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Social media framing within the Million Hoodies movement for justice

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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

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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.

concluded that, overall, the activist organizations were not optimizing the use of core framing processes in their website communication, which limited the organizations' effectiveness at creating support and transforming that support into action.

Extending research on activist websites, Zoch, Collins, Sisco and Supa (2008) investigated specific framing devices within the broader core tasks. They looked at framing devices such as catchphrases, depictions (general description, testimony, and statistics), exemplars, metaphors, and visual images. Again, they found that the activist organizations in their sample were not optimally framing the messages on their websites to increase awareness, motivation, and supportive behaviors among publics. Zoch, Collins and Sisco (2008) and Zoch, Collins, Sisco and Supa (2008) suggested that practitioners need to drastically improve their website communication and suggested that future research be done via other communication vehicles to further explore framing and its relationship to public relations.

Muralidharan, Rasmussen, Patterson and Shin (2011) analyzed how nonprofit organizations and media organizations used Facebook and Twitter during relief efforts following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. These researchers found that the dominant frame for nonprofits and media organizations on both Facebook and Twitter was episodic rather than thematic, meaning that most of the messages were short and direct and lacked contextual background that could have been included through the use of links. They also found that the dominant motivational frame for nonprofits on Facebook was morality while it was attribution of responsibility on Twitter. The dominant frame for media organizations was conflict for both Facebook and Twitter, suggesting "a sensational factor to grab attention" (p. 177). Muralidharan et al. (2011) concluded that although these organizations were using social media during the crisis to communicate, they were not using social media to their full potential to involve stakeholders via stronger, more involving frames and strategies.

With this backdrop, this study investigated the following research questions:

RQ1. Which specific frames are used by Million Hoodies in its social media communication?

RQ2. Does Million Hoodies' social media communication display examples of prognostic, diagnostic, and motivational framing and, if so, how are they expressed?

RQ3. Does Million Hoodies' social media communication display examples of frame alignment—bridging, amplification, extension, and/or transformation—and, if so, how are they expressed?

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

The Million Hoodies Facebook page was selected for analysis. The Pew Research Internet Project reported that Facebook continues to be the most popular social media site among Internet users in the United States, and although its growth rate has slowed, the level of user engagement has increased (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). Pew documented that Facebook is used by 71% of online adults, compared to 28% for LinkedIn, 28% for Pinterest, 26% for Instagram, and 23% for Twitter (Duggan et al., 2015). Facebook also allows for longer text-based conversation than Twitter, which is constructed for microblogging, and Instagram, which is largely photo-based. However, many of the Facebook posts examined here cross-referenced related Twitter hashtags, especially #Millionhoodies.

Because examining the initial period of mobilization immediately after Trayvon's death is crucial, the time period examined for this study is the day the site was founded, March 12, 2012, until July 20, 2013, one week after Zimmerman's July 13 acquittal. This post-verdict week was included to examine post-trial framing with the particular goal of looking for evidence of preliminary frame transformation, given the outcome of the trial.

3.2. Data analysis

Each post² (a total of 652) was examined and analyzed by the researcher using an interpretive perspective rather than quantitatively coding units of analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Owen, 1984; Putnam, 1983). The approach was described in the textual analysis of social media communication conducted by Carr, Pratt and Herrera (2012) following Japan's 2011 Tohoku earthquake. As Carr et al. (2012) explained, "Textual analysis enables a researcher to decipher the overarching themes based on the sum of mini-messages on [a] SNS (social networking site). The analysis is systematic and invokes a broader process of critical reflection on various interpretation of messages and ideological streams embedded in the text" (p. 297).

The researcher began by reading the posts within the designated period in reverse order since the posts are organized from most recent to oldest. Key words and phrases were noted as the researcher read and re-read the posts. Most of the posts contained supporting content such as promotional material (fliers, posters, links to Million Hoodies' website and allied organizations such as Global Grind.com, a video-centric website focused on African Americans), links to news articles and videos, as well as videos, photos, and photos of artwork posted by Trayvon supporters. All of this additional material was reviewed. However, several of the links were no longer working.

The posts were examined for specific frames that emerged inductively within and across the posts (Fairclough, 2003) as well as to determine whether posts within a particular frame were indicative of one of the core framing processes (diagnostic,

² Because the emphasis of this study was communication from Million Hoodies, comments to the main posts left by supporters, or in some cases trolls (opponents who leave flaming comments), were not included in the analysis.

prognostic, or motivational). Notes were taken as frames and processes emerged. In addition, posts were reviewed for indicators of frame alignment (bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation).

