Activism, Public Relations, and the Internet: A Case Study of Moveon.org

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ACTIVISM, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND THE INTERNET:
A CASE STUDY OF MOVEON.ORG

by

Erich Sommerfeldt

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Erich Sommerfeldt
This thesis explores how an activist organization, MoveOn.org, is using the Internet to meet its public relations needs. MoveOn.org’s Web site was analyzed to the extent that MoveOn engaged in three basic functions of public relations. Accordingly, this inquiry asked how MoveOn.org engaged in relationship-building with publics via e-mail action alerts; agenda-stimulation through online information subsidies (press releases); and how MoveOn mobilized organizational resources on its Web site. Results show that MoveOn.org regularly engages in rhetorical relationship building through action alerts with its publics, mainly through Burke’s *identification by antithesis* identification strategy. Keywords from MoveOn’s press releases were used in a search to determine if mainstream media utilized MoveOn’s releases in information-gathering. Outside media sources did not use information from MoveOn’s press releases in great frequency. Consequently, MoveOn missed an important opportunity to stimulate the national/social agenda. MoveOn’s Web site and action alerts were coded for instances of resource mobilization features. MoveOn was found to engage in resource mobilization more heavily in its action alerts and in Web pages specific to unique campaigns. Overall, the data suggests that MoveOn engages in major public relations functions in a manner representative of a catalytic issues management strategy.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

McCarthy and Zald (1977) write that the first goal of any organization is to ensure its survival, and only when survival is ensured can other organizational goals be pursued (p. 1226). Activist organizations have long depended on the use of mass media to disseminate their message and activities to potential movement participants to achieve their goals (Myers, 2002, p. 130). Jenkins (1983) notes that mass media coverage is imperative to informing publics of the actions of a particular movement or organization, as well as helping to shape the identity and morale of activist groups (p. 546). Thus, it is important to consider the function mass media play in the public relations activities of activist organizations.

With the advent and popularization of the World Wide Web, activists and activist organizations have created thousands of Web sites that provide information on activist concerns and activities. As activists have become more sophisticated computer users, the Internet has become a mass media tool that has dramatically improved communication between activists and their constituents (Myers, 2002, p. 126). Indeed, the emergence of the Internet has created new opportunities to enhance the participation of activists in democratic politics (Cornfield, 2000). Numerous organizations have formed online-based activist groups intent on communicating with, engaging, and mobilizing potential supporters through e-mail and Web sites. One such organization that has recently risen to prominence in the American political scene is MoveOn.org.
Dozier and Lauzen (2000) have urged public relations practitioners and scholars to value alternative perspectives to the field, such as those of activists, to better understand public relations theory and practice. Kent, Taylor, and White (2001) posit that researching the public relations practices of activist organizations is important “because they have unique communication and relationship building needs” (p. 264). This thesis examines how one activist organization, MoveOn.org, is using the Internet to meet its public relations needs. With MoveOn as the study’s focus, this inquiry examines the public relations activities that are possible through purely online facilitation and interaction.

The major objective of this thesis is to build on activist group research concerning relationship building, issues management and agenda stimulation, and resource mobilization by extending these public relations concepts to how they can be applied by an activist organization on the Internet. More specifically, this research intends to address how the Internet is used by MoveOn.org to meet their public relations needs by asking the following three questions:

1) How does MoveOn.org facilitate relationship building with its publics via e-mail action alerts?

2) Are the information subsidies provided by MoveOn.org effective in agenda stimulation?

3) How is MoveOn.org using its Web site to mobilize resources?

To frame the discussion towards addressing the above questions, chapter 2 reviews the literature on activism and the Internet. The review continues through addressing relationship building and identification; issues management and agenda
stimulation; and resource mobilization. The review is punctuated with literature concerning the role of the Internet in achieving the aforementioned public relations objectives. To demonstrate how these objectives can operate online within a single organizational context, a case study of MoveOn.org is then presented. The discussion in chapter 3 synthesizes analyses of data by demonstrating how MoveOn engages in each of the three concerned functions of public relations. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this study to the research of activist groups, public relations, and the Internet.
CHAPTER II

ACTIVISM, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND THE INTERNET

To frame the discussion of how activist groups can use the Internet to meet central public relations objectives, this chapter begins with an explanation of activist groups and their origins, how activists can utilize public relations to achieve their goals, and how the Internet is a relatively new and powerful public relations tool available to activist organizations. Next, I explain how the Internet is a public relations tool for relationship building, resource mobilization, and issues management and agenda stimulation. Chapter two concludes with a case study of MoveOn.org, and then poses three questions intended to answer how MoveOn is utilizing the Internet to meet the aforementioned public relations objectives.

Activism

Because activist groups vary in “size, range of issue involvement, tactics, and effectiveness” (Grunig, 1992, p. 513), a significant problem in addressing activist groups is exactly how they should be defined. As Grunig (1992) characterizes them, an activist group is a “group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force” (p. 504). The naming of activist groups has been problematic in activist group/social movement research for years. Smith and Ferguson (2001, p. 291) write that activist groups are commonly referred to in the literature as special interest groups, pressure groups, issue groups, grassroots organizations, or social movements. Stewart, Smith and Denton (1989) add more descriptive terms to the list of labels for
activist movements, such as radical, reactionary, revolutionary, and repressive. Stewart et al. (1989) observed that the abundance of labels attached to activist phenomena have confused scholastic efforts to understand activist groups (p. 3). Stewart et al. (1989) further noted that the nomenclature used to describe activist groups to that point often carried negative or denigrating connotations (p. 3), no doubt because activist groups were most frequently treated in the literature as adversarial to the interests of traditional organizations or governments. As will be discussed later, views of activists have changed significantly since Grunig’s (1992) and Stewart et al.’s (1989) work, and as the plethora of terms for activist groups are generally viewed in the literature as analogous, from this point forward all such groups will be referred to as activists or activist groups/organizations.

\textit{Formation of Activist Groups}

Emerging as a reaction to discontent with the social order, activist organizations are formed as people join together to act collectively towards the reversal or enactment of change (Heberle, 1995, pp. 55–56). Dissatisfaction or discontent with the current social order may come from a sense that a change (or lack thereof) within the moral, ethical, or normative fabric of the social order is perceived as negatively affecting the interests, values, and way of life of a certain group of people (Heberle, 1995, p. 55; Oberschall, 1993, p. 16). The group(s) of affected individuals come to share a set of opinions and beliefs based around the perceived change in the social order. When a large number of affected people organize together in order to supplant a part of the existing culture or social order, an activist group is formed. An activist organization may identify its goals
with the ideologies of a particular movement, and organize to systematically attempt to implement those goals (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1218).

**Activist Group Communication**

An activist group establishes itself as a proponent of or in opposition to a particular ideology or set of goals concerning changes in societal norms and/or values (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 1989, p. 9). An activist group must also effectively disseminate its messages of what it proposes or opposes, and its ideology to a larger audience, which is accomplished through communication (Oberschall, 1993, pp. 21–22). Wilkinson (1976) constructed a definition of activist groups around the notion that such groups are distinguished by patterns of rhetoric in their communications. He defines activist groups as:

> languaging strategies by which a significantly vocal part of an established society, experiencing together a sustained dialectical tension growing out of moral conflict, agitate to induce cooperation in others, either directly or indirectly, and thereby affecting the status quo. (p. 91)

To inform the public of the ideology and goals of the movement, activist groups construct their communication in a manner that establishes and reinforces the ethical, virtuous, principled, and righteous position of the organization or movement. Moreover, activists try to attract new members by communicating the justness of their cause through ideological and moral appeals (Oberschall, 1993, p. 21). Reinforcing the ethical legitimacy of the movement can be accomplished while simultaneously censuring adversarial entities by claiming to reveal the “moral, intellectual, and coercive bankruptcy of the opposition” (Stewart et al., 1989, p. 11).
Cheney (1983) notes, “persuasion is inherent in the process of organizing” (p. 144), and according to Stewart et al. (1989), persuasion is a way for activist organizations to affect public perception of issues, to call for action, and to mobilize the constituents of the group (pp. 125–129). Persuasion is a communicative process by which an activist group seeks, through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, to affect perceptions. The use of persuasions leads to changes in the ways constituents think, feel, and/or act (Stewart et al., 1989, p. 140). Public relations is thus a key function of activist groups, for it is through public relations activities that an activist organization communicates its position on issues, and solicits support from publics (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 294).

Activist groups use public relations to make publics aware of the effects that issues have on them and to organize coalitions of publics to work with the activist groups (Grunig, 1997, p. 9). The next section will discuss how public relations is a natural and necessary function of activist groups.

Activism and Public Relations

Grunig’s situational theory (Grunig, 1989, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) provides a theoretical basis from which to explain the origins of activism through a public relations perspective. Derived from Dewey’s (1927) notion of an active public that forms upon the recognition of a problem and organizes to solve that problem, Grunig’s situational theory of publics was developed to segment publics around issues and communication.

According to the situational perspective, publics are perceived as developing situationally, emerging as social entities through “spontaneous argument, discussion, and collective opposition to some issue or problematic situation” (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001, p. 142). Given that publics are issue-oriented, publics form when organizational
stakeholders encounter similar problems, recognize that a problem exists, and organize to do something about that problem (Dozier & Ehling, 1992, p. 170). Conversely, when there is no universal problem among stakeholders that bonds them together, a public will not form. Grunig and Repper (1992) note that “problems define publics more than publics define problems” (p. 138). Through the segmentation of publics around issues and their expected information seeking and communication behaviors, situational theory is used predict an individual’s likelihood of membership and participation in issue-oriented publics, and the likelihood of a public communicating with an organization.

As the progression of recognition and the organization of publics in Grunig’s situational theory indicates, publics can “begin as disconnected systems of individuals...but they can evolve into organized and powerful activist groups engaging in collective behavior” (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 138). Dozier and Ehling (1992) posit that active publics are the only publics capable of generating consequences for organizations, thus it is generally ideal for an organization to identify, and communicate with, aware publics before they become active or activist groups (p. 171). As activists have the capacity to hamper an organization’s ability to function and achieve its goals, Anderson (1992, p. 151) notes that activists are key strategic publics for organizations. Writing from a similar perspective, Grunig (1989) held that activism “create(s) a public relations problem and the need for a public relations program” (p. 8). Grunig, writing in 1992, posits that “activist pressure is an extensive problem for organizations” (p. 513) and that without a clear understanding of activist groups, “the organization may be at their mercy” (p. 507).
The previously mentioned research on activism has privileged for-profit organizations, and has largely disregarded the idea that traditional organizations or governments can be key strategic publics for activist groups. However, Sen Das and Taylor (2006) comment that views of activist groups within the literature have changed drastically in recent years (p. 3). Perceptions of activist groups as entities that “contribute to the constraints on organizational autonomy” (Grunig, 1989, p. 8), have evolved to those which view such groups as public relations practitioners in their own right (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Grunig, 1997; Holtzhausen, 2000; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). Just as more conventional public relations practitioners, activist and advocacy organizations struggle to acquire or strengthen support for ideas, programs or products, or work on behalf of some interest (Spicer, 1997, p. 180). But whereas public relations is traditionally thought of as a tool to help advocate for and protect traditional organizations, Holtzhausen and Voto (2002, p. 60) contend that activists are genuinely dedicated to advocating a certain cause rather than to a particular organization. This, they maintain, is rare among “traditional” public relations practitioners. Holtzhausen (2000) argues that although activists are often perceived in public relations as organizational adversaries and sometimes as the causal force behind public relations programs, activist groups are actually the “real voices of democracy” (p. 100).

Bridges and Nelson (2000, p. 103) suggest that the creation of active publics is possible through public relations activities, for communication about issues is essential to the formation of new active publics. Accordingly, publicizing issues through communication can attract new members to activist organizations. One such way in
which activist organizations can attempt to generate publics is by increasing their issue-interest and involvement is through Internet technologies.

The Internet as a Public Relations Tool for Activists

Botan (1992) comments that public relations is simply the use of communication to negotiate relationships among groups (p. 153), and Kent and Taylor (1998) note that the Internet offers a “multi-channel environment” where negotiation between an organization and its various publics may occur (p. 322). Kent and Taylor (1998) posit that organizational Web sites serve as a means to engage in common public relations functions such as news releases, opportunities for research of publics, and distribution of organizational information (p. 322). The Internet has thus become a media outlet and public relations tool for activist groups to communicate their message cheaply and expeditiously (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001, p. 264). Information disseminated via the Internet “educates the public, builds constituencies . . . and pressures decision makers at a cost that is generally lower than traditional methods” (Queiro-Tajalli, McNutt, & Campell, 2003, p. 154). Coombs (1998, p. 299) notes that the Internet is controlled; that is, activist groups can decide exactly what information it will communicate, when, and how. Additionally, the Internet reduces a group’s dependency on outside media to disseminate its information. The Internet allows activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers making it, as Coombs (1998) describes, “a de facto rival to the news media” (p. 299). In turn, the Internet and organizational Web sites offer activist groups (as well as traditional organizations) an opportunity to have their perspectives and goals evaluated by the mainstream or traditional media (c.f. Callison, 2003).
As early as 1994, Rice and Steinfeld suggested that many Internet users will rely on information provided from a chosen organization because they feel the information they receive from the organization is of higher quality than traditional sources, and because they do not want to “miss” anything of perceived importance (pp. 121–124). Holtzhausen (2000) posits that activists have become experts at making their voices heard through small, niche media, while at the same time, people have become increasingly skeptical of traditional media and its credibility (p. 103). As such, Coombs (1998) notes that publics which seek out information on a particular organization’s Web site are likely to be, or become, active publics. He argues that such publics are the “type of people [an organization] wants to reach with issue messages because they are politically active, looking for information, and are likely to relay information to others” (p. 300).

As activist groups are issue-oriented, Kent, Taylor, and White (2001) posit that meeting the informational needs of publics is essential to an activist group’s survival (p. 65). In the past, activist groups have kept members informed of organizational news and the organization’s issues through internal communications such as newsletters or other publications targeted at members or other interested persons. New communication technologies such as the Internet are performing a function similar to newsletters, allowing “resource/membership-dependent” (Kent et al., 2001, p. 65) activist organizations to provide information to their key publics. Beyond mere provision of information, the Internet can also be utilized to accomplish several key functions of public relations.

Smith and Ferguson (2001) posit that activists use public relations to achieve two main organizational goals. First, activist organizations want to rectify certain conditions
identified as problems. In order to overcome obstacles to achieve this goal, organizations must "solicit support for action" (p. 294); activists must build positive relationships with their publics and in so doing build support for the organization’s stance on issues. Smith and Ferguson (2001) also suggest that as part of this goal, activists must draw public attention to these problems, and “position themselves as legitimate advocates” (p. 294).

One way to understand how organizations become advocates for and draw attention to issues is through the theoretical lenses of issues management and agenda stimulation.

According to Smith and Ferguson (2001), the second goal of activist organizations in using public relations is to “maintain the organization established to pursue the activists’ purposes” (p. 294). Activist organizations must garner resources in order to function and accomplish their missions. Thus, derived from Smith and Ferguson’s suggestions as to how activist groups use public relations, in this inquiry the Internet will be considered as a public relations tool for activist groups to meet these three basic needs: 1) engaging in relationship building with publics, 2) managing issues with the purpose of stimulating the public agenda, and 3) mobilizing organizational resources. The next section elaborates on relationship building literature and how the Internet can be used to build and maintain organization-public relationships.

Internet Relationship Building

The building and maintenance of relationships is often considered to be the central activity of public relations. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1994) write that public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 2). Although relationship building research has advanced considerably since
Ferguson’s (1984) initial call for public relations research to center on the explicit “relationship” between organization and public, exactly what constitutes a “relationship” and how one is constructed continues to inspire debate within the discipline.

Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) have posited that the lack of a clear definition for “relationships” has stifled the development of theory building in public relations (p. 3). After explaining the concept of relationships from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, Broom et al. (2000) suggest a concept of relationships wherein the relationship should be considered in terms of its antecedents and consequences. Broom et al. (2000) explain antecedents to relationships as the “perceptions, motives, needs, behaviors, and so forth, posited as contingencies or as causes in the formation of relationships” (p. 16). The antecedents are the sources of change, pressure, or tension resultant from the system or environment within the relationship exists. The consequences of relationships are the “outputs that have the effects of changing the environment and of achieving, maintaining, or changing goal states both inside and outside the organization” (p. 16).

An example of this process that Broom et al. (2000) provide includes collective perceptions and expectations as antecedents of relationships. Collective perceptions and expectations may lead to exchanges, transactions, communications, or other interconnected activities, which may result in the achievement of goals (p. 16). Goal achievement (or any other consequence of a relationship) may, in turn, cause other changes. Thus, relationships can be considered as essentially both the causes of and consequences of changes; changes that are achieved through communication.
The process of building mutually beneficial relationships with publics, or relationship management, is recognized to be of great import to organizations as publics can “constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission” (Grunig, 1992, p. 20). Previous research has demonstrated that activist organizations have become more connected with their publics through the use of Internet communication technology (c.f. Fisher, Stanley, Berman, & Neff, 2005) and have engaged in relationship building with their publics via the Internet (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Jo & Kim, 2003; Romm & Pliskin, 1998; Taylor et al., 2001). The Internet clearly offers activist groups a convenient medium to engage in relationship building with their publics, particularly through facilitating mass communication and information dissemination (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002, p. 550). The key benefit of using the Internet to build organization-public relationships is that the Internet permits activists groups to disseminate information as they wish, how they wish, and whenever they want to. In essence, the Internet is another mass communication tool besides the mainstream media that activists can utilize.

Drawing upon a conclusion about relationship building made by Broom et al. (2000) and other sources, Kent and Taylor (1998) put forward five principles of how organizations relate to publics via their Web site. These principles include: offering (1) dialogic loops, (2) ease of interface, (3) conservation of visitors, (4) generation of return visits, and (5) providing information relevant to a variety of publics. Arguing that organization–public relationships can be “created, adapted, and changed” (p. 326) through the Internet, these principles serve as a guide as to how organizations can actually build relationships with their publics through their Web sites. For activist organizations that rely primarily on the Web for their very existence, it follows that
activist organizations will seek to create and maintain positive relationships with their publics through the Internet.

As discussed heretofore, public relations scholarship is often concerned with the examination of relationships between organizations and their key publics. One of the core objectives of building relationships with publics is, as Heath and Coombs (2006) write, the "cocreating of meaning that supports the mutual interests of the organization and its key stakeholders" (p. 352). To ensure that the interests of the organization are supported, public relations departments can promote an "alignment" of interest between the organization and its publics through its communications. Heath and Coombs (2006) note that interests are aligned "where people understand one another, agree with one another, and are satisfied by the benefits they receive from one another" (p. 352). The process of cocreating meaning may entail demonstrating how an organization's and public's interests are commensurate because of shared facts, evaluations, or conclusions (Heath & Coombs, 2006, p. 352). One way of demonstrating such organization-public alignment is through shared identifications. Organizations express shared identifications when they communicatively demonstrate how they share identities, values, and norms with their publics (Quesinberry, 2004, p. 403). As will be shown in the following sections, identification can be thought of both as a facilitator of and resultant from changes accomplished through communication. Put in terms applicable to the organization–public relationship, publics' identification with an organization can result from communication with the organization; identification with an organization can also heighten as the organization seeks to maintain a positive relationship with publics. As such, identification
meets the theoretical conditions of what constitutes a relationship set forward by Broom et al. (2000).

**Identification**

Introduced by Burke (1950), identification is a rhetorical concept that has become progressively more important in public relations as more organizations compete to garner the support from potential audiences needed to survive (Quesinberry, 2004, p. 403). Heath (2001) stresses the importance of identification to the practice and theory of public relations, and posits that the need to create, apply, or sustain identification is a focal point for relationship building (p. 33). Similarly, Quesinberry (2004) writes that the theory of identification offers public relations practitioners “a strategy companies and other organizations employ to influence audiences and build relationships with them” (p. 403).

