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The Outsiders: Understanding How Activists Use Issues Management to Challenge Corporate Behavior

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THE OUTSIDERS: UNDERSTANDING HOW ACTIVISTS USE ISSUES MANAGEMENT TO CHALLENGE CORPORATE BEHAVIOR

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Communication and Information at the University of Kentucky

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2017

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE OUTSIDERS: UNDERSTANDING HOW ACTIVISTS USE ISSUES MANAGEMENT TO CHALLENGE CORPORATE BEHAVIOR

Increasingly, corporations receive pressure from activist organizations to alter activities that these individuals find problematic and irresponsible. Despite this escalation, research on activism from a public relations perspective progressed slowly; much of this literature privileges the perspective of corporations and rarely examines the process from the activist perspective. To address this gap, this dissertation examined how activist organizations use issues management and communication strategies to incite corporations to change their practices and policies while simultaneously building relationships with pertinent audiences. This study incorporated data collected from qualitative interviews with activist practitioners representing a variety of activist organizations, along with organizational texts and news articles. These data provided an understanding of how activist organizations campaign against corporations using a variety of strategies and tactics in an effort to pressure corporations into changing their behavior.

Because this dissertation focused on how activist organizations generate and promote issues to gain the attention of their targets, issues management served as the theoretical framework. Guided by this theory and existing issues management models, this dissertation demonstrates how activist groups identify and establish legitimacy for their issue(s). As issues management is traditionally studied from a corporate perspective, the findings show that the process differs slightly for activist organizations and introduces the Issue Advancement Model to demonstrate how activists employ issues management. Additionally, this dissertation explored how activist groups develop relationships with their targets, supporters, communities, and other relevant publics, noting the nuances involved in each of these dynamics. Specifically, this dissertation supports claims that the dialogue approach is more appropriate for understanding and analyzing the corporation-activist relationship than other public relations models, but also notes that some activist organizations may not seek resolution. In addition to these theoretical findings, this dissertation also offers practical implications, introducing the Corporate Campaign Model, which depicts how activist organizations challenge firms while also offering suggestions for corporations targeted by these groups.
THE OUTSIDERS: UNDERSTANDING HOW ACTIVISTS USE ISSUES MANAGEMENT TO CHALLENGE CORPORATE BEHAVIOR

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May 19, 2017
To my Grandpa, who taught me not to take everything too seriously and bragged about me to everyone he knew (and people who he didn’t know). Thanks for being my number one fan. And to my Great Granny, for your thirst for life and adventurous spirit that continue to inspire all of us. I look forward to seeing you both one day.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Increasingly, corporations and other entities are challenged by citizens and organized coalitions who seek to incite change, often because they perceive the target as acting irresponsible (Soule, 2009). John and Thomson (2003) contended “capitalism and corporations are under more pressure now than at any time since the Great Depression” (p. 1). This rise in activist activities gradually caught the attention of corporate management and scholars. Over two decades ago, activism was called “one of the most important domains of public relations research” (Anderson, 1992, p. 151). Yet, academic research on activism progressed slowly (Jaques, 2013), particularly within public relations, where the “perspective that activism is a legitimate public relations practice” has yet to be “fully embraced” by scholars and practitioners (Smith & Ferguson, 2010, p. 405). As a result, much of the research on activism in public relations spawned from “the perspective of organizations with pockets deep enough to hire professional public relations practitioners” to ward off activists (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, p. 8). While some public relations scholars perceive activism as a form of public relations used by groups seeking to incite change (Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Smith & Ferguson, 2001), others position it as a “growing problem for organizations” (Werder, 2006, p. 342) that must be “dealt with in the right manner” (Deegan, 2001, p. 2).

Activism is a “process by which groups of people exert pressure on corporations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions the activists find problematic” (Smith, 2005, p. 5). Like the corporations they frequently challenge, activist groups organize to persuade publics rather than yielding actual power in and of themselves (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Through this process,
activists and their opponents engage in a “contest over social reality” (Heath, 1990, p. 36) in which the objective is to “define and claim the moral high ground” (Manheim, 2001, p. xiv). Often referred to by various terms such as issue groups, grassroots organizations, or social movement organizations (Smith, 1997), activists are generally nonprofit or nongovernmental agencies that use strategic communication for two primary purposes (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). First, these groups seek to address the issues through three goals: promoting or resisting change on behalf of a target company or industry, invoking public policy or regulatory changes, or altering social norms (L. A. Grunig, 1992; Smith, 1997). Many groups pursue all three goals (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). To achieve the desired outcome, activists must position their issue(s) as important, demonstrate that they are capable of managing the issue, and offer a viable solution (Coombs, 1992). In doing so, activists can promote their issue(s) into the public policy arena, where they gain salience and the attention of the target firm’s leadership (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Second, activists must maintain the organization established to pursue their purposes, meaning they must secure ongoing support for the organization’s goals in the form of supporters, volunteers, and various resources (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Defined broadly, resources include anything an organization needs to survive (Jenkins, 1983). As Heath and Palenchar (2009) noted, “activists do not exist long on fire and brimstone alone” (p. 180) but depend on resources and mobilization (Sommerfeldt, 2013). Activists utilize various resources, including money, facilities, and publicity, and rely on issue salience and monetary donations to remain visible (Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012). Like other organizations, these groups must also adjust to changes in their environment, appeal to new publics to remain viable, and compete for resources against comparable
groups addressing similar issues and pursuing the same publics (Smith & Ferguson, 2001; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001).

Examining activism from a primarily corporate perspective results in a research agenda favoring the status quo (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000). Coombs and Holladay (2012) emphasized the need to move beyond a corporate-centric perspective of U. S. public relations, arguing that the contributions of activists to the field are overlooked. While literature has evolved from perceiving activists as a nuisance to the corporation to positioning their activity as a form of public relations (Sommerfeldt, 2013), research on these organizations and their “unique communication and relationship building needs” is limited (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 264). Activists often differ from corporations in that they must negotiate “their dual role as public and public communicator” (Aldoory & Sha, 2007, p. 352). These groups operate as a public in communicating with the target firm while simultaneously working as a public communicator when interacting with their own publics. Further, activists often differ from traditional public relations practitioners because they are dedicated to promoting a cause rather than an organization and often rely on unconventional tactics to achieve their goals (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002).

Campaigns targeting corporations and their reputations have become increasingly prevalent since the 1960s as activists seek to influence corporate behavior by holding corporations and other entities to higher standards of social performance (Coombs, 1998). The challengers have also become more diverse (Manheim, 2001), representing various issues ranging from the abolition of genetically modified foods to the right to life. What these groups have in common, however, is their mission to identify a problem, unite to do
something about it, and doggedly pursue the issue through a variety of strategies and
tactics (Deegan, 2001).

Manheim (2001) referred to the targeting of corporations by activist groups as
“corporate campaigns,” and explains “every well-conceived corporate campaign will
probe for a potential weakness in the target company and then systematically exploit that
weakness until the benefit of doing so declines” (p. 85). What is lacking, however, is an
examination of how these groups probe for these weaknesses and then design strategies,
allocate resources, and implement tactics to exploit these weaknesses. Furthermore,
Reber and Kim (2006) pointed out that in “a rapidly changing media environment,
activist tactics may be evolving” (p. 313). Previous research shows that the Internet is
promising for activists in mobilizing, dialoguing, and pressuring their targets (e.g., Heath,
research is needed to better understand how activists gain visibility and legitimize their
actions via new communication technologies, such as social media (Adi, 2015).

