 2010, the PEG helped to establish the 209,000 square miles Chagos Archipelago Marine in the UK; and 21 Canada’s largest timber companies and 9 conservation groups signed the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement under the leadership of the PEG, which aims to protect Canada's forest and improve the practices of the timber industry. Within the US, the PEG works with other ENGOs, government agencies and business to advance environmental practices and environmental policies.

Different from most ENGOs that relying on membership and contributions for financial support, most of PEG’s programs are founded by Pew. It is Pew’s board of directors has the final say on PEG’s program budget. As such, although educating the public about environmental issues remains one of the campaigning strategies of the PEG, the direct

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<sup>25</sup> Archive documents at the Environmental Defense Fund website  
[http://www.edf.org/documents/7221\\_National%20Environmental%20Trust.pdf](http://www.edf.org/documents/7221_National%20Environmental%20Trust.pdf)

interaction between PEG and the public is much less than most ENGOs. Before the establishment of a PEG main website in early 2011, only very concise information about the PEG was published on Pew's website, and the PEG does not have members nor email newsletters. What was available then was a weekly email newsletter about all work of Pew. This changed after the introduction of the new PEG website, on which the PEG stands as an independent organization, and online petition letters are now available for campaigns as well as email newsletter for members.

As such, it is appropriate to say that the PEG has just started to present on the Internet as an independent ENGO rather than a branch of Pew, and its employment of online advocacy has just begun. However, even during the time when the PEG's direct interaction with the public was limited and with legislators, governmental agencies, and business leaders as its direct targeted audiences, the PEG delivered its campaigning messages to the public through building coalitions with other ENGOs.

### **2.3.2 Maximize the synergy, the ENGOs coalition websites**

In 2009, the PEG started a partnership—the Alliance for Global Conservation with the Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund. The Alliance aims to conserve the biodiversity, natural resources, and wilderness of the Earth, and urges the US to pass the Global Conservation Act which was introduced to the Congress in 2010 and be a leader in protecting the planet.

The main website of the Alliance, <http://www.actforconservation.org>, started to function soon after the establishment of the partnership. With staff members of the PEG as its main maintainers and contacts, the Alliance's main website is the information center for

staff members working on the Alliance, media, and the public. The latest progress about the Global Conservation Act is published on the website, rich information about the importance of biodiversity and the global ecosystem are easy to access, and the environmental challenges the world is facing are also presented to the audiences. Supporters can subscribe the Alliance's electronic newsletter, and sign electronic petitions online to support the Global Conservation Act. The Alliance presents as an independent organization with clear action targets, and actively engages public attention and supports. Other than main websites and electronic newsletter and petition letters, the Alliance has also developed its Facebook page and Twitter page to further mobilize public supports.

The Alliance for Global Conservation is just one example of many coalitions among the PEG and other institutions, and among the ENGOs in the US. For example, the PEG also started a coalition with South Carolina organizations, such as the Audubon South Carolina, Carolina Climate Network and the SC Small Business Chamber of Commerce in 2009. This coalition aimed to improve the Lowcountry residents' awareness about the significant impacts of climate change on South Carolina, and called on South Carolina members of Congress to support the federal action to reduce the US's carbon dioxide emissions by 80 percent by 2050. Similarly, a website was built for the Save the Lowcountry campaign, as well as other online advocacy tools such as pages on social media and electronic petition letters.

From the above examples we can tell that building websites and social media pages of a coalition or an environmental campaign presents the public more direct and concentrated information. In the meanwhile, Internet provides a more effective and efficient platform

for ENGOs to work as a coalition on local, regional, national and international environmental issues, and to maximize their synergies.

#### **2.4 Earth Hour – From Local to Global**

The first Earth Hour was held from 7:30 to 8:30 pm March 31, 2007 in Sydney, Australia. During those 60 minutes, more than 2 million Sydney residents and 2,000 businesses turned off their lights and other electronic appliances; the Sydney Harbor Bridge, the Sydney Opera House sails and the Luna Park face went dark; and the energy consumption of the Sydney CBD had a 10.2% decrease. The first Earth Hour demonstrated that people and business in Sydney were aware of the causes of and challenges brought by climate change, and were willing to take actions to reduce their CO2 emissions.<sup>26</sup>