According to Pratt (1998), one meaning of identification is “to recognize.” Pratt (1998) writes that “meaning is made salient when individuals identify with an organization that they believe has values and beliefs similar to their own” (p. 180). A fundamental task of any organization is to engender identification with its publics, for it must do so in order to preserve its interests, function, grow, and survive within its environment (Cheney, 1983; Pratt 1998). As Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) note, identification is accomplished through “the forging, maintenance, and alteration of linkages between persons and groups” (p. 304). Thus, organizational efforts to foster identification with publics constitute an exercise in relationship building.

A rhetorical goal of organizations in constructing their strategic communications is to persuade others to adopt interpretations of issues that conform to the organization’s desired perception of reality (Heath, 1992a, pp. 26–27). In agreement with Burke (1950),
Heath (1992b) observes that identification is a rhetorical means by which people come to recognize others as sharing values and opinions on matters of self-interest (p. 45). Therefore, organizations make use of rhetorical identification to “help” their publics realize that they share interests, values, and opinions with the organization; that they have a relationship. Dewey (1927) defined a public as a group of people who see that they have a common interest with respect to an organization, and in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (1950) writes:

> A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (p. 20)

Given the above statement, a focal point for organization–public relationships can be found in the confluence of interest, or in identification between a public and an organization.

Scott et al. (1998) posit that any identity is partially constituted by core beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and values (p. 303). As a consequence, when individuals negotiate identity, they will be more inclined to communicate and cooperate with targets, and therefore organizations of all varieties, that are perceived as sharing similar interests, values and goals (Cheney, 1983, p. 146). According to Greene (1999), identification is a “motivational need for some positive distinctiveness” (p. 394). Thus, the need to identify with an organization is motivated by a desire for some positive individual distinctiveness and validation. In public relations, managing issues and promoting one value over another also affects the organization’s image and identity (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987, p. 175). If an individual believes that an organization is defined by qualities of positive
distinctiveness, personal association with and membership in that organization is perceived as an opportunity for them to see themselves as possessing the same distinctive qualities (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994, p. 247). Hence, an individual can be said to identify with an organization when he or she comes to adopt the defining characteristics of an organization as self-defining. When individuals identify with an organization, they accept the values and goals of the organization as their own, and desire to make decisions that will protect and promote the perceived image and interests of the organization because it affords them a sense of personal distinctiveness to do so.

Recognizing, as Burke (1950) does, that identification is a ubiquitous communicative process, and one necessary to an organization’s survival, adds much to the understanding of how activist organizations build relationships with their publics. Different types of organizations have different types of relationships with their publics (Leitch & Neilson, 1997, p. 24), but the most important indicators and expressions of an identity are always found in communication (Scott et al., 1998, p. 305). Therefore, organizations can help to facilitate identification and relationship building with its publics via numerous communicative tactics, including internal publications (e.g. Cheney, 1983), television ads (e.g. Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004b), or Web sites (e.g. Taylor et al., 2001), the communication an organization creates is an expression of the organization’s identity (Leitch & Neilson, 1997, p. 28) and can help to elicit identification. Such communications are a way an organization can seek to foster attachment and build and maintain relationships.

The underlying intent of communication with publics is to create a collective identity for members. Individuals that experience a collective identity have common
interpretations of reality—a reality in which the organization is perceived favorably (Dutton et al., 1994, pp. 256–257). Thus, identification can be thought of as an antecedent or cause of relationships. However, identification can also be considered a consequence of relationships due to the fact that as individuals are exposed to organizational communications positive perceptions of and identification with the organization can increase (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 247; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1999, p. 779).

A significant consequence of identification’s relationship building function is that it can be used to persuade publics and induce collective action. Indeed, identification efforts within activist groups are particularly crucial. Appelrouth (1999, p. 331) observes that the viability of an activist organization is dependent upon its ability to align its ideology and goals with its publics, leading them to collective action. Thus, organizations utilize rhetorical identification to create common interpretations of issues and ideas to achieve fulfillment of organizational interests. If the organization desires its publics to engage in actions that advance these interests, creating common interpretations of an issue is necessary to induce sufficient agreement so the action called for is perceived to be justified. By persuading publics to identify with an organization—and thereby its interests—the organization is subsequently afforded the opportunity to persuade its publics, through communication, to act in the best interests of the organization (Dutton et al., 1994, pp. 256–257). Thus, public relations can utilize identification strategies to help their publics “fulfill their needs of belongingness while simultaneously garnering stakeholder commitment to organizational missions” (Quesinberry, 2004, p. 404). As will
be discussed in the next section, there are three basic strategies through which public relations activities can endeavor to induce organization-public identification.

**Forms of Rhetorical Identification**

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (1950) writes that a speaker—and so rhetors of all other communication modes—have the ability to persuade an audience through:

- the use of stylistic identifications; his *sic* act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speakers interests; and
- the speaker draws on identification . . . to establish rapport between himself and his audience. (p. 46)

Burke (1972) subsequently delineates three forms of how identification manifests itself or can be applied within discourse, writing that:

- The first is quite dull. It flowers in such usages as that of a politician who, though rich, tells humble constituents of his humble origins. The second kind of identification involves the workings of antithesis, as when allies who would otherwise dispute among themselves join forces against a common enemy. This application can also serve to deflect criticism, as a politician can call any criticism of his policies “unpatriotic,” on the grounds that it reinforces the claims of the nation’s enemies. But the major power of “identification” derives from situations in which it goes unnoticed. My prime example is the word “we,” as when the statement that “we” are at war includes under the same head soldiers who are getting killed and speculators who hope to make a killing in war stocks. (p. 28)

This passage conveys Burke’s general observations about the ways in which identification manifests itself, but provides little specific insight into how identifications
are enacted rhetorically. In an effort to further clarify his thoughts on identification, Burke (1973, pp. 268–272) later categorized his variants of identification as *identification by sympathy, identification by antithesis, and identification by unawareness.*

The first of the identification strategies articulated by Burke (1972) in the above passage, *sympathy,* implies an associational process wherein a rhetor presents him or herself as alike the audience, sharing their interests, values, and concerns. Indeed, Burke (1973) likens *sympathy* to mere persuasion, and writes that utilizing *sympathy* as an identification strategy is “merely a way to establish rapport by the stressing of sympathies held in common” (p. 268). In adapting Burke’s work, Cheney (1983) relates that this strategy is exemplified by the rhetor linking him or herself to publics in an overt manner. Sommerfeldt (2007) completed a study of how Christian Right organizations engender identification with its publics via e-mail action alerts. E-mail action alerts from the Christian Coalition and the American Family Association were content analyzed for instances of Burke’s three forms of identification, and examples of the *sympathy* strategy included: “We believe, like you, that the threat against traditional marriage is real” and “we need your help to fight for the protection of the values that we, and you, hold dear” (p. 32). As shown through these examples, this identification strategy is explicit in that the public is directly told that the rhetor shares their values, goals and belief systems.

Burke’s (1972) second form of identification, *identification by antithesis,* involves the rhetor calling for unification against some common adversary. This form of identification suggests that dissociation with some individuals, groups, or organization indirectly establishes association with others. The strategy functions by attempting to establish an “us vs. them” mentality, pointing out the differences between the rhetor and a
rival. The rival or enemy may be outsiders (i.e. organizational non-members) who hold disparate views, or agents perceived to be adversarial of or a threat to the rhetor. Thus, Burke (1973) titles this form of identification as *identification through antithesis*, for through portraying organizational outsiders as enemies, organizations “implicitly stress identification with ‘insiders’ as an effort toward achieving unity and collective acceptance of organizational values” (Cheney, 1983, p. 148). Examples of this strategy from Sommerfeldt’s 2007 study included: “Ford Motor Company is showing contempt for the concerns of traditional families . . . sign the petition to let Ford know we will boycott their products” and “. . . this [an ad from an opposing organization] is, in reality, a declaration of war against the entire pro-family movement . . . their goal is to depress religious conservatives. *They* want to bring down the pro-family movement” (emphasis mine, p. 32).

Burke (1973) writes that *identification by unawareness* is an illusory kind of identification, “whereby an individual who may be personally modest and unassuming becomes deceptively aggrandized by thoughts of his citizenship in a powerful nation” (p. 270). *Unawareness* may therefore be thought of as a kind of perceived personal attachment to the “idea” of an organization or ideology, however abstract. Given that, Burke comments that *unawareness* can easily be mistaken for *sympathy*. Burke (1973) distinguishes *unawareness* from *sympathy* through the same aforementioned allegory, writing:

> . . . only too often, such identification [unawareness] is but the failure to distinguish between one’s country and the decisions of certain politicians who . . . get the nation into foreign embarrassments . . . Look more closely, and you will
see that the embarrassment is not really the nation’s but that of certain officials
whose interests are not necessarily identical with the nation’s interests. (p. 270)

In other words, *identification by unawareness* is a kind of inherent or unknown
identification that an individual may share with an organization, entity, cause, or ideal;
though there may be no direct connection or relationship between said individual and the
object or concept with which he or she identifies.

In the most succinct and simplest of terms, Burke (1973) explains that
*identification by unawareness* can be achieved through the use of the pronoun “we” or
synonyms thereof. *Identification by unawareness* points to the uniting processes of
association and disassociation, where dissimilar people with disparate interests are
brought together under an assumed or transcendent “we” (Cheney, 1983, p. 148).
Organizations can attempt to foster identification in this fashion by referring to all
members of the organization as implicitly sharing the same values, opinions, and beliefs
even if these characteristics are not shared. Through using “we-oriented” rhetoric, rhetors
seek to implicitly associate themselves with the values, characteristics, policies, etc. of
others. This strategy is found in organizational discourse “when the sharing of interests
by the corporation and employee seems taken for granted” (Cheney, 1983, p. 149).
Examples of instances from Sommerfeldt (2007) included: “We must act to protect our
beliefs” and “Don Wildmon [chairman of the AFA] has been fighting for our values”
(emphases mine, p. 32).

As articulated above, *sympathy* and *unawareness* are more associative in nature,
while *antithesis* is dissociative, though none of the three strategies is purely either-or.
Understanding the identification strategies as tensions between association and
disassociation—unity and division—is at the very essence of identification, for as Burke (1950) notes, identification “is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (p. 22). Further, he writes that “identification is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of division” (p. 22). Cheney (1983) relates that in identification there is always an implicit congregation and segregation; there is always a “we” and a “they” (p. 148). Thus, organizations can utilize identifications to identify similarities between itself and publics (which implicitly creates division) as well as to create division between itself and other entities (which implicitly inspires unity).

Stewart et al. (1989) provide a useful reference to further appreciate and discuss the associative and dissociative natures of identification in the context of activist organizations. According to Stewart et al. (1989, p. 75), to inform the public of the ideology and goals of the organization, activist organizations can construct their communication in either coactive or confrontational strategies. Coactive rhetoric—complementary to Burke’s identification strategies of sympathy and unawareness—emphasizes similarities, shared experiences and a common cause. In this way, social movements identify with a certain set of norms and values in society, “identifying themselves with what is large, good, important, and of the highest order in society” (Stewart et al., 1989, p. 75). Conversely, confrontational rhetoric—congruent with antithesis—is constructed in a manner to make people see that other social entities are immoral and illegitimate.

To summate, individuals are likely to seek out organizations that exhibit values and beliefs similar to their own as they negotiate their corporate identity. Organizations
use public relations strategies and tactics to publicize their identity through various communication media to attract new members and build relationships. Once an individual is inclined to identify with an organization, he or she will be receptive to persuasive communications from within the organization. These communications are constructed in a manner that appeals to the sensibilities of the audience, which heightens identification, establishes common interpretations of issues and thus a picture of reality favorable to the organization and its goals and interests. Consequently, individuals who identify and have a relationship with an organization will generally share motives with the organization and act in a manner which embodies the values and advances the goals of the organization. “Motives” for Burke (1950), is a term that is used as a short-hand terms for situations. Motive refers to action by way of communicative behavior. Thus, as Stewart et al. (1989) interpret motive, Burke is “primarily interested in the attribution of motives to action through communicative behavior” (p. 139). Thus, through the identification process relationships can be built, maintained, and the motives for engaging in collective action are established. As maintained in the next section, the Internet and its ancillary technologies have proven to be to be an effective medium through which activists can foster identification and coordinate collective action.

Identification and Internet Technologies

The need to foster identification among organizational members is particularly salient for “virtual” organizations, such as the one to be examined here. Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud (1999) note that identification is crucial to sustaining virtual or Internet-based organizations because identification “facilitates critical organizational functions that pose a particular challenge in virtual contexts, such as . . . the coordination
and control of dispersed organizational actors” (p. 778). Wiesenfeld et al. (1999) suggest that to achieve coordination and control, organizations may rely on a variety of communicative means (p. 780). Further, Wiesenfeld et al. (1999) observe that electronic media such as e-mails are particularly important in the maintenance of organizational identification (p. 778). As such, in this inquiry the specific means through which identification efforts from MoveOn.org will be examined is the e-mail action alert. Because identification efforts take place in unique political and social settings (Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004b, p. 40), focusing on identification efforts through a specific channel such as action alerts should help in the effort to more fully understand the uses and applications of the Internet as means to advance organizational identification in activist organizations. The next section briefly reviews research concerning e-mail, and how the channel can be used as a political and motivational tool.

**E-mail Action Alerts**

Ducheneaut and Watts (2005) write that “e-mail is, first and foremost, a communication technology used to support interaction and coordination between groups of people” (p. 22). Queiro-Tajalli, McNutt, and Campbell (2003) comment that, in retrospect, the major impact of the Internet and e-mail might be their role in causing the death of distance as a consideration for coordinating human action (p. 156). Through the Internet and e-mail, organizations can strengthen the identity link between organizations and organizational members, including members who are geographically removed (Eveland & Bikson, 1988; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). E-mail contact with isolated constituents on the periphery of the organization can help these members stay connected to the group by supplying them with valuable information. This,
in turn, may reinforce the positive orientation an individual has toward the group (Ducheneaut & Watts, 2005, p. 34) which positively complements the possibility for inspiring collective action.

As e-mail mailing lists can be used to inform and provide large groups of attentive people with information, e-mail has the potential to allow for various strategic and political manipulations of information in organizations (Ducheneaut & Watts, 2005, p. 33). The particular form of e-mail that is of concern in this inquiry is known as the “action alert.” Action alerts are an e-mail communication that is distributed to individuals which calls for a specific action to be taken on a current issue (Agre, 1999). Structured campaigns can be conducted through action alert-mailing lists, constructing the message and meaning of the e-mail with a group of already-engaged individuals in mind. Organizations can use e-mail to contact their publics, inform them of current issues, convince them to support the cause, and to coordinate action (Queiro-Tajalli et al., 2003, p. 155). E-mail messages instantaneously reach large groups within and outside an organization, persuading targeted groups to think and act cohesively (Romm & Pliskin, 1998, p. 93). As such, action alerts may well be an effective tool to “solicit support for action” (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 294), which Smith and Ferguson suggest is a way to rectify certain conditions identified as problems, and to build support for an organization’s stance on issues.

Indeed, e-mail communications may be one of the most effective communicative media for activist groups to engage in relationship building with their publics. According to Romm and Pliskin (1998, p. 95) e-mail messages should be regarded as a communicative technology with strong political potential. Yet, the extent to which
activist groups are utilizing communicative media, let alone e-mail action alerts, to maximize organization-member identification and participation in collective action has received little attention in the literature. As Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986) suggest, understanding the persuasive processes by which interpretations are created and reinforced is particularly relevant to understanding identification with, and thereby support for, activist groups (p. 466).

Smith and Ferguson (2001, p. 294) posit that a main organizational goal of activist groups is to rectify certain conditions identified as problems. Activist groups can begin to build support for tackling these problems by building relationships with their publics through identification. Moreover, Smith and Ferguson (2001) suggest that as part of this goal, activist groups must actively draw public attention to problems and issues the organization deems to be of concern. The process of bringing issues to the attention of publics is known as issues management. Issues management is a public relations concept particularly relevant and important to activist groups, given that activists are typically low on access to resources. Additionally, the Internet has provided new opportunities for activists to engage in issues management, a concept which is addressed in the following section.

Internet Issues Management and Agenda Stimulation

Sen Das and Taylor (2006, p. 6) suggest that activist organizations want people interested in the mission or topic of the organization to visit their Web site. Further, activist organizations also want to reach and influence publics beyond individual visitors to their Web site. If activist organizations want to influence public opinion and the perception of an issue, they need to be actively engaged in the management of the issue.
As will be exemplified in the following sections, part of managing an issue entails attracting media attention to the issue. The attraction of media disseminates information about an issue to a broader audience, and influences the national and social agendas.

**Issues Management**

Crable and Vibbert (1985) suggest that an issue is “created when one or more human agents attaches significance to a situation or perceived problem” (p. 5). As demonstrated by the literature detailed in previous sections, publics are issue-oriented. The extent to which a public is likely to seek out information and communicate with an organization regarding an issue is dependent on three factors: 1) their recognition of an issue as a problem; 2) the belief that they are capable of somehow affecting the issue, and; 3) how deeply they perceive the issue to involve them (Grunig, 1997, p. 10). Therefore, it is to an organization’s benefit to be fully aware of what issues may be perceived as problems by their various publics, and how to deal with issues in a manner results in outcomes favorable to the organization. To that end, the notion of issues management developed as strategic planning tool for organizations and a way for organizations to influence public opinion and policy. Often, issues management was thought of as means to deal with activist group pressures (Jones & Chase, 1979). Scholars have since recognized that activist organizations are also capable of and have utilized issues management strategy, in some cases with more dexterity than “traditional” organizations (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 10).

Often cited as the seminal authors of issues management, Jones and Chase (1979) felt that most companies react too late to issues and their corresponding publics, and therefore become forced to submit to new regulation and policy that results from
government action on issues (p. 7). Consequently, Jones and Chase (1979) put forward a process model of issues management as a way corporations could identify emerging issues and react to them before they become public knowledge. Arguing that activist groups have largely been the causal force behind anti-business legislation, Jones and Chase observe that corporations have every moral and legal right to participate in the creation of public policy instead of waiting to see what new legislation the government will implement.

Building on Jones and Chase (1979), Crable and Vibbert (1985) argue that organizations have no real authority over public policy, so they are therefore limited to exerting influence over those who do (p. 5). As such, Crable and Vibbert's (1985) take on issues management is inherently more publics-oriented. Publics become publics because of certain issues. As publics are issue-oriented, and will take action to resolve issues if sufficiently engaged, it suggests that if an issue is managed from its inception in a way favorable to the organization, it is likely that any resulting policy or legislative changes will be more palatable to the organization. The role, then, of the public relations professional, is to manage an issue through its natural life cycle to achieve "current status," which includes gaining media attention for the issue.

Organizations want their issues to become public knowledge. Media coverage of an issue heightens the potential for connectivity between the issue and various groups. If the issue is to achieve what Crable and Vibbert (1985) term "widespread currency," the media must devote attention to the issue, for it lends a feeling of credibility to the issue and distributes knowledge of the issue to a wider population, allowing more and more
people the opportunity to see linkages between themselves and the issue. Crable and Vibbert (1985) write that an issue evolves to current status when:

sources with widespread communication contacts (usually the mass media) are disseminating information . . . an issue with current status is one that can be spent or purchased readily as part of the social agenda . . . media makes it [the issue] known to (or “honored” by) increasingly greater, but more remote, publics. (p. 6)

Crable and Vibbert (1985) comment that companies should follow the example set by activist organizations and their usage of issues management strategy (p. 10), as activist groups have been very successful in bringing media attention to issues (a significant step in moving an issue forward in its life cycle). Crable and Vibbert (1985) attribute this success to the clear determinations of activist groups concerning what changes they want made in legislation and policy. Because of these determinations, Crable and Vibbert (1985) argue that activist groups have been able to formulate potential issues based on the changes they would like implemented, brought attention to the issues by gathering support from other individuals and publics, and sought to make issues current by legitimizing them through media coverage. This places the issue on the public or social agenda. The concept of agenda setting will be discussed more thoroughly in a future section.

