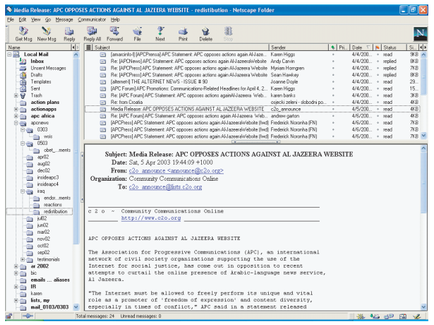
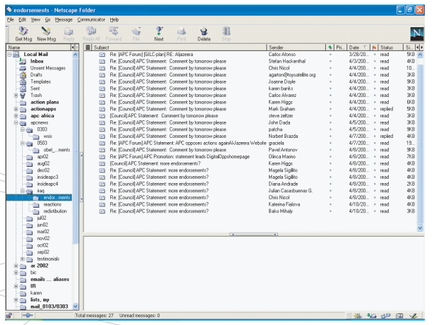
Do Formats Organize Networks?

What does a network do with a press release?

Statement by APC
Opposing Actions Against the Online Presence of Middle East News Agency, Al-Jazeera.



APC Press Release is received by APC.
Inbox, Karen Higgs, APC Communications Manager.



Endorsements of Press Release by APC Members.
Inbox, Karen Higgs, APC Communications Manager.

APC formats for networks (and beyond)

Newsletters · APC News/APC Noticias*
Press Releases to network (teaser + link)
Press Releases to press list (full text)**
New Resource announcements (itrain, actionapps)
Award (announcements) [Hafkin Prize]*
Annual reports*
Publications (e.g., ICT Policy Primer for WSIS (Geneva round, 2003)*
Capacity-building events (membership meetings)
Websites*
Alerts about Web site under threat!***

* Formats for multiple networks
** Format just for the press
*** Format from Network to APC to Network

According to the Web, what does a new media-civil society network do with an old media format (the press release)?

Method

1. Locate, on Web through search engines, the verbatim use of significant phrases from the APC Al Jazeera press release (a format). In AltaVista, Google and Alexa, portions of a key sentence are sought:

> *"The Internet must be allowed to freely perform its unique and vital role as a promoter of 'freedom of expression' and content diversity, especially in times of conflict." (APC Al-Jazeera Press Release, 4 April 2003) Results are triangulated.*

2. Note date of re-posting of the press release by network actors. Page date is ascertained by the human eye and by javascript.

3. Sit next to Karen Higgs (APC communications manager) and ask her to code the actors returned in the queries, as known or unknown, "Is this actor in the 'APC network' (however you may define it) or is this actor a stranger?"

4. Look at every network actor's Web site, and ascertain whether the actor does 'media freedom' as an issue.

Findings (First set, from method #2)

The networks treat the press release with an attention span familiar not to new media but to old media researchers. A familiar 'press attention bell-curve' is noted. A short attention span is likely to be more extreme in the news production environment than in news readership.

Network resonance of APC press release concerning aljazeera.net, 4 April 2003.

Date · Network Mentions
April 4 · 3
April 5 · 5
April 6 · 8
April 7 · 4
April 8 · 3
April 9 · 3
April 10 · 2

Events in the wild may not affect the circulation of information in networks, if the information is packaged properly (as a press release, in this case).

The press release circulated in a vacuum, in its own trajectory space, in the sense that its re-posters and re-purposers circulated the press release without adding the detail that the Al Jazeera site went back up on 6 April. The 6th of April was the day when the press release about reactions to its downing was circulating the most. The network appeared too busy networking to add that piece of information to the formatted press release. The old media format circulated like a chain letter, without intervention by 'editors'.

Findings (Second set, from method #3 and #4)

Press release organizes social network
When asked, most APC members choose to 'endorse' the APC statement, and make this endorsement known to APC and beyond.

