No Longer Just a Protest: How Women's March Strategic Messaging for Collective Action Mobilizes a Movement

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Executive Summary

Aligning two areas of research that intersect in the strategic communication activities of a modern political movement, this research examines how public relations can support activism by connecting to relevant audience issues. The study examines messaging strategies for the Women's March, which started as a grassroots protest in 2017 and evolved into a social movement organization (SMO) in 2018. This transition was initiated to mobilize an active audience for political activities such as voting, donating, and attending training sessions and events. The study draws from sociology research to analyze Women's March message strategies to support collective action frames aimed at motivating people to take action toward larger goals. Additionally, this work integrates framing theory from public relations research, which examines message strategies used in these frames as intentionally communicated to audiences in order to promote action.

Two research questions explore how collective action frames and discursive processes, which refer to speech and communication in the SMO's activities, work within public relations messaging strategies to ignite collective action among participants. Content analysis was used to determine the three messaging frames of diversity, resistance, and education on the organization's website, and to evaluate email communication to opted-in stakeholder audiences for message intention, framing tasks and discursive processes of articulation and amplification regarding issues such as immigration, healthcare, and gun control.

This work contributes to the limited research on how public relations strategies can impact activism by connecting to relevant issues. Findings show that the Women's March employed sophisticated public relations tactics to activate framing tasks and SMO techniques to mobilize its internal, active audience for action. Drawing on the situational theory of publics further adds depth to this area. This organization used prognostic and motivational collective action framing tasks tailored to stakeholder needs with public relations processes; leveraged discursive processes to elevate awareness, support calls to action, and strengthen motivational frames; and maintained its unifying principles from its early days as a protest while expanding its mission as an SMO that educates its stakeholders.

In terms of professional practice, findings demonstrate that the Women's March potentially has found effective methods to listen to its base, identify issues of concern that align with the SMO, and craft resonating messages and program choices to directly address these situations. Email communications from the Women's March show that this young SMO is selectively engaging its messaging strategy in a way that follows goal-oriented theory and practice.

Taken together, this work's critical contribution to the field is in linking public relations theory and practice with the vivid activism and communication strategies of the Women's March as a social movement organization. Through this strategic approach, this relatively new SMO has impacted the national political conversation while drawing attention to select social issues to mobilize citizen engagement.

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Introduction

The Women's March started as a grassroots protest in January 2017 and evolved into a social movement organization (SMO) in 2018. One woman started the idea for the march with a single Facebook post after the election of President Donald Trump, and it rapidly drew support from throughout the U.S. The 2017 Women's March became the largest single-day protest in Washington, D.C., and worldwide support was demonstrated in hundreds of sister marches in the U.S. and abroad (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017). In January 2018, the Women's March hit the streets again but this time with more structured support and visibility as an organization promoting change. *The New York Times* described the second march as drawing crowds while contributing nationally to a record number of women running for U.S. office and publicly resisting male privilege with the #metoo uprising (Chira, 2018). News outlets from Politico (Griffiths, 2018) to Fox News (Joyce, 2018) noted the SMO's efforts to resist the Trump administration and mobilize voters for the 2018 midterm elections.

Since that first protest, the Women's March has visibly grown its leadership, increased national events for voter turnout, expanded partnerships, focused on training local leaders to lead huddle gatherings and youth empowerment, and weighed in on headline issues such as immigration, healthcare, and gun control. The Women's March national leadership team is described on the organization's website (Women's March "Team," 2018). The organization's leadership connects to local chapters and sister marches throughout the U.S. The Women's March frames communicated to the media, participants, and other publics through its mission and unity principles on its website have evolved as well. Previous organizational frames in January 2017 included diversity, resistance, activation, and solidarity (Nicolini & Hansen, 2018). These frames have been updated on its website to include diversity, resistance, and education (Women's March "Our Mission," 2018). Such transitions indicate a communication shift from initial activation to a more permanent messaging strategy.

The Women's March messaging strategy is central to this pivotal time period for a nascent SMO. Though it has held successful large-scale protests in multiple cities and drawn some recognition as a movement, the ability of the Women's March to mobilize protesters as political leaders, regional organizers, and voters is still being tested. Within sociology research, message strategy is a key part of collective action frames, which are based on the idea that unrest is not enough to motivate people to work together toward change (Tarrow, 1992). Collective action frames provide meaning for individuals experiencing and taking action as part of a broader political movement (Benford & Snow, 2000). Combined with framing theory from public relations literature, message strategy communicated through collective action frames becomes a helpful lens into organizational messaging for a still-developing SMO.