Few studies have examined the tactics used to maintain activist organizations,
including keeping members informed about and invested in the organization’s issues
(Smith & Ferguson, 2001). The research that does exist shows mixed understandings
about how activists perceive and use the media as part of their strategies. For instance, L.
A. Grunig (1992) asserted activists rely on media coverage to promote issues whereas
Ryan, Carragee, and Schwerner (1998) reported that activists are often reluctant to rely
on the media to disseminate their messages. Thus, more research is needed to “test
assumptions about activists and their tactics” (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 299).
Although activists may challenge a variety of entities, including government, they often target well-known corporations because of their prominence in Western society (John & Thomson, 2003). The following sections provide a brief history and overview of anti-corporate activism in the United States. Then, the formation of activist groups and their use of resources, strategies, and tactics are outlined. Finally, this chapter concludes by outlining the theoretical questions that can help us understand how activist groups form, mobilize, and challenge corporations, industries, and society to achieve their goals.

The History of Anti-Corporate Movements

Individuals have long distrusted corporations in the United States, leading to anti-corporate activism (Soule, 2009). Activists’ ongoing activities to challenge corporations prompted the growth of public relations departments (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). In the late 1800s, organizational leaders gradually recognized the utility of shaping public opinion to their benefit; as a result, both corporations and activists adopted public relations strategies. This section outlines key events in which disgruntled individuals and groups pressured corporations, leading to modern day activism, beginning with one of the earliest anti-corporate campaigns led by Amos Kendall.

The Bank War. In 1829, Andrew Jackson was elected President of the United States. His election ushered in an era of “Jacksonian Democracy,” which focused on the “common man,” laissez faire, and Manifest Destiny (Meacham, 2008). Jackson opposed the existence of the Bank of the United States, which was designed as a private corporation with public duties and handled all fiscal transactions for the federal government, which he believed favored financial elites at the cost of the lower-class (Remini, 1967). To assist in the demolition of the financial institution, Jackson enlisted
the help of Amos Kendall, who would become a member of the President’s “kitchen cabinet,” an unofficial group of advisors and policy makers (Meacham, 2008). Kendall served as Jackson’s publicist and chief advisor for his two terms, polishing Jackson’s rough persona, crafting strategy, and coordinating communication efforts among the three branches of government, making him the first White House secretary.

Kendall developed his strategic communication skills while working as the editor of the *Western Argus of Kentucky*, a Frankfort, Kentucky newspaper. During his tenure, Kendall became involved in the Kentucky Relief War of the 1820s when indebted Kentucky citizens pressed the state legislation to make it easier for them to pay off their debts (Hardin, 1966). His experience in public polling and shaping public opinion, along with his distaste for the Bank of the United States, would serve him well as Jackson’s aide during the Bank War. Following Jackson’s re-election in 1832, Kendall embarked on a fact-finding mission in major cities, identifying banks that were willing to take the government’s money and were also loyal Jacksonians (Cuttip, 1994).

Lasting for three years, The Bank War was a key event in the development of anti-corporate movements and public relations as both Jackson and the Bank’s president Nicholas Biddle fought to influence public opinion using every communication channel available (Cuttip, 1994). Jackson had Kendall at his side and Biddle hired a publicist to direct the Bank’s propaganda campaign, likely the first publicist to be employed by a bank or business. Hammond (1957) noted that Jackson’s team was “unconventional and skillful in their politics” (p. 329), emphasizing the Bank’s interference with states’ rights and claiming the bank impeded business. Kendall also relied on the support of antagonistic groups, uniting individuals from the financial elites to the rugged
frontiersmen to support the cause (Schlesinger, 1945). Kendall also introduced the “news leak” strategy when Jackson decided to attack the Bank in his first Congressional address; Kendall’s letter outlining Jackson’s address to the New York *Courier and Enquirer* was published as an editorial (Bowers, 1922). As a former newspaper editor, Kendall embraced media relations, sending friendly letters to editors nationwide to prepare them and their readers for the unavoidable Bank War.

To counter Jackson’s attempts, Biddle launched an unprecedented publicity campaign, spending large amounts of money on pamphlets, press releases, Congressional reports, and other media to win over the public (Remini, 1987). Biddle’s publicists also enlisted Tennessee Congressman Davy Crockett to appeal to Jackson’s base support group. According to Cutlip (1994), banks were likely the first businesses to use the press to sway public opinion. Although the Bank ultimately folded, this event not only shaped public relations within the White House, but also illustrates the implementation of early strategic communication efforts by a corporation and its critics to establish issue legitimacy and influence public opinion.

**“The public be damned” years.** Near the end of the nineteenth century, “contemporary public relations, as a practice and as a management concept, was to emerge out of the melee of opposing forces” (Cutlip, 1994, p. 187). During this time, the United States underwent seismic growth, spurred by the development of industry, railroad, and utilities, along with an influx of immigration. Coupled together, the upsurge of monopolies and availability of workers led to an exploitation of human labor which gave rise to corporate public relations and organized labor unions, laying the foundation for modern-day activism.
Industrialization produced great wealth and influence for prominent businessmen known as the “robber barons”, whose power often went unchecked by competitors or the federal government and lead to the establishment of monopolies (Weinberg, 2008). In 1882, William Henry Vanderbilt, son of prominent businessman Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and his successor as the head of the New York Central Railroad, was attributed with uttering the phrase “the public be damned” during an interview (Watson, 1936). Though Vanderbilt later denied saying the words, the expression captured the attitude of the industrialists and financiers of the time who developed contemptuous attitudes toward the media, employees, and other publics.

At the time, corporate executives subscribed to the belief that “the less the public knew of its operations, the more efficient and profitable – and even the more socially useful – operations would be” (Goldman, 1966, p. 4). Eventually, public consent would become increasingly important in policy making (Jones & Chase, 1979) and by the 1890s, a few corporations became more aware of their need to respond to critics to diminish the anti-industry protests and bolster public perceptions (Curti, 1982). As a result, organizations began relying on public relations not only as a form of publicity to boost profits, but also as an early form of issues management.

The Standard Oil Company, owned by prominent robber baron John D. Rockefeller Sr., illustrates the rise of public relations and organizational critics as the monopoly “came to stand before the bar of public opinion as the epitome of the evils of Big Business” (Hidy & Hidy, 1955, p. 201). Like other industry giants of the time, the Rockefellers ignored critics, provided no information about their practices, and were largely apathetic to the plights of their employees as they gained control of the petroleum
industry (Cutlip, 1994). As criticism escalated, Standard Oil and other companies gradually began to engage in attempts to shape public opinion, including paid advertising, as a way to influence policy decisions. Many of Standard Oil Company’s efforts to placate publics were less obvious; during the 1880s, Standard officials maintained financial ties with newspapers (Cutlip, 1994). Evidence suggests that the company controlled, via subsidy, the Oil City, Pennsylvania newspaper *Derrick*, which supported the company’s activities. A more frequent tactic used by Standard Oil was the use of paid but unlabeled articles inserted in newspapers (Hidy & Hidy, 1995). Toward the end of the decade, Standard Oil began to soften on its secretive practices as managers adjusted their public relations practices, giving out limited information and cooperating in industry movements. The muckrakers were a driving factor in this adjustment.

*Ida Tarbell and the muckrakers.* As big corporations grew even bigger, critics called for reform, including governmental checks on power (Weinberg, 2008). And so, the early twentieth century saw the rise of the muckrakers, journalists who exposed the actions of the corporations and criticized irresponsible practices. The muckrakers reflected the larger Progressive social movement, to provoke positive social change through influencing opinion leaders while also exposing social issues and gaining support for their cause (Cutlip, 1994). These individuals served as the “impetus for modern public relations” by forcing corporations to hire public relations practitioners to represent their interests in the court of public opinion (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 77). Prominent muckrakers include Upton Sinclair, whose book *The Jungle* exposed the unsanitary conditions and exploitation of workers in the meatpacking industry and spawned legislative reform, and Ida Tarbell.
Ida Tarbell built her reputation as a prominent biographer (Weinberg, 2008). *McClure’s Magazine* employed Tarbell to write a series on the Standard Oil Company. Using public records, including court documents, and comments from Standard Oil, she crafted a 19-part series titled “The History of Standard Oil” (Tarbell, 2009). The work illustrated the company’s illegal practices, including bribery, fraud, and violence and spurred widespread criticism of Rockefeller and his company’s practices (Weinberg, 2008). Standard Oil responded by having journalists negatively review Tarbell’s series and distributing pamphlets outlining Standard Oil’s perspective to teachers, preachers, journalists, and other influential community leaders. The company also subsidized books and universities to portray a positive image of JDR Sr. before the government ordered the company be broken up in 1911 (Hidy & Hidy, 1955). Big Business policies and reputations were not only challenged in print media, but also directly defied by employees who resented the long working hours and often unsafe working conditions. This displeasure led to open demonstrations of opposition.