A categorization scheme was created by copying the posts or transcribing the posts verbatim³ under what appeared to be the most appropriate frame and then placing the post under the appropriate core or frame alignment process. This initial categorization scheme then was analyzed, reanalyzed, and adjusted by moving some examples to other categories to develop the best description of all of the phenomena represented in the posts.

Sample posts and descriptions of supporting material were selected for the results section by identifying the most representative and/or compelling examples to illustrate the over-arching specific frames and describe the core or framing alignment process. Dates of the posts are included in the results section to indicate the chronology of the posts during the timeframe examined.

4. Results

4.1. Diagnostic framing

The most prevailing diagnostic frame in Million Hoodies' Facebook communication is evidenced in the organization's full name, Million Hoodies for Justice. The campaign mobilized people through the collective frame of outrage at the injustice of the circumstances surrounding Trayvon's death and, later, Zimmerman's acquittal. Million Hoodies also used the frame of racism to diagnose and explain the problem.

4.1.1. Justice

From the outset (March 2012), Million Hoodies began its diagnostic framing using a justice frame. One of the earliest posts featured a photo shared by U.S. professional basketball player LeBron James. The photo showed the Miami Heat (James' team at the time), wearing hoodies and bowing their heads. A message from James said: "We are all Trayvon. Hoodies. Stereotyped. We Want Justice" (March 23, 2012).⁴ Another early post showed a photo of a young girl at a Trayvon rally in Phoenix, AZ, with a sign that said, "Justice is the balance between morality and right and has a valor superior to that of the law" (March 26, 2012).

In one of the first longer posts, Maree included an excerpt from his letter to Florida State Prosecutor Angela Corey:

In my 24 years on this earth I've seen more violent injustices committed against black people at the hands of bigots and racists than I care to recount—to say nothing of the countless others which have no doubt missed the headlines of national news media. My reaction is always the same: Anger. Sadness. More Anger. Empathy for the family of the victim. Fear (an overwhelming sense that it could happen to me. . . it has happened to me). But at this point—despite lingering thoughts of how to protect my little sister from such violence—I've been programmed to console myself with the rationalization that these are just isolated incidents far from the norm and to move on with my day. Not today. (March 26, 2012)

A day later, Million Hoodies continued this theme:

Justice is not enough for Trayvon Martin. Yes, justice is what we all want for Trayvon. Justice is what he and his family deserve. And justice is what I'm confident that they will one day receive, hopefully in the not too distant future. But no, justice alone is not nearly enough for Trayvon. If his senseless death can somehow lead to anything of lasting value, it will only be an awakening to a much larger truth. (March 27, 2012)

Two months later, a posted quote from Martin Luther King, Jr., revealed the justice frame again: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (May 23, 2012).

A year after the shooting, Million Hoodies still was emphasizing justice. An example came in a post that is an excerpt from a speech given by New York City councilmember Jumaane D. Williams at a Million Hoodies vigil. As Williams said:

Please do not make us speak in a language you do not want to hear. Please hear us while we're calm because unheard people do things to be heard. When black men and brown men are shot and killed without any retribution, when stop-and-frisk is condoned by a mayor⁵ who will double down on the State of the City address, our people will do things to be heard. So I beg for justice. . . If you don't hear us now, you will hear us later. I beg and plead, hear us now. Because it is true: No Justice No Peace. If you know justice, you know peace. Please choose justice, don't ask us for peace. It's unfair, it's immoral. We want justice and we want it now. (February 26, 2013)

Later in the campaign and just days before the Zimmerman verdict, Million Hoodies emphasized justice to communicate its frustration with a mobile application that showed a photo of Trayvon giving the camera his third finger (unflattering

³ In some cases, the posts included so many visuals and hypertext that the researcher typed the main text content verbatim before coding the post's text within the categorization scheme.

⁴ For direct quotes, the original spelling and punctuation are preserved in the posts with the exception of some minor editing for several posts.