This study uses both bodies of literature to explore how an SMO makes use of public relations strategies and tactics to activate framing tasks aimed to motivate stakeholder groups toward organizational goals. These goals, common to other political movements, include engaging internal stakeholders, at varying levels of involvement, to participate in events, education, fundraising and voter turnout activities by reaching out to a dispersed and emerging network.

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To examine these elements in depth, content analysis was conducted for the Women's March website and its targeted stakeholder email messages from 2017 to 2018. Analysis evaluated collective action frame tasks and discursive processes (Benford & Snow, 2000) in messaging strategy to mobilize active stakeholders who opted in as an internal public. This work contributes to the limited research on public relations strategies' impact on activism related to discursive, relevant issues (Ciszek, 2015). Findings show how collective action framing tasks can help build SMOs and motivate citizen engagement.

Literature Review

Originating in sociology research, literature related to social movement organizations (SMOs) using collective action frames was reviewed from a strategic communication perspective. Research focused on communication framing, public relations, and activism add context. Strategies and tactics used in organizational efforts to engage and activate stakeholder groups are examined related to political issues for the Women's March.

Social Movement Organizations

The Women's March began as a one-day protest to initiate broader political change. In the wake of what was recognized as the largest protest gathering in U.S. history (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017), organizers sought to continue the momentum by implementing follow-up calls to action including localized grassroots mobilization through "huddles," the 10 Actions in 100 Days campaign, and voter-driven initiatives (Women's March "Actions," 2018). Following the initial year of momentum-based activities, leaders sought a more permanent identity, leading to the Women's March operating as an SMO today. SMOs are defined as "associations of persons making idealistic and moralistic claims about how human, personal, or group life ought to be organized that, at the time of their claims-making, are marginal to or excluded from mainstream society – the then dominant constructions of what is realistic, reasonable, and moral" (Lofland, 1996, p. 2-3).

Sociology literature provides a starting point in studying SMO development and strategic communication. Della Porta and Diani (2009) describe the typical progression of SMOs, originating with Blumer (1995/1951), as starting with agitation and a core group of agitators. As excitement broadens with participants during the second phase, the SMO creates objectives for action, from which steps toward formal organization begin as a third phase. In the fourth stage, the SMO institutionalizes and "becomes an organic part of society and crystallizes into a professional structure" (Della Porta & Diani, 2009, p. 150). As a group of citizens joined through social concerns evolves into an SMO and interacts with other SMOs, processes and communication become less grassroots and more structured. To be effective, SMOs must balance idealism with practical aspects of operation, such as the degree of formal or informal organizational structure, which may impact their abilities to be innovative yet efficient in strategies and tactics (Staggenborg, 1989), and resource mobilization (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1996).

Structural concerns hold true for SMO strategic communication. Tarrow (1992) suggests that while unrest is not enough to spur collective action among people in protest of power structures or injustices, communication strategies can have an impact. Leaders and operatives can organize resistance through communication with collective action frames, defined as "purposively constructed guides to action created by existing or prospective

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movement organizers" (Tarrow, 1992, p. 177). Operatives can use frames to organize SMO participants and resources as "collective action frames offer strategic interpretations of issues with the intention of mobilizing people to act" (Noakes & Johnston, 2005, p. 5).

Originating with Goffman's (1974) concept, framing helps provide meaning to life experiences and activities. Benford and Snow's (2000) conceptualization of collective action frames demonstrates how these frames impact individual experiences and drive action based on meanings. SMOs convey meaning by creating collection action frames using three framing tasks: diagnostic framing (identifying problems/causes of problems), prognostic framing (proposing solutions/plans and strategies to solve), and motivational framing (a rallying cry and rationale to take action) (Snow & Benford, 1988).