Perhaps a significant limitation of both Jones and Chase (1979) and Crable and Vibbert (1985) is that their work operates largely from a pragmatic or functional perspective, viewing issues management as a strategic organizational tool and taking into account only the needs and perspectives of the organization. As the field of public relations has progressed from more functionalist (organization-centered) perspectives to
cocreational (organization–public relationships) ones (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 651), so too has thought concerning issues management. In an effort to further extend scholastic discussion on issues management, Taylor, Vasquez, and Doorley (2003) proposed an engagement framework of issues management more consistent with the current view in public relations that privileges the relationship between organizations and their publics.

Consistent with Jones and Chase (1979) and Crable and Vibbert (1985), Taylor et al. (2003) agree that issues management is an important organizational function, given that an organization is influenced and affected by their various publics. However, while prior work in issues management views publics as merely something to respond to, manipulate, appease, or diffuse, central to the engagement approach of issues management is the need for dialogue between an organization and its publics (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 260). The engagement approach recognizes that publics are, essentially, valuable organizational resources. Publics are interested stakeholders whose support is necessary for the continued functioning and success of the organization. Taylor et al. (2003) argue that organizational interests are best served when the needs and concerns of publics are heard and solicited and that the organization should make every effort to “adapt to public needs” (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 260).

Thus, Taylor et al. (2003) posit that active dialogue or engagement with publics concerning issues is the most effective way to manage them for, as they note, “the convergence of organizational interests with public interests provides both parties with the greatest opportunity for issue resolution through communication” (p. 261). Dialogue between organizations and publics’ ensures that the needs and views of publics are considered in an organization’s decision making process, and encourages the
development of mutually beneficial relationships. As engaging is dialogue with publics is more likely to result in outcomes beneficial to both the interests of organizations and publics, emerging issues should be perceived not as reasons to cease communication and stifle the development of issues. Instead, emerging issues should be treated as opportunities to communicate and influence the life-cycle development of issues. While the engagement approach to issues management has not been thoroughly discussed in the public relations literature, this approach, as well as Crable and Vibbert’s (1985) catalytic issues management approach, have the greatest bearing on and strongest connections to activist groups, particularly in the context of Internet issues management.

Indeed, Internet technologies may be well suited to engaging in new and improved forms of issues management practice. Heath (1998) has characterized the advancement of Internet technologies as opportunities for issues management. Web sites offer the possibility for individuals and organizations, including activists, to have their perspectives evaluated by media reporters. According to Heath (1998), the Internet offers “issue discussants access to audiences and publics which are otherwise difficult or impossible to reach” (p. 274). Further, through the Internet individuals are able to monitor the development of issues that are of interest to them. Respective to activist groups, the Internet offers such entities an easy and affordable way to engage in public dialogue. Not only can large corporations with considerable resources engage in issues management, but so can activist groups. Indeed, the Internet may be thought of as the “great leveler” in issues management practice, for as Heath (1998) notes: “the Web will help democratize issues discussions” (p. 274).
Based on the literature discussed above, activist groups can utilize issues management theory and Internet technologies to garner support for organizational issues. An important step in managing an issue through its life-cycle is drawing media attention to the issue. As will be demonstrated in the following sections, through the agenda-setting process, media attention can place an issue on the public agenda, thereby elevating the salience of an issue in the minds of individuals and publics.

**Agenda Setting**

Publics come together because of specific recognizable or shared issues. Publics are issue-oriented and will take action to resolve issues if sufficiently engaged, which suggests that if an issue is managed from its inception in a way favorable to the organization, any resulting policy or legislative changes are likely to be more palatable to the organization. The role, then, of the public relations professional, is to actively manage an issue through its natural life cycle. Indeed, Crable and Vibbert (1985) attribute the success of activist groups in achieving agenda-stimulation, to their proactive approach to issues management. As such, they proposed a “catalytic” strategy wherein an organization endeavors to “take an issue through its life cycle so that it can be resolved in directions favorable to the organization” (p. 12). From the catalytic approach, issues management becomes a “truly proactive organizational activity to influence and formulate public policy” (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 259). From this perspective then, both engaging in relationship building via action alerts and mobilizing resources could be considered part of a catalytic issues management program. Both activities (relationship building and resource mobilization) are intended to build support for the organization’s
stance on issues and to provide the organization with enough fiscal and political clout to influence policy formation.

Crable and Vibbert (1985) observe that to successfully manage an issue through its life cycle in a manner favorable to an organization requires the legitimization of the issue by garnering media attention (p. 6). If the issue is to achieve current status, it must attain "widespread currency." The media must devote attention to the issue, for it lends a feeling of credibility to the issue, and distributes knowledge of the issue to a wider population. The goal of any issues management program, as Crable and Vibbert (1985) posit, is agenda-stimulation. Once an issue has attained media attention, according to the tenets of agenda setting theory, the issue becomes part of the public sphere of awareness or the "social agenda" (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 6).

Agenda setting is a process that suggests that news coverage influences public perception as to what are the salient issues of the day (McCombs, 1992; McCombs & Masel-Walters, 1976). In agenda setting theory, the level of emphasis placed on certain objects and issues in the news media may potentially affect the public's cognitive prioritization of issues and objects (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; McCombs & Masel-Walters, 1976). The mass media has become a convenient and powerful instrument through which politically motivated individuals and organizations are able to promote their ideas, positions, and agendas (Shen, 2004, p. 400). Mass media has tremendous influence over public awareness, affairs, and opinions (McCombs & Masel-Walters, 1976; McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). Publics do not merely receive factual information from various media sources, the media is capable of transferring its constructed picture of the world into the minds of audiences (McCombs & Masel-
In the attempt to explicate the processes and effects of this transmission, agenda setting theory has emerged from several decades of scholarship.

Indeed, the literature on agenda setting in media and its effects has nearly become a field of its own since McCombs and Shaw's (1972) seminal work. Though disparate in subject matter, the universal theoretical component to which traditional agenda setting research has adhered is "... the salience of elements, objects or attributes, on the media agenda influences the salience of those elements on the public agenda" (McCombs et al., 1997, p. x). In other words, the media do not tell people what to think, but instead tell people what to think about. Issues in the media may potentially affect the public's cognitive prioritization of issues and objects (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). Thus, agenda setting theory does not accredit media of being capable of telling us *what to think*, but suggests that media excels at telling us *what to think about*.

Traditional research concerning agenda setting has focused on patterns in transmission of object or issue salience from the media to the audience. The assumption in agenda setting research is that what the media emphasizes is what the public considers to be salient. Work conducted from this perspective has been categorized as examinations of the "first-level" of agenda setting (Huckins, 1999; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001) and has been primarily concerned with identifying correlations between the salience of objects in media and public opinion (c.f. Eaton, 1989; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Existing research provides an easily discernable example of the agenda setting phenomenon in media (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Iyengar and Simon's (1993) analysis of news coverage of the Persian Gulf Crisis and the resulting war suggests that augmented
levels of media coverage on the crisis were responsible for the public naming the crisis as the most important national issue, supplanting illegal drug use. Considering that illegal drug use was acknowledged as the most salient national issue only three months prior to the outbreak of the Persian Gulf Crisis underscores the agenda setting power of media. Iyengar and Simon's (1993) work also suggests that the ways in which the media presented news around the Gulf Crisis increased viewer's support for a military resolution of the conflict and positively affected the public's evaluation of President George H.W. Bush. In short, Iyengar and Simon's (1993) research identified the object being elevated in salience, telling the public what to think about, and also examined the emphasized attributes characterizing the object, which told the public how to think about the object.

Iyengar and Simon (1993), as well as many other scholars, determined that news coverage has the potential to affect the way people think about issues. As such, an Internet-based activist organization can increase its salience by attracting the attention of the media via its Web site. Further, if a virtual activist organization wants certain issues to become part of the national agenda and participate in how said issues are portrayed, the organization must first attract the attention of and inform the news media about issues via its Web site. Once attention is gained, the media can be a powerful tool in an activist group's persuasive arsenal. One such way in which virtual activist organizations can attract the attention of the media is through the provision of information subsidies on its Web site.
Information Subsidies and News Creation

In attempting to accentuate an issue through media attention, activist organizations are utilizing key ideas of public relations to accomplish their goals. However, to achieve agenda-stimulation through the Internet, activist groups first need journalists or other media representatives to visit their Web sites and use the information therein to construct news items about the organization and its stance on issues. As suggested by Callision (2003) and Hachigian and Hallahan (2003), growing numbers of journalists and media representatives are using the Internet as a reporting tool to search for information to support news stories. Through the Internet, journalists can quickly find information and conduct research about issues and organizations, thus relying on informational sources provided on the Web site. Informative content (such as news releases) provided on a Web site can be used by a journalist in the formation of news stories. However, research has shown that the information in a press release must be "newsworthy" enough for the release to be successful in attracting the attention of journalists or news sources (Turk, 1986). Therefore, as Jacobs and Glass (2002) relate, organizations that want to garner media attention must be able to successfully supply information that can "pass" as news (p. 236).

The benefits of providing informational subsidies like press releases are mutual: journalists find information quickly and at no cost to them, while organizations gain free media attention and publicity. As activist organizations have an interest in certain issues, they also have an incentive to influence the information related to those issues. Efforts to influence information which may affect issues are explained by Gandy (1982) as information subsidies. Gandy (1982) writes that "an information subsidy is an attempt to
produce influence over the actions of others by controlling their access to and use of information relevant to those actions” (p. 61). Thus, information subsidization may be considered a part of the agenda-stimulation process to the degree that the information subsidies provided garners media attention, affects public awareness, and influences the interpretation of a particular topic.

Both Callison (2003) and Hachigian and Hallison (2003) demonstrated that organizational Web sites include information subsidies such as news releases for explicit use by journalists. Specific to activist groups, Sen Das and Taylor (2006) examined news coverage of stem cell issues to see if stem cell activist organizations were appearing in stories about the issue. Further, they examined if such organizations were being cited by the media as experts on the issue, which involved investigating if the media used the information subsidies provided by the organizations. Arguably, a measure of an organization’s success in achieving agenda stimulation via information subsidies would be if the information provided about an issue in an information subsidy appears in mainstream media.

As stated earlier, the first goal of activist groups in using public relations is to rectify conditions identified as problems (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). As elaborated upon in the previous two sections, this goal can be accomplished through relationship building and managing issues to stimulate the public agenda. Smith and Ferguson (2001) relate that the second goal of activists in using public relations is to preserve the viability and efficacy of the organization. In order to function and to accomplish their goals, activist groups must have civil and pecuniary resources to maintain the organization. Both kinds of resources, often referred to in the literature as tangible and intangible resources
(Freeman, 1979), are necessary to facilitate the mission of an activist organization. The next section considers how activist organizations can use the Internet to mobilize resources.

Internet Resource Mobilization

Writing in 1997, J. Grunig noted that activist groups use public relations to make their publics aware of the potential effects that issues may have on them, and to organize coalitions of publics to work with the activist group. But to achieve these goals, activist organizations must also use public relations to maintain the organization’s viability and capacity to pursue certain issues. Viability is made possible through the acquisition of resources such as membership, visibility, the ability to fund-raise, and control over forms of communication media (Stewart et al., 1989, pp. 29–30). Smith and Ferguson (2001) note that often times activist groups must compete for these resources with other organizations that have similar goals (p. 295). As Marwell and Oliver (1993) point out, an individual’s likelihood of participation in one activist group over another often depends on the organization’s apparent mastery over resources:

People join groups involved in collective pursuits not only out of perceived common interests, but also because they regard the groups or individuals organizing the action as in some sense efficacious. . . . For most people, however, the most prominent and convincing evidence of a group’s efficacy is probably the group’s size and command over resources. (p. 10)

Thus, to be seen as efficacious and legitimate, an activist organization must be able to marshal, retain, and mobilize resources; they "must maintain membership, [and] thrive in
what might be described as a competitive marketplace of ideas and issues" (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 295).

Famed activist Cesar Chavez is quoted as saying, “There are two sources for power: money and people” (McKelvey, 2004, p. 17). Similarly, McCarthy and Zald (1977, p. 1216) comment that the study of the aggregation of resources such as money and human labor is crucial to the understanding of activist group formation and activity. The process of resource “aggregation” has become known as resource mobilization, which Jenkins (1983) describes as a “process by which a group secures the resources needed for collective action” (p. 532). While there is no agreed upon list that specifies the exact resources that are significant or required for activist groups to operate, Freeman (1979) purports that resources needed by activists to function could be categorized as either tangible or intangible resources (p. 170).

Tangible Resources

According to Freeman (1979), activist groups must have tangible resources such as money, space, and a means to publicize the existence of the group and its ideas (p. 170). Tangible or “material” resources are resources needed by virtually all activist groups in furthering their causes. Tangible resources are required to build the institutional and technological structures necessary to engaging in the promotion of collective action and an organization’s interpretation of reality (McLaughlin & Khawaja, 2000, p. 432). As such, the ability to mobilize tangible resources is key to the emergence of activist organizations and the instigation of collective action (Tilly, 1978).

Sen Das and Taylor (2006) posit that the Internet can also be described as a tangible mobilization resource in and of itself (p. 5). Further, Sen Das and Taylor (2006)
note that activist organizations are reliant upon outside sources to acquire tangible resources and that the Internet can be utilized to mobilize intangible and well as tangible resources (p. 5). Sen Das and Taylor (2006) identified sixteen features on activist Web sites that serve to solicit tangible resources from visitors and mobilize intangible resources. Features that would help mobilize tangible resources included opportunities to make donations, participate in fundraising, shopping at online stores, volunteering, and internship opportunities.

*Intangible Resources*

Intangible resources, on the other hand, consist primarily of people, their support for an organization, and the activities they perform to further the goals of the organization. Intangible resources are the human assets that form the central basis for activist groups (Jenkins, 1983, p. 533). According to Sen Das and Taylor (2006) some Web site features designed to mobilize intangible resources included action alerts, chat rooms, and opportunities to volunteer or to contact other institutions. Sen Das and Taylor (2006) also note that “Web sites facilitate the bridging, aligning or extending of frames of understanding” (p. 6). Sen Das and Taylor (2006) observe that when visitors to an activist Web site find a reference or link to a related issue or get the opportunity to visit a different Web site, there is a possibility that some of these individuals will join the supporters of the second/related issue (p. 6). Such synergy may help to build, what Sen Das and Taylor (2006) term, an advocacy network. The formation of an advocacy network through Web site links and coalitions can be considered yet another form of resource mobilization the Internet offers.
McCarthy and Wolfson (1996) suggest that examining the means by which resources are mobilized as central to the study of activist groups (p. 1071). Mobilizing resources provide opportunities for Web site visitors to actively participate in the public debate about the issue (Sen Das & Taylor, 2006, p. 6). A question of interest in this investigation therefore, is how is MoveOn.org utilizing their Web site to mobilize resources?

Based on the literature discussed above, this inquiry addressed how one activist organization in particular, MoveOn.org, utilizes the Internet to achieve the three key functions of public relations: relationship building, agenda stimulation, and resource mobilization. Before delineation of the methods to be used in this investigation, it is both helpful and necessary to understand the history, ideologies, purpose, and operations of MoveOn.org.

The Case of MoveOn.org

Two Silicon Valley software entrepreneurs, Joan Blades and Wes Boyd, created MoveOn.org in 1998 as an e-mail-based online group petitioning Congress to censure President Clinton and "move on" past the impeachment proceedings to other pressing national issues. Within days of its establishment, hundreds of thousands of individuals had signed up with MoveOn (http://moveon.org/about). MoveOn provided Web site visitors with opportunities to donate money or volunteer hours to candidates challenging members of the House Judiciary Committee who voted for the impeachment (Cornfield, 1999, p. 51).

Bolstered by this initial success, Blades and Boyd created a Web site that invited new subscribers, solicited donations, and constructed a system to stay in touch with
supporters through online communication and telephone surveys (Wolf, 2004a, p. 4). In its brief existence, MoveOn has launched many similar campaigns, including opposing the election of George W. Bush in both 2000 and 2004, as well as programs that voice disapproval of the Iraq war. Hazen (2003) argues that MoveOn's most remarkable achievement was to turn its Web site, originally focused on petitions, e-mails to politicians and raising and distributing money to candidates, into face-to-face activism and grassroots media buying (p. 2). MoveOn has become one of the most influential activist groups in the United States, supporting Democratic political candidates with tens of millions of dollars in advertising, as well as the mass coordination of volunteer activities including telephone and door-to-door fieldwork (Wolf, 2004b).

Wolf (2004b) estimates that MoveOn contributed nearly $40 million to various campaigns during the 2004 national elections. Further, MoveOn takes full advantage of Internet technology in segmenting and contacting publics. Hazen (2003) reports that MoveOn has the addresses of all their members and organizes them by zip code—an incredible asset in influencing local political campaigns.

*MoveOn's Organizational Structure*

To aid the reader in understanding the discussion yet to come, a brief explanation of MoveOn's organizational structure is necessary. Since its inception, MoveOn has evolved into a sophisticated operation that consists of three separate entities with distinct purposes. MoveOn Civic Action, previously known just as MoveOn.org, is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization whose primary focus is on educational issues and advocacy for “important” national issues (http://moveon.org/about).
MoveOn.org Political Action, a federal political action committee (PAC), previously called MoveOn PAC, is responsible for the mobilization of people across the nation with the intent of influencing congress and to elect candidates that embody the values of the organization. MoveOn reports that both MoveOn.org and MoveOn PAC are funded wholly by individual contributions.

The final organizational component of MoveOn is a “527” voter-education organization. A 527 group is a tax-exempt group organized under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code, which enables such organizations to solicit funds for political activities including voter mobilization efforts, issue advocacy, and candidate support. “MoveOn Voter Fund” (MoveOn’s 527) has sponsored numerous advertisements attacking conservative candidates and agendas. However, according to a statement e-mailed to USA Today by founder Wes Boyd “the MoveOn.org Voter Fund, the MoveOn 527, ceased operations in 2004” (http://blogs.usatoday.com/ondeadline/2006/12/moveon_swift_bo.html).

A “New” Kind of Activist Organization

MoveOn offers a new form of participatory online politics that makes it possible for individuals to engage in collective action wherever they might be. McKelvey (2004) argues that one of the reasons MoveOn has become so successful and popular in attracting new membership is because the group “makes it so easy to do something” (p. 17). On one hand MoveOn is, as Wolf (2004) terms it, a “Democratic juggernaut” (pp. 3-4). It is an energetic and dexterous movement with formidable financial resources and the ability to dispense much of it into campaigns unhindered by the restrictions political parties are subject to. On the other hand, MoveOn is also a massive and complex social
network, linked by online discussions, message boards, and e-mail petitions that can be forwarded from friend to friend.

Several characteristics separate MoveOn from more traditional issue organizations. MoveOn is dissimilar to other online activist organizations such as the Sierra Club or Emily’s List in that it does not focus on or advocate for a single issue. McKelvey (2004) comments that MoveOn operates more as an affinity group, attracting different kinds of people who are dedicated more to the overarching democratic cause than to a particular issue (p. 16). Updates on issues that MoveOn deems to be of concern, as well as opportunities to become involved are posted regularly on MoveOn’s Web site. While MoveOn has no particular set of policy statements, MoveOn instead seems to thrive as a foil to conservative candidates, organizations, and ideals. McKelvey (2004) observes than since the 2000 election of George W. Bush as President, anti-Bush sentiment has helped to fuel the growth of MoveOn (p. 16). McKelvey (2004) further suggests that MoveOn has capitalized on anti-Bush attitudes to help fundraise and achieve their goals (pp. 16–17).