The Earth Hour campaign was initiated by WWF Australia and the advertising agency Leo Burnett in 2004, with the aim to find “engage everyday people and businesses in the climate change debate through a simple action.”<sup>27</sup> Organized by WWF Australia, Leo Burnett, Fairfax media and supported by the state government and the city of Sydney, the first 2007 Earth Hour proved a great success. However, probably no one had ever imagined that Earth Hour would grow into a global event in 4 years’ time. In 2010, 4616 cities and towns in 128 countries participated in the Earth Hour, with 1.3 billion people involved.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Congratulations Sydney! Earth Hour 2007 results. <http://wwf.org.au/news/congratulations-sydney-earth-hour-2007-results/>

<sup>27</sup> ANDY RIDLEY – BIOGRAPHY <http://www.earthhour.org/Spokespeople.aspx>

<sup>28</sup> Earth Hour 2011 official video on Youtube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Mxibip6y04&feature=related>

Earth Hour Historical Timeline <http://www.earthhour.org/History.aspx>

In 2011, the Earth Hour campaign moved a big step further. With the electric lamps off, hundreds of millions of people in more than 5000 cities and towns in 135 countries spent an hour in the light of candles, fireworks, and the moon. In addition to asking people and business to switch off their lights for 1 hour, it encouraged Earth Hour activists to go “beyond the hour”, to commit to changing their daily behaviors and adopt a more sustainable lifestyle, so as to counter climate change with further actions.

#### **2.4.1 Organizational structure and main strategies of Earth Hour**

The first Earth Hour was held in Sydney alone and was led by WWF Australia and its partners for this event. However, the Earth Hour campaign was soon adopted by other WWF national offices in over 40 countries in the next years, and has now grown into the largest voluntary action for the environment in history.

A national office of WWF works independently as long as it can raise funds. All national offices link with each other as a network (called WWF International), accepting the guidance and coordination of the secretariat located in Gland, Switzerland. Under such an organization structure, while under guidance and coordination of the Earth Hour Global team located in Sydney, Australia, each WWF national office is autonomous in deciding their Earth Hour strategies, including identifying and building relationship with partners, raising funds, and introducing Earth Hour to the public. In the meanwhile, Earth Hour is an open access brand, which means that anyone can organize and join the Earth Hour event without notifying WWF. On the other hand, Earth Hour activity organizers are encouraged to contact WWF for supports and official recognition.

As such, it is appropriate to say that WWF is the main organizer of Earth Hour, since it leads the promotion of this event and decides when the 1 hour happens. But as messages about Earth Hour spread around the world, and an increasing number of people, business and cities recognize it as an event to express their concerns about climate change and the environment, participants of Earth Hour organize themselves, turn off their lights for an hour at the appointed time in the last Saturday evening in March.

#### **2.4.2 Earth Hour and the Internet**

Can the Earth Hour reach its current scale and influence without using Internet? The answer is, definitely impossible.

As mentioned above, the 2011 Earth Hour is led by the Earth Hour Global team based in Sydney, Australia. This 12 people team worked with their WWF colleagues around the world, set out campaigning strategies and tools, and successfully mobilized the maximum amount of resources with limited inputs. The Internet was one of the most effective levers facilitating this campaign.

As the information hub, the Earth Hour main website has a neat design with clear direction to different categories of information. On the website, Earth Hour history and highlights are documented, as well as official press releases and the best videos and photographs about annual Earth Hours. All this information is free to download and use, for the purpose to spread the word about the Earth Hour. Linkages to Earth Hour social media websites are listed at the bottom of the main site homepage as icons. A click will lead a visitor to Earth Hour on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube, Myspace, Posterous and LinkedIn.

Social media websites are the platforms where Earth Hour organizers publish news, engage Earth Hour activists, direct conversations, and are the cyber communities where Earth Hour participants communicate with each other and share their thoughts. By April 2011, the official Earth Hour Global Facebook page had more than 624,000 followers, and the official Earth Hour Twitter page had more than 49,000 followers. There were more than 100 local Earth Hour communities on Facebook and Twitter, which were set up by both individuals and WWF country offices, including Earth Hour UK, India and South Africa. In the meanwhile, WWF used its email lists to send information about the Earth Hour to millions of its subscribers, and published Earth Hour news on its main websites as well as social media websites.

In spite of being used as an effective tool to disperse information and to engage the public, Internet has also played a big role in inner communication within WWF. Calls, emails and inner Earth Hour wiki site were the three main coordination tools for the 2011 Earth Hour campaign at WWF, among which two are based on Internet. The wiki site was the inner information hub. WWF Earth Hour campaigners around the world built country pages on the wiki site, where progress of the Earth Hour campaign and contact information of each country offices were stored. This allowed the Global Earth Hour team to monitor the campaigns across the world, and to share the best practices among campaigners in different countries. Regular calls and emails were used for communication between the global and local teams. Each representative from a country office reported to an assigned contact at the global team, who was responsible to deliver main campaign strategies and information, and to support the work of country representatives.