In media and public relations research, framing theory (Scheufele, 1999) broadly shows how audiences respond to key messages in media coverage that use frames from media or sources (such as organizations) to aid with making sense of issues. Framing analysis helps identify how media coverage may present an issue, and how a political organization may structure its strategic communication, such as news releases, to impact interpretations for the media or participants (Barnett, 2005; Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006). SMOs also may directly frame communication through websites, social media, and email, thus making use of framing tasks. In political contexts, diagnostic frames from jury activists explained the problem of women not serving on state juries in the first half of the 20th century, and how including women would solve those problems (McCammon, Muse, Newman, & Terrell, 2007); prognostic frames from activists advised climate change progress stems from changing citizen attitudes and behaviors or legislation (Wahlstrom, Wennerhag, & Rootes, 2013); and motivational frames on activist websites offer a rationale for actions that individuals may take to advance causes, such as to email a legislator or bring friends to an event (Zoch, Collins, & Sisco, 2008).

The Women's March as a political SMO started with grassroots communication by speaking to target audiences interested in the January 2017 protest through social media, web, and email communication. Benford & Snow (2000) describe organizational speech and communication in writing, images, and video as operating as discursive processes, which continue as the SMO aligns with societal issues and culture. The two discursive processes are articulation, which threads together events and experiences in a synced and compelling way, and amplification, which serves to punctuate or highlight issues, events or beliefs like a movement slogan (Benford & Snow, 2000).

In this framework, SMOs must make choices among issue narratives, cultural symbols, interpretation of events, and actions to persuade stakeholders. SMO organizers may have the discursive opportunity (Koopmans & Statham, 1999) to use articulation of issues of concern at the time in the broader public discourse aligned with their cause. Articulation that connected the cause of legally allowing women on juries during U.S. war time, a highly relevant societal issue at the time, impacted outcomes of law passage (McCammon et al., 2007). As articulation connects the cause with a relevant issue in society, amplification makes the connection resonate with symbols that carry the message with speed and efficiency, such as attention-catching phrases (Noakes & Johnston, 2005).

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Public Relations and Activism

Activism is defined as a process by which a group exerts pressure on institutions to initiate change (Smith, 2005). Scholars in health psychology, sociology, and allied health fields study activism in terms of social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2009). To enact activism, a group must coalesce around a shared outcome. The Women's March clearly embodies this through its mission, as noted on its organizational website, "to harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to create transformative social change" (Women's March "Our Mission," 2018).

Communication research acknowledges the importance of understanding how activists perceive and label their actions and choose to identify (Zoller, 2005). Within this context, sophisticated activists may employ public relations to transition initial rallying events into social movements by linking them to pertinent societal issues to achieve specific outcomes (i.e. media coverage, event attendance, and election results). The relationship between public relations and activism has been conceptualized differently over time. Some scholars argue activists have employed the use of public relations for over a century (Ciszek, 2015; Demetrious, 2013; Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995).

The transition of the Women's March from a protest to an SMO embodies activism and demonstrates the use of public relations to connect the organization to discursive, relevant issues (Koopmans & Statham, 1999). As Ciszek (2015) identifies, scholars have yet to explore the "nuanced conceptualization of the dynamic interplay between activism and public relations" (p. 448). This study seeks to begin that conversation by exploring how an SMO employed sophisticated public relations tactics to activate framing tasks and SMO techniques to mobilize a specific stakeholder group to action. This effort demonstrates a different aspect of public relations more focused on engaging an internal, active audience rather than external audiences such as the media.

Situational Theory of Publics

Activism joins together groups of like-minded people motivated by problem identification and solutions through collective action. The situational theory of publics provides a useful lens for understanding why an SMO would implement specific public relations strategies to further activism efforts. Dewey (1927) and Grunig (1997) define publics as individuals facing similar situations, causing them to recognize a problem and then work together, or organize, to develop a solution. In this sense, a group of individuals can be defined as stakeholders focused on a specific situation. How individuals perceive a situation and how that perception impacts their decision to engage in specific communication behaviors (i.e. information-seeking, information-processing, and participatory intentions) is examined through this theoretical lens.

Grunig (1997) further defines three tenets of the theory to determine the effectiveness of communication with different publics: 1) problem recognition, 2) constraint recognition, and 3) involvement. Therefore, active publics recognize something needs to be done, may not see potential obstacles to a solution, and are highly involved in trying to solve the situation at hand. Because these individuals recognize how the problem impacts them and believe they can do something about it, they are more likely to actively seek and act upon information (Kim & Grunig, 2011).