Additionally, unlike traditional brick and mortar organizations, MoveOn is largely facilitated via home computer. Wolf (2004b) reported that Eli Pariser, Director of MoveOn PAC, works from his New York apartment. According to Wolf (2004b), Pariser raised more than $750,000 in one day by organizing a nation-wide bake sale from the comfort of his home office. Because of such extensive fundraising capacity, MoveOn is not dependent on foundation money with its related restrictions and spending limitations. Foundation money is often awarded conditionally, based on criteria specified by the
Financial independence from grants and foundations allows MoveOn to be partisan, contribute to campaigns, and wield its clout in the political process.

MoveOn has utilized Internet technology to create a new kind of activist organization with the capability to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars and move tens of thousands of people to action within hours. It has proved itself successful in attracting public interest, in raising funds, and in mobilizing its members. By selecting such an innovative activist organization, this inquiry was able to examine the public relations activities that are possible through purely online facilitation and interaction. I proposed three research questions:

RQ1: How does MoveOn.org facilitate relationship building with its publics through e-mail action alerts?

RQ2: Are the information subsidies provided by MoveOn.org effective in agenda stimulation?

RQ3: How is MoveOn.org using its Web site to mobilize resources?

The literature presented to this point indicates that it would be of benefit to MoveOn to use the Internet as a public relations tool to meet its relationship building, resource mobilization, and agenda stimulation needs. The next section will detail the methods used in this study to answer to posed research questions.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this inquiry was to assess how MoveOn.Org is utilizing the Internet as a public relations tool to meet its relationship building, resource mobilization, and agenda setting needs. Each research question represents a specific facet of the public relations practices being considered in this study. Further, each question collects evidence to extend public relations theory by the following methods: measuring identification strategies in MoveOn’s e-mail action alerts; measuring the use of information from MoveOn’s press releases in mainstream media coverage; and measuring features that mobilize tangible and intangible resources on MoveOn’s Web site.

Measuring Identification as Relationship Building

In public relations, identification is a focal point for relationship building (Heath, 2001). In particular, rhetorical identification is thought of as a strategy organizations employ to influence audiences and build relationships with them (Quesinberry, 2004). Moreover, identification also meets the requirements of what constitutes a relationship set by Broom et al. (1997) in that identification can be thought of both as a facilitator of and resultant from changes accomplished through communication.

Sample

Answering RQ1 established how MoveOn.org is facilitating relationship building with their publics via the Internet. To answer RQ1, this study applied the concept of Burkean identification to e-mail action alerts from MoveOn. According to Agre (1999), action alerts are e-mail communications to individuals that call for a specific action to be
taken on a specific issue. The sample data for analysis was collected via MoveOn's Web site and registration with their e-mail "action update" service. MoveOn's Web site advertises their action alerts as a way to get "instant action updates" on important news and events. For an example of an action alert from MoveOn, see Appendix A. To allow for a significant size-sample to accrue, 59 action alerts from MoveOn were collected over an eight month period, from October 2006 to May 2007. In order to be considered part of the sample, action alerts had to contain an issue of concern, and an action to be taken by the recipient. Several action alerts were discarded, as they failed to meet these requirements, resulting in a final sample of 51 \((n = 51)\) action alerts.

**Procedures**

To evaluate rhetorical identification strategies in the e-mail action alerts of MoveOn, and how they may help to build relationships, Burke's three identification strategies were utilized. Burke (1950) entitles these strategies *identification by sympathy*, *identification by antithesis*, and *identification by unawareness*. Following Cheney (1983), Benoit (2000) and Connaughton and Jarvis (2004a, 2004b), this study looked for isolated "tactics" of identification, which are specific identification appeals that fall within the three strategies.

In order to evaluate the data, the researcher analyzed each e-mail, and highlighted instances of one of the forms of identification in a prescribed color. Like Cheney (1983), the units of analysis (e-mails) will be organized and discussed according to identification strategy. How each identification strategy was used by MoveOn will be given illustration through discussion of textual examples from the e-mails. As this method is an amalgamation of Cheney (1983), Benoit (2000), and Connaughton and Jarvis (2004a,
2004b), I view this approach as beneficial given the exploratory nature of this proposed study.

Further, to assess how MoveOn may be using identification strategies in action alerts to build and maintain relationships, quantification of each strategy was used to determine the frequency of use of each identification strategy. Cheney (1983) comments that it is important to note the prevalence of identification strategies as well as to discuss their presence, and suggests that quantification serves as a useful way to illustrate the significance of identification tactics in a specific context. The identification strategies, as detailed above, will be treated as mutually exclusive categories and coded in a consistent manner. Often, more than one form of identification was present within a single action alert. Thus, to determine how often each identification strategy is employed by MoveOn, each of the three strategies was coded for their presence (1) or absence (0) in all of the e-mails from MoveOn. Coders also recorded the number of times a particular strategy was used within an action alert. Quantification is utilized to complement and punctuate the discussion of each identification strategies' usage.

**Coding Protocol**

Following Burke's definitions, instances of sympathy were coded as such when the organization linked itself to publics in an overt manner. In this identification strategy, the audience is directly told that the organization shares their values, goals and belief systems. A preliminary examination looked for instances of identification by sympathy. An example of this form of identification from this preliminary coding is: "This will help MoveOn understand where we stand with the people that matter most to us—that are most like us—our members." In this statement, MoveOn overtly attempts to link itself to
the e-mail recipient by saying the organizational member is valued, and is similar to the other individuals a part of MoveOn.

Instances of the identification by antithesis strategy were considered as such when MoveOn identifies an enemy, the threat it poses, and calls for unification against it. This enemy may be outsiders (i.e. organizational non-members) who hold disparate views, or agents perceived to be adversarial of or a threat to MoveOn, its candidates or causes. An example of this form of identification is: “Fox is a mouthpiece for the Republican Party, not a legitimate news channel. The Democratic Party of Nevada should drop Fox as its partner for the presidential primary debate.” This example clearly demonstrates the criteria of identification by antithesis.

Identification by unawareness has been described as notoriously difficult to use and interpret. This strategy is by far the most complex of the three, and it is therefore difficult to be sure where sympathy ends and unawareness begins. Fortunately, Burke provides an easily discerned rhetorical feature that distinguishes sympathy from unawareness. Burke (1973, p. 271) suggests that the most succinct form of identification by unawareness can be associated with the word “we.” Therefore, instances of identification by unawareness will be considered as such when the rhetor attempts to foster identification through the use of the pronoun “we” or synonyms thereof. Organizations can attempt to foster identification in this fashion by referring to all members of the organization as if they implicitly share the same values, ideas, opinions, or beliefs. Simple use of the word “we” was not enough to merit the categorization of unawareness. In order for an identification to be considered as unawareness, the use of the pronoun “we” (or its synonyms) had to be tied to an abstract concept, ideal, or entity
that MoveOn attempts to invoke association with. An example of this form from preliminary coding is “This is our best chance ever to advance the cause of public financing for fair elections.” In this case, the pronoun “our” is used to imply that all member of MoveOn support the cause of public financing for elections.

For an example of the coding protocol, see Appendix B. For an example of the coding sheet used, see Appendix C. It was through the analysis of identification strategies in e-mail action alerts that RQ1—which asked how MoveOn is utilizing the Internet to facilitate relationship building—was answered.

*Reliability of Content Categories*

As Neuendorf (2002) notes, "given that a goal of content analysis is to identify and record relatively objective (or at least intersubjective) characteristics of messages, reliability is paramount" (p. 141). Given the obvious importance of establishing reliability, two additional coders were provided with the coding protocol and asked to assign 20 instances of identification from the action alerts (22% of the total instances of identification found in action alerts) one of the three identification strategies based on the protocol. In order to take into account chance agreement among the three coders, a kappa coefficient was calculated, obtaining a value of .75, a strong value. The kappa value indicates that the coding of the researcher strongly correlates with the coding of the additional coders.

*Measuring Information Subsidies*

RQ2 sought to determine if the information subsidies provided by MoveOn are effective in stimulating and influencing the national agenda. Callison (2003) and Hachigan and Hallison (2003) demonstrated that Web sites often include information
subsidies such as news releases for use by journalist and other media sources. Information subsidies are one way in which organizations can attempt to stimulate the public agenda and bring the organization—and the issues the organization is concerned with—into the public sphere of awareness. Thus, one way of gauging the effectiveness of an information subsidy is to determine if information provided in the subsidy is used by the mainstream media.

Sample

To answer RQ2, news coverage of MoveOn was examined to see if the mainstream media is actually using the information MoveOn provides in its press releases. Through a prominent link labeled “Press” on the home page, links to PDF files of MoveOn’s press releases are displayed. The dates of the 38 press releases that were considered ranged from January 31, 2005 to September 2, 2006. It is important to note that MoveOn’s press page lists a total of 51 press releases dating back to 2003, and that only press releases from the past two years were examined in this investigation. For each press release examined, LexisNexis Guided News Search was searched using unique keywords from the release to see if any mainstream media sources may have used information from the subsidy. Keywords from each release were searched for under the “major papers” and “magazines and journals” parameters available on LexisNexis. From the LexisNexis search, articles ($n = 10$) were identified as having used information from MoveOn’s press releases, thus constituting the final sample. The articles were subsequently printed and analyzed by the following procedures.
Procedures

All articles within the sample were analyzed by looking for use of information provided by MoveOn in their press releases. The press releases in question often provide facts and statistics concerning the MoveOn or its various causes. The researcher examined if this information noted in the release was included in the ensuing news article. When information from one of MoveOn’s press releases was found to be used, the date and the name of the media that used the information were recorded. Usage of the information will be reported and discussed in the next chapter.

Additionally, quotes in the press release that appear in mainstream media articles were examined for the purpose of determining how mainstream media may be utilizing statements from MoveOn’s press releases. Caldiero and Taylor (2006) provide direction as to how newspaper articles’ use of statements attributable to organizational spokespeople may be examined. Statements were considered as such when they are attributed to MoveOn employees. Direct quotes from all articles obtained through LexisNexis will be amassed, broken down and counted. As Caldiero and Taylor (2006) suggest, if a statement was “broken up” in the initial press release, it was counted as separate statements.

The statements to be analyzed were coded into three types: full quotes, partial quotes, and background information. According to Caldiero and Taylor (2006), full quotes are statements released by an organization (most often displayed in quotation marks) that appear verbatim in the corresponding news article. Partial quotes are portions of a statement that appear in news articles. Background statements include portions of MoveOn’s press releases that appear in news articles. For instance, if a news article
included something that is mentioned in MoveOn’s press release, but that something is not counted as being a direct or partial quote, it will be counted as an organizational quote, attributable to no one in particular except MoveOn itself. Caldiero and Taylor (2006) concluded that organizational quotes can be recognized as such through use of markers or of facts/statistics. Markers are exact words from the press release that give a clear indication that the press release was the source. Caldiero and Taylor (2006) give the following example: if the press release states that “Pending the investigation we have suspended market services agreement” and the news report reads: “The company said it suspended the practices under investigation” suspended is considered a marker. As such, the statement can be counted as a background statement.

The effectiveness of MoveOn’s press releases (information subsidies) was evaluated by the researcher based on the timeliness in which the subsidy was used by outside media, how often and what kind of quotations are utilized, and by the number of media sources to report information from the subsidy. The results from this part of the investigation answered if MoveOn is indeed effective in influencing the agenda through its information subsidies. The next section details the methods by which RQ3 was answered.

Measuring Resource Mobilization

In order for an organization to maintain its viability and effectiveness, tangible, intangible, and coalition-building resources must be mobilized. RQ3 asked how MoveOn is using its Web site to mobilize resources. To answer RQ3, MoveOn.org’s Web site was coded for instances of tangible, intangible, and coalition-building resource mobilization features.
Sample

MoveOn’s Web site consists of a home page that highlights current campaigns and provides opportunities to sign up for action updates and to donate money. On the home page are five tabs which link to the five major sections of MoveOn’s Web site, titled: Campaigns; Success Stories; Donate; Sign Up; and About. The home page and the five section pages were captured and archived on May 26, 2007. The aforementioned pages served as part of the sample for analysis. Each page was analyzed for attempts to mobilize tangible, intangible, and coalition-building resources.

As activist organizations seek to strengthen support for specific issues or ideas (Spicer, 1997, p. 180), the remaining sample consisted of the pages devoted to the specific issue campaigns MoveOn was facilitating at the time. The “campaign” page of MoveOn lists the various campaigns currently underway by MoveOn Civic Action or MoveOn Political Action. Each campaign is first identified with either MoveOn’s Civic Action or Political Action divisions, given a brief explanation, and then a link is provided to the campaign page. On May 26, 2007, all of the campaigns and their respective pages were captured and archived. The campaign pages also were examined for attempts to mobilize intangible, tangible, and coalition-building resources for specific campaigns.

Coding Protocol

Organizational Web sites can serve as a means to engage in a number of common public relations functions, including resource mobilization. Sen Das and Taylor (2006) provided a general list of Web site features intended to mobilize tangible and intangible resources. Freeman (1979) described tangible resources as money and facilities (p. 170). Guided by Sen Das and Taylor (2006), opportunities to mobilize tangible resources may
include features that ask visitors to: make a donation, participate in fundraising, become a corporate sponsor, or shop at the on-line store. Each page was analyzed for the presence or absence of each of the aforementioned features. The presence or absence of the feature was noted on a coding sheet along with a brief description of the feature. In other words, if only one tangible feature, such as asking a Web site visitor to donate money was found on the home page of MoveOn, the feature was recorded as present. Accordingly, no other features on the same page that asked visitors to donate money were counted as “present” as the same kind of feature is represented on the page. For each page examined, the presence or absence of each kind of tangible mobilization feature is reported. Also, the number of times each kind of tangible resource mobilization feature is used is reported per Web page, and by the total number of times each feature is used on MoveOn’s site. In the course of analysis, no other features intended to mobilize tangible resources on MoveOn’s Web site besides Sen Das and Taylor’s (2006) list became evident.

According to Freeman (1979) intangible resources consist mainly of human labor and support (p. 172). As such, Web site features intended to mobilize intangible resources will focus on human skills and building levels of support for the organization. According to Sen Das and Taylor (2006), Web site features intended to mobilize intangible resources may include options that ask visitors to: become a member, sign up email updates, sign up to receive a newsletter, join message boards or chat rooms, volunteer, tell a friend, fill out an action alert, contact Congress/government/organization/media, benefits to members, member login, internship/job opportunity, and look at the past voting records of political leaders. In the course of analysis, two other features intended to mobilize tangible resources besides Sen Das and Taylor’s (2006) list became evident:
opportunities to sign a petition and the collection of personal contact information. Each page of MoveOn's Web site was analyzed for the presence or absence of each of the aforementioned features. The presence or absence of the feature was noted on a coding sheet along with a brief description of the feature. Also, the number of times each kind of intangible resource mobilization feature is used is reported per Web page, and by the total number of times each feature is used on MoveOn's site.

Grunig (1997) has noted that activists organize coalitions of publics to work with the activist group (p. 9). Accordingly, Sen Das and Taylor (2006) suggest that mobilizing intangible resources may include coalition-building features such as referencing affiliate or similar issue-advocacy organizations, and links to such organizations. References and/or links to other issue-oriented activist organizations can help to build an advocacy network, generating support for a variety of interrelated issues. Each kind of coalition-building feature was coded for its presence or absence on a Web page.

Thus, to answer RQ3, MoveOn’s Web site was assessed for the presence and number of tangible, intangible, and coalition-building mobilizing features. In the next section, features are listed, discussed, and punctuated by examples. For an example of the coding sheet to be used for tangible, intangible, and coalition-building resource measurement, see Appendix D. The next chapter reports the results of study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

How MoveOn Builds Relationships through Identification

RQ1 asked how MoveOn.org uses identification strategies in its action alerts to facilitate relationship building through identification strategies. In the effort to answer that question, 51 action alerts from MoveOn were examined for usage of Burke's rhetorical identification strategies. In this section, I first describe the general characteristics of the alerts, and follow with the results of the identification strategy-coding of MoveOn's e-mail action alerts.

Descriptives

The 51 action alerts were collected over an eight-month period (October 2006 to May 2007) and averaged a word count of 388 words per e-mail, with a range of 61 to 634 words. Forty-one of the action alerts contained some form of identification strategy. For a complete breakdown of the coded strategies contained within action alerts, see Table 1. The issues presented in the alerts were found to belong in 16 general issue or topical categories. Eighteen distinct actions to be taken emerged from the action alerts. For a complete list of the issue categories and actions found within action alerts, see Table 1.

Identification by antithesis was the most frequently used form of identification, found present in 28 of 51 action alerts (55%). Forty-eight unique examples of antithesis were discerned, averaging 1.71 instances per e-mail. Action alerts that contained antithesis dealt with nearly every issue presented by MoveOn. Derived from the results of the analysis, there appears to be no tenable connection between the type of issue
addressed in the action alert, the action called for, and the use of *antithesis* in action alerts. Such an assumption can be made due to the presence of *identification by antithesis* in alerts concerning a wide variety of issues and prescribing a variety of actions to be taken. For example, *antithesis* was present in alerts that asked readers to call their congressmen, contribute to a television advertisement arguing against the Iraq war, and to sign a petition on election reform. A prime example of *antithesis* taken from an alert dated February 6, 2007, reads:

It’s outrageous. After saying they wanted to join the Democrats, Senate Republicans now are filibustering the anti-escalation resolution—dodging the first vote on the war since the election. They know the American people are fed up. And they know the president is wrong. But they still won’t take a stand.

MoveOn subsequently asks readers to donate $25 to help air a television advertisement with the intent of putting political pressure on certain Senators to vote for the resolution. In this statement, MoveOn points to an adversary (Senate Republicans) and why this adversary poses a threat to the values and goals of MoveOn and its members. Further, MoveOn prescribes an action to be taken against the adversary (donate $25 to air an advertisement), making this passage a clear illustration of how MoveOn uses *identification by antithesis*.

*Identification by unawareness* was present in 19 out of 51 action alerts (37%), and 20 unique examples of *unawareness* were discerned, averaging 1.05 instances per e-mail in which *unawareness* was present. Action alerts that contained unawareness dealt with nearly every issue presented by MoveOn. As will be discussed more thoroughly in future sections, the use of *unawareness* in action alerts was most often found in attempts to
implicitly build support for liberal or progressive ideas, candidates, or policies. In an April 19, 2007 alert, MoveOn uses *unawareness* to build support for a video that advocates bringing U.S. troops home from Iraq, saying “The voices of veterans and military families are missing from the debate in Washington. Together we can make sure they become a vital part of the national dialogue around ending the war.” In this example, MoveOn uses the transcendent “we” to implicitly stress the taken-for-granted anti-Iraq war sentiment among MoveOn’s members.

Out of the 51 action alerts collected, 15 action alerts or 29% of e-mails contained instances of *identification by sympathy*. Eighteen unique examples of *sympathy* were discerned, averaging 1.2 instances per e-mail. *Sympathy* was the least frequently used of the three identification strategies, both in presence and in unique instances. Action alerts that exhibited *sympathy* were focused on a variety of issues, including support for increasing the minimum wage, the war in Iraq, and gathering support for Democratic candidates. As will be discussed more thoroughly in an ensuing section, *sympathy* appears to be used for internal purposes, most often in cases where MoveOn attempts to stress the value of its members on shaping the opinions, actions, and future direction of the organization; and in phrases intended to stress the shared values among MoveOn and members. For instance, in an alert dated January 18, 2007, Eli Pariser, director of MoveOn PAC, writes, “If you are like me, you watched with outrage last week as Bush announced his plan to send 21,000 more U.S. troops to Iraq.” In this passage, Pariser clearly intends to demonstrate alignment between the views of MoveOn’s publics and himself (as a representative of the views of MoveOn). Next, the efficiency of MoveOn’s press releases, as determined by this investigation, is detailed.
Effectiveness of Information Subsidies

RQ2 asked if the information subsidies provided through MoveOn’s Web site are effective in agenda stimulation. To answer that question, keywords from 38 of MoveOn’s press releases, ranging in dates from January 2005 to September 2006, were entered into the LexisNexis search engine to identify news articles that may have used information, quotes, or other statements from MoveOn’s press releases. From the LexisNexis search, only 10 articles from various sources were identified as having used information from MoveOn’s press releases in the stated date range. For a complete list of the dates and sources of the articles, see Table 2. The articles discovered contained an average word count of 924 words, and ranged from 351 to 1452 words. The unexpected lack of articles discovered in this part of the investigation has several implications of interest to activist group and public relations theory, to be discussed in the following chapter.

