

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Public Relations Review



Social media framing within the Million Hoodies movement for justice



Linda Hon

College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 September 2015

Received in revised form 23 October 2015

Accepted 19 November 2015

Available online 11 December 2015

1. Introduction

Hallahan's (1999) overview of framing and its applications laid the groundwork for how seven models of framing could be applied to public relations. One of these models was framing of issues, and Hallahan pointed out how this perspective could be applied to the public relations strategies and tactics of activist campaigns and social movements. Since Hallahan's work was published, digital media, particularly social media, complement and extend traditional public relations efforts related to activism and social movements.

The purpose of this research is to apply framing theory to the social media communication of a particular activist organization, Million Hoodies. Examined here is how the activist group used social media to frame issues related to injustice and racism toward African-Americans and mobilized a large base of supporters. Million Hoodies includes more than 50,000 members and college chapters across the United States (www.millionhoodies.net).

Million Hoodies refers to itself as a racial justice network (www.millionhoodies.net) and was founded by 25-year-old Daniel Maree (Williams, 2013) March 21, 2012, following the shooting death of Trayvon Martin (www.facebook.com/MillionHoodies). Trayvon¹ was a 17-year-old unarmed African-American who was killed by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman in Sanford, FL, February 26, 2012. On social media and during public protests, Trayvon supporters often wore hooded sweatshirts, or hoodies, to express their solidarity with Trayvon who was wearing a hoodie when he was killed. Zimmerman later was acquitted on the charge of second-degree murder after what some observers called "the trial of the century" (Smith, 2014, para 1).

The Trayvon Martin case is especially significant to examine because the shooting represented a turning point in activism in the United States (Smith, 2014). Social media were largely credited for creating the widespread awareness that led to coverage by mainstream media and pressure on federal and state law enforcement to arrest Zimmerman (Szekely, 2012; Trayvon Martin: How social media, 2012; Wood, 2012). The case also has been cited as the catalyst for creating the groundswell of outrage and motivation that spawned more recent mobilization efforts such as the Black Lives Matter network (Altman, 2015). For example, Alicia Garza, one of the three co-founders of Black Lives Matter, posted her feelings on Facebook after the verdict was announced: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter" (quoted in Altman, 2015, p. 22).

Million Hoodies was chosen to analyze in the context of activism and social media because the online network illustrates many of the unique characteristics of grassroots activist groups in the digital environment (see Hon, 2015). As Million

E-mail address: Lhon@ufl.edu

¹ Trayvon is referred to by his first name to distinguish him from his father, Tracy Martin.

Hoodies' founder, Maree could be characterized as a "lone wolf" organizer, or someone who takes on the task of organizing or "leads drastically small teams" (Earl and Kimport, 2011, p. 15). At the time of this writing, Millions Hoodies has a national administrative staff of eight, including current executive director Dante Barry. However, the group is largely an unstructured network of volunteer supporters who share information and organize offline protest activity collaboratively through social media. The top-level posts are generated by Million Hoodies, and anyone reading or viewing them can like, comment, and/or share.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Social movements, activism, and digital media

Tilly (2004) identified the three main elements of social movements as campaigns (long-term public efforts that make claims on a target), repertoires of contention (strategies and tactics available in a certain sociopolitical environment) and WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment). Tilly's definition bridges social movement theory with public relations scholarship by highlighting the role of strategic communication and mobilization of publics.

Digital media scholars have argued that digital technologies have ushered in a communication revolution that has fundamentally changed the nature of media and power relations among organizational and grassroots communicators. Shirky's (2008) work has focused on how collaboration in the digital sphere is occurring without the formal organizations and extensive resources needed in the past. Earl and Kimport (2011) addressed how digital media provide supersizing effects (increased speed and reach) and leveraged affordances, or unique dynamics that a new technology makes easier or possible. Carty (2015) noted that digital media allow users to create and distribute messages without permission from elites such as the mainstream media, corporate gatekeepers, the police, the military, or campaign managers.

Carty went on to explain that whereas traditional social movements tended to rely on hierarchy, charismatic leaders, and professional experts, collective behavior in the digital space is more horizontal and interconnected. Digital peer-to-peer networks broaden the traditional public sphere and create an electronic, grass roots civil society that operates in ad-hoc settings (Castells, 2001). Digital media have provided activists unprecedented opportunity to get their message out, quickly reach a critical mass, and mobilize publics around a formidable campaign (Carty, 2015).

2.2. Framing theory and public relations

Snow and Benford (1988) explained that activist organizations use frames to engage supporters, recruit new supporters, and motivate supporters to act in ways congruent with the organization's mission. They went on to suggest that organizations accomplish these tasks through three core framing processes. Diagnostic framing identifies a problem in need of a remedy, prognostic framing proposes a solution to the problem, and motivational framing represents the call to action. Diagnostic framing includes attributions of blame or causality so that the movement has a target for its action (Carty, 2015).

Within this larger context, Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986) identified frame alignment as the device activist groups use for mobilization whereby they articulate how individual interests, values, and beliefs are congruent and complementary with the group's (Carty, 2015). Four strategies for frame alignment identified by Snow et al. (1986) are frame bridging (linking two or more congruent but structurally unrelated frames), frame amplification (clarification and invigoration), frame extension (reaching out to other potential supporters), and frame transformation (redefining what is meaningful within the primary framework in terms of another framework).

Studies about framing and public relations that are most relevant to this research are the few that specifically addressed framing as it relates to activist organizations and digital media. Weberling (2012) examined email messages from the Susan G. Komen for the Cure and Komen Advocacy Alliance to determine how frames were used to inform and inspire involvement among donors, volunteers, and individuals involved with Komen. She found three types of email categories—policy, development, and e-news—strategically used nine frames. Policy emails were in-depth and directed toward facts and decision making with a sense of urgency. Development emails tended to be shorter with direct emotional appeals for donations that focused on hope, survival, and the "face" of breast cancer (p. 114). E-news was the most informative with an emphasis on science, progress, and international news related to the organization and breast cancer. She concluded that hers was one of the first studies to look at framing through direct communication with constituencies. She argued that this approach was increasingly important for nonprofit organizations, given the proliferation of social media and the limited resources of some non-profits for traditional agenda building through the news media.

Ihlen and Nitz (2008) compared texts published on the Norwegian Oil Industry's website with hearing statements from two environmental organizations and media coverage about whether to lift a moratorium on petroleum exploration in two seas off of Norway. They concluded that even though the organizational actors in their study largely failed to get the media to adopt their frames, successful framing still has great potential for communicators. They went on to suggest that larger and differing cultural frames may have led to the impasse and that the various groups, including journalists covering the issues, should focus on ways to co-create shared meanings (Banks, 1995).

Zoch, Collins and Sisco (2008) examined whether Snow and Benford's (1988) framing processes were present in the issue-related messages on activist group websites and found that only 18% of the websites in their study contained public relations messages that included all of the three core framing tasks—diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. Zoch et al.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/138644>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/138644>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)