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By choosing to actively engage with the Women's March by signing up to receive email updates, the stakeholders demonstrate information-seeking behaviors associated with active audiences. Such audiences understand a problem exists and are seeking solutions. Through the use of a sophisticated email marketing campaign, the Women's March clearly focuses on communication designed to call its active audience to action to further specific initiatives. By providing clearly communicated solutions, the SMO utilizes constraint recognition by removing potential issues related to activating this audience to action. This type of email communication ultimately realizes broader public relations goals associated with organizational mission and vision positioning.

Research Questions

Two research questions explore how collective action frames and discursive processes work within public relations messaging strategies toward the collective action of participants. The Women's March is engaging with an internal audience or active public of interested participants operating with different levels of vested interest or activism. Some may be highly active in events and sharing messages, while others may be listening but not necessarily actively engaged in promoted messages. The first question looks at the framing tasks used in organizational messaging from the Women's March to build a collective action framework. This messaging is further studied within the second question focused on discursive processes examining how these frames are communicated. Based on the transition of the Women's March from a one-day protest event to an SMO, the following research questions are posed:

1. How is the Women's March messaging aligning with framing tasks to build a collective action framework?
2. How is the Women's March messaging aligning with discursive processes to build a collective action framework?
3.

Method

This study employs content analysis to examine key organizational messaging distributed directly to stakeholders during the year since the initial Women's March protest. The analysis includes two distinct stages of evaluating key messaging distributed on the Women's March organizational website available for public consumption and the specific organizational messaging distributed through email communication with stakeholders who signed up for updates through the Women's March website.

Organizational Dominant Frames

To retrieve information on key organizational messaging from the Women's March, the researchers used the Women's March website, www.womensmarch.com, and reviewed the "Mission and Vision" and "Unifying Principles" documents within the "About" section of the website. Both researchers reviewed the documents separately to determine frames central to organizational messaging. Each researcher developed possible frames individually and then the two researchers spent significant time discussing the categories to obtain consensus before creating the codebook with key organizational messaging frames and examples. Three distinct frames emerged from this analysis: diversity, resistance, and education.

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The researchers had undertaken the same process outlined above two weeks after the first Women's March protest took place on January 21, 2017. The original messaging was compared with the organizational messaging currently on the Women's March website within these same sections resulting in the identification of four dominant frames: diversity, resistance, activation, and solidarity (Nicolini & Hansen, 2018). Comparing the original messaging from the organizational website in January 2017 to the messaging present in May 2018, the researchers were able to identify several key differences within the transition from a one-time protest event to an SMO.

Stakeholder Emails

The researchers completed the online registration form on the Women's March website in January 2017. Since that time, each researcher has received stakeholder emails from the organization. The researchers have received 37 emails spanning from July 2017 to May 2018. Similar to Froehlich & Rudiger's (2006) evaluation of political public relations messages, each email was analyzed for dominant organizational messaging frames and framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational) (Snow & Benford, 1988).

Typically, each email message had multiple instances of dominant organizational messaging frames, which were coded separately, and then evaluated for framing tasks and other criteria. Instances could be text or images. A spreadsheet identified each instance with the messaging frame and framing tasks, as well as official messaging descriptions linked to website content, key issues, description of the messaging, discursive processes of articulation or amplification, and calls to action.

Framing tasks were identified using the definition provided by Snow and Benford (1988). Organizational messaging frames included education, resistance, and diversity. Official messaging descriptions were more detailed topics within the organizational messaging frames. For example, messages embodying the education organizational messaging frame were then analyzed further to determine if the message was intended as an entry point, training, outreach, or event promotion. Instances were evaluated for articulation and amplification to determine if the purpose was to neatly package and deliver content (articulation) or to motivate stakeholders for action (amplification). Finally, instances were assessed for specific calls to action which may be triggered by amplification or serve as a mechanism to inspire stakeholders to get involved on some level with the SMO. The dataset consisted of 188 instances of such communication which served as the units of analysis for this study.

Data Analysis

Both researchers coded individual emails within a shared spreadsheet to identify each instance of dominant organizational message framing. Each instance, which served as a unit of analysis, was then coded for the specific framing task, articulation or amplification purpose, and specific call to action linked to the overall email message. For example, many of the email communications included a link to the Women's March Power to the Polls donation page. Issues mentioned, partner organizations, and authors of the emails also were recorded. After each researcher had completed the individual coding, the researchers reviewed all units of analysis together to ensure consistency and discuss any discrepancies.