In the 10 news articles that used information from MoveOn’s press releases, full quotes from MoveOn’s releases were used 4 times, partial quotes were used 7 times, and background statements or markers were used 6 times. For a complete breakdown of the usage of quotes by article see Table 2. Specific information or quotes from 9 of MoveOn’s press releases was found in 10 corresponding articles. Only one of MoveOn’s press releases, dated September 2, 2006, had information that was used in more than one of the corresponding news articles. Nine of the 10 articles that used MoveOn’s information subsidies were published in three days or less of MoveOn’s posting of a press release. The sole remaining article was dated 13 days after the corresponding press release from MoveOn. Overall, information from MoveOn’s press releases was used by mainstream media sources in a timely fashion. Still, the paucity of articles generated by
the keyword search, especially given the two-year time frame, strongly indicates that MoveOn’s press releases are not effective in stimulating the agenda. The next section relays the results of how MoveOn.org engages in online resource mobilization.

**MoveOn’s Resource Mobilization**

RQ3 asked how MoveOn.org uses its Web site to mobilize resources. In the effort to answer that question, the six main pages and 14 specific campaign pages of MoveOn’s Web site were analyzed for tangible, intangible, and coalition-building resource mobilization features. In the course of analysis it became apparent that action alerts contained mobilization features in great frequencies, and were therefore subjected to the same analytical scrutiny as the rest of the Web site. Results indicated that MoveOn employs resource mobilization features in significantly greater frequencies on the pages devoted to specific issues or campaigns than in the main pages of the Web site. In this section, I first delineate the general details of the resource mobilization features found present on MoveOn’s main pages and specific campaign pages.

*Characteristics of MoveOn’s Resource Mobilization*

In general, this part of the analysis can be characterized by the relative lack of presence of resource mobilization features on most of the main pages of MoveOn’s Web site. Tangible and intangible mobilization features were present only 11 times on the six main pages of MoveOn’s Web site. In other words, only 11 kinds of resource mobilization features were found to be present in the six main pages of MoveOn. See Table 3 for the absence/presence distribution of tangible, intangible, and coalition-building resource mobilization features on the main pages. However, in contrast to the relative paucity with which intangible and tangible resource mobilization features
appeared on the main pages of MoveOn’s Web site is the abundance of mobilization features employed on the specific campaign pages and in the e-mail action alerts of MoveOn. In the 14 specific campaign pages examined, mobilization features were found present 37 times. See Table 3 for the absence/presence distribution of tangible, intangible, and coalition-building features across the campaign pages of MoveOn. In even greater number was the presence of resource mobilization features discovered in MoveOn’s action alerts—148 times.

Across all the pages examined (including e-mail action alerts), opportunities to “make a donation” or to “contribute” were the only tangible resource mobilization feature described by Sen Das and Taylor (2006). Common manifestations of tangible resource mobilization features included button-links to donation pages with text such as “Help put this ad on the air” or text-links such as “Donate: Can you make a financial contribution to support this campaign? Tangible features were present in three of the six main pages, and in eight of the 14 specific campaign pages. Further, 15 of the 51 action alerts examined had features asking members to donate or contribute money. On only three occasions were requests for contributions not tied to a specific issue, campaign, or advertisement. MoveOn’s propensity for linking tangible resource mobilization to issues rather than to the auspices of the organization itself will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

The intangible resource mobilization features MoveOn employed were more diverse. On various pages, MoveOn employed intangible features that asked Web site visitors to become members, sign up for e-mail action alerts or newsletters, to contact legislators, to tell a friend about MoveOn, or that gave information about volunteering opportunities. Beyond the aforementioned intangible features, two additional intangible
features emerged that were employed by MoveOn. The first new feature discerned was asking members to sign petitions. On numerous occasions MoveOn asked members to sign a petition on various issues. Secondly, MoveOn often paired requests for donations with the collection of personal data such as street addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

On only three occasions did MoveOn employ coalition-building features. On the Success Stories page, MoveOn referenced another issue-based organization, “Million Voices for Darfur.” Additionally, one entire campaign page was devoted to the activist organization “Americans United to Protect Social Security,” and in one action alert (01/31/2007) MoveOn references the veteran’s group VoteVets. The next section reports the details of the tangible and intangible resource mobilization features found on the six main pages of MoveOn.org’s Web site.

Main Pages

On the home page of MoveOn, both tangible and intangible features were discerned. With eight unique resource mobilization features, the home page of MoveOn contained the most mobilization features of any single page or action alert analyzed from MoveOn’s Web site. MoveOn’s home page contains opportunities to donate, sign petitions, register with the organization as a member, and to sign up for action alerts. As the introductory page to MoveOn’s Web site, various issues of concern are briefly highlighted and given features to mobilize either tangible or intangible resources. For an example of a tangible resource mobilization feature, at the top of the home page MoveOn asks members to donate funds towards airing a television advertisement that advocates pulling U.S. troops out of Iraq. Similarly, MoveOn provides an opportunity to sign a
petition concerning voting reform in Florida. MoveOn also provides a feature on the home page that asks for a contribution to the organization, one of a few times tangible resource mobilization was not tied to a specific issue. The only two intangible resource mobilization features that were not directly tied to an issue or campaign are found on the home page as well; MoveOn asks people to sign up for action updates and to register with the organization on home page.

MoveOn’s Sign Up page, with four unique mobilization features, contained the second-greatest amount of mobilization features of any page found on MoveOn’s Web site. On the Sign Up page, Web site visitors are asked for their personal contact information, to tell others about MoveOn, to make a financial contribution to the organization, and to volunteer their time. Of the remaining main pages (Campaigns, Success Stories, Donate, and About), only Donate and Success Stories contained mobilization features. The Donate page, characteristically, asked for a financial contribution, and the Success Stories page contained a link to sign a petition on voting reform. The next section discusses how resource mobilization features were mobilized in the specific campaign pages and action alerts of MoveOn.

Campaign Pages and Action Alerts

As discussed above, features intended to mobilize resources were present in each of the 14 specific campaign pages examined. The design of the study did not originally intend to include an examination of the resource mobilization features employed in MoveOn’s action alerts. However, a surprising and unintended conclusion made from this investigation is that MoveOn’s action alerts may be a more effective context in which to engage in resource mobilization than any other page or feature of MoveOn’s Web site.
Such a conclusion can be drawn given that resource mobilization features appeared in each of the 51 action alerts.

The main Campaign page on MoveOn.org contains brief descriptions of the campaigns MoveOn is currently undertaking. Each campaign is given a brief description, and titled with a link that directs Web site visitors to page entirely devoted to a specific campaign. Examples of the campaigns included petitions to build support for a ban on paperless voting, to “save” National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Services from budget cuts at the federal level; and to raise funds to place a newspaper advertisement supporting “Internet freedom.” For a complete distribution of the tangible, intangible, and coalition-building features discerned on the campaign pages, see Table 4. Eleven out of 14 campaign pages asked members either to sign a petition in support of an issue, or to contribute funds towards the placement of advertisements or in support of MoveOn’s “election plan.” One of the three remaining campaigns asked visitors to send an anti-John McCain advertisement to their friends and to donate funds to help air the advertisement. The remaining two asked visitors to join a subsidiary organization of MoveOn focused on local activism, and to visit the Web site of a similar issue-oriented organization (a coalition-building feature).

As shown in Table 1, MoveOn asks action alert subscribers to take a variety of actions, and a mixture of mobilization features and tactics are present in action alerts to help mobilize resources pertaining to the issue or campaign of concern in the action alert. Regardless of whether the feature was intended to mobilize tangible, intangible, or coalition-building resources, features were often contextualized in an issue repeatedly. For example, an e-mail dated May 3, 2007 asked members to sign a petition to demand
that Congress override a presidential veto regarding a funding bill tied to bringing troops home from Iraq. The first attempt to mobilize this intangible resource was preceded by the statement: “If hundreds of thousands of us speak together we can make it clear we’re counting on Congress to keep fighting for a timeline to end this war. Click here to add your name to the petition” (emphasis theirs, 05/03/2007). In a subsequent attempt to get members to sign the same petition, the mobilization feature was preceded by “We have to be clear: benchmarks alone are not enough to end this war. Tell Congress to stand firm.” The link to the petition immediately followed. Final (or penultimate) attempts to mobilize the same resource were often placed in a sidebar of the e-mail, preceded by a brief summary of the point of the action alert, highlighting why the prescribed action should be taken.

Additionally, in 39 of the 51 action alerts considered, MoveOn concludes the e-mail with a boiler-plate statement asking members to support MoveOn, as it is a “member-driven organization.” The previous example is representative of the majority of the action alert resource mobilization efforts, whether tangible or intangible. Action alert readers are repeatedly bombarded with the reasons—rephrased each time—why they should take the action prescribed, and are often asked to donate to the auspices of MoveOn as well. The next section briefly discusses a possible relationship between the use of identification strategies and resource mobilization features.

Identification and Resource Mobilization

In the course of examining data, the possibility of a relationship between identification strategies and resource mobilization became apparent. In the 15 action alerts that asked MoveOn members to make a financial contribution—either to a
candidate, cause, or advertisement—27 unique instances of identification by antithesis were discerned. To put this number in perspective, both sympathy and unawareness were only used 6 times each, which means that 81% of the identification efforts in action alerts that asked for monetary donations were identification by antithesis. Additionally, efforts to mobilize intangible resources, such as asking individuals to call legislators, sign petitions, or write letters were largely paired with antithetical identification efforts. In fact, 55% of all the unique identification efforts found in the 16 action alerts that attempted to mobilize intangible resources were identification by antithesis. 

**Summary**

RQ1 addressed how MoveOn engages in rhetorical relationship building with publics through e-mail action alerts. Identification strategies, an important relationship building tool, were discovered in nearly all the e-mail action alerts examined, and more than half of all identification attempts identified were exemplified by identification by antithesis. This may, at first glance indicate MoveOn attempts to build relationships with publics by demonizing the activities of adversarial individuals or groups. As to RQ2, given the lack of outside media coverage that used information in MoveOn’s press releases, it seems that MoveOn is not effective at agenda stimulation via its information subsidies; though the organization is certainly not ineffectual altogether. Lastly, MoveOn’s resource mobilization efforts are more concentrated in the campaign pages and e-mail action alerts of MoveOn, indicating that MoveOn attempts to solicit resources more from individuals deeply concerned with or connected to MoveOn and the issues it advocates. In the next chapter, I discuss possible interpretations and implications of the findings delineated above.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter relates interpretations and possible implications of the results presented in chapter 3 to public relations theory and practice. First, I provide examples of the action alerts by discussing them by coactive and/or confrontational rhetoric and how the identification strategies MoveOn employed may help to build relationships with publics. I also comment on the motivational capacity that identification strategies may hold. Next, the discussion continues with a commentary on the agenda-stimulation efficacy of MoveOn's press releases. Further, it is postulated that MoveOn has progressed beyond the provision of information subsidies to the offering of "perspective" from MoveOn's spokespeople to the media. The ways in which MoveOn attempts to mobilize resources are also discussed. Included in this section is an explanation of the potential relationship that exists between MoveOn's identification and resource mobilization efforts. Finally, I derive the overall implications of the study, and its relevance to activist public relations theory development, by discussing how MoveOn seems to be engaging in a catalytic issues management program.

Identification as Relationship Building

Identification is an important part of relationship building and essential to an individual's participation in collective action. Identification strategies, Cheney (1983) notes, are intentional and unintentional attempts by an organization to induce identification on the part of organizational members (p. 157). What RQ1 intended to address was exactly how MoveOn builds relationships with publics via e-mail through
identification which, in turn, may help to induce collective action on the part of members. In this section, interpretations of the coactive identification strategies of sympathy and unawareness employed by MoveOn are discussed, followed by MoveOn’s confrontational or antithesis-oriented identification efforts. Burke’s rhetorical identification strategies, though three-fold, are quite akin to Stewart et al.’s (1989) elucidation of coactive and confrontational rhetoric. As the purpose of sympathy and unawareness appears to be largely focused on consensus-building and on the shoring-up of organizational support, the first and third of Burke’s identification strategies were grouped under Stewart et al.’s (1989) coactive classification. Coactive rhetoric emphasizes similarities, shared experiences and a common cause, thus, it makes sense to discuss the identification strategies of sympathy and unawareness together. Confrontational rhetoric, however, is constructed in a manner to make people see that other social entities are immoral and illegitimate. The second of Burke’s strategies, identification by antithesis, is the sole strategy considered to be confrontational per Stewart et al.’s definition, and is discussed separately.

Interpretations of Coactive Action Alerts

Sympathy. Unlike unawareness and antithesis, identification by sympathy traditionally relies almost completely on explicit or overt associative rhetoric, which provides rationalization for Benoit’s (2000) renaming of identification by sympathy as explicit identification. However, in this investigation, sympathy was not often exhibited overtly. Unlike the identification strategies of antithesis and unawareness (which will be discussed shortly), no single action alert appeared to encompass sympathy as the dominant identification strategy. Rather, sympathy most often appeared in action alerts
that attempted to reinforce the relationship between MoveOn and its members in two
general ways.

Two key themes emerged from analyzing how identification by sympathy was
utilized in MoveOn’s action alerts. First, sympathy was strategically used in action alerts
to galvanize member morale through highlighting organizational issues of concern or in
touting MoveOn’s accomplishments, for example: “The new Congress was elected with a
broad mandate for change . . . you played a key role in getting us to this moment”
(10/27/2006). Secondly, sympathy was consistently identified in alerts that asked for the
input or opinions of MoveOn members on candidates, issues, or events. For example,
also in the alert from November 10, 2006, MoveOn says, “all of us together are smarter
and wiser than any one of us” and “we want to know where you want to go next. Can you
take a minute to let us know what your goals for MoveOn and the next Congress are?”

In the aforementioned statements, and in many others, MoveOn tries to establish
similarity between the organization and its publics through stressing the alleged unity of
thoughts and ideals of MoveOn and its members. Often, MoveOn will precede claims of
organization–public unity with statements highlighting how much the input of members
shapes the goals of MoveOn. For example, in a November 10, 2006 alert, MoveOn asks
members to take a survey, saying “Your answers will help us plan our future.” As
MoveOn is a member-driven organization, MoveOn may, arguably, be using sympathy in
a way that differs from Burke’s (1973) conception of the strategy as “merely a way to
establish rapport by stressing sympathies held in common” (p. 268). Instead of one-way
or unilateral communication, such as the “politician who, though rich, tells humble
constituents of his humble origins” (Burke, 1972, p. 28), through feedback opportunities,
such as surveys, MoveOn gives its members the opportunity to shape the values, opinions, and decisions of the organization in action alerts—making MoveOn appear sympathetic to the needs and concerns of publics.

Taylor et al. (2003) have noted that dialogue between organizations and publics ensures that the needs and views of publics are considered in an organization’s decision making processes, and encourages the development of relationships (p. 261). Via polls, surveys, and solicitation of comments, MoveOn attempts to engage in two-way or dialogic communication with its publics through features included in action alerts. As such, the similarities between MoveOn and its members are not communicated nor established in a completely one-sided fashion. Indeed, MoveOn makes regular habit of proclaiming how much the input of members is appreciated in statements such as “MoveOn is a member-directed organization—we believe that all of us, together, are smarter than any one of us” (03/18/2007) and “We want to make sure that we're on the same page that you are as we move forward together in future campaigns” (10/10/2006). Thus, members of MoveOn are likely to identify and be associated with the organization, as the members are (theoretically) afforded the opportunity to participate in shaping the values and goals of MoveOn. MoveOn exhibits this kind of practice in 11 of its action alerts.

Consider, for a more detailed example of an alert representative of how sympathy is utilized by MoveOn, an e-mail dated March 18, 2007 which concerns a Democratic proposal on Iraq. The purpose of the alert is to gauge (and inspire) support for the proposal from MoveOn’s members. A passage in the alert reads: “I’ve [Eli Pariser, Director of MoveOn PAC] told Rep. Murtha that [support for the proposal] was a
decision for MoveOn’s members to make. Now I’m asking you to help make it. Should we support or oppose the Democrat’s plan?” Readers are then asked to take a simple poll which asks if they support, oppose, or are unsure of the plan. In a subsequent e-mail, dated March 21, 2007, MoveOn relays the results of the poll, reporting that 85% of MoveOn members support the Democratic plan for Iraq. Given the overwhelming support from MoveOn members for this plan, the action alert states “Yesterday, you saw the results of our poll . . . Today, we have to get to work.” By soliciting the opinion of members, MoveOn may have *created* a sympathetic identification. In this action alert, MoveOn highlights that members are responsible for MoveOn’s stance on the Democratic plan and then uses that fact to inspire *sympathy* for the issue. In turn, *sympathy* (as well as the other identification strategies) for the issue leads to MoveOn asking support for the issue, either through tangible or intangible resource mobilization.

MoveOn presents itself as capable of representing the interests of publics by appearing to incorporate and value the ideas and concerns of members. MoveOn is then able to rhetorically identify with publics through *sympathy* by presenting all actions and issues undertaken as the will of its public. This form of *sympathy*—while outside of Burke’s definition, but still strongly associated—is akin to an engagement approach to issues management. Central to the engagement approach of issues management is the need for dialogue between an organization and its publics (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 260). Taylor et al. (2003, pp. 260–262) suggest that the engagement approach recognizes that publics are, essentially, valuable organizational resources. Publics are interested stakeholders whose support is necessary for the continued functioning and success of the organization. Taylor et al. (2003) argue that organizational interests are best served when
the needs and concerns of publics are heard and solicited and that the organization should make every effort to “adapt to public needs” (p. 260).

Further, Taylor et al. (2003) posit that active dialogue or engagement with publics concerning issues is the most effective way to manage issues. Communication between organization and public identifies and defines issues, and it affords organizations and their publics an opportunity to build a relationship around issues of shared concern. As Appelrouth (1999) observes, activist groups must align their goals regarding an issue with those of their publics to ensure the viability of the organization (p. 331). MoveOn must therefore engage in dialogue with publics to help establish alignment between the ideas and goals of the organization and the ideas and goals of publics. Moreover, a common interpretation of an issue is necessary to induce sufficient agreement among publics so that taking actions towards remedying the issue is perceived to be necessary and justified. As such, dialogue between an organization and its public can help achieve fulfillment of organizational interests in that dialogue helps to foster interpretive conformity among publics.

Thus, an organization’s ability to effectively manage issues benefits from building/maintaining relationships with publics. Though relationship building is not issues management in the traditional, media-related sense of the term, relationship building is part of catalytic issues management in that relationships help to build support for issues. MoveOn may be using sympathy to help manage or create interest in certain issues—issues that are of shared concern between MoveOn and its publics. In a similar vein, Grunig, Grunig, and Ehling (1992) note that organizational adaptation to the needs and opinions of publics is a positive public relations practice; one that helps to maximize
organizational autonomy and engender good relationships with publics (p. 69). From this perspective, then, MoveOn—for the purpose managing the interdependence between MoveOn and its publics—may be using identification by sympathy to show that the organization is adapting to public needs and opinions. That is to say that MoveOn is also engaging in relationship management with publics via sympathetic rhetorical identification.