**The Ludlow Massacre.** The Rockefellers’ public perception problems did not perish with the Standard Oil Company but escalated with the bloody Colorado coal strike of 1913-1914. In 1913, the United Mine Workers began organizing the eleven thousand coal miners employed by Rockefeller’s Colorado Fuel & Iron Company who were unhappy about the low pay, long hours, and corrupt management (Martelle, 2007). That August, the union invited company representatives to meet and discuss these grievances, many of which were required by Colorado law but unenforced. Management rejected the invitation, and the following month eight thousand mine workers went on strike. Evicted from their company-owned homes, the miners set up tents near the mines. In response,
the Rockefellers hired an agency of “Texas desperadoes and thugs” who would raid the
camps (Gitelman, 1988, p. 3). In November, the Colorado National Guard arrived, per the
company’s request, and formed militias who would also conduct raids. The strike
continued for months and on April 20, 1914, the Colorado National Guard and armed
coal miners waged battle, initiating ten days of violent riots, resulting in the death of at
least sixty-six miners, their wives, and children (Martelle, 2007).

The Ludlow Massacre quickly became national news and “to many Americans,
the massacre exposed the consequences of unchecked corporate might,” rousing the
corporate labor movement (Mauk, 2014, para. 7). The union blamed company
management, claiming the company could have avoided bloodshed by entering into
negotiations, and initiated a publicly campaign to generate nationwide support. Like his
father in the case of Standard Oil, John D. Rockefeller Jr. was quickly vilified; in
response, he called on Ivy Lee, an ex-reporter turned publicist (Hallahan, 2002).

Lee created a name for himself by representing the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1906
after an accident occurred on the main line. Relying heavily on media relations, Lee set
out to change public perception that railroads were heartless; he invited reporters to the
scene and supplied information (Ross, 1959). Lee was then hired by George F. Baer to
represent the Coal Operators’ Committee of Seven in a coal strike (Olasky, 1987). By
being open and accessible to the media, the public could easily follow the story, and Baer
gained favorable press coverage. Because of Lee’s roles in these efforts and recognizing
the need to take action, JDR Jr. retained Lee to guide the public relations efforts
(Hallahan, 2002). To overpower strikers’ messages, Lee wrote newspaper articles, used
photos of JDR Jr. dancing with miners’ wives, and developed promotional materials,
including bulletins to shift public opinion in favor of the Rockefellers (Raucher, 1968). Lee also encouraged JDR Jr. to meet with miners and their families and listen to employees’ grievances to demonstrate remorse and empathy (Hallahan, 2002). As a result of his involvement in a variety of events, Lee would go on to become one of the prominent historical figures in public relations.

Heath and Palenchar (2009) argued that “despite the widely accepted view that large corporations dominated society at the turn of the century, activist groups played a major role in the first quarter of the 20th century” (p. 67). Over the course of a century, leaders such as Amos Kendall and Ida Tarbell used various strategies and tactics to force corporations to examine their policies, or at the very least, defend themselves against criticism levied against them. This call for corporate reform led to the establishment of public relations and labor unions. Labor unions would remain a fixture of U.S. history until the 1950s when they began losing members and influence (Manheim, 2001). This decline provided an opening for anti-corporate campaigns, which became increasingly popular as individuals and organized groups pushed corporations to alter their behavior.

The “great era of reform”. Anti-corporate activism gained prominence in the 1960s as a result of larger environmental forces described by Soule (2009). First, over the course of the twentieth century, corporations became larger and more powerful because of economic factors, such as mergers and acquisitions. This concentration of economic influence permitted the largest corporations to control more assets than they once did, limiting consumers’ alternatives. Second, these corporations often obtained influence within the American political process, such as campaign contributions and lobbying. Additionally, companies gained leverage using the “revolving door” between corporate
executives and public regulatory positions as individuals in government often have ties to
the private sector (Danaher & Mark, 2003). Third, labor unions declined in the 1950s
(Manheim, 2001); this trend became more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s. These
changes created “the perfect storm in the eyes of critics of corporations” (Soule, 2009, p. 7) and altered the way activists challenged corporations. Instead of pressuring
corporations through government regulation and labor unions, activists now had to target
the corporations directly (Vogel, 1978).

As part of the new direct challenge approach, activists adopted corporate
communication strategies to generate hostility against the private sector (Heath, 2002). Activists at that time were setting public policy agenda by promoting their issue and
establishing legitimacy for it, prompting managerial responses as these groups sought
new laws and regulations to increase corporate social responsibility standards during the
“great era of reform” (Heath & Cousino, 1990, p. 7; Jones and Chase, 1979). Chase
(1976) introduced the concept of “issues management,” a scientific approach for
corporate communication managers to identify and respond to criticism in an attempt to
resolve any issues to the benefit of the corporation. Issues management advocated for
corporations to be engaged in the creation of public policy rather than reacting to it
(Jones & Chase, 1979; Crable & Vibbert, 1985).

Larger social movements also played a role in the rise of activism. In the 1960s,
as the war waged in Vietnam and Civil Rights became a primary area of concern, many
institutions, including corporations, were scrutinized (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Emerging social movements focused on issues such as the environment, civil rights,
women’s rights, and employment practices. Consumer organizations, such as the
Consumer Federation of America, also emerged to support consumer rights (Soule, 2009). For example, in 1965, Ralph Nader published *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile*, a critique of safety standards in the automobile industry focusing on the Chevrolet Corvair. The book would heavily impact government regulation over the industry and turned Nader into a household name, especially after General Motors admitted to hiring a private investigator to follow Nader (De Leon, 1994). By the end of the 1960s, he launched a nationwide consumer movement known as Nader’s Raiders and established the Center for Study of Responsive Law.

**Dow Chemical.** Specific anti-corporate movements included the protests against Dow Chemical and Honeywell for producing napalm and other weapons during the Vietnam War (Manheim, 2001). Huxman and Bruce (1995) called the protests to Dow’s involvement in the war “the first large-scale public efforts to hold a corporation morally responsible for its actions” (p. 61). Amid increases of student activism and concerns over the use of chemicals in the war, protestors moved Dow from a low-profile chemical producer to a primary focal point as a manufacturer of napalm. Picketing began early in 1966 at Dow’s New York Sales office and the California plant where napalm was manufactured. A few months later, activists arrived at the company’s Michigan headquarters with signs stating, “Dow shalt not kill” and “War is hell – Sherman. Hell is profitable – Dow.” A student protest at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1967 resulted in several hundred students blockading themselves in a room where Dow was holding recruiting interviews; police arrested more than seventy students and injured close to fifty (Fraser, 1967). Dow executives admitted the protests hurt its stock prices and made it difficult to recruit employees (“Dow Chief Says”, 1967).
The nationwide protests against Dow were named as the top story of the year in 1967 by the Associated Press. Ill prepared for the backlash, Dow was thrust into this new era of “corporate citizenship” (Huxman & Bruce, 1995, p. 63) and struggled to issue an appropriate public relations response, highlighting the need for corporations to engage in effective issues and crisis management. Similar activism strategies were also levied against Honeywell for their involvement in producing weapons; these attacks continued into the early 1970s and included an eight-day “Corporate Crimes Hearing,” during which activists suggested that executives should be prosecuted for war crimes (Soule, 2009). According to Manheim (2001), once the Vietnam War ended, the movements “lacked a cohesive strategy for organizing broad-based support” (p. 11) and struggled to continue. One man who helped address this need for activist strategy was Saul Alinsky.