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Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability is important to ensure interpretation of latent content is consistent between coders. To establish intercoder reliability, the researchers randomly selected five emails representing 36 units of analysis, a total equivalent to 20 percent of the overall sample. In alignment with content analysis methodology, the reliability is reported first with the percentage of agreement and secondly with Scott's *pi* (Scott, 1955), an index appropriate for nominal level variables and two coders (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Campanella Bracken, 2002). The reliability on identified messaging frames was 89%, resulting in a Scott's *pi* value of .85. The frame task classification reliability was 81% and yielded a Scott's *pi* value of .77. Reliability reached 94% with a Scott's *pi* value of .91 for discursive processes. Each variable demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability.

Results

The Women's March stakeholder email messages included: 1) a wide scope of more than two dozen issues, 2) varied authors with 10 different individual or paired authors, and 3) mentions of more than 14 partner organizations and speakers. Some of the issues addressed included anti-discrimination, healthcare, immigration, and women's rights with some issues mentioned once in email instances and others mentioned with high frequency, such as voting (n = 42), Women's March (n = 41), and gun control (n = 37) (Table 1). The email messages expressed a consistent voice and frequent calls to action even as authorship of the message instances varied between the organization, Women's March leadership, or external authors such as Congresswoman Maxine Waters or Alyssa Milano, the actress and activist. Most instances were authored from the organization in general (n = 130) with other instances authored from Winter Minisee, a 17-year-old Women's March Youth Empower activist for gun control (n = 19), and from six other Women's March leaders (n = 32) (Table 2). Partner organizations were mentioned in 36 instances, such as Lifecamp Inc. to reduce gun violence (n = 10), United We Dream to support immigrant dreamers (n = 3), and Our Revolution, Domestic Workers Rights (n = 3) (Table 3). On the Women's March website, more than 500 partner organizations are identified (Women's March "Partners," 2018).

The Women's March national presence and sophisticated communication within its emails to stakeholders indicate that in the past year the organization has transitioned into an SMO. While this represents a shift in operations, the core mission and unifying principles remain largely consistent as evident in the analysis of key message instances (N = 188) (Table 4). Analysis demonstrated resistance (n = 85, 45%) continues to be a prominent organizational frame. All messaging under resistance was consistent with the overarching messaging related to dismantling systems. An example of such messaging includes: "School should be a safe place. We're walking out because it isn't. Please join us as we stand up for our right to safety in our schools and our communities. We're counting on you" (Women's March organizational email, March 13, 2018).

The second most prominent organizational frame was education (n = 67, 36%), which was further analyzed for specific key messages related to: entry point (n = 26), training (n = 18), events (n = 13), and outreach (n = 12). Entry point was the most frequent key message communicated and was represented through messaging such as: "We left the Women's Convention with the same feelings we had after the Women's March: Hopeful,

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inspired and determined to take on the work ahead. See photos from the incredible weekend here" (Women's March organizational email, November 1, 2017).

Diversity was the least represented organizational frame (*n* = 34, 18%) and included two key messages: unity principles/issues (*n* = 29) and inclusivity (*n* = 5). Unity principles/issues messages centered on promoting societal issues linked to the unity principles document located on its website (Table 1). Many emails combined multiple organizational messaging strategies within one message (i.e. education and resistance).

The first research question focuses on how Women's March messaging aligns with framing tasks (i.e. diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational) to build a collective action framework (Table 5). Motivational framing tasks had the highest representation within the dataset (*n* = 119, 63%), such as this excerpt (March 13, 2018): "We can't do this without you. Will you take action to support us, the young activists of Women's March Youth Empower, as we work to end gun violence?" Here stakeholders are called to take action for a cause associated with the Women's March. A call to action was included in (*n* = 125, 66%) instances.

The second most frequent framing task was prognostic (*n* = 50, 27%), which links a specific problem to a pre-offered solution. The emails demonstrate this task through examples such as "Since the 2017 Women's March, more women are running for office than ever. It's our responsibility to make sure these women win in 2018. That's why we've launched the #PowerToThePolls campaign to bring the power of our marches to ballot boxes across the nation" (May 11, 2018). Providing a logical connection between the problem and solution helps organizations drive specific outcomes to support mission and vision.

The least-used framing task was diagnostic (*n* = 19, 10%), where the SMO distinguished the problem and why it matters to stakeholders, as seen in this excerpt.