Under the lead of a 12 people team in Sydney, hundreds of millions of people in 5000 cities and towns in 135 countries volunteered to turn off their light for one hour on March 26, 2011, and many of them have committed to take actions beyond the Earth Hour. A large part of the coordination work relied on Internet, and many of the Earth Hour participants were motivated by the picture and videos they had watched online. Earth Hour is a witness to the world's willingness to protect the environment; it is also a witness to the power of Internet.

### **Chapter 3 Functions of Internet as an ENGO Campaigning Tool**

Starting with the goal of preserving the wilderness and anti-pollution, the contents and diversity of the modern American environmental movement have evolved during the past half century.

Clapp and Dauvergne (2005) mapped out four idea types of current worldviews on global environmental change and its relationship with world politics and economy: market liberals who take poverty, weak economic growth, market failure and poor government policy as the root causes of environmental problems; institutionalists who blame weak environmental institutions and inadequate global environmental cooperation for current environmental issues; bioenvironmentalists who see overpopulation, excessive economic growth economic growth and overconsumption the causes of environmental problems; and social greens who believe environmental problems derive from social and economic inequity at both local and global levels.

With different assumptions about the root causes of environmental problems, market liberals, institutionalists, bioenvironmentalists and social greens come up with different solutions. To market liberals and institutionalists, incremental changes within the current economic, political and social system such as economic development, correction of market failures and effective environmental regulations and policies will solve environmental problems. But to bioenvironmentalists and social greens, making incremental changes within the current system is not the real remedy, fundamental changes of the current system are required to save human society and the Earth from environmental crisis. For example, human beings need to curb overconsumption, sustainable economic development rather than economic growth at the price of

environmental wellbeing are the correct path of development, and more resources should be devoted to local community, marginalized people and developing countries.

Although ENGOs in the US have conducted numerous campaigns regarding various environmental issues, the typology proposed by Clapp and Dauvergen (2005) generalizes the main themes and debates within the environmental movement. In the real world, an ENGO may hold one or a mix of these four worldviews, according to which it chooses which environmental issues to work on, what solutions to advocate for, which facts, opinions, beliefs to deliver to the public, and what actions to promote. Activists from all of these worldviews are taking advantage of new social media to advocate for their cause.

During the past 15 years, using websites and direct email to publish and disseminate information has become a standard practice of ENGOs in the US, and an increasing number of ENGOs start to open staff blogs, launch social media pages and set up organizational channels on video-sharing websites in the past 5 years to have further interaction with the public. What differences has been made with Internet as a new campaign tool, and how does the Internet empower ENGOs and the environmental movement?

### **3.1 Internet for Public Opinion Construction**

One traditional way for ENGOs to influence public opinion is through media coverage of environmental issues, debates on environmental policy and environmental campaigns. For example, wide public interests and concerns were sparked when the pictures and videos about Greenpeace activists confronting whaling ships on the high sea

was first published on news papers and played on television in 1975, and many people turned against whalers after got these messages. Today, media still plays an important role in cultivating public concerns towards environmental issues, but the arising of Internet gives ENGOs the autonomy and flexibility to publish online the message they wish to deliver.

As we can tell from the NRDC's use of Switchboard, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, in spite of being reported occasionally on newspaper, radio or television, ENGOs now have their own online media center. They store comprehensive reports on environmental issues and media releases on their websites, update latest news on social media, and build their own channels on video-sharing website. To grassroots ENGOs, especially those who take the bioenvironmentalist and/or social green positions, media attention is usually difficult to obtain due to the limits of their scale and influences, as well as their objection of the mainstream neoliberal development model. But through Internet, they go beyond local and have their voices heard nationally, even internationally.

Individual belief and public opinion are subjected to the impacts of information. Whether an individual become a market liberal or a social green depends on his or her experiences and the information he or she is exposed and drawn to. The birth and development of the US environmental movement is a journey of raising environmental awareness and making social change basing on the dissemination of facts and opinions on environmental issues. The Internet has increased ENGOs' capacity to reach the public and to influence public opinion, which is necessary for ENGOs to build public concerns towards environmental problems, to promote sustainable lifestyles among individuals and

communities, and to mobilize the resources they need to move the environmental movement forward.