**Saul Alinsky.** Saul Alinsky is credited with perfecting the practice of grassroots organizing and leading community action efforts in the 1960s (English, 2007). Alinsky relied heavily on non-traditional forms of public relations, such as protests and demonstrations, to generate publicity and pressure leaders and power-wielders. A prime example of his work occurred in Rochester, New York, home of the Kodak Company. In the 1960s, Kodak was suspected of discrimination in hiring workers; by 1964, it was at the center of race riots that tore Rochester apart. Clergy from the area asked Alinsky for assistance with the black community. Upon arriving in Rochester, Alinsky organized a community group known as FIGHT. After failed talks between FIGHT and Kodak, Alinsky took a creative approach and planned a “fart-in” at the Rochester orchestra, beloved by the community’s elite, including several Kodak executives. The group planned to purchase 100 tickets for a quiet symphony and feed baked beans to the
attendees before the concert to publicly embarrass Kodak (Weisheit & Morn, 2015). Though the plan was never executed, it remains the exemplar of Alinsky’s practices (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Soon after, Kodak altered its hiring practices (Weisheit & Morn, 2015).

Jaques (2006) claimed that Alinsky’s influential book Rules for Radicals “gave form and focus to the rise of modern activism” (p. 408) and focused on the organizer’s need to understand the experiences of the community. Alinsky’s (1971) guidelines included focusing on the expertise of supporters while going outside of the opposition’s expertise, maintaining pressure, implementing tactics that people enjoy, avoiding the use of one tactic for too long, and using ridicule and threats when necessary. A primary component of Alinsky’s approach was power, which derived from money and people. Alinsky contended grassroots organizations must acquire power to incite change and establish dialogue: “It is only when the other party is concerned or feels threatened that he will listen” (p. 89). One of the ways to gain this power and thereby the attention of corporations, is through public communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2014), a strategy adopted by environmental groups throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

**The forgotten decades.** While most historians focus on activism during the 1960s, Foley (2013) contended activists did not retreat from civic engagement during the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s, corporate stakeholders also served as activists by using proxy votes to force General Motors to be more responsible in areas such as product safety, environmental pollution, and employment description (Eichar, 2015). The government also became involved as a result of the public uprising against corporate practices, establishing increased regulation on tobacco, alcohol, mine and railroad
protection, clean air, water pollution, and food quality (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Thus, activists set out not just to sway corporations, but also to shape public values (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994). Using communication strategies, activists gained publicity and promoted their agendas to direct publics toward specific issues. For example, by the 1990s, environmentalism became a primary issue, leading to “greenwashing” as businesses paraded their environmentally-friendly activities (F. Bowen, 2014).

Nuclear energy became a prominent environmental concern in the 1970s and 1980s as activists perceived it as a tool of dominance and violence (Vinthagen, 2007). In the 1970s, the Clamshell Alliance, an anti-nuclear group in New England, organized efforts to oppose Seabrook nuclear power plant. In 1976, the group’s third and largest movement involved around 2,500 individuals occupying the planned Seabrook site. Participants were organized within autonomous action groups of three to 15 individuals (Epstein, 1991). In keeping with the egalitarian nature of Clamshell, facilitators rotated and “vibes-watchers” monitored group energy and emotions. Spokespersons would relay decisions made by the group to committees, whose decisions must reflect the agreements of the groups. After the protest, more than 1,400 activists were held in the National Guard Armories for almost two weeks. During this time, members held educational sessions on nonviolent action trainings and viewed the effort as a success as it powered additional protests against nuclear power. Soon, the egalitarian structure of the group resulted in a paralyzing fracture, but not before inspiring other groups to adopt its decentralized mass action and non-violent approaches (Vinthagen, 2007).

On the West Coast, one group inspired by Clamshell Alliance was the Abalone Alliance. From 1977 to 1984, the group staged blockages and occupations at the Diablo
Canyon Power Plant (Giugni, 2004). During a two-week long blockade in 1981, almost 2,000 individuals were arrested, exceeding Clamshell’s protest at Seabrook. Participants also marched on San Francisco. Eventually, members recognized the blockade would not stop the construction of the plant. However, shortly after the protestors left, a plant superintendent noticed a serious error in the blueprints of the plant. As a result, the plant could not be safely operated without extensive repairs at a high cost and operation of the plant was delayed indefinitely (Epstein, 1991). Although the Abalone Alliance did not succeed in stopping construction, many felt their efforts led the superintendent to check the blueprint and feel obligated to report the errors. Like the plant’s future, the Abalone Alliance faded away. The following decade, activists would gain access to a new tool for their movements: the Internet.

Activism goes digital. In the late 1990s, the Internet further altered activists’ communication efforts (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Activist groups could now create critical websites, online petitions, listservs, discussion groups, and blogs; in addition to educating audiences, recruiting supporters, and collecting online monetary donations, activists could also use their online activities to generate news coverage. In 1995, a college student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison organized the Free Burma Coalition primarily using the Internet. The organization quickly established chapters at 110 college and university campuses and arranged boycotts, campus protests, and demonstrations at stakeholder meetings (Manheim, 2001). One of its prominent campaigns was against PepsiCo for its presence in Burma. Using the Internet, activists shared information about labor and human rights violations in Burma.
After extensive boycotts, protests, and picketing at fast food restaurants, PepsiCo ceased operations in Burma in 1997 (Matthews, 1997).

Using the Internet, activists were also able to publish an expose on Nike’s sweatshops and instigate a crisis for Nike (Bullert, 2000). Like other apparel companies, Nike routinely contracted production of its apparel to factories in Asia, where products could be manufactured at a lower cost. At the time, Nike was heavily promoting the social responsibility of its actions (Knight & Greenberg, 2002). In 1997, the media released reports on Nike’s labor practices in Southeast Asia about the conditions for workers, including exposure to dangerous chemicals, low pay, and physical abuse (Greenberg & Knight, 2004). The reports generated the “antisweatshop” movement as critics called out Nike for the inconsistency between its words and its deeds (Knight & Greenberg, 2002). Through the Internet, information about the movement spread quickly and easily between the United States and other industrialized nations, leading to highly publicized boycotts, demonstrations at colleges and universities, and lawsuits (Soule, 2009). In addition to helping spread information, the Internet also permits campaigners to make it easy for individuals to get involved (John & Thomson, 2003), intensifying pressure on corporations. Recently, social media sites have become a vital resource for activists, who have adapted many of their tactics for these forums and use it to directly challenge corporations (Adi, 2015; Veil et al., 2015). The specific affordances of social media will be highlighted in more detail in later sections.

**Anti-Corporate Activism**

As shown, activists rely on the Internet, boycotts, demonstrations, lawsuits, and other means to influence corporate behavior. Recognizing corporations are often
susceptible to reputational attacks (Hart & Sharma, 2004), activist groups adopted tactics and strategies pioneered by labor groups for corporate campaigns. Manheim (2001) defined the corporate campaign as “a coordinated, often long-term, and wide-ranging program of economic, political, legal, and psychological warfare” fought in the media, marketplace, and courts (p. xiii). Thus, anti-corporate activism aims to attack the firm’s image and reputation using a variety of strategies and tactics in an effort “to cause so much pain and disruption that management is forced to yield to their will” (p. xiii).