For MoveOn, sympathy appears to be a strategic rhetorical device for building relationships through association, around issues of shared concern. Building consensus and interpretive cohesion (i.e. relationship building) around issues affords MoveOn the ability to more effectively manage issues. I move now to the third of Burke’s rhetorical identification strategies, identification by unawareness, where the rhetorical relationship building processes of “association and dissociation are inextricably interwoven” (Cheney, 1983, p. 154), more so than the overtly associative identification strategy of sympathy.

Unawareness. The use of unawareness in MoveOn’s action alerts was overwhelmingly connected to attempts to build support for progressive issues, policies, or candidates. While at the same time, MoveOn implicitly censures conservative policies and ideology. A passage from an alert dated March 1, 2007 demonstrates an attempt by MoveOn to inspire identification with a transcendent or assumed liberal cause. MoveOn encourages members to write letters to the editor of local papers, saying “we can change the narrative to reflect reality: Supporting the troops means protecting them from being sent into the middle of a civil war inadequately equipped and under-prepared.” Though not stated, the previous passage covertly reminds readers that it is the Republicans who are “sending exhausted and under-equipped troops into Iraq” (03/01/2007).
Also representative of MoveOn’s use of unawareness is an alert dated April 4, 2007, in which MoveOn attempts to invoke the transcendent “we,” for the purpose of inspiring support for embattled democratic candidates. A passage in the alert asserts: “We helped elect these folks, and now they’ve stuck their necks out to do the right thing” and “We need to have their backs.” MoveOn subsequently asks for a donation to their campaigns—more than a year and a half away from Election Day, 2008. Noticeable in this alert is the call to support Democratic legislators, which is accomplished through engaging in coactive or congregational rhetoric. For example, “Let’s make sure these new members of Congress know we’ll stand with them as they demand accountability from President Bush and work to end the war.” Antithesis is also used in this alert, aligning Republican legislators with pro-war policies, and portraying these Republicans as out to defeat Democratic candidates because of their vote against the war.

At first glance, highlighting support for Democrats could be interpreted as efforts to induce identification by sympathy in that Democrats are more likely to support MoveOn’s issues, and as MoveOn’s members helped to elect democratic legislators. MoveOn describes democratic candidates as anti-war and not afraid to take on the Republicans, qualities that are admirable and likely to inspire sympathy or to make clear the similarities between said candidates and MoveOn’s members. However, implicit in these passages is the identification with the entity of the Democratic Party or the idea of what it represents. The “we” in the aforementioned statements—and the subsequent invocation of President Bush as the ultimate champion of the war—are intended to hearken up sentiments of both association and dissociation. In this alert, MoveOn covertly reminds members of strong affiliations with the Democratic Party and its anti-
war position, which inherently implies division with President Bush, Republicans, and all those who support the war. Thus, it could be argued that *unawareness* is as rhetorically confrontational as it is coactive. But as relationships with MoveOn are built and maintained in this alert through reminding publics of the association with Democratic values, characteristics, and policies; dissociation with Republicans is a consequence of association, and thus is a secondary rhetorical characteristic of *unawareness*.

Consequently, unlike *sympathy*, which appears to be utilized by MoveOn more for initiating or building relationships, *unawareness* is utilized in MoveOn’s action alerts in attempts to *maintain* or strengthen relationships, lending credence to Wiesenfeld et al.’s (1999) observation that e-mails are particularly important in the maintenance of virtual-organizational identification (p. 778). In the context of MoveOn, relationships are maintained by *unawareness* through ensuring interpretive cohesion among publics, which, in turn, aligns support for the issues, causes, and candidates supported by MoveOn. As Wiesenfeld et al. (1999) suggest, maintaining organization-public identification helps to ensure “the coordination and control of dispersed organizational actors” (p. 778). Therefore, it can be assumed that MoveOn, like any other virtual organization, engages in coactive identifications to manage and control publics. I now turn to how MoveOn uses confrontational rhetoric, and the most dissociative and divisive of identification strategies, *identification by antithesis*.

*Interpretations of Confrontational Action Alerts*

Stewart et al. (1989) suggest that use of confrontational rhetoric positions enemies of an activist group as illegitimate and unworthy of support (p. 76). The use of *antithesis* in MoveOn’s action alerts relies heavily on the assumption that action alert subscribers
have an entrenched dislike of the Republican Party and a fear of conservative ideology. MoveOn then uses anti-conservative apprehensions to get the reader to take the action prescribed in the alert. One of the rhetorically most confrontational action alerts is dated April 13, 2007. This action alert provides clear examples as to how identification can be used by rhetors to simultaneously create an enemy, call for unification, and point towards what can be done about said enemy. “How much would it be worth to you, personally, to have the neocons out of the White House?” MoveOn asks action alert subscribers.

“Republicans are ramping up for 2008, just like they did to get the critical edge in 2004.” Antithesis is used in this alert to evoke fear from the reader; a fear that Republicans will again capture the Presidency come 2008, which will lead to more war, support for torture, big oil, tax cuts for the rich, etc. As a consequence, a clear—and at the same time nonspecific—enemy emerges, embodied in the Republican Party. MoveOn then provides a way to unify against this enemy, presenting a 6-point plan to win the 2008 elections, saying “If we want to make sure a Progressive replaces George Bush, we have to start now; laying the groundwork for the most sophisticated progressive voter turnout ever” (emphasis original). Finally, MoveOn provides direction as to what the individual can do to assist in this effort: “Can you chip in $15 a month to end the Bush era, once and for all?”

Just as often as MoveOn cites a specific enemy, such as George W. Bush, John McCain, or Dick Cheney, MoveOn frequently draws attention to vague or ill-defined adversarial entities such as Republicans in general, the “right wing,” and corporate lobbyists. In MoveOn’s use of identification by antithesis, MoveOn is quite arbitrary in ascribing enemy status to individuals, organizations, or ideology. MoveOn’s occasional
lack of specificity in framing attempts at antithetical identification indicates that it may not entirely matter whom or what the enemy is, as long as there is an enemy—however abstract. MoveOn may be strategically ambiguous in ascribing enemy status to entities, causes, or candidates for the purpose of inspiring a larger range of publics to adopt a negative view of an enemy. Eisenberg and Witten (1987) write that the use of strategic ambiguities in communication “... allow[s] divergent interpretations to exist and are more effective in allowing diverse groups together” (p. 422). Further, Eisenberg (1984) maintains that, when used strategically, ambiguity "promotes unified diversity in organizations" (p. 230). As such, MoveOn may be strategically ambiguous on some occasions to further heighten identification with the organization through antithesis and to maintain a broad understanding of whom or what is the enemy of MoveOn and its members.

Another emblematic example of an antithesis-oriented or confrontational alert from MoveOn is dated February 22, 2007. The purpose of this alert is to convince the Democratic Party of Nevada to drop Fox News Channel as the host of a Democratic presidential primary debate. The enemy identified in this alert is immediately established as Fox. Dissociative passages in the alert describe Fox as an “illegitimate news channel... a right wing mouth-piece like Rush Limbaugh and the Drudge Report—repeating false Republican talking points to smear Democrats.” MoveOn proceeds to ask the readers to sign a petition to ask the Democratic Party to find a new host for the debate, and claims that “if there ever was a battle where we could beat Fox, this is it—since Democrats will make the ultimate decision, not Fox executives.” Beyond the repeated attacks on Fox (5 unique instances in total), MoveOn also attempts to inspire
association with certain politicians through antithetical rhetoric, saying “Fox has also spread false smears about Hilary Clinton,” and “Fox has tried to skew the 08’ race by accusing Senator Barack Obama of attending a terrorist school.” Through accusing Fox of attacking democratic candidates, MoveOn is also attempting to generate positive association with the Democratic Party, which further stimulates individuals to sign the petition.

The previous examples illustrate just how easily relationships can be maintained and strengthened through antithesis and how easily a relationship can be used to solicit personal and financial support from constituents. Stewart et al. (1989) argue that activist organizations must transform publics’ “perception of the opposition and self and, in so doing, create a clear we-they distinction” (p. 125). This concept is palpably evident in identification by antithesis; in the case of MoveOn, a relationship with MoveOn is established or strengthened in identifying a common enemy. As identification by unawareness inspires dissociation through association, dissociative rhetoric in identification through antithesis also evokes association. MoveOn uses antithesis to point out the differences between its publics and an enemy, which covertly implies a public’s similarity to MoveOn. Dissociative identification inspires and heightens association with MoveOn, as publics may want to have a relationship with an organization that so vehemently opposes Republicans and conservative news sources.

MoveOn also uses antithesis to persuade publics that the organization is capable of defeating conservative candidates and ideology. As Marwell and Oliver (1993) have indicated, people are more likely to join and have a relationship with organizations that are perceived to be organized and efficacious (p. 10). Accordingly, MoveOn presents
itself in the April 13 action alert as prepared and capable of taking on Republicans by presenting an easily comprehensible, if rather simplistic, campaign plan. MoveOn often attempts to rhetorically demonstrate efficacy, as in the February 22 alert in which MoveOn says that “we can beat Fox.” Readers of the alert may well be inspired to take the action MoveOn prescribes in the alert because of the perception that MoveOn can put member support (whether through a donation or a signature) to effective use. The act of signing a petition or donating money further heightens the relationship with MoveOn, for now the individual has personal resources invested in the organization, and will likely take interest in future issues addressed by MoveOn.

The aforementioned illustration shows how effectively identification by antithesis can be used to strategically to mobilize resources as well as to build and maintain relationships. Connaughton and Jarvis (2004a) note that individuals identify with an organization when they “see” themselves in the organization (p. 467). If the results of this study are sound, identification by antithesis may, in effect, prompt or remind an individual to “see” how different an adversarial person or organization is from MoveOn. Consequently, that individual may be incited to give resources aimed at countering an enemy. In a following section, the apparent relationship between antithesis and resource mobilization is elaborated upon in greater detail.

As noted in chapter 2, identification with an organization is a necessary precursor for an organizational member to engage in collective action (Appelrouth, 1999; Grunig & Repper, 1992). Brunsting and Postmes (2002) suggest that to the extent that group members identify with a group, they are motivated to view their own group as positive and distinct. This implies that, generally speaking, identification is an important predictor
of collective action tendencies. Although it was not the intent of this study to address how identification strategies may function as a catalyst for collective action, a logical progression in this vein of research would be to address the relationship between rhetorical identifications and motivation. In the next section, I briefly comment on the implications that can be derived from this study on identifications as catalysts for taking action.

Identification as Motivational Catalyst?

It is important to consider if, from the results of this investigation, conclusions can be made about the potential for motivation each identification strategy holds. If the intent of this study were to gauge the motivational efficacy of rhetorical identifications, enacting said intentions might have been problematic. Postulating on which rhetorical identification strategy is the most effective in stimulating members to take the action prescribed in a specific action alert would be near impossible. Without access to results of the action alerts, and without speaking with a significant number of MoveOn’s members, no substantive conclusions can be made about how, why, and if, MoveOn’s identification strategies are motivationally efficacious. In the four occasions that MoveOn reports the results of actions taken by members in action alerts, it is impossible to discern if it was rhetorical identification, individual concern for the issue, or some other factor which inspired an individual to take action.

For example, in one alert dated January 23, 2007, MoveOn encourages members to commit $15 a month to support MoveOn’s campaign to end the war in Iraq by increasing pressure on Congress and boosting media coverage. In this alert, *antithesis* and *unawareness* are utilized in similar frequencies, in statements such as “George W. Bush
will use the State of the Union to push his outrageous plan for escalation in Iraq” and “We’re launching our own escalation . . . together, we can stop it.” The next day, January 24, 2007, MoveOn reported that 1,548 people signed on to pay the requested $15 a month. In a similar pairing of action alerts, dated April 12 and 13, 2007, both containing only antithesis, MoveOn first presents a plan for Democratic-electoral victory in 2008 and asks for $15 a week; the next day reporting that 1,000 individuals had already made the aforementioned financial commitment. In a March 28, 2007 alert, which contained an instance of sympathy, MoveOn asked members to take a survey and submit questions to ask democratic candidates in a town hall debate. On April 2, which contained unawareness, MoveOn reported (through a link in the alert) that over 6,800 questions were submitted. On January 4, 2007, containing both antithesis and unawareness, MoveOn asked readers to sign a petition in support of the Democrat’s 100 hours agenda, and on January 5 (containing both sympathy and antithesis) MoveOn reported that 140,000 signatures had already been gathered. The results reported in the aforementioned action alerts demonstrate that MoveOn’s alerts are efficacious. However, it is difficult to determine if there is a relationship between the identification strategies employed in an action alert and if a reader actually takes the action prescribed. Antithesis does seem to be the identification strategy most commonly found in the action alert-pairings presented above, but no tenable conclusions can be drawn as to if antithesis is the strategy most effective an inducing an e-mail action alert reader to take action.

Summary

As reported earlier, instances of identification by antithesis comprised 55% of the total number of identifications employed. Given that sympathy and unawareness are both
coactive strategies, and that combined together, instances of *sympathy* and *unawareness* constitute 45% of all identification strategies employed, it seems that MoveOn divides its identification efforts almost evenly between confrontational and coactive strategies.

Stewart et al. (1989) write that activist organizations, in constructing coactive rhetoric, may “identify themselves with what is large, good, important, and of the highest order in society” (p. 25) in order to emphasize similarities with publics. MoveOn used coactive identifications to portray the organization as an advocate of liberal social and political causes who represents the concerns of members at the national level; thereby attempting to invoke congregation or association with MoveOn.

In utilizing the coactive identifications of *sympathy* and *unawareness*, MoveOn is, essentially, managing the interpretations of its publics and the reinforcement of publics’ support. Put another way, *identification by sympathy* and *unawareness* are rhetorical facilitators of relationship management by way of controlling in-group commitment and interpretive cohesion. Through *sympathy* and *unawareness*, MoveOn often implicitly reminds publics that loyalties should lie with MoveOn (or with other entities that hold congruent values and/or agendas) because MoveOn cares about what publics care about. Further, through *sympathy* and *unawareness*, MoveOn often attempts to shape what publics care about by positioning issues of concern for MoveOn as issues of concern for publics, or by portraying MoveOn as the champion of shared issues of concern.

The analysis of the confrontational rhetorical strategies employed by MoveOn—exemplified by use of *identification by antithesis*—may be of the greatest heuristic import and most beneficial to the understanding of rhetorical relationship building in MoveOn’s action alerts. Although the primary rhetorical intent of MoveOn’s use of *antithesis* is to
create division between publics and stated enemies of MoveOn, efforts to create
antithetical identifications may also result in a stronger connection with MoveOn. In
other words, MoveOn may be purposefully inspiring division for the purpose of eliciting
stronger affiliation and support from MoveOn’s members. Cheney (1983) comments on
how antithesis can be beneficial to inspiring support for organizations, writing,
“identification with the collective membership of the organization is suggested not only
as desirable . . . but also as necessary to oppose threats from outsiders” (p. 154). As such,
MoveOn’s usage of antithesis in action alerts may be the most effective way to foster
organization-public identification, which, in turn, may lead to a greater likelihood of
members taking collective action.

Moreover, given that activist organizations must compete for resources, antithesis
may well be the most meaningful and efficacious identification strategy for activist
groups to employ. Antithesis was, by far, the most frequently employed identification
strategy by MoveOn, and as identified in Sommerfeldt’s (2007) study of Christian Right
activist group use of identification, identification by antithesis was also the most
pervasive strategy utilized. If antithesis is indeed the most commonly used identification
strategy of activist organizations, such conclusions would have strong implications for
future research. Antithesis may well be the preferred rhetorical identification device for
activist organizations, given the strong dichotomous nature of the identification. Indeed,
Burke (1973) comments that antithesis is the strongest way in which rhetoric can inspire
congregation through segregation, through “union by some opposition shared in
common” (p. 266). As will be discussed in a later section, use of identification by
antithesis may also be complementary to resource mobilization.
As discussed previously, the perspective of viewing identifications as means to elicit motivation from publics' may be limited. However, insofar as identifications were used to build and maintain organization–public relationships in MoveOn's action alerts, identifications appear to be powerful rhetorical tools for activist organizations. I move now to interpreting the results of the analysis concerning whether the information subsidies MoveOn provides in the form of press releases are effective in stimulating the social and national agenda.

**Information Subsidies and Agenda Stimulation**

Given the failure of MoveOn’s press releases to attract media coverage—as evidenced by the lack of articles containing information from the releases—the answer to RQ2 appears to be that MoveOn’s information subsidies are not effective in agenda stimulation. In an effort to explicate the potential implications of that conclusion, this part of the discussion begins with an elaboration on the few articles that resulted from the LexisNexis search. Further, I comment on why the poor result of the search does not necessarily mean that MoveOn is failing in agenda-stimulation or issues management efforts. Next, examples of the quotations and pieces of information taken by news sources from MoveOn’s press releases are discussed in the context of the articles, and inferences are drawn as to how MoveOn may be stimulating the agenda through interpersonal relationships with media contacts as opposed to press releases.

*Failing to Stimulate the Agenda?*

The Internet is a tool for activist organizations to have their perspectives and goals evaluated by the mainstream or traditional media (Callison, 2003). Information subsidies can be provided online in order to ease the information-gathering process of
reporters, which, at the same time, disseminates the message of the activist group. Given the relative dearth of articles that used information from MoveOn’s press releases, it can be concluded with some degree of certainty that the information subsidies provided on MoveOn’s Web site are not particularly effectual in agenda stimulation. The prestige and influence of the sources that used the subsidies, however, was impressive. The Washington Post and The Boston Globe were found to have used information from MoveOn’s press releases on two occasions respectively, and sources like The New York Times and Newsweek also used information from MoveOn’s subsidies. Still, given that the date range of the search spanned two years, only 10 articles in even the most prestigious of news outlets is a dismal showing.

Further, it may be possible that the information presented in MoveOn’s press releases was not deemed “newsworthy” enough to warrant attention in mainstream media. Turk (1986) determined that newsworthiness is the most important factor in a newspaper’s decision to use information from a news release. News gatekeepers such as journalists or editors, who make the decision about what is newsworthy, have a powerful agenda setting-effect on public discussion (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Jacobs & Glass, 2002). As evidenced by the results of this portion of the study, it seems that news gatekeepers found the information subsidies provided by MoveOn as insufficiently newsworthy, consequently rendering MoveOn’s press releases as incapable of agenda-stimulation.

Taken in the context of Gandy’s (1982) definition, that information subsidies are intended to influence “the actions of others by controlling their access to and use of information relevant to those actions” (p. 61), MoveOn was not successful in influencing
outside media through press releases. The infrequency with which mainstream media uses MoveOn’s press releases as information subsidies does not, however, indicate that MoveOn as a whole is ineffectual at agenda-stimulation. Often, keyword searches in LexisNexis would produce innumerable articles that contained statements from MoveOn spokespeople on the same topics addressed in press releases. While it seems that MoveOn is not particularly effectual in stimulating or influencing issues and agendas via its online information subsidies, the overwhelming number of times in which MoveOn spokespeople are quoted or used as information sources in mainstream media indicates that MoveOn participates in agenda stimulation more effectively by way of personal interviews. The next section briefly describes how MoveOn was quoted in articles that used information from MoveOn’s press releases.

Use of Information Subsidies in Mainstream Media

All of the quotes found to have been taken from MoveOn’s press releases were categorized as full or partial quotes, or as background statements. Partial quotes (quotes that used only part of a statement from a press release) were the most frequently used kind of quotation in the articles analyzed. Partial quotes were used in articles that covered a variety of subjects. In one article (Savage, 2005) a full quote (a complete statement from a press release) and a partial quote that were taken from MoveOn’s release were simply snippets of text from an advertisement MoveOn planned to air attacking President Bush’s leadership following Hurricane Katrina. Interestingly, the quotes of text taken from the press release were interspersed with interview quotes from Tom Matzzie, Washington director of MoveOn. In this case, MoveOn was able to stimulate the national
agenda an influence issues both through its information subsidies and through its interactions with media personnel.