### **3.2 Internet for Resource Mobilization**

As the main actor of the environmental movement, ENGOs need to aggregate and mobilize resources for the environmental movement, as well as their own survival. Except for building public attention and support through disseminating information on environmental issues and environmental ideologies, ENGOs also build organizational image and brand through delivering to adherents and other individuals and groups its goals, expertise, achievements and ongoing programs; and raise funds from organization members, other citizens, foundations, and governments based on their support for the environmental movement and the organization.

Unlike traditional communication tools such as mail and phone call which require enormous efforts of work to reach a large number of audience, Internet mediated communication allows ENGOs to reach millions of audiences with a moderate economic and personnel input. Via email newsletters and email alerts, one staff member of FWW can reach thousands of email list subscribers by a simple click. On Facebook and Twitter, several staff members from NRDC lead the conversation among the organization and thousands of its followers. Victories of campaigns are delivered to the public at the first time, and electronic petitions are collected the moment it is signed. The Internet has greatly reduced the cost of resource mobilization, while at the same time has significantly increased its efficiency and scale.

In the meanwhile, the Internet allows ENGOs to use their resources more efficiently. Fully utilizing all kinds of Internet mediated communication tools, 12 people directed the 2011 Earth Hour, which had hundreds of millions of participants from than 5000 of cities and towns in 135 countries across the world. Because of the Internet, the Alliance for Global Conservation acts as an independent organization but is actually a partnership among five ENGOs. Communications and cooperation among ENGOs and different offices or chapters within an ENGO became much easier with Internet, which increases the strength and vitality of the polycentric and networked US environmental movement.

### **3.3 Internet for Action**

The Internet has significantly increased ENGO's capacity to disseminate information and interact with the public, which in turn strengthened ENGO's ability to mobilize resources for the environmental movement, and to use these resources more efficiently. But have these extra resources mobilized by Internet mediated communication tools been transformed into real actions?

As summarized in Chapter 1, the goals of various environmental campaigns can be generalized into three categories: to facilitate environmental legislation, to stop or alleviate environmental destructive behaviors of corporations and other institutions, and to cultivate environmental ideologies and sustainable lifestyles among individuals and communities. Tens of thousands of electronic petition letters collected by FWW and the change Starbuck made about dairy products produced with rBGH is one of many cases which prove the effectiveness of online advocacy. The 2011 Earth Hour's "beyond the hour" got tens of thousands of people commit online that they will change their daily behaviors to protect the environment. Thus, it is fair to say that Internet mediated

communication tools have transferred the mobilized resources into tangible personal and social changes.

## Conclusion

The empirical study of the FWW's email newsletters and email alerts, the NRDC's Switchboard, Facebook page, Twitter page and Youtube channel, the PEG's coalition website, and the success of the Earth Hour shows the employment of the Internet as campaign tools has empowered ENGOs and the US environmental movement. This confirms inferences about Internet's effects from Resource Mobilization Theory and New Social Movement Theory, as well as the conclusions of prior theoretical studies on Internet's impacts of ENGOs' work.

However, it will be dangerous to overstate online advocacy's contribution to the individual and social changes mobilized by the environmental movement. According to the *2011 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study*, in 2010 the open rate of ENGO's direct email is 17%, decreases 13% compared to the 2009 level, and the click through rate in 2010 is merely 3.2%; the email advocacy response rate of in 2010 is 5.6%, which means 5.6% of email alerts recipients signed electronic petition letters or emailing a legislator.<sup>29</sup> Even though direct email has the potential to reach a large amount of people, its effects might be much smaller than expected due to the low open rate and response rate. Furthermore, it is often difficult to mobilize activists to take offline advocacy actions such as call or visit a legislator through these Internet mediated campaign tools. But offline advocacy actions often bring bigger changes. Social media has similar problems, according to the estimation of Apollo Gonzales, the director of social advocacy at NRDC, only 1-2% of NRDC Facebook followers click the linkages which connect to more detailed information

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<sup>29</sup> Nonprofit Technology Network. [www.e-benchmarksstudy.com/files/2011\\_Benchmarks\\_Infographic.pdf](http://www.e-benchmarksstudy.com/files/2011_Benchmarks_Infographic.pdf)

on the NRDC website.<sup>30</sup> Even if an online advocacy does reach its campaign target, such as Starbucks committed to stop using dairy products produced with rBGH due to the petition of its customers, the success would not be achieved without the parallel offline actions taken by the ENGO and its activists.

As such, although this paper maps out on which aspect the employment of Internet empowers ENGOs and the US environmental movement, further study is needed to quantify the effectiveness of ENGO's Internet mediated campaign tools.

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<sup>30</sup> This data was obtained through an interview of Apollo Gonzales on March 30, 2011.

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