In addition to damaging the target’s image or reputation, activists may also seek to disrupt organizational routines (Luders, 2006), as demonstrated by Clamshell Alliance and Abalone Alliance’s attempts to interfere with the construction of nuclear plants. These groups may also attempt to divert revenue from the target entity (Friedman, 1999); for instance, by promoting boycotts of fast food restaurants serving PepsiCo products, the Free Burma Coalition aimed to constrain revenues for both PepsiCo and its corporate partners (Soule, 2009). By targeting PepsiCo’s business partners, activists can also undermine the relationships upon which the corporation depends, which can also include stakeholders, customers, and employees (Manheim, 2001). Often, corporations perceive activists as threats and resist interactions (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). However, activists have proven astute at recruiting new members and volunteers, gathering resources, and invoking a variety of strategies and tactics to force corporate engagement.

**Activist Organizations: Formation, Strategies, and Tactics**

Like other organizations, activist groups progress through various stages of development, each stage with its own unique challenges. Heath (1997) proposed a model outlining the stages of development for activist organizations: 1) strain (when activists
identify and legitimize issues), 2) mobilization (when activists organize into groups, establish communication networks, and use resources to achieve their goals), 3) confronting (when activist groups pressure their target to resolve issues), 4) negotiating (when parties involved in a conflict negotiate to reach a compromise), and 5) resolution (when the conflict is resolved). Heath notes the stage in which an activist organization stands influences its public relations practices. However, not all activists will go through every stage of the model as some activist groups and targets refuse to compromise (Murphy & Dee, 1992; Stokes & Rubin, 2010), or firms may avoid activists altogether (Dougall, 2006), forcing activists to alter plans in an attempt to achieve their goals.

Activists rely on both power and persuasion to achieve their goals. However, “typically activists are marginalized by and have much less power than organizations” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 882) and must use communication in order to gain power and persuade their targets to adjust policies and actions. Activists are adept at identifying and promoting issues into the public policy arena in order to seek change at the organizational, industry, or societal level (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Zietsma and Winn (2008) noted activists “often recognize issues earlier and package them to shape the interpretation of others” (p. 71). In gaining attention and traction, activists aim to both generate legitimacy for their own issue while also challenging the target’s legitimacy to create a legitimacy gap (Heath & Waymer, 2009), which emerges when an organization’s actions do not match society’s expectations (Sethi, 1975). A firm can avoid conflict and crises by operating within the norms of its society (Sethi, 1977).

In addition to gaining legitimacy for their issues, activists must also mobilize resources. Sommerfeldt (2013) contended that mobilization is a tactical campaign
decision. The specific tasks chosen are based on the issues of the activist group and how it wishes to strategically achieve objectives. The resources used in a campaign are often characteristic of the activist group and will vary based on the issue(s), goal(s), organizational structure, and strategies. To pressure corporations or other agencies, activists will use one, or a combination of two routes. First, activists may seek regulation from the government (L. A. Grunig, 1992). Second, activists may pressure companies through a variety of strategies or tactics, including nonconventional measures such as boycotts or protests (King, 2008). Strategy is the “glue that binds the disparate elements of the corporate campaign together” (Manheim, 2001, p. 191). Strategies are the types of deeds undertaken to meet an organization’s goals whereas tactics are the actions intended to implement the strategies; thus, strategies condition tactics (Botan, 2006).

Jackson (1982) identified five general categories of tactics often used by activists. First, activists employ informational activities, such as interviews and other forms of media relations, including press conferences. Through these efforts, activists hope to have an agenda-setting effect (McCluskey, 2009); by drawing attention to the condition that they find problematic, activists hope to turn the problem into an issue by assigning significance to it (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Second, activists often use symbolic activities, such as protests or boycotts. Manheim (2001) elaborated on symbols, which he defines as a “simple, shorthand way of conveying a more or less complicated meaning” (p. 19). To illustrate his point, Manheim used the example of a demonstrator from the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) climbing the office-tower headquarters of a lumber company and hanging a banner. This action annoys and embarrasses the company while also sending a message. For corporate management, the action shows concern about the
company’s policies and may also be a threat of future acts. For the public, it displays RAN’s commitment to protecting the environment and raises red flags about the company’s practices. To RAN members, it demonstrates the group’s dedication to a shared objective. These activities, Manheim claimed, “are the stuff of news” (p. 19). Third, activists may engage in organizing activities such as distributing pamphlets or hosting community outreach activities. Fourth, activists may also implement litigious activities through petitions, lawsuits, or other steps involving regulatory and administrative agencies. Finally, these groups may engage in civil disobedience, such as sit-ins, blocking traffic, or getting arrested. Smith (1997) added that depending on the group and the issue, organizations may also engage in issue advertising.

In addition to designing and implementing tactics, activist organizations and their causes often receive help from celebrities. Known as “actorism” (Andrews, 2007), celebrities who donate to causes can help raise the profile of an issue through media interviews and participation in demonstrations (Hawkins, 2011). Celebrities are perceived to be more capable at cultivating public interest in an issue (Larkin, 2009) because they have the “initial advantage of a warmed up media spotlight” and access to richer financial resources (Hawkins, 2011, p. 88). For instance, celebrity influence is often seen following natural disasters (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000) and has been linked to short-term surges in financial donations to aid agencies (Hawkins, 2011). A notable example of this concept is actor Brad Pitt; following Hurricane Katrina, Pitt purchased a home in New Orleans and became involved in rebuilding homes for the area’s homeless residents, spawning public interest (Fuqua, 2011).
While celebrities are helpful at generating media attention (Tsaliki, 2015), such efforts may not be sustaining. Thrall et al. (2008) found activist groups and causes linked to celebrities are more likely to make news, but this association does not lead to extended coverage for the cause, even with highly visible celebrities. Rather, organizational size, reputation, and funding ability are more important in procuring ongoing media attention. Some issues are also better suited for celebrity involvement (Tsaliki, 2015). The popularity and simplicity of an issue influences public interest (Larkin, 2009), and issues with considerable public support are more likely to benefit (Hawkins, 2011).

Activist organizations rarely rely on one group of tactics; rather, their use of these different approaches often evolves as the debate over an issue escalates or as the organization evolves (Botan, 2006). Once an issue is perceived as legitimate in the public policy arena (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), activists may shift their resources and strategies to focus on resolving that issue (Sommerfelt, 2013). Further, communication also varies by the type of activist organization (Heath & Palenchar, 2009), including the organization’s structure and communicative characteristics (Leitch & Neilson, 2001), as well as its size (Jaques, 2006). Whereas larger activist groups use approaches similar to corporate communicators, smaller groups rely heavily on media attention (Carroll & Hackett, 2006). Strategies and tactics may even mirror those used by their corporate counterparts.

Another important communication function for activists is relationship-building. Much like corporate public relations professionals, activists must establish positive relationships with publics to build support for issues and the group’s issue stances (Sommerfeldt, 2008). Manheim (2001) emphasized activists’ resources are often quite limited, particularly in comparison to the company or industry; as a result, groups must
rely on mobilizing the resources of others. Activist groups must maintain and increase membership to promote their issues (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Reber and Kim (2006) argued that the effectiveness of activism depends on the construction of relationships among individuals who share a purpose, as well as connecting with other organizations with similar goals for social change. Thus, activists must appeal to broader organizational audiences to both influence public perceptions of the organization while also increasing resources (King, 2008). One important avenue for building relationships, generating resources, and challenging targets is the Internet.