Endorsements by the following APC members:

LaborNet, USA · www.labornet.org
Jinbonet, South Korea · www.jinbo.net
TAU, Argentina · www.tau.org.ar
Wamani, Argentina · www.wamani.org.ar
ComLink, Germany · www.comlink.org
GreenNet, UK · www.gn.apc.org
APC Women's Programme (APC WNSP) · www.apcwomen.org
Institute for Global Communications (IGC), USA · www.igc.org
Fantsuam Foundation, Nigeria · www.fantsuam.com
ChangeNet, Slovakia · www.changenet.sk
RITS, Brazil · www.rits.org.br
LaNeta, Mexico · www.laneta.apc.org
Colnodo, Colombia · www.colnodo.apc.org
Third World Institute (ITeM), Uruguay · www.chasque.apc.org
Pangea, Spain · www.pangea.org
Econnect, Czech Republic · www.ecn.cz
StrawberryNet, Romania · www.sbn.ro
c2o, Australia · www.c2o.org
BlueLink, Bulgaria · www.bluelink.net

Press release organizes (small) issue network and stranger network

Networks form around known and unknown actors doing 'media freedom,' as well as 'allied' issues. Unknown actors not specifically in the media freedom space also circulate the press release by re-releasing it on their Web sites or on discussion lists (archived on the Web).

Actors, known by the APC, that cited the APC's press release about aljazeera.net, 4 April 2003.

arabdev.org
labornetjp.org
crisinfo.org
comminit.com
kubatana.net
ctrlaltesc.org
cidadania.org.br
isiswomen.org
wsisasia.org
fma.ph
jca.apc.org
fitug.de/atlarge-discuss/0304/msg00197.html
bbc.co.uk (Press!)
oneworld.net
ipsnews.net

The following actors are not personally known, and picked up or cited it. (Because they are unknown, they have longer URLs.)

groups.yahoo.com/group/bangla_ict/ (Bangladesh ICT Group)
lists.jammed.com/politech/2003/03/0081.html (D. McCullagh)
mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/ (Sarai)
nuke.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/ (Argentine Gov't Human Rights)
paris.indymedia.org/article.php3?id_article=2598
switzerland.indymedia.org/fr/2003/05/8619.shtml
www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2003_0411_01.htm
(Philippine media freedom group)
www.e-leusis.net/noticia.asp?id_noticia=786 (Spanish women's portal)
www.flora.org/nowar/forum/old-2448 (Anti-war list)
www.goanet.org/pipermail/goanet/2003-April/001083.html
(Latin Cyberfeminists)
www.hro.org/editions/alert/7-3/15.htm (Russian GILC)
www.laborbeat.org/3/uppnet_spr03.pdf (U.S. Labour Union Producers and Programmers)
www.lafil.org/ (French media freedom group)

APC.ORG The Association for Progressive Communications
Internet and ICTs for Social Justice and Development

Media Events

2003

MARCH

Al-Jazeera site launched
Monday March 24th
Al-Jazeera launches English-language *english.aljazeera.net*.

Al-Jazeera site downed
Tuesday, March 25th
Al-Jazeera releases pictures of American war prisoners and receives a very high number of hits to its Web site. One of Al-Jazeera's spokesmen suspects a distributed denial of service attack (DDoS) is being conducted against their site. The server is inaccessible from Monday to early Tuesday. *(Text: f-secure.com)*

Al-Jazeera site defaced
Friday, March 28th
Hackers have hit the Qatar-based news network Al-Jazeera hard. Their sites have been unavailable for long periods and also the target of defacement attacks. See the defacement gallery for a screenshot. *(Text: f-secure.com)*

APRIL

Friday, April 4th
APC issues press release (in English),sent to approx. 1300 recipients. Web version read 1237 times.

Al-Jazeera site back online
Sunday, April 6th
english.aljazeera.net back up. Even for civil society networks making intensive use of the Internet, the event may go unnoticed, for it is Sunday.

Monday, April 7th
Spanish translation of APC press release. There is no mention of english.aljazeera.net being back online. Web version read 630 times

Wednesday, April 9th
French translation of APC press release. There is no mention of english.aljazeera.net being back online.
Web version read 1029 times

Tuesday, April 10th
Last known re-posting of press release by network actors.

Network Events

OCTOBER

Tuesday, October 7th
The network has memory! The press release gains a new lease on life. It is cited (once) in connection with the preparations for the up-coming World Summit on the Information Society.

Product of the workshop_____ Social Life of Issues 7
Issue Network Interventions: The Problem of Information Formats.

Cartagena, Colombia. | October **03**

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