> *This time last year, we were deeply engaged in recruiting partners, securing permits and getting the word out about what would become the largest mass demonstration in U.S. history, a day when 5 million women and allies across the world joined forces to declare that the rise of the woman IS the rise of the nation (Women's March organizational email, November 28, 2017).*

Most messages focused on framing tasks associated with motivating audiences to specific calls to action rather than identifying a specific problem (diagnostic) or linking the problem to specific solutions (prognostic). The data supported how the Women's March messaging aligns with discursive processes to build a collective action framework (Table 6). The discursive process for frames of articulation was evident in a majority of the messaging (*n* = 125, 66%), as seen in this excerpt that packages the importance of political outreach.

> *This is the time to keep our momentum going. The House and Senate will be in recess from July 31st through September 4th, and they need to hear from you while they're in the neighborhood. It's the perfect time to tell them about the issues you want them to address when they return to Washington this fall (Women's March organizational email, August 1, 2017).*

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Amplification was used and often linked to specific calls to action (*n* = 63, 34%) in catchphrases in text, images, and hashtags, such as "the rise of the woman IS the rise of the nation" (Women's March organizational email, November 28, 2017) or "we are walking out because enough is #ENOUGH" (Women's March organizational email, March 13, 2018). Amplifying the message with simple statements helps spread the message, as in this excerpt.

> *We believe in the power of women in leadership as the fundamental, grassroots force for change. As we face the critical elections of the coming year, our movement must convert this momentum into direct electoral power. Women's March is focused on registering new voters, electing more women and progressive candidates to office, sparking critical dialogue, and continuing to uplift the campaigns and voices of our most vulnerable communities. 2018 is quickly approaching. Make a contribution today and keep winning with us (Women's March organizational email, November 28, 2017).*

In another example of amplification, an image was embedded in an email message titled "The NRA should be very scared." The email, regarding efforts to protest gun control, used images to further draw attention.

> *[Image] Group of students walking in New York City with a protest sign that says "I SHOULD BE WRITING MY COLLEGE ESSAY NOT MY WILL." (Women's March organizational email, March 15, 2018).*

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the Women's March used strategic messaging to mobilize stakeholders toward collective action to reach political policy and election goals through its organizational messaging frames of diversity, resistance, and education. This young SMO operated with sophisticated messaging that aligned with theoretical approaches to resonate with active stakeholders for mobilization. Collective action frames were paired with strategic messaging for an internal stakeholder audience, showing how public relations strategy and tactics can leverage collective action frames toward achieving organizational activism goals.

Key findings demonstrate the Women's March: (1) employed prognostic and motivational collective action framing tasks tailored to stakeholder needs with public relations processes; (2) leveraged discursive processes to elevate awareness, support calls to action, and strengthen motivational frames; and (3) maintained its unifying principles from its early days as a protest while expanding its mission as an SMO that educated its stakeholders. Situational theory provides context for the stakeholder experience in this communication. Theoretical implications of these findings are discussed, as well as practical insights that explore how other SMOs may leverage these strategies and tactics.

Theoretical Implications

The Women's March used framing tasks to build a collective action framework. The use of such tools aligned with the stakeholder audience and distribution channel for organizational emails. The stakeholder audience-initiated email communication by signing

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up online for regular updates and information. Given that stakeholders have already taken this step, and aligning with the situational theory of publics, the SMO may assume stakeholders already understand the problems the organization seeks to address (diagnostic), as seen in Sarrica's work (2011). Therefore, the persuasive messaging associated with the prognostic framing task provided valuable links between the identified issues and potential solutions (prognostic) and overcame potential constraint recognition (Grunig, 1997). Because of the internal stakeholder audience, the organization could focus on motivational messaging around education and resistance based on individual level of past involvement and/or comfort within the collective action framework. In this sense, framing tasks are initiated to create motivation to enact specific calls to action (motivational) that further the activism goal of the Women's March social movement organization. These framing tasks and calls to action often referenced shared views and experiences within the SMO and issues, offering opportunities for an interactive relationship with stakeholders (Powell, 2011).

The use of discursive processes played a critical role in the distribution of key organizational messaging to stakeholders. According to situational theory, this group is an active audience that is well informed of the issues and can be mobilized to take action (Grunig, 1997). Therefore, the use of articulation to effectively package messages around the dominant organizational frames of education, resistance, and diversity was a public relations strategy to distribute the messaging to a broader network accessed through internal stakeholders' personal networks. Using amplification in words and images to create easily digestible calls to action, the Women's March provided various levels of involvement for potential action.