**Activism 2.0**

The Internet, including social media, presents abundant opportunities for activist groups of all sizes and resource richness to build and maintain relationships, disseminate their messages, and publicly challenge corporate policies and actions (Coombs, 1998; Heath, 1998). Heath and Palenchar (2009) noted “Web capabilities have been a boon to activists” (p. 181). The Internet “affords activists greater access to and use of power resources” to promote their issues in the public sphere, gaining supporters in their quest to incite change (Coombs, 1998, p. 295). The low cost and ease of accessibility provided by the Internet makes it an ideal channel for activists, who are often quicker than many corporations to integrate these new communication tools as part of their strategy to share their messages and gain support for their causes (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Much of the literature on activist use of the Internet examines the role of websites (Heath, 1998; Reber & Kim, 2006; Reber & Berger, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2011a, 2011b; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2001; Zoch, Collins, Sisco, & Supa, 2008). This body of literature largely explores the potential for activists to use websites to establish
dialogue and relationships with publics (Taylor et al., 2001). Research shows that websites are helpful with mobilization efforts, including collecting donations, encouraging supporters to join, and linking to other activist organizations (Sommerfeldt, 2011b). Websites are also effective when tied to issue currency and for communicating with existing, highly involved publics (Sommerfeldt et al., 2012). However, Sommerfeldt et al. (2012) found that activists relied more heavily on traditional forms of communication and media relations for building relationships compared to websites.

In addition to fostering relationships with key audiences, Heath (1998) demonstrated the Internet also presents new opportunities for dialogue through a case study examining a public issues debate between Greenpeace and Shell Oil Company UK, where both sides presented their perspectives. While websites allow for two-way communication, Taylor et al. (2001) found activist websites failed to capitalize on this opportunity as the sites lacked the “relationship-building capacity” (p. 277). Building on this study, Reber and Kim (2006) discovered few activist organizations’ websites offered dialogic features benefitting journalists, such as expert contact information, a way to request information, and email updates. By missing out on these opportunities, they argued activist groups fail to use websites to their fullest potential when attracting and communicating with journalists. Focusing on the Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London movements, Adi (2015) found the Occupy groups made clear attempts to share content with the media, thereby seeking to set the media agenda using their website and social media pages. However, website content and Twitter posts predominantly preached to the converted rather than enabling dialogue with opponents, generating concerns about how the movement might expand.
Other studies have explored how activists frame their messages. Zoch et al. (2008) analyzed how activists frame the public relations messages posted on their websites. The authors reported that activists failed to frame the issues to their own benefit, failing to tell stories in compelling ways that would attract and motivate others to become involved. Sommerfeldt (2011a) examined the use of action alerts, emails that call for the receiver to take action on an issue. He found activist groups most often framed these calls to action through antithesis, in which groups identify an enemy and outline a course of action to challenge this enemy. Through this framing mechanism, activists persuade supporters to act out of objection to the opinions and actions of others in relation to an issue rather than out of a sense of loyalty to the activist organization.

Through antithesis, activists portray organizational outsiders as antagonists” (Sommerfeldt, 2011a, p. 88) to “implicitly stress identification with ‘insiders’ (i.e., members of the organization) as an effort toward achieving unity and collective acceptance of organizational values” (Cheney, 1983, p. 148). According to Cheney (1983), this strategy can generate support for organizations as this identification with the group is “necessary to oppose threats from outsiders” (p. 154). For example, in Sommerfeldt’s (2011a) study, MoveOn’s action alerts focused highly on anti-Republican party sentiments and fear of conservative ideology, suggesting “activist groups tend to identify with their publics less in terms of ‘who we are’ and more in terms of ‘who we are not’” (p. 89). This finding illustrates a difference between activist groups and more traditional organizations that are less dependent on the relevance of an issue or a shared opponent to maintain legitimacy.
More recently, research has shown social media proves to be a fertile arena for activists to publicly challenge corporate policies and actions (Adi, 2015; Veil et al., 2015). Adi’s (2015) examination of Twitter during the Occupy movements offered suggestions for how activists could appeal to a wider audience as they struggled to balance managing their reputation, controlling their image, and sharing their message online. These groups, she contended, should heighten their focus on using websites to raise tangible resources (e.g., money), reach out to individuals who are not already part of the Occupy group, and continue to use social media and websites to acquire media attention.

Focusing on how activists hijacked Kraft’s Facebook page to cause reputational damage, Veil et al. (2015) demonstrated that the Internet has not reinvented the strategies used by activists as outlined by Jackson (1982). Rather, activists have adapted strategies for the Internet and can easily use social media to work with other activist groups and incite behavioral change. Further, Veil et al. (2015) found public relations practitioners should be willing to engage with the individual(s) leading the campaign against the corporation to understand their perspective. Thus, these practitioners should not only engage in proactive issues management, but also meet with activists to discuss their concerns and understand their perspectives. While the Internet and social media offer a promising channel through which activists can build relationships and mobilize support, attempts to harness its power vary in their success. Additional research is needed to better understand how activists successfully formulate strategy and implement tactics to promote issues, build relationships, and challenge their targets.
To achieve these goals, the primary research question guiding this dissertation is:

*How do activist organizations use communication to incite corporations to change practices and policies?* Drawing from issues management and other public relations concepts, this dissertation examines how activist organizations identify and promote issues, exerting pressure on their corporate opponents to achieve change while also building and maintaining relationships with their own supporters. Thus, this dissertation expands on theories within public relations to explain how activist organizations promote their issue(s), gain support for their cause, and alter corporate behavior.

This chapter provided an overview of corporate campaigns and activism. As shown, activists played a prominent role in the history of public relations, drawing on a variety of communication strategies, tactics, and resources in their unwavering pursuits of corporate change. The widespread adoption of the Internet in the 1990s fueled these efforts by providing activists with a more cost-effective and direct route to their corporate targets and supporters. However, as this chapter depicts, more research is needed to better understand the process of anti-corporate activism, including the formation of strategy, collection and allocation of resources, and implementation and evaluation of tactics. In doing so, this dissertation not only contributes to knowledge about activism but also to the theory of issues management, at the heart of the practice. The next chapter provides the theoretical framework that guided this dissertation.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Like the practice of corporate public relations, the theory of issues management grew out of corporate responses to activism (Heath, 1997). Issues management focuses on proactively managing issues and generating understanding between organizations and publics (Heath, 2005) as they co-construct issues pertinent to the organization (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), which may or may not occur in the public policy arena (González-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). From an ethical perspective, the intent for issues management should not solely be to influence publics so that they are amenable to organizational decisions, but rather to “change an organization’s practices, making them more responsive to the public interest” (Pratt, 2001, p. 336). Thus, issues management is a prominent theory, if not the prominent theory, used in public relations research on activism (e.g., Coombs, 1992, 1998; Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Heath, 1998, 2002; Jaques, 2013; Kernisky, 1997; Jones & Chase, 1979; Smith & Ferguson, 2013; Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003; Veil et al., 2015).

This chapter explores components of public relations literature that explain how activists identify and promote issues in an effort to challenge corporations while also building relationships with these adversaries and their own publics. First, the literature on issues management and the issue lifecycle model, catalytic model, and issues process model are outlined. Then, legitimacy, punctuated equilibrium, and power, which are central to issues management are discussed. Next, a relational approach to issues management is provided, focusing on the need for dialogue and engagement. Finally, this chapter acknowledges the need for theory explaining the practice of public relations within an activist context.
Issues Management

The offspring of a multi-disciplinary union, issues management derived from public policy before being adopted by strategic communication, and eventually, public relations. A theory with a complex history, issues management explores the long-term strategic management process that seeks to monitor, identify, and respond to issues (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Issues are “unsettled matters which are ready for decision” (Jones & Chase, 1979, p. 11) that arise when “one or more human agents attaches significance to a situation or perceived ‘problem’” (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5). A problem morphs into an issue when it becomes a publicly discussed concern, often gaining media coverage and even governmental responses (Hallahan, 2001).