⁵ This is a reference to the mayor of New York City at the time, Michael Bloomberg.

and/or doctored pictures of Trayvon were circulated on the Internet and shared by social media). As the group said in its post that included a photo of the app:

Justice For All. “Angry Trayvon” mobile app portrays the slain teen as a street thug & you can STILL buy it in the Google Play store <http://bit.ly/1aVKPyX> The developer announced that they had removed it, but you can still find “Angry Trayvon HD” in the Google Play store at a premium price of \$1.99. Ignorance. . . . (July 9, 2013)

After the verdict, Million Hoodies continued using the justice frame. For example, the following quote was posted with a link to a story from CRASSTALK.COM whose headline read, “When will being young, black, and male cease to be a crime?”:

This is why the peaceful marches and protests we’ve witnessed in the last 48 hours are so very important. It is marking the will of the people. A clear sign that we feel that justice has not been served. That it is not acceptable to hunt young black men. To stalk them, to instigate a situation where they have to fight for their lives, just to then be put on trial for enacting their rights of liberty in this country. (July 15, 2013)

4.1.2. Racism

In its diagnostic framing, Million Hoodies targeted racism as the explanation for why Zimmerman followed and confronted Trayvon the night of the shooting. In addition, the group’s posts implied that some police officers are racist and the law enforcement system is characterized by institutional racism. For example, one post said: “No justice, No Peace. No racist police (March 24, 2012). Another told supporters: “Text TRAYVON to 30,644. Help ensure Justice for #TrayvonMartin. Tell @TheJusticeDept to arrest his killer + hold Sanford police accountable” (March 25, 2012). Still another asked readers to “see if you can figure out the common theme” and then provided a list of 39 unarmed African Americans who were victims of gun violence (March 25, 2012). A day after the verdict, Million Hoodies posted a photo of a girl at a rally holding a sign that said, “Fight systemic racism.” In response, Million Hoodies posted, “This says it all” (July 14, 2013).

The racism frame was elaborated by communicating a distrust of the law enforcement system in general. In response to the police video footage of Zimmerman’s being questioned on the night of the shooting, Million Hoodies said, “There is not a scratch on him” (March 28, 2012). The day the Sanford police chief was fired for his mishandling of the case, the group posted the story from CNN.com and commented, “Accountability is a wonderful thing” (June 20, 2012). And, after the announcement that Zimmerman would be charged in Trayvon’s death, Million Hoodies posted, “Long overdue!” (April 11, 2012).

One of the most compelling posts related to institutional racism toward African-Americans is a photo of Tracy Martin, Trayvon’s father, with a tear rolling down his cheek. Behind Martin is the obscured image of the American flag. Below the photo, Million Hoodies posted, “This pic just made me cry” (April 12, 2012).

Million Hoodies also expanded the racism frame by emphasizing people’s unfounded suspicion of African-American males. An early post (March 24, 2012) showed a photo of a male African-American child, dressed in a hoodie and holding the same brand of canned drink Trayvon was carrying when he was shot. The child is carrying a sign that shows a checklist of four items, all checked off. The items are ice tea,⁶ Skittles (Trayvon also had a packet of Skittles with him that night), hoodie, black. The bottom of the checklist said, “Am I next?”

Several days later (March 27, 2012), Million Hoodies posted a video, featuring male African-American students at Howard University School of Law titled, “Do We Look Suspicious?” In the video, each student pulls the hood of his hoodie over his head and says, “Do I Look Suspicious?” Several of them tell the viewer their major and/or career plans. As one of the men explained, “Contrary to what America has led many to believe, all young black males are not suspicious. Unfortunately, for Trayvon, we will never know what was in store for him because America believed this innocent child was suspicious.”

4.2. Prognostic framing

Prognostic framing used by Million Hoodies was less prevalent than diagnostic framing and vague about concrete solutions. Prognostic frames tended to center around the frame of solidarity among people. Solidarity was presented as the solution to countering the feelings of injustice stemming from Trayvon’s shooting and Zimmerman’s acquittal and preventing such occurrences from happening in the future. However, increased gun control, including repealing Stand Your Ground,⁷ emerged as a specific proposed remedy for curbing gun violence.

4.2.1. Solidarity

Million Hoodies used a solidarity frame to appeal to people’s desire for unity. For example, one of the early posts asked supporters to “help create a collective portrait of an America that won’t stand for racial profiling” (March 20, 2012). When Million Hoodies launched its website, the group shared this news in a post that said, “When you see me, see you” (March 22, 2012). In another post about early protest activities, Million Hoodies commented, “Great photos of our nation coming

⁶ Based on the Sanford police department’s inaccurate cataloging of evidence, the media reported the drink was Arizona’s iced tea although the drink was actually Arizona’s watermelon beverage (Bloom, 2014).