Throughout this process, the organization also linked internal audiences back to other key initiatives centered on "Power to the Polls," "Youth Empower," and "#Enough." This cross-promotional strategy of associating key messaging with initiatives may have educated its base and motivated stakeholders to take action on causes outside of the initial reason they chose to engage with this SMO. If the Women's March gains momentum with stakeholder knowledge and action, it may alter its use of articulation and amplification to focus on fewer issues (Sarrica, 2011). Along with cross-promotional efforts, the Women's March included partners in authoring emails and as noted partner organizations. Coalition-building can help a social movement expand relationships (Institute of Public Relations, 1999; Wilson, 1996) but it brings challenges. The scope of the Women's March partnerships illustrates the concept of social movements as coalitional networks "with varied constituencies, ideological perspectives, identities, and tactical preferences," and reveals how "tensions can surface among groups with different cultures, practices, and goals" (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010, p. xii). As such, the Women's March has had some successes in bringing together a sizable coalition of organizations connected to issues but outcomes within this scope of partnerships remain to be seen.

The Women's March maintained its unifying principles and resistance message throughout its transition from a protest movement to an SMO, while lessening its focus on diversity and adding a strong focus on education. Organizational structure can impact communication processes (Staggenborg, 1989) as the Women's March continues its growth as a formal organization while trying to maintain its grassroots energy. Resistance maintains a connection to the start of the Women's March, when a case for diversity was important to

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grow its initial network. During the first march in 2017, the organization encouraged local leaders to bring the central tenets of that historic event back to their communities and provided resources for forming huddles and recruiting new participants. During the year that followed the initial protest, a focus on education became more prominent with an emphasis on training and outreach, and partnering with other organizations, such as Run to Win and Training from Emily's List to educate women on how to run for political office. Educational messages included calls to action designed to encourage stakeholders to attend regional events, participate in online training, and support the movement financially in order to accomplish initiatives.

Applied Implications

From a more applied perspective, the Women's March persuasively used language linking issues, which were relevant at key times since the first march and supported by compelling frames, to motivate stakeholders toward activation. This SMO used motivational frames to present discursive, or issues-based, opportunities. These opportunities aligned with issues-based U.S. headlines, such as gun control with high school shootings or immigration policies before lawmakers, in order to encourage stakeholder mobilization. Consistent with its origins, this strategy encouraged a diverse group of individuals to mobilize around an issue they felt strongly about in order to further the overall mission of the SMO.

One major takeaway for practice is the use of issues that offer relevancy and support for public relations strategies to unite stakeholders toward collective action. The public relations practitioner, trained to know and anticipate the values and needs of stakeholders, is essential in this intersection of meaningful issues-based outreach and message creation for stakeholder mobilization. Practical use of understanding the issues and using collective action framing tasks to create messaging that will resonate with stakeholders while illustrating the problem (diagnostic) or the solution (prognostic) in order to spark participation and align effectively toward the organization's goals is essential. In practice, conveying facts and direction based on issues important to stakeholders can bring together a public focused on achieving a particular situation, as well as broader organizational communication, to improve this alignment and effectiveness.

A second takeaway builds further on issues related to managing relationships. The Women's March demonstrated ways to use issues to inform and draw attention toward building relationships with stakeholders and like-minded organizations. This strategy helped the young SMO stand out in a competitive communications landscape. This approach was demonstrated in its effort to craft messages from diverse speakers (Table 2) and cross-promote with coalition partner organizations (Table 3). Broadly, relationship management seeks to build trust and commitment in competitive environments (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). For organizations, as well as SMOs or nonprofits with limited resources, issues that can connect with partner organizations and events add credibility and build broader recognition. Trust and credibility may be expanded through relationships with stakeholders and as a wider cooperative community (Wilson, 1996). Coalition-building among and with public groups and organizations toward shared goals creates relationships that are situational and based on shared behaviors (Institute of Public Relations, 1999).