Early forms of the theory focused on issues management as a problem-solving mechanism to address issues of public concern, often identified and promoted by activist organizations, and reach a resolution benefitting the target firm (Jones & Chase, 1979; Crable & Vibbert, 1985). With a history spanning nearly four decades, issues management scholars later emphasized engaging stakeholders and publics through dialogue (Heath, 1998; Taylor et al., 2003) to serve the interests of both society and the organization (S. A. Bowen & Heath, 2005). Thus, issues management links the public relations and management functions “in ways that foster the organization’s efforts to be outer directed and reflective, as well as to have a participative organizational culture” (Heath & Palenchar, 2009, p. 12).

Heath (2002) contended the ultimate objective of issues management is to “make a smart, proactive and even more respected organization” (p. 2011). However, issues management is not limited to corporations. All organizations have a need to be proactive
rather than reactive because the environment in which the organization exists can affect its ability to operate (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Changes in this environment may require the organization to frame issues in a compelling manner, often to alter the knowledge, attitudes, and actions of individuals (Hallahan, 2001) in an effort to prevent problems and generate opportunities (Heath & Nelson, 1986). Issues management enables organizations to exist and grow while also offering benefits to activists by helping them establish their role, legitimacy, and value to society (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). This section outlines the evolution of issues management, beginning with its early stages as a corporate response to activism and concluding with a relational approach to issues management offered by public relations literature.

**Origins.** Issues management arose when “new corporate stakeholders” demanded corporations use their power for the betterment of society and take action on issues ranging from energy conservation to the employment of women and minorities (Jones & Chase, 1979, p. 7). A driving force behind the implementation of issues management was activism. Beginning in the 1960s, activist groups adopted corporate communication strategies to organize and generate hostility against the private sector, often through shaping public policy initiatives (Heath, 2002). This surge in anti-business protests caused corporations to realize their activities could be “substantially challenged and constrained by the value preferences and growing publicity and political clout of activists” (Heath, 2002, p. 209). In response, these profit-seeking entities began to rethink the role of corporate communication and acknowledged the need to respond to evolving public expectations and the growing number of critics (Gaunt & Ollenburger, 1995).
In their seminal work on issues management, Jones and Chase (1979) recognized the need for organizations to prepare in advance for these challenges. They argued that “business tends to react to overt symptoms, rather than by identifying and analyzing fundamental causes of the trend which has led to a critical issue” (p. 3). Kent, Taylor, and Veil (2011) explained, “Issues cannot be managed if they are not planned for, thus, organizations need to be prepared for crises and ready to deal with technical and symbolic obstacles” such as public outcry and calls for regulation (p. 535). Jones and Chase (1979) also claimed business “in general has been ineffective in defining and then validating its position on public policy issues” (p. 3). Public policy, they contended, derived from interactions between public and private perspectives and existed outside of the government’s purview. Therefore, businesses should be taking the reins on responding to “reasonable” public expectations by answering to changes in their environment, including influencing public policy.

Chase coined the term ‘issues management,’ which focuses on identifying, monitoring, and analyzing public opinion trends that could “mature into public policy and regulative or legislative constraint” (Heath, 1997, p. 6). This approach empowered corporations to repress activist groups and influence public policy rather than waiting on the government to enact legislation, which could potentially restrict the organization’s operations (Chase, 1984; Gaunt & Ollenburger, 1995; Jones & Chase, 1979). In doing so, corporations started to realize that acting socially responsible and being profitable were not mutually exclusive concepts (Jones & Chase, 1979). Indeed, organizations must act in a socially acceptable manner not only to remain legitimate and avoid crises but also because companies have the “ultimate responsibility to serve the interest of society” (S.
A. Bowen & Heath, 2005, p. 87), not just the organization (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). While issues management would continue to progress throughout the decades, early on in its history, key models emerged (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Jones & Chase, 1979) which significantly impacted theory development.

**The issue life cycle model.** In an effort to identify and predict the effects of environmental changes on the corporation, Jones and Chase (1979) outlined a five-step process providing senior-level managers “a results-oriented philosophy of management, combining solid management technique with the growing knowledge available from the social, political, and communication sciences” (p. 9). The five steps included identifying the issue, analyzing the issue, identifying issue change options, creating an action program, and evaluating results.

**Issue identification.** The first stage of the model, issue identification, focuses on scanning the environment and identifying issues of relevance to the organization. This stage begins with identifying trends, or detectable changes, which precede issues (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Managers should classify these issues based on their type (e.g., social, economic, political, technological), impact and response source (e.g., corporation, industry), geography (e.g., local, state, national, international), span of control (e.g., non-controllable, somewhat controllable, controllable), and salience (e.g., immediacy, prominence) (Chase, 1984; Renfro, 1993).

Identifying issues may entail a range of both qualitative and quantitative processes to foretell the effects of change on the organization (Jones & Chase, 1979). Jones and Chase (1979) claimed the ability to forecast permits organizations to 1) make decisions and plan, 2) identify both dangers and opportunities, 3) identify multiple
solutions, 4) assess alternative policies and actions, enable people to see the present more clearly, and 5) increase the degree of choice (p. 11). Failing to engage in this step may result in the organization being ill-prepared to face issues that may invite public criticism. Because an organization cannot manage every possible issue, personnel may also need to prioritize issues (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

**Issue analysis.** Next, the issue manager must engage in issue analysis by researching the issue. This research should include how and where the issue originated since many issues may be ascribed to multiple sources (Jones & Chase, 1979). Organizations should also gauge the issue’s potential impact and determine which issue(s) should be addressed. During this stage, research is critical and often entails methods such as leadership surveys, media content analyses, public opinion surveys, and legislative trend analyses (Jones & Chase, 1979). Drawing from these various methods, the issue manager is able to identify the organization’s strengths and weaknesses with regard to each issue and set priorities.

**Issue change strategy options.** After analyzing issues individually, the issue manager crafts an issue change strategy option to select the most feasible and practical response strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 2014), while keeping the organization’s long-term goals in mind. When choosing a strategy, the organization makes a decision about whether or not to engage, where to engage, and when. Jones and Chase (1979) contended executives can choose to manage the change on their own terms rather than responding to others’ attempts to incite organizational change. When challenged by others, organizations can choose from one of three strategies, or a combination according to Chase (1984). First, organizations may adopt a reactive stance, during which they attempt
to suppress an issue by carrying on with past behaviors and postponing public policy
decisions using various tactics. A second strategy is to be adaptive by anticipating change
and offering accommodations before unacceptable reforms are implemented. The third
strategy, dynamic, entails organizations anticipating and attempting to shape public
policy. Timing is essential in this stage of the model and guided by five key forces: the
innate situational risks, the confidence the issue manager has in the information, the
accuracy of predictions, the likelihood that this issue may self-heal, and the direction of
affairs (Jones & Chase, 1979, p. 17).

**Issue action program.** After selecting an issue response plan, management must
adopt the policy to support the plan and commit to it, ensuring that the action program
achieves its goal (Jones & Chase, 1979). First, managers must identify the goal, followed
by the objectives, which are narrower and measurable (Chase, 1984). Together, the goal
and objectives are used to evaluate the action program and issue manager’s performance.
Next, managers determine the strategies for achieving the goal and objectives before
identifying the tactics, which Jones and Chase (1979) organized into four categories:
financial, human (staff), project (communication platforms such as media coverage or
advertisements), and information (messages).

**Evaluation of results.** Finally, issue managers must evaluate the results by
determining the effects of the issues management process. According to Jones and Chase
(1979), success is measured by how closely the actual outcome matches the intended
outcome. Even though the program may be complete, managers should continue to
monitor the economic, political, and social changes.
While Jones and Chase (1979) are considered the forefathers of issues management, Crable and Vibbert (1985) molded issues management into “what was in many ways the most pronounced and probably first cocreational theory in public relations” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 652) with their catalytic model, which empowered publics as the key component to identifying, defining, and promoting issues.