⁷ Stand Your Ground laws provide people the right to defend themselves with deadly force if they believe they are in mortal danger (<http://www.ncsl.org>).

together for Trayvon Martin” (March 28, 2012). Later in the campaign, solidarity still was emphasized. For example, a new poster was distributed on Facebook to publicize the Justice for Trayvon National Day of Action Vigils in 100Cities. In the post that includes the poster, Million Hoodies told supporters, “Please use this one! SOLIDARITY!!!.”

Many individual supporters—of all races and ages—expanded the solidarity frame by posting photos of themselves' wearing hoodies. Although some of these posts came from celebrities such as Muhammad Ali and Kathy Griffin, the overwhelming majority were shared by the grassroots followers who make up Million Hoodies' constituency.

4.2.2. Gun control

Within two weeks of the organization's founding, Million Hoodies was using a gun control frame. A March 26, 2012, post read, “Let's put an end to Stand Your Ground nationwide!” Less than a month later, the Dream Defenders, a group of high-school students formed after Trayvon's death, posted a picture of a group of defenders, wearing hoodies, bowing heads, and holding anti-Stand Your Ground signs. The accompanying post said:

DREAM Defenders in Miami tried to deliver more than 14 thousand petitions collected by Presente⁸ Action to [Florida] Senator Marco Rubio demanding for him to revoke his support for the “Stand Your Ground” law. They were received by the police telling them that they would get arrested. Please share this message so we can hold Senator Rubio accountable for supporting the “Kill at Will” law in Florida. MH posts Solidarity! (April 10, 2012)

Other later posts illustrated the continued use of a gun control frame. For example, a supporter posted a picture of a postcard (with names of U.S. senators) that read:

URGENT Call NOW! These senators are facing pressure from the gun lobby to say no to every proposal INCLUDING background checks. Please call them and tell them to vote: YES on background checks, YES on assault weapons, YES on large magazine ban, YES for sensible guns. (February 22, 2013)

Another post said:

Today is the one-year anniversary of Trayvon's death. We will be tweeting and Facebooking the names of kids killed by gun violence in the last year. All of our children deserve to grow up in a safe environment. We must stop the violence. Please follow us @millionhoodies or watch this page to join in. (February 26, 2013)

4.3. Motivational framing

The Million Hoodies motivational framing centered on a participation frame aimed at individual supporters. Million Hoodies organized marches, rallies, and vigils before and after the trial. Million Hoodies' posts also indicated numerous examples of the organization's encouraging supporters to share information and photos through social media.

The first post to use the participation frame borrowed phrasing from the Occupy Wall Street Movement. A supporter posted a photo of herself with the caption, “Occupy the Hood.” In her hand, she is holding a coffee cup that says, “This is your world. Shape it or someone else will” (March 21, 2012).

A sampling of other early posts with calls for participation included the following:

Marches are spreading—Tonight in LA, Leimert Park at 5 pm. (March 22, 2012)

Good luck to all the #MillionHoodies events taking place across the nation tonight and this weekend! Official website for all organizers coming soon! Post your photos here. (March 22, 2012)

Here is an updated schedule of this week's rallies and vigils. Please spread far and wide. (March 25, 2012)

Tonight at 7:17 PM EST please take your #hoodiesdown for 1 min and 46 s of silence on the 2 month anniversary of #Trayvon's death. Please spread the word. (April 26, 2012)

Million Hoodies used a participation frame to forge a personal connection between Trayvon's family and supporters. For example, an April 24, 2012, post asked supporters to send Mother's Day wishes to Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon's mother. Another said:

February 26, 2013, will mark the one-year anniversary of the death of Trayvon Martin. We will join his mother and father in New York City for a candlelight vigil in his honor. Please join us. Please bring a candle, as we will have a special moment at 7:17 PM. Please spread the word about this event by SHARING this flyer and link with your friends: <http://goo.gl/ikCMc> Our work is not done! Justice for Trayvon! (February 21, 2013)

Some of the most obvious examples of calls for participation had to do with the verdict. On the day Zimmerman's acquittal was announced, Million Hoodies posted, “Join Million Hoodies in an open national call tomorrow at 11am Eastern and 10