Background statements or markers (statements attributable to no one but the organization itself) were used a total of six times in the articles found from the LexisNexis search. One article from The Washington Post dated January 5, 2006 used a marker from MoveOn’s January 4 press release. The article pertained to the nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, discussing those politicians and organizations that support or oppose the nomination. MoveOn is one of only two organizations cited in the article that opposed Alito’s nomination, positioning MoveOn as, if you will, a leading proponent of liberalism and a noteworthy adversary of the Bush administration. The article merely uses a marker derived from MoveOn’s January 4 press release, in which MoveOn announced that it would begin airing anti-Alito television advertisements that portray Alito as an extremist “trying to pass himself off as a moderate” (Babington & Fletcher, 2006). In this particular case, the fact that information was taken from one of MoveOn’s press releases is not of great significance. Worthier of note is that MoveOn was mentioned as only one of two liberal organizations opposing a Republican nominee to the Supreme Court. Through being included as a main opponent of the Alito nomination, MoveOn successfully becomes a legitimate and credible force in the political debate.

In another article from The Washington Post (Baker, 2005) MoveOn is also cited as the only liberal group mentioned as opposing President Bush’s Iraq war exit strategy. The article includes a marker from MoveOn’s December 14, 2005 press release that mentions a petition drive MoveOn conducted which called for an exit plan to leave Iraq.
MoveOn’s inclusion in the two aforementioned articles from *The Washington Post* represents that MoveOn is viewed as an authority on or representative of progressive political views in the U.S. by that particular news source. Stewart et al. (1989) suggest that in order for an activist group to be successful, it must be viewed as legitimate by institutions and the public (p. 71). As MoveOn is viewed as a legitimate authority on issues by a prominent newspaper, and appears in the newspaper without solicitation, MoveOn has successfully participated in stimulating the agenda and shaping the discussion of issues without any real effort on the part of MoveOn.

Full quotes were the least frequently used kind of quote discovered in the articles from the Lexis Nexis search. Two of the 4 full quotes found were used in an article from *The New York Post* (Haberman, 2006) concerning anti-Jewish slurs that appeared on MoveOn.org’s Open Forum Web site. The quotes were from a September 2, 2006 press release meant to be a response to the discovery of the slurs. Another of the full quotes discovered was a statement by Eli Pariser taken from MoveOn’s February 1, 2005 press release. Used in a February 3, 2005 article in *The Boston Globe* (Milligan & Klein, 2005), the quote clarifies MoveOn’s position on President Bush’s one-time plan to overhaul social security.

In the few statements used in articles, it is difficult to make any substantive statements about how MoveOn participates in agenda-stimulation and issues management via press releases. What can be said of the quotes examined, however, is that they were mostly used to provide a progressive perspective on an issue or event. In the articles examined, and in the countless articles not a part of this investigation in which MoveOn spokespeople are quoted, MoveOn is treated as an authority on liberal points of view, and
therefore referenced in articles that benefit from a range of perspectives. As such, what is truly of interest in this part of the investigation is the notion of legitimacy as prescribed by Stewart et al. (1989), and how MoveOn’s personal interaction with media personnel achieves legitimacy and agenda stimulation, and the implications of those personal interactions.

*Legitimacy through Media Coverage*

Bridges and Nelson (2000) posit that it is necessary to cultivate positive relationships with media personnel, as media have the power to establish the credibility and legitimacy of the organization on particular issues (p. 108). Legitimacy, in and of itself, is seen as an intangible resource by McCarthy and Zald (1977). Legitimacy contributes to the likelihood of the organization achieving its goals. Several of MoveOn’s top spokespeople are consistently referenced or quoted in articles that concern not only MoveOn, but the dominant moral, social, and political issues of the day. As Broom et al. (2000) indicate, a positive relationship with the media can help to establish the credibility of an organization, particularly when media reporters contact organizations as a source when relevant problems or issues are in the news (p. 108).

The credibility and legitimacy of MoveOn is advanced when its spokespeople are called to offer opinions on issues; perspectives that will be printed in the most prestigious news sources in the nation. Furthermore, in several of the press releases analyzed, MoveOn provides direction as to how an interview may be scheduled with the leaders of MoveOn PAC and MoveOn Civic Action. In providing such information, and in regularly agreeing to be interviewed, MoveOn’s leaders are, to some extent, shaping the discussion around issues and influencing the national agenda as well as cultivating positive
relationships with media personnel. As such, it can tenably be concluded that MoveOn is attempting to engage in catalytic issues management and agenda stimulation via interpersonal public relations tactics, not through its press releases. As will be discussed shortly, MoveOn is also engaging in catalytic issues management through its action alerts and resource mobilization efforts.

Additionally, exposure of the organization through mass media publicity provides an opportunity to establish yet another link between an organization and various potential publics. Mass media distributes knowledge of an issue and of an organization to wider populations (Bridges & Nelson, 2000; Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Once publics are made aware of an issue, there is greater potential for publics to see a link between themselves and MoveOn. This, in turn, may lead to a relationship with MoveOn, and the possibility of the individual contributing resources to the organization.

Summary

From this part of the investigation, it becomes clear that information subsidies in the form of press releases (at least in the case of MoveOn), are not particularly effective in agenda stimulation. MoveOn is not, however, lacking in exposure or in being referenced in news media as the leading advocate of progressive issues in the nation. From the key word searches that yielded the 10 articles containing quotes from MoveOn’s press releases, 117 articles were found with the same key words without information from MoveOn’s releases. All of the 117 additional articles included references to or quotes from MoveOn and its spokespeople; this number does not even include the countless articles in which MoveOn’s spokespeople are quoted that did not contain any of the key words. As evidenced by the extraordinary number of articles in
which MoveOn’s spokespeople are quoted, and in the presentation of interview scheduling information in press releases, MoveOn is willingly participating in the political dialogue through agreeing to be interviewed. Given that MoveOn has not posted a new press release on its site since September 2, 2006, perhaps MoveOn has determined that agenda stimulation and participating in issue discussion can be more effectively achieved through direct media contacts as opposed to press releases. The exposure MoveOn gains from interviews helps to establish legitimacy and propagates the views of the organization. As such, MoveOn may be catalytically managing issues and shaping the agenda through the provision of in-depth perspective in interviews.

Not only is publicity important for organizations to gain legitimacy in the eyes of publics, but publicity also is necessary to gain the attention of politicians and policy makers (Jacobs & Glass, 2002, p. 236–247). Additionally, Jacobs and Glass (2002) go so far as to suggest that there may be a relationship between the membership size of an organization and publicity (p. 239). Needless to say, publicity is a necessary and desirable thing for activist organizations such as MoveOn to have. As in the catalytic issues management strategy suggested by Crable and Vibbert (1985), publicity or media attention about an organization’s stance on issues can ultimately lead to the resolution of issues in a manner favorable to the organization. What can be derived from this study about how MoveOn garners publicity (and how MoveOn catalytically manages issues) is that MoveOn is more effective in attracting and holding the attention of mainstream media via person-to-person interviews than in providing online information subsidies in the form of press releases.
Jacobs and Glass (2002) posit that, "media publicity is an incredibly scarce resource" (p. 245). While publicity may be in short supply for less-established or smaller activist organizations, MoveOn has had no shortage of media publicity, and may therefore not be too concerned with attracting media attention via press releases. The same, however, cannot be said of other activist groups. Activist organizations, in order to communicate their positions on issues and, in so doing, reach wider populations, must garner media attention. Traditionally, resource-dependent or needy activist groups, or groups that are not perceived as legitimate by institutions, governments, social groups, etc. (Stewart et al., 1989), have relied on information subsidies such as press releases to provide news sources with information on the group’s position on issues. Yet, once an activist organization has crossed a certain threshold of legitimacy and credibility, does the need to engage in the provision of online information subsidies continue? As evidenced in the case of resource-rich MoveOn.org, activist organizations that have become legitimate and arrived, if you will, on the political scene as a major player, may rely more heavily on interpersonal relationships with media as opposed to the provision of information subsidies. Perhaps well established, well-funded, and politically influential activist organizations have surpassed the need to supply information to the media; the media will, instead, come to MoveOn’s spokespeople for information and commentary. This notion, though rich in heuristic potential, requires further discussion, and will be addressed in a later section. Next, I move to a discussion of how MoveOn engages in resource mobilization via its Web site.
As previously elaborated, resource mobilization features were sparingly employed on the main pages of MoveOn’s Web site. It seems logical that the main pages of MoveOn would contain the greatest amount of mobilization features as the main pages are a Web site visitor’s first exposure to the organization, and only one to two layers into the site. However, this lack of mobilization features does not necessarily indicate that MoveOn is remiss in its resource mobilization efforts in the first two layers of the Web site. As will be discussed shortly, the vast majority of resource mobilization features employed by MoveOn were discerned within the specific campaign pages and action alerts. The disproportion of mobilization features in pages and e-mails linked to specific issues, candidates, or advertisements suggests that effective and strategic resource mobilization is hinged on connecting mobilization features to outcomes or issues rather than to the general auspices of an activist organization. This section first discusses the two new intangible features discovered in the course of analysis, and the lack of coalition-building features on MoveOn’s Web site.

**New Intangible Features**

Intangible resources consist primarily of people, their support for an organization, and the activities they perform to help advance the goals of an organization. Jenkins (1983, p. 533) notes that human assets are the central basis for activist groups. In the course of analysis, it became evident that MoveOn attempts to gather personal data such as addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc., as often as possible. The acquisition of personal information allows MoveOn to contact an individual with future tangible or intangible resource mobilization efforts, making the possession of personal contact data
an intangible resource in and of itself. Another new intangible feature discerned, beyond Sen Das and Taylor's (2006) list, included asking individuals to sign petitions. Securing signatures on petition advances the MoveOn's position on issues by demonstrating to legislators that a large number of individuals share the same position as MoveOn. Further, when an individual signs a petition, the individual’s relationship with MoveOn is likely heightened, due to the personal investment in an issue required to sign a petition.

Like MoveOn’s tangible resource mobilization efforts, intangible resource mobilization features (particularly those asking readers to sign petitions) were largely connected to a specific issue, campaign, or other point of concern. The connection between intangible resource mobilization and issues, coupled with the finding that tangible resource mobilization features were most often connected to issues, suggests that resource mobilization is more effective when mobilization efforts are targeted at specific issues or causes. As individuals build relationships with organizations around issues more so than with the organization itself (Dozier & Ehling, 1992), it may be that resource mobilization efforts, both tangible and intangible, are most efficacious when related to issues. If this is case, organizational efforts to mobilize resources may be dependant on the relationships they have with publics. This concept is more thoroughly discussed in a following section.

Lack of Coalition-Building Features

The lack of coalition-building features is not altogether surprising given the unique nature of MoveOn as an activist group. Like any other activist organization, MoveOn must compete for resources in order to preserve viability (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). For instance, if an individual were to find a link on MoveOn’s site to another
similar-issue organization and that individual subsequently donate money to (tangible mobilization) or volunteer for (intangible mobilization) that organization, MoveOn has essentially led that individual into giving resources to a competitor (c.f. Kent & Taylor, 1998). As resources are necessary to participate in social conflict, (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1216), MoveOn must aggregate limited resources for collective purposes. The scarcity of coalition-building features on the Web site may indicate that MoveOn is attempting to isolate itself from or discount other progressive activist organizations, which positions MoveOn as the foremost legitimate face of liberalism on the Internet.

Further, given that MoveOn is not a single issue-advocacy organization—rather, MoveOn advocates numerous issues and campaigns at one time—the need or relevancy for building coalitions with other issue-oriented activist groups may not be present or advantageous. Individuals may choose to give resources to one activist organization over another based on the goals or issues an organization propounds (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1228). By not engaging in coalition-building with other similarly minded activist organizations, MoveOn keeps a Web site visitor’s focus on MoveOn and on the multitude of issues it advocates, which may help to deter said visitor from giving resources to other activist organizations. The next section discusses the resource mobilization capacity of the organization’s action alerts.

*Action Alerts as Resource Mobilization Tools*

A further way in which action alerts proved to be efficient resource mobilization tools is the ability of the information presented in action alerts to be tailored down to specific geographic constituencies. Nineteen of the 51 analyzed alerts contained localized information, such as city names, local representatives/senators (with contact
information); and information regarding other MoveOn members in the area and their activities. Action alerts that contained a legislator’s contact information asked members to call said legislator regarding a specific issue. For example, a Michigan Congressman’s office phone number was provided in an alert dated March 14, 2007, and members were asked to call the office to support a bill that would bring U.S. troops home from Iraq by the end of 2007. Other e-mails that contained localized information often contained intangible resource mobilization features that allowed members to RSVP for a meeting or party other MoveOn members were hosting in the area. Occasionally, action alerts asked members to host a meeting or party, the implication being that if one were to host a party, MoveOn would e-mail other members in the same geographic area with an invitation to the party, providing a networking opportunity.

As seen through the previous two examples, the ability to target specific geographic constituencies is a practical and efficient means to facilitate intangible (as well as tangible) resource mobilization. Research has shown that e-mail can provide geographically specific constituents with strategically manipulated information (Eveland & Bikson, 1988; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999), which, in turn, helps to maintain group cohesion and identity (Ducheneaut & Watts, 2005, p. 34). Action alerts with information on current issues, policies, or politicians specific to certain areas may be able to persuade the targeted groups to think and act cohesively around that issue, and to coordinate action (Queiro-Tajalli et al., 2003, p. 155).

In sum, what distinguishes action alerts from the campaign pages in terms of the potential efficacy of resource mobilization is that action alerts are sent directly to a member. Information regarding an issue, campaign, or other cause is brought to the
attention of an individual through an e-mail. Information provided through e-mail is more conveniently accessed than information presented on the campaign pages, which must be sought out on MoveOn’s Web site. Readers of action alerts are provided with opportunities to support the issues or campaigns presented in action alerts without having to do any research of their own. In other words, MoveOn makes it easier to get involved in progressive activism. Action alerts make participation, whether through a donation, signature, or phone call, simple and straightforward for members. All this considered, action alerts have added significantly to the methodological base of activist organizations.

Queiro-Tajalli et al. (2003) list issue research, information dissemination/awareness, coordination/organizing, and influence as the main processes in activist/advocacy organizations (p. 154). As evidenced in this and previous sections, action alerts accomplish all of these functions, often simultaneously. Action alerts have thus emerged as an ideal tool for activist group advocacy efforts.

**Identification Strategies and Resource Mobilization**

Overwhelmingly, efforts by MoveOn to mobilize tangible and intangible resources seem to be tied to *identification by antithesis*, lending credibility to the notion that *antithesis* is the most efficacious rhetorical identification strategy for activist organizations to engage in, both to foster identification and to mobilize resources. The supposition that there is a perceptible relationship between identification and resource mobilization is by no means groundbreaking. Tilly, writing in 1978, suggested that groups that share strong identifications are highly organized and, therefore, readily mobilized (p. 62). Jenkins (1983) has argued that activist group supporters “act in terms of internalized values and sentiments as well as calculations of self interest” (p. 538).
Jenkins (1983) therefore posited that the most significant task in resource mobilization is to "generate solidarity and moral commitments to the collectivities in whose name movements' act" (p. 538).

Although previous work has addressed the link between identification and resource mobilization, by no means is the actuality of the identification-mobilization relationship solidly established within the literature. Admittedly, the purpose of this inquiry was not to confirm such a relationship. However, the results of this investigation builds on previous thought concerning identification and resource mobilization by suggesting that antithesis may be the most efficient means of identification to reach the desired end of resource mobilization, if the relationship between rhetorical identification and resource mobilization actually exists.

Summary

Despite the small quantity of resource mobilize features found present on the main pages of MoveOn, there are several implications of interest that can be derived from the presence (or lack thereof) of said features. Resource mobilization features found in the main pages of MoveOn were generally intended to gain the personal contact information of Web site visitors. On the home page, Sign Up page, and Donation page, Web site visitors were encouraged to sign up as members, register with MoveOn's e-mail action alert services, and to contribute funds to the organization. If an individual takes the initial steps of either signing up or contributing funds to MoveOn as a whole, MoveOn is capable of contacting that individual with future resource mobilization efforts. Thus, new levels of resource mobilization tactics are made available to MoveOn once an individual takes the first steps of becoming involved with MoveOn. MoveOn's main page resource
mobilization tactics may only be the groundwork for more strategic and complicated uses of mobilization features.

Consider, for example, if a Web site visitor has taken the initiative to register with the action alert service. This individual is likely to be interested in the kind of issues which MoveOn advocates for or identified with the entity MoveOn itself. Similarly, an individual who seeks out information on MoveOn’s specific campaigns, three layers into the Web site, is also likely to be interested in or identified with MoveOn or the kind of campaigns MoveOn undertakes. Perhaps MoveOn’s efforts can be viewed as a kind of progressive model of resource mobilization: as investment (a.k.a. identification) with MoveOn (and thereby with the issues MoveOn advocates) increases, so too does the reliance of MoveOn on issues to mobilize resources. Jenkins’ (1983) supposition that identification is the first and most important goal of resource mobilization lends further credence to the proposed model.

Another finding of interest yielded from analysis is that MoveOn tends to segregate tangible and intangible mobilization features, employing one or the other on a particular page or in an action alert. Throughout the entirety of the Web site, MoveOn relies heavily on either tangible or intangible resource mobilization in the campaign pages, not often placing tangible and intangible mobilizing features side-by-side. However, in three campaign pages MoveOn asks members to sign a petition in support of the campaign, asks for a financial contribution, and also provides a “Tell Others” link so that visitors can spread the word regarding the campaign. The provision of three separate resource mobilization features allows for Web site visitors to take action in one, two, or three distinct ways; facilitating the potential for extensive resource mobilization around a
single campaign. As such, it is surprising that more of the pages on MoveOn.org that concern a specific campaign or issue do not include a variety of mobilization features.

A tenable assumption that can be derived from this part of the study is that action alerts are a better measure of and more effective at mobilizing organizational resources than any other part of an activist group Web site. The features to mobilize intangible and tangible resources in action alerts are directly tied to a specific issue, as opposed to the auspices of the general organization. Perhaps, MoveOn’s apparent propensity for linking resource mobilization to issues provides a new framework for looking at activist organizations and how they interact with publics. As part of an activist organization–public interaction, the organization must meet the informational needs of their publics to retain the public’s interest and support (Taylor et al., 2001). Taylor et al. (2001) found that activist organizations are effectively meeting the informational needs publics via their Web sites. Accordingly, the pairing of resource mobilization features along with issue information in action alerts satisfies the public’s need for information and provides a “rational” action to be taken based on that information. In effect, action alerts can be used to spoon-feed publics’ information constructed for the purpose of mobilizing resources.

In looking at the results of this investigation generally, it seems that relationship building via identification strategies and resource mobilization are essentially undertaken for the same purpose: to positively augment MoveOn’s ability to affect issues. In the next section, all of the results discussed heretofore are integrated and presented in terms of a catalytic issues management strategy.
Catalytic Issues Management

Perhaps a new way to study virtual activist organizations may be through the lens of activist group Web sites as catalytic issues management tools. Indeed, simply through a cursory examination of MoveOn’s Web site, it can be determined that MoveOn regularly engages in at least two effective issues management functions delineated by Bridges and Nelson (2000, p. 97). For one, MoveOn “establishes grassroots contact with potential cooperators (including the media)” (p. 97) via its Web site, action alerts, and press releases. It was determined in the course of this investigation that MoveOn establishes contacts with the media more through interpersonal interactions than press releases or other online communication tactics. Secondly, through its Web site, and in particular, action alerts, MoveOn communicates with publics about issues “identified as most important to the organization . . . to establish an agenda and build external support” (p. 97). The purpose underlying all issues management functions delineated by Bridges and Nelson (2000) is to abet an organization’s ability to manage issues, and MoveOn is no exception to this statement.