A final point is that communicating with articulation (to neatly package information for stakeholders) and amplification (to draw attention or encourage stakeholders to share

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information) can pose a fine line in practice. Practitioners increasingly need to reach audiences in a cluttered, cross-platform communication landscape. Findings showed ways information can be packaged for quicker relevancy and awareness. Networking through coalitions also can aid efforts to build awareness through groups already connected to issues (Institute of Public Relations, 1999). As practitioners seek to cut through the clutter and create messaging that resonates with both stakeholders and coalition partners, they must understand the delicate balance of striking a tone that initiates the need for action while also aligning with the broad interests represented across partner organizations. A tone that is too aggressive may impact the effectiveness of the message and ultimately polarize certain factors of the audience or trigger adverse reactions. Conversely, a tone that is not assertive enough may fail to convey the problem (diagnostic) or communicate possible solutions (prognostic and motivational).

These findings demonstrate that the Women's March followed key public relations practices to evolve into an organization. The Women's March appeared to listen to its base, identified issues of concern that aligned with the SMO, and crafted resonating messages and program choices to directly address these situations. It can be difficult for any organization to simultaneously discuss multiple social issues, link to many national and regional events aimed at motivating and recruiting participants and engage with hundreds of partners in its operations and communications. Email communications from the Women's March show that this young SMO was selectively engaging its messaging strategy in a way that follows goal-oriented theory and practice.

Limitations and Future Research

This study explored messaging for the Women's March toward collective action goals to build an SMO and impact movement outcomes. The demonstrated frames for collective action building and discursive processes indicate formal communication operations focused on these goals. Some limitations and future opportunities are discussed.

The scope of the findings is limited to one organization using content analysis from internal communication within one channel. Insights from this work on the Women's March operate with less visibility of the larger context for issues such as immigration and women's rights that also are a focus of other SMOs. Strategic framing of broad societal issues will vary in terms of enthusiasm and duration in different U.S. and global regions over time (Schlichting, 2013). Future work could examine how the Women's March frames connect with other partners and groups, such as with the #metoo movement. In terms of internal organizational communication, connections to media and stakeholder outcomes (Rohlinger, 2002) could add insight on message framing effectiveness toward collective action. Other channels beyond email could be evaluated, such as social media and event communication.

Finally, researchers might examine how SMOs can integrate more strategic public relations campaigns designed to achieve specific key performance indicators. Further defining how an emerging SMO might define and evaluate success versus a more established social movement organization may highlight the different stages of development SMOs must experience as they seek to transition from a protest into a formidable organization focused on achieving specific goals.

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Table 1

Issues in Women's March Emails

Issue	*n*
Voting	42
Women's March	41
Gun control	37
Other	10
Events	9
Multiple issues	9
Women's rights	9
Healthcare	8
Immigration	8
Anti-discrimination	7
Human rights / police brutality	5
Women in government	3
Total	188

Table 2

Authors of Women's March Emails

Author	*n*
Winter Minisee, 17, WM Youth Empower	19
Rachel O'Leary Carmona, WM chief operating officer	7
Tabitha St. Bernard-Jacobs, WM Youth Empower coordinator	7
Tamika Mallory, WM co-president & #ENOUGH co-president	6
Bob Bland, WM co-president	5
Alyssa Milano, actress & activist	4
Mallory and Bland, WM co-presidents	4
Maxine Waters, congresswoman	3
Nantasha Williams, WM political engagement co-lead	3
Total	188

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Table 3

Partner Organizations Mentioned in Women's March Emails

Partner	*n*
Lifecamp Inc.	10
Featured Speakers	5
Bend to ARC Jewish Action	3
Dream action toolkit.org	3
Our Revolution, Domestic Workers Rights	3
United We Dream	3
Moveon.org	2
Girls Today Women Tomorrow	1
United We Dream	1
NY Immigrant Coalition	1
Defend Our Dreams Coalition	1
Center for Popular Democracy	1
Working Families Party	1
Run to Win Training from Emily's List	1
Total	36

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Table 4

Frames and Key Messages in Women's March Emails

Frame	Key Message	*n*
Diversity		
	Unity principles (issues)	29
	Inclusivity	5
Resistance		
	Dismantling systems	85
Education		
	Entry point	26
	Training	18
	Events	13
	Outreach	12
Total		188

Table 5

Framing Tasks in Women's March Emails

Framing Task	*n*
Diagnostic	19
Prognostic	50
Motivational	118
Total	188

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Table 6

Discursive Processes in Women's March Emails

Framing Task	*n*
Articulation	125
Amplification	63
Total	188