⁸ According to its website, “Presente is the largest national Latino online organization advancing social justice with technology, media, and culture” (www.presente.org).

am Pacific to discuss the #Zimmerman verdict and response” (July 13, 2013). A day later, Million Hoodies said, “Time to take the gloves off. Millionhoodies is now accepting donations” (July 14, 2013). On the same day, Million Hoodies posted calls for attendance at various protests, rallies, and vigils including events in New York City, Portland, OR, Grand Rapids, MI, Washington, D.C., and Boston, MA. Indicating the international reach of Trayvon’s supporters, one post said, “Germany stands for Trayvon! Tonight: Berlin at Brandenburg Gate in front of US Embassy, 6 pm (18 Uhr). Please show these folks some love for standing with us” (July 15, 2013).

Million Hoodies also encouraged participation by targeting national law enforcement officials. For example, early in the campaign (May 4, 2012), the organization asked supporters to sign a petition urging then U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to investigate the death of Kenneth Chamberlin, an African-American man shot by police in his own home (Powell, 2012). After the Zimmerman verdict, Million Hoodies also posted a link to a *Washington Post* story indicating that the U.S. Department of Justice sought public feedback on the Zimmerman case through emails to the department. Million Hoodies’ accompanying post told supporters, “You know what to do” (July 17, 2013).

4.4. Frame alignment—bridging

Frame bridging can be seen in the social media conversation that linked issues surrounding Trayvon’s case to African Americans facing injustice and racism. One of the most obvious examples was comparing Trayvon’s circumstances to other African Americans killed by gun violence, often at the hands of Whites and/or the police. For example, one post said: “While preparing for the Million Hoodies March for Trayvon Martin I received this heartbreaking call from the mother of Johnny Cash VanderWiele, another victim of gun violence in Florida. I promised to share her son’s story” (March 31, 2012). Million Hoodies also weighed in on the case of Jasmine Thar, a 16-year-old African-American girl who was shot and killed February 25, 2011, outside of a home she was visiting in Chadbourn, NC (Harden, 2011). A year after the shooting, Million Hoodies shared a link to a news report with the headline, “James Blackwell Shoots, Kills Jasmine Thar; Still No Charges Filed” (April 25, 2012) and posted, “Tomorrow we wear our hoodies for all Trayvons” (April 25, 2012). On November 23, 2012, Jordan Davis, a 17-year-old African-American male, was fatally shot in Jacksonville, FL. A week later, Million Hoodies posted, “Make your voices (and radios) heard today at 5 pm in honor of Jordan Davis!” (November 30, 2014).

Million Hoodies also forged connections to other African-Americans facing racial profiling and police brutality. For example, an April 8, 2012, post said:

Our inbox is full of messages from all of you. Thank you for your continued love, support, and activism. This came from a supporter in Sacramento, CA. A young man was asked to leave the mall for wearing a hoodie. When his father intervened, this is what happened.

The post includes a link to a video taken by a female customer who witnessed security officers’ restraining an African-American male in a suburban mall. As the video starts, the woman says: “He’s not doing anything. I’m going to record this.” The viewer then can see the man being held on the floor while pleading with the officers: “What did I do? I have a broken wrist. Please.”

Other posts connected Million Hoodies to the bigger issue of institutional racism in law enforcement. For example, one post (July 4, 2012) included a photo of a promotional poster for the upcoming film about police stop-and-frisk practices, “Fruitvale Station.” In this post, Million Hoodies told supporters: “Commit. Since 2002, over 4 million young people have been stopped-and-frisked in NYC. In 2011, 87% of those stopped-and-frisked were Black or Latino, and nine out of ten were completely innocent, according to NYPD’s own reports.”

Frame bridging also was seen in references to other social justice movements. Next to a photo of a group of Dream Defenders wearing hoodies and blocking the doors to the Sanford Police Department, Million Hoodies posted, “Occupy Wall Street” (April 9, 2012). Another post said:

On Tuesday May 1st, 2012, citizens from all over the world will participate in a general strike and take to the streets in support of workers everywhere. We join the call to demand social and economic justice for all the world’s people and stand in solidarity with the direct actions meant to target a racially biased global economic system that contributes to human suffering and countless deaths. (April 28, 2012)

Another example was when Maree applied for a “Do Something”⁹ funding award and asked supporters to vote for him. As Maree said, “Arab Spring. Occupy Wall Street. Millionhoodies. Whose streets!!!!???. Text DAN to 38,383 (July 3, 2013).