As seen in the action alerts, relationship building (whether through coactive or confrontational rhetoric) was mainly undertaken for the purpose of mobilizing organizational resources, both tangible and intangible. MoveOn was found to engage in dialogue with publics to generate sympathetic identification with the organization, further augmenting the possibility of an identified individual participating in resource mobilization efforts. Further, in a catalytic issues management approach, publics should also be viewed as resources that the organization depends on. Resource/membership dependent organizations like MoveOn must compete for resources with other like-minded
activist organizations, and will therefore attempt to foster identification from publics in order to insure continued fiscal and participatory support. The resource mobilization patterns displayed throughout MoveOn’s Internet presence indicates that as an individual’s connection to (and thereby identification with) the organization increases, so too does MoveOn’s efforts to solicit resources from that individual increase.

Resources and membership wealth are put to use for the purpose of achieving MoveOn’s goals: advancing progressive issues and candidates. Part of the responsibility of a public relations practitioner in executing a catalytic issues management program, as Crable and Vibbert (1985) suggest, is garnering media attention for the issues an organization advocates. One strategy in garnering media attention can be through the provision of information subsidies, however, MoveOn showed significantly greater representation in the media through interviews. The abundance with which MoveOn’s spokespeople were quoted in the mainstream media indicates that said spokespeople (representative of MoveOn as a whole) are viewed as legitimate and credible sources on relevant issues. Research has shown that legitimacy can be established through positive media relations, which, in turn, leads to media coverage. Media coverage distributes knowledge of MoveOn and its issues to wider publics, as well as helping to shape the debate around issues. The benefits of media publicity, therefore, are two fold. First, publicity can help to generate new publics for MoveOn, which helps MoveOn in its resource mobilization efforts. Second, publicity is tool to stimulate the agenda, helping MoveOn to carry out its goals. MoveOn appears to have great success in obtaining media coverage, and therefore influencing the agenda and shaping issues, via personal relationships with media personnel, suggesting that MoveOn is viewed as one of the
leading legitimate voices of progressive thought in the nation. MoveOn may have moved beyond the provision of information subsidies to representing the perspective of the progressively-minded political left.

Each public relations activity examined in this study (relationship building via identification, resource mobilization, and agenda stimulation) was undertaken for the purpose of advancing the organization’s ability to influence issues. MoveOn engaged in rhetorical relationship building with its publics via action alerts to help build consensus of opinion around issues. Once consensus of opinion around issues is achieved, MoveOn engages in resource mobilization to pursue the resolution of issues. Since there appears to be a strategic progression from relationship building, to resource mobilization, to agenda stimulation and issues management, none of the public relations functions studied in this thesis can be satisfactorily explained without reference to another. This apparent progression, in effect, comprises a catalytic issues management program.

Bridges and Nelson (2000) have suggested that the formation of active publics is possible through public relations activities, mainly through communication about issues. If the public relations practices examined herein can be considered a part of a comprehensive effective or catalytic issues management program, MoveOn is attempting to generate new publics, maintain relationships with current publics (including the media), while at the same time mobilizing resources all at the same time through communication on its Web site. No one public relations function can be truly separated from another, for they all play an integral role in MoveOn’s ability to catalytically influence issues, policies, and legislation.
In the next, and final, section of this thesis, I discuss the limitations of this study as well as offering suggestions about future avenues for research. The thesis concludes with some final thoughts regarding the implications this paper holds for research concerning virtual activist organizations, their public relations practices, and the potential the Internet holds for increasing the clout and issue-purview of activist groups.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A number of interesting and heuristically-rich conclusions have been drawn from this study. However, this inquiry, while quite thorough, is nonetheless limited by its focus on a single organization. With that said, this inquiry also attempted to analyze a range of public relations functions in great detail. In hindsight, perhaps the foci of this research were too broad in scale to yield any specific conclusions about how MoveOn engages in a particular function of public relations online. Additionally, little research has investigated the public relations activities of activist organizations in the form of case studies, most likely due to the fact that making generalizable conclusions about how activist organizations engage in specific functions of public relations can be problematic.

If more generalizable and tenable conclusions were to be made about online or virtual activist organization’s use of public relations techniques, several other activist organizations’ Web sites would have to be examined. Studies like Sen Das and Taylor (2006) have examined the general public relations capacity of activist group Web sites. However, more research into virtual activist organizations and their Web sites is required before inquiries like this thesis can fully claim to understand how specific functions of public relations can be carried out exclusively online. This study may help to extend thinking around virtual activist organization’s public relations activities, particularly given the extraordinary nature of the activist group studied.
There is no doubt that MoveOn is effective in mobilizing their publics to take action as evidenced by the many legislative and electoral successes in which MoveOn has participated. However, taken in the context of the relationship between identification and motivation, the results of the study offer little substantive information and are heuristically limited in terms of determining the motivational efficacy of identification strategies in action alerts. Identifications are a key rhetorical device, but determining how and if identifications actually work in efforts to motivate individuals to action is problematic. Yet, perhaps a more practical and insightful way to discern and discuss the public relations capacity that action alerts and identifications hold would be through analyzing the ability of action alerts to mobilize resources. From this analysis, I derive that rhetorical identifications, particularly in the context of action alerts, may be every bit as much a function of strategic resource mobilization as relationship building tools.

From the conclusions drawn from this thesis, an area in which there is great potential for further development is the possible relationship that exists between resource mobilization and identification. Direct connections must be drawn from an individual’s feelings of identification with an organization, and the likelihood of contributing resources, whether civil or pecuniary. Further, attempts could be made at measuring the efficacy of individual identification strategies in mobilizing resources. Another interesting finding of this investigation is that MoveOn prefers to engage in agenda stimulation via interpersonal contacts with reporters rather than press releases. A question of interest, then, is how and when do activist organizations become so “legitimate” that the provision of information subsidies is no longer necessary. The notion that well-established and legitimate activist organizations are better off when they have positive
relationships with the media has significant implications for the understanding of activist group public relations theory and practice. If this supposition has any merit, what needs to be determined is how and when activist organizations move beyond the need to provide information subsidies such as press releases.

Conclusion

If there is one lasting conclusion that can be drawn from this investigation, it is that the Internet has afforded MoveOn.org the opportunity to evolve far beyond the limits of characteristics traditionally assigned to activist groups by public relations scholars. Though it began as a single issue organization (urging Congress to move on from the Clinton-Lewinsky sex scandal), since the year 2000, MoveOn has not been a “traditional” activist organization at all, given the wide range of issues for which MoveOn advocates. In a matter of seven years, MoveOn has, arguably, positioned itself as the organizational personification of the political left. MoveOn no longer engages in coalition-building via its Web site; MoveOn.org is, in a sense, a coalition of liberal-minded interest groups in and of itself. As such, it has little need or incentive for referencing other issue-oriented groups. MoveOn houses a myriad of political and civil issues under one roof, making its Web site a “one-stop shop,” if you will, for information on and participation in progressive causes. MoveOn has evolved into a panoptic activist organization, advocating for a progressive credo and fighting the specter of conservatism.

This investigation has offered several conclusions on the manner in which a panoptical activist organization engages in several common functions of public relations. Resultant from this inquiry, it can tenuously be concluded that in this kind of activist group, one that exists wholly online, a Web site serves as a comprehensive catalytic
issues management tool. The construction and content of the Web site are oriented around positively augmenting the organization’s ability to affect issues. First, relationships can be built and maintained through information provision. Information provided on the Web site or through e-mail can be constructed to include identifications that inspire connection to the organization and its ideals, or to heighten dissociation with organizational adversaries. Such information and the identifications therein can be used to help mobilize organizational resources; resources that are used in the effort to achieve organizational goals. While non-virtual activist organizations have the capacity to build relationships and mobilize resources, the Internet provides a forum in which to do both simultaneously, and with much greater speed and cost-efficiency than other methods. Indeed, MoveOn is consummate in forms of online relationship building and resource mobilization, and in engaging in many traditional activist activities online. As Hazen (2003) writes of MoveOn’s mastery over the Internet, “MoveOn’s most dramatic achievement was to turn its Internet machine . . . into the kind of activities that make politicians in this country sit up and take notice” (p. 2). Thus, largely due to its facility with Internet technologies, MoveOn has become a political behemoth.

Further, in a panoptic activist organization, there appears to be a move from the provision—originally—of information subsidies to the media, to offering “perspective” through interpersonal media contacts. Whether or not Internet technologies have facilitated MoveOn’s progression from the posting of press releases to personal interactions with media, it cannot be argued that MoveOn’s presence in mainstream media is considerable. MoveOn appears to no longer engage in one-way communication and information subsidization with the media; instead, MoveOn spokespeople are the
perspective of the organization. Often, the views and opinions of MoveOn and its staff are treated by the media as one of the only representatives of liberalism in the nation. What the Internet has contributed to MoveOn’s significant media presence, however, is the ability to advocate for a broad range of issues. The Internet has facilitated MoveOn’s advancement into a panoptic activist organization, which has, in turn, abetted MoveOn’s stature as a major political player, and a leading voice of the left.

Public relations scholarship has yet to provide any real insight into the kind of panoptic or universal activist group phenomena MoveOn demonstrates. No such phenomena existed before the advent of the Internet, and the success of MoveOn is inexorably tied to the Internet and its ancillary technologies. Public relations scholarship has, in recent years, begun to understand the capacity Internet technologies hold for the practice of public relations. Additionally, the literature has only just begun to move on from perceptions that view activism as a corporate public relations-liability to those which see activists as genuine and democratically responsible organizations that are capable of public relations practice. The study of public relations, the Internet, and activism have rarely converged, and activist organizations the likes of MoveOn.org have not been considered at all. This inquiry extends previous literature on activism and public relations in explicating some of the public relations activities of a new form of activist organization: one that is completely virtual, and far more complex and broad in scale than the literature has previously held possible for an activist group. Given that the Internet has made an activist organization like MoveOn possible, public relations scholarship should move to further understand the Internet’s potential for transforming activism from
a small-scale operation into a large, influential and resource-rich public relations machine.
### Table 1

**Identification Strategies in MoveOn's Action Alerts**

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<th>Ant</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Una</th>
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Totals: 15 18 28 48 19 22

\(^a\) 1 = presence of strategy, 0 = absence of strategy. \(^b\) Number of unique times strategy appeared.
Table 2

*Articles Containing Information from MoveOn’s Press Releases*

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<th>Source</th>
<th>Date of MoveOn’s Release</th>
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<th>Partial(^a)</th>
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Totals: 4 7 6

\(^a\)Numbers of types of quotes respective to column.
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*Resource Mobilization Features on the Main Pages of MoveOn.org*

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<th>Campaigns</th>
<th>Success Stories</th>
<th>Donate</th>
<th>Sign Up</th>
<th>About</th>
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*Note.* 1 = presence of mobilization feature, 0 = absence of mobilization feature.

* Features taken from Sen Das and Taylor (2006) that were not present on the main pages of MoveOn.org are excluded from this table.
Table 4

*Resource Mobilization Features in the Campaign Pages of MoveOn.org*a

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Total: 37

*Note:* Features taken from Sen Das and Taylor (2006) that were not present on the campaign pages of MoveOn.org are excluded from this table.

*a* 1 = presence of mobilization feature, 0 = absence of mobilization feature.
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Appendix A

Example of a MoveOn.org Action Alert

MSN Hotmail - Message

From: Noah T. Winer, MoveOn.org Civic Action <moveon-help@list.moveon.org>
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2007 1:57 PM
To: <moveon-help@list.moveon.org>
Subject: It's time to take on Fox!

Dear MoveOn member,

The Democratic Party of Nevada just announced plans to let Fox News host a presidential primary debate. But Fox isn't a legitimate news channel. It's a right-wing mouthpiece like Rush Limbaugh and the Drudge Report—repeating false Republican talking points to smear Democrats.

Fox has already tried to skew the '08 race by accusing Senator Barack Obama of attending a terrorist school. CNN immediately exposed the charge as false, and Obama hit back by refusing to appear on Fox—sending them scrambling. Democrats can force Fox to be fair and balanced by fighting back hard.

Can you sign this petition asking the Democratic Party of Nevada to drop Fox as its partner for the presidential primary debate?

[Clicking here will add your name:]

"Fox is a mouthpiece for the Republican Party, not a legitimate news channel. The Democratic Party of Nevada should drop Fox as its partner for the presidential primary debate."

Clicking here will add your name to the petition:
http://civic.moveon.org/foxdebate/o.pl?id=9923-7652344-e09Z&t=3

It's very important to also invite our friends to sign this petition. If ever there was a battle where we could beat Fox, this is it—since Democrats will make the ultimate decision, not Fox executives. But to be convinced, Democratic leaders need to see a growing public backlash.

We'll deliver the petition signatures to the Democratic Party of Nevada and let petition signers know what next steps they can take to make a difference.

When you click the petition link, you'll see a great new YouTube video from filmmaker Robert Greenwald called "Fox Attacks: Obama." It exposes Fox's numerous attacks on Senator Obama—saying he attended a terrorist school, belittling his race, and implying that his name sounds like that of a terrorist.

Fox has also spread false smears about Hillary Clinton this year. Plus, when Democrats trusted Fox to host a presidential debate in 2003, Fox undermined Democrats with on-screen headlines like "Democratic Candidates Offer Grim View of America."

We can fight back. The Washington Post reported that "the Obama camp has 'frozen out' Fox News reporters and producers in the wake of the network's major screw-up in running with the erroneous Obama-the-jihadist story." "I'm still in the freezer," one Fox journalist said." Fox News CEO Roger Ailes has personally called Obama twice to smooth relations.

As the 2008 cycle begins, we need to show Fox there will be serious repercussions for being part of right-wing smear jobs—and we need to show voters they cannot trust Fox for news.
Can you sign this petition asking the Democratic Party of Nevada not to partner with Fox for a presidential primary debate?

The full text of the petition is: "Fox is a mouthpiece for the Republican Party, not a legitimate news channel. The Democratic Party of Nevada should drop Fox as its partner for the presidential primary debate."

Clicking here will add your name to the petition: http://civic.moveon.org/foxdebate/o.pl?id=9923-7652344-.eD9Z&t=4

Thank you for all you do.

~Noah, Adam G., Marika, Wes, and the MoveOn.org Civic Action Team

Thursday, February 22nd, 2007

Sources:

   http://www.moveon.org/?r=2374&ad=9923-7652344-.eD9Z&t=5

2. "CNN Debunks False Obama 'Madrassa' Smear," ThinkProgress.org, January 22, 2007
   http://thinkprogress.org/2007/01/22/cnn-obama-debunk/

   http://www.moveon.org/?r=2378&ad=9923-7652344-.eD9Z&t=6

   http://mediamatters.org/items/200702160001

"Right-wing media figures claim Clinton behind Obama-Muslim smears." Media Matters, January 19, 2007
http://mediamatters.org/items/200701200003

5. "Nevada Dems getting outfoxed?" Lasvegasgleaner.com, February 20, 2007
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Appendix B

Identification Strategy Protocol

Coding Protocol

*Identification by Sympathy.* Sympathy implies an associational process wherein a rhetor presents him or herself as alike the audience, sharing their interests, values, and concerns. Burke (1973) likens *sympathy* to mere persuasion, and writes that utilizing *sympathy* as an identification strategy is “merely a way to establish rapport by the stressing of sympathies held in common” (p. 268). Instances of this strategy should be coded as such when the organization links itself to publics in an overt manner. In the use of *sympathy*, an audience is directly told (or it is suggested) that the organization shares the values, goals and belief systems of their publics.

*Identification by Antithesis.* Identification by antithesis involves a rhetor calling for unification against some common adversary. This form of identification suggests that dissociation with some individuals, groups, or organization indirectly establishes association with others. The strategy functions by attempting to establish an “us vs. them” mentality, pointing out the differences between the rhetor and a rival. Instances of this strategy should be coded as such when the organization identifies an enemy, the threat it poses, and/or calls for unification against it. This enemy may be outsiders (i.e. organizational non-members) who hold disparate views, or agents perceived to be adversarial of or a threat to the rhetor.

*Identification by Unawareness.* Identification by unawareness is an illusory kind of identification, “whereby an individual who may be personally modest and unassuming becomes deceptively aggrandized by thoughts of his citizenship in a powerful nation”
Unawareness may therefore be thought of as a kind of perceived personal attachment to the “idea” of an organization or ideology, however abstract. Given that, Burke comments that unawareness can easily be mistaken for sympathy. Burke (1973) distinguishes unawareness from sympathy through the same aforementioned allegory, writing that:

... only too often, such identification [unawareness] is but the failure to distinguish between one’s country and the decisions of certain politicians who . . . get the nation into foreign embarrassments . . . Look more closely, and you will see that the embarrassment is not really the nation’s but that of certain officials whose interests are not necessarily identical with the nation’s interests. (p. 270)

In other words, identification by unawareness is a kind of inherent or unknown identification that an individual may share with an organization, entity, cause, or ideal; though there may be no direct connection or relationship between said individual and the object or concept with which he or she identifies.

In the most succinct and simplest of terms, Burke (1973) explains that identification by unawareness can be achieved through the use of the pronoun “we” or synonyms thereof. Identification by unawareness points to the uniting processes of association and disassociation, where dissimilar people with disparate interests are brought together under an assumed or transcendent “we” (Cheney, 1983, p. 148). Organizations may attempt to foster identification in this fashion by referring to all members of the organization as implicitly sharing the same values, opinions, and beliefs.
Appendix C

Action Alert Coding Sheet

Coder’s Name: ___________________________ Date: __________

Action Alert Identification Strategies

Subject of Action Alert: ____________________________________________

Date Sent: _______ Sender: ________________________________

Action Desired: _________________________________________________

Identification Strategies:
1. Common Ground:
   a. How many times utilized: ______

2. Antithesis
   a. How many times utilized: ______

3. Assumed ‘We”
   a. How many times utilized: ______

Code examples of “Common Ground” with pink highlighter.

Code examples of “Antithesis” with yellow highlighter.

Code examples of “Assumed We” with orange highlighter.

Staple the corresponding action alert to the back of this sheet.
Appendix D

Mobilization Features Coding Sheet

Coder’s Name: ___________________________ Date: __________

Web site Resource Mobilization Features

Name of Web page: ___________________________
  Home page
  Campaigns
  Success Stories
  Donate
  Sign Up
  About

Campaign Name (if applicable): ___________________________

Tangible Resource Mobilization Features

  4. Make a donation ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  5. Participate in fundraising ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  6. Become a corporate sponsor ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  7. Shop at the on-line store ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  8. Other ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  9. Other ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  10. Other ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

  11. Other ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
     a. Describe Feature: ___________________________

      Total: ___

Intangible Resource Mobilization Features
12. Become a member  
   a. Describe Feature: 
13. Sign up to receive e-mail updates  
   a. Describe Feature: 
14. Sign up to receive a newsletter  
   a. Describe Feature: 
15. Message boards or chat rooms  
   a. Describe Feature: 
16. Volunteering opportunities  
   a. Describe Feature: 
17. Tell a friend (help spread the word about us)  
   a. Describe Feature: 
18. Action alerts (e.g., legislative alerts)  
   a. Describe Feature: 
19. Contact representative/government/organization  
   a. Describe Feature: 
20. Benefits to members (e.g., legal services, support)  
   a. Describe Feature: 
21. Other  
   a. Describe Feature: 
22. Other  
   a. Describe Feature: 
23. Other  
   a. Describe Feature: 
24. Other  
   a. Describe Feature: 

Coalition-Building Features: 
1. Reference to affiliate organizations  
   a. How many times: 
2. Reference to other similar issue-advocacy groups  
   a.  

Total: ___
3. Out-links to other similar issue-advocacy groups ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
   a. How many times: ______
4. “Link to us” option ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
   a. How many times: ______
5. Guides/resources for advocates (“how to” info.) ______ (0=no / 1=yes)
   Total: ______

   Total: ______