4.5. Frame alignment—amplification

Many examples were found of how Million Hoodies’ Facebook communication amplified its framing of the Trayvon case through clarification and invigoration. Some posts gave encouraging updates:

⁹ These awards honor young change-makers in the United States (www.dosomething.org), and Maree was selected for a \$100,000 award (Williams, 2013).

We may not have to wait on a grand jury decision to arrest George Zimmerman! (March 29, 2012)

ZIMMERMAN IS GETTING CHARGED!!! (April 11, 2012)

Zimmerman Confronted Martin, Court Affidavit Released! (April 12, 2012)

Motion for Acquittal is denied. Zimmerman will face the jury. (July 5, 2013)

Implicit in many of the posts was how Million Hoodies tried to link supporters' individual identities to the group's collective identity and shared purpose. For example, a March 26, 2012, post said: "As you take to the streets and the Internet today for #trayvon, remember how powerful your voices are. The whole world knows about Trayvon now, and we will get justice for him (March 26, 2012). Another said: "WOW. Millionhoodies crashed because of all the love and support. That's a good thing" (March 27, 2012). When a Change.org petition demanding Zimmerman's arrest was delivered to Sanford authorities with over two million signatures, the group posted, "Hoodies, you should all be proud of this." Still another post encouraged supporters to contribute their own content to Million Hoodies:

Hello, Friends. We are working on a video/media project celebrating all of the wonderful people who have come out to march for #Trayvon. If you have attended a march, please send us the best pictures and video you have from the event. We want everyone to see the power of a million hoodies in action. (March 29, 2012)

Other examples of attempts by Million Hoodies to create and nurture collective identity were discovered. The day after the announcement of Zimmerman's arrest, Million Hoodies told supporters: "Sleep well my friends. Although we are just starting our march, we achieved something wonderful today. We should all feel proud" (April 12, 2012). On the six-month anniversary of Trayvon's shooting, Million Hoodies said, "Let's rededicate ourselves to the cause" (August 26, 2012).

After the Zimmerman verdict was announced, Million Hoodies issued a terse response: "Not guilty on all counts" (July 13, 2013). The group then tried to clarify its position and invigorate supporters by taking a combative stance. For example, one post said: "The majority of the [media] coverage has been APPALLING and downright inexcusable. The worst part is that it's not being done intentionally (for the most part), it's just PLAIN IGNORANCE" (July 15, 2013). Another said: "Millionhoodies has just received an invitation to appear on the Geraldo Rivera show this Saturday at 10 pm. Make sure you tune in and show your support! We're ready for him! Time to set the record straight, Geraldo! (July 16, 2013). One more said: "Hey Fox News we're ready for you! Millionhoodies isn't your daddy's movement. You better buckle up for @danielmaree this Saturday at 10 pm! (July 16, 2013). On July 19, 2013, the group posted a photo from U.S. President Obama's post-verdict speech with the caption, "Trayvon Martin could've been me 35 years ago." The photo is accompanied by a post that expressed the group's frustration that Obama had waited so long to make a public statement: "It's about damn time."

Other posts expressed disbelief and sadness about the verdict. One included a photo of the Lincoln Memorial sent by an animator for the television cartoon show, "Brooklynians." The photo showed Lincoln wearing a hoodie, pulled down slightly below his eyes. The caption read:

I was in the middle of animating when I heard the news of the Zimmerman/Trayvon Martin verdict, and I couldn't go on with what I was drawing. And, I didn't have any words either. So I made this. RIP Trayvon. (July 14, 2013)

Despite disappointment over the verdict, Million Hoodies rallied and joined other groups in organizing post-verdict protest events. Most notable was the July 20, 2013, National Day of Action in cities throughout the United States. Commenting on the protest in New York City, Million Hoodies posted, "Today was awesome. [Recording artists] Jay Z and Beyonce came out to support the cause! Next stop, Washington DC on Aug. 24th!" (July 20, 2013).

4.6. Frame alignment—extension

Examples of frame extension were not as common as other instances of frame alignment, perhaps because of the early time period within the campaign examined here. However, some posts did demonstrate how Million Hoodies tried to increase its base of supporters. For example, two days before Zimmerman is charged, Million Hoodies announced, "National Hoodie Day and International Day of Internet Action for Justice! Spread the word!" (April 9, 2012). Another post said:

"Help us build a million #millionhoodies by empowering the next generation of young creatives at The Marcus Graham Project.¹⁰ . . .New recruits: @MissVhob @ItsMeMarcusB @RobTheHandsome @JulianGilliam @JSwayP Follow them @ThinkFruition." (June 3, 2012)

Three days after the verdict, Million Hoodies made its strongest plea yet for new recruits:

CALLING ALL ARTISTS, DESIGNERS, BLOGGERS, MUSICIANS, POETS, TEACHERS, UNION MEMBERS, DANCERS, PROMOTERS, STRATEGISTS, DATA SCIENTISTS, MATHEMATICIANS, DIRECTORS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, PRODUCERS (STAGE &

¹⁰ Marcus Graham is a male African-American advertising executive who founded the non-profit Marcus Graham Project to recruit and train men of color for the advertising and marketing industries (www.marcusgrahamproject.org).

SCREEN), ACTIVISTS, CITIZENS!!! IF YOU ARE READY TO TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL WITH @MILLIONHOODIES join us tonight on a national organizers' conference call. (July 16, 2013)

Million Hoodies also affirmed how the organization was extending its reach to international supporters. For example, on April 6, 2012, post was a link to a story from *democracynow.org*, indicating the United Nations Commissioner had called for a probe into Trayvon's death. Million Hoodies also posted a photo of Trayvon's parents, their lawyer, and Trayvon's brother with a link to an accompanying news story from *Independent.Co.UK*: "Trayvon Martin's parents call for an end to racial profiling in Britain" (May 12, 2012). The next day, Million Hoodies' post read: "Profiling is a global problem and it is time for us to start working together across borders. Love to all of those in the UK who came out to talk about these issues" (May 13, 2012).

Million Hoodies' posts indicated that Maree capitalized on the power and convenience of digital media to reach new supporters. For example, less than a week after the verdict, Million Hoodies announced a Google + Hangout On Air during which Maree and other social media professionals discussed how social media are effectively being used to rally global support for "#justicefortrayvon and change national Stand Your Ground laws" (July 18, 2013).

4.7. Frame alignment—transformation

Again, given that the time period for this study extends only one week after the Zimmerman verdict, indications of frame transformation were not as discernable as some of the other processes of frame alignment. Still, Million Hoodies' posts during this week indicated that the group realized it needed to move beyond Trayvon's case and focus on the systemic deleterious social conditions disproportionately affecting African-American communities.

Two posts sought to re-energize Million Hoodies' base two days after the verdict:

"Justice Doesn't Stop With George Zimmerman" (July 15, 2013) and "Who is ready to step up? Tomorrow night. National call for Million Hoodies Organizers. Join us if you are ready to take it to the next level" (July 15, 2013).

A day later, Million Hoodies shared a poster from Moms Demand Action.¹¹ The poster featured Sybrina Fulton, holding a photo of a younger Trayvon. The poster read: "We are not going to let this verdict define Trayvon. We will define our son's legacy. We have a long way to go to make sure this happens to nobody else's child" (July 16, 2013). Next to the poster, Million Hoodies told supporters to ask their friends and families to join Million Hoodies in the fight to reduce gun violence.

Other evidence of transformative framing could be seen as Million Hoodies forged alliances with other protestors. One post encouraged followers to sign a NAACP petition through *Moveon.org* that requested the U.S. Department of Justice open a civil rights case against Zimmerman (July 16, 2013). Another Million Hoodies' post shared a link to a news story from *GlobalGrind.com* about recording artist Stevie Wonder's vow not to perform in any state with a Stand Your Ground law and said: "STAND WITH STEVIE WONDER!!! BOYCOTT ALL SHOOT FIRST STATES!" (July 16, 2013).

Some of the last posts in the time period for this study illustrated how Million Hoodies explicitly began to transform its original specific frames to other broader frames. For example, on July 18, 2013, Million Hoodies sent birthday wishes to the late Nelson Mandela with this message: "Your continued presence gives us hope during this grave hour of need in America and indeed around the world. Thank you for your strength. We know you are beside us in this other 'Long Walk to Freedom.'" Perhaps the best example of frame transformation was this July 20, 2013, post:

People love to talk about black on black crime as if it's Trayvon Martin vs. Black on Black Crime. As if we have to pick between the two. Ok. Let's talk about it. Let's talk about drugs and guns in our inner cities. Let's talk about how they got there. Let's talk about Ronald Reagan. Let's talk about Iran Contra. Let's talk about poverty. Let's talk about the victimization of black communities. These black talking heads should be ashamed of themselves for not making that point. Let's be honest about the crises that exist in our communities. Let's not just use them as excuses for not finding justice for Trayvon. #GetSerious #Millionhoodies.

5. Discussion

All of *Snow and Benford's (1988)* core framing processes could be identified in Million Hoodies' Facebook posts during the time period examined. The organization mobilized publics using a diagnostic frame of justice and connected people's individual value systems about fairness to the larger issues of social injustice inherent in Trayvon Martin's shooting and law enforcement's initial failure to arrest Zimmerman. Million Hoodies diagnosed the problem as racism and suggested the prognostic frames of solidarity among people and increased gun control as remedies. Through motivational framing, Million Hoodies called supporters to action with a focus on participation in its many protest initiatives—both online and offline.

Million Hoodies' Facebook communication also displayed all of the frame alignment processes suggested by *Snow et al.'s (1986)* concept of frame alignment. Frame bridging linked Trayvon's circumstances to other examples of African Americans (particularly men) who have faced injustice and racism such as racial profiling and police brutality because of individual

¹¹ According to its website, Moms Demand Action "was created to demand action from legislators, state and federal; companies; and educational institutions to establish common-sense gun reforms" (www.momsdemandaction.org).

and systemic racial biases within the U.S. law enforcement system. Million Hoodies used frame amplification extensively to provide information about protest events and major breaking news surrounding the Trayvon campaign. The group also used frame amplification to encourage and invigorate supporters throughout the turbulent chronology of the Trayvon-Zimmerman story. Examples of frame extension were not as common, perhaps because of the early time period within the campaign examined here.

Future research should investigate how digital activists may use frame extension to increase their base of supporters over a longer time period. Similarly, some examples of frame transformation were evident but mostly tentative. A review of Million Hoodies' more recent posts suggests police militarization and brutality as frames. These themes are linked in particular to police crackdowns on protesters after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed African-American man, by a white police officer, Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, MO, August 9, 2014. Events in Ferguson were followed by highly publicized deaths at the hands of police officers of other unarmed African-American men. Additional scholarship also should examine the relationship between frame transformation and campaign effectiveness, especially in terms of how transformation might help a short-term campaign create the momentum, or as Tilly (2004) said, the WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment), needed for a long-term social movement that produces meaningful structural change.

This research adds to the nascent literature on digital media, public relations, and framing and suggests that communication on social media by grassroots activists may display more examples of effective framing than Muralidharan et al. (2011) found for organizations' and media's use of social media. This study also raises the question of whether social media, perhaps because of their ease of use, fluidity, and access, may provide more compelling examples of strategic framing than researchers have found when examining other digital media such as websites (Zoch, Collins, & Sisco, 2008; Zoch, Collins, Sisco, & Supa, 2008).

Like all research, this study has limitations. Although the researcher relied on primary documents (social media texts and supporting content) created or shared by Million Hoodies, she made inferences about the group's framing. Interviews with Million Hoodies' staff members, such as Maree, might have provided triangulation of the researcher's interpretation of the texts with content creators' intent. This research also was limited to one grassroots activist network, so caution should be taken when applying these findings to other activist groups. Similarly, only one social networking site—Facebook—was profiled here. Although the researcher examined Twitter and Instagram and noticed similar frames and framing processes, a formal analysis of these sites might have produced different results. This especially might be the case because the percentage of African Americans using Twitter and Instagram is higher (27 and 38%) than percentages for Whites (21 and 21%) or Latinos (25 and 34%) (Krogstad, 2015). Instagram also appeals to a younger demographic (Krogstad, 2015), the target public for much of Million Hoodies' digital activism (Williams, 2013).

Digital activism and social media framing remain a promising research area for public relations scholarship. Digital media have given rise to new forms of grassroots public relations, including that performed by social action networks. Million Hoodies is just one example of how this new brand of communicators is seizing the power of strategic message framing for engaging and motivating supporters, recruiting new followers, attempting to legitimize messages among a broader constituency, and transforming frames as circumstances call for other emphases.

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