The catalytic model. In formulating their model, Crable and Vibbert (1985) acknowledged that government, business, and citizens do not maintain equal shares of power. While only the government yields authority, organizations can influence policy and manage issues, which are co-constructed with publics. Thus, issue managers must aim to influence the public agenda by informing and persuading publics on the issue, in addition to setting the policy agenda (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Crable and Vibbert also differentiated between policy management and issues management, noting issues management is a way to influence policies before they become policies whereas policy management deals solely with current and critical issues (Jones & Chase, 1979). Coombs and Holladay (2014) suggested a weakness in Jones and Chase’s model is its failure to detail the use of communication to manage issues and influence the policy making process. The catalytic model illustrates the role of communication in arousing interest in an issue, thereby increasing awareness of the issue, granting it legitimacy, and gaining support for the policy proposal. This approach demonstrates how organizations can initiate and engage in long-term issues management to resolve issues “in directions favorable to the organization” (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 12), situating issues management as a proactive organizational approach to influencing public policy using research and persuasion.
Issues are dynamic rather than static, moving between different stages of a lifecycle. Whether or not a ‘problem’ manifests into an issue is not “an all or nothing proposition” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 655). Rather, issues progress and develop following a cycle, outlined by the catalytic model (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). The model contends issues may progress through a lifecycle composed of five different stages: potential, imminent, current, critical, and dormant. Communication is used to move an issue through each stage by generating interest in the issue among audiences.

**Potential status.** An issue may be thought to have potential status when stakeholders begin to demonstrate interest in an issue and construct arguments to support their perception of the problem (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). During this stage, issue managers should define the issue to establish the issue’s boundaries and attract stakeholders to or repeal stakeholders from the issue.

**Imminent status.** Next, when stakeholders begin to accept the issue, it moves to imminent status, gaining legitimacy as individuals realize their connection to the issue and accept its relevancy and importance (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Often, issues begin to receive endorsements by opinion leaders, members of a system who can influence other members’ attitudes and behaviors (Rogers, 2003), leading to the legitimization of the issue. At this stage, the issue is gaining attention but is not widely recognized.

**Current status.** The issue reaches the third status, current status, when it is communicated to a wide array of stakeholders (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), often through media or Internet coverage. The current stage is of particular interest because it “signals the point when a large number of stakeholders know about an issue” (Coombs, 2002, p. 217). While mass media and interpersonal channels may be used at this stage, mass
media is more commonly employed to promote an issue because of the ability to reach a wide number of people. Additionally, through the use of agenda-setting, the media can generate awareness by focusing on an issue (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Ryan, 1991).

**Critical status.** Depending on the amount of attention the issue gains, it may then progress to critical status (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), pressuring the issue manager to take action, perhaps to avert a crisis. At this stage, individuals begin to identify with the issue, and issue managers use persuasion to gain support for their side of the issue.

**Dormant status.** If an issue is resolved, or interest fades, it moves to dormant status. Crable and Vibbert (1985) claimed that “issues may be resolved – in the sense of a temporary answer – but they are never solved in the sense of a final answer” (p. 5). Individuals or groups may recognize an issue’s potential and attempt to revive it. Additionally, an issue may become dormant at an earlier stage of the model, such as if an issue fails to achieve legitimacy or does not gain significant attention. A dormant issue may always reemerge at a later time.

By outlining these different issue stages, the model acknowledges issues are not equal, but have “various levels of status or importance” (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5), meaning dormant issues are less pressing than issues with current or critical status. Issues may not always move in a linear direction, leading to a resolution (Jaques, 2009). Rather, issues may skip a step, may never reach a step, or may revert to an earlier stage. Because issues are social constructs, they “follow paths that reflect the intensity and diversity of the values and interests stakeholders bring to an issue and the complexity of the interaction among the…factors” (Bigelow, Fahey, & Mahon, 1993, p. 29).
The catalytic model outlines the progression of an issue through the various stages, but does not identify the different types of publics who may become involved at each stage. To address this gap, Hallahan (2001) introduced the issues process model. Like the catalytic model, the issues process model details the various stages through which an issue progresses. Drawing from the situational theory of publics (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the issues process model identifies the various types of publics and the role of issue involvement and knowledge in their progression from stage to stage.

**The issues process model.** J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) situational theory of publics posits publics can be identified and classified based on their level of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition regarding a problem. Level of involvement reflects how connected individuals feel to the issue. The strength of the personal connection an individual feels determines the level of problem recognition, with more personal issues being perceived as greater problems. Depending on the personal significance of the problem, individuals may feel compelled to seek information or take action; constraint recognitions is the level of personal efficacy an individual believes he or she holds, and the extent to which he or she may have an impact on the problem.

Individuals who have high constraint recognition feel nothing can be done and are less compelled to seek information or take action. Publics with no knowledge of the problem are called nonpublics; those who are aware but do not perceive the issue to be a problem are latent publics. Individuals who recognize the problem are aware publics; those who recognize a problem and do something about it are called active publics. These levels can then be used to determine which members will “communicate actively, passively, or not at all about organizational decisions that affect them” (p. 62).
Drawing heavily from this theoretical perspective, Hallahan (2001) contended publics can be categorized along two dimensions based on their knowledge and involvement in a particular topic, such as a problem, issue, organization, or cause. Hallahan posited that individuals who are more knowledgeable are better equipped to process information and arguments about a topic, thereby making sense of it. Involvement refers to an individual’s predisposition to pay attention to and communicate about a topic. Like J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984), Hallahan’s model theorizes individuals most connected to a problem are more likely to take action.

Hallahan (2001) identified five types of publics, similar to J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) categorization: nonpublics, inactive, aware, aroused, and active. Nonpublics are in the default category; individuals in this group have no knowledge and no involvement and are unlikely to become aware or involved. Thus, they can be ignored by corporations and activist groups. Next, inactive publics are individuals with low levels of knowledge and involvement in a topic. They may not believe a problem exists, may not recognize an existing problem, may believe a problem does not warrant action, are convinced others are attending to the problem, or believe that nothing can be done to address the problem.

The third category, aware publics, includes those individuals who are aware of a problem but not personally involved. These individuals may become opinion leaders; while unlikely to mobilize on their own, they may join efforts led by others. Aroused publics are those individuals with high levels of involvement but low knowledge about the problem, or how to resolve it; thus, they are motivated but not prepared to move into an activist role. Many followers of activist groups fit into this category. Finally, active
individuals are those who have high levels of knowledge and involvement in a topic; thus, they have identified a problem and may organize to incite change. Active individuals include the leaders of organizations and their most devoted supporters who are willing to put time and effort into a cause.

Building on these typologies, the issue process model suggests that issue dynamics rely on activation and response. Issue activation occurs “whenever an individual recognizes an inequity in the allocation of natural, financial, political, or symbolic resources and sets about to rectify the problem” (Hallahan, 2001, p. 36). Hallahan (2001) contended that “at the heart of issue activation is understanding how issues emerge and how individuals and groups are transformed from states of inactivity to activism” (p. 36). According to Hallahan, levels of involvement and knowledge move an individual from a lower level (nonpublics or inactive) to higher levels (aware, aroused, active). Comparatively, issue response entails activities implemented by the target entity “to which these initiatives are directed” (p. 36). As individuals move from inactivity to activism, they progress through four stages (Hallahan, 2001): problem recognition, the arousal process, activation, and awareness of emerging issues by groups.

**Problem recognition.** The process begins with problem recognition, which occurs when individuals “compare their everyday personal experiences with their expectations and find an inconsistency related to the fairness or risks inherent in a situation” (Hallahan, 2001, p. 36). Numerous factors may influence why an inactive public will recognize a problem; however, those individuals with moderate levels of knowledge or involvement are more likely to identify problems than those with less interest or involvement. Individuals may perceive an organization to be underperforming in a certain
area, based on their prior experiences with that organization or comparison of that organization with another. Further, organizational activities may be perceived as incongruent with cultural or societal values.

Arousal. Once individuals identify an issue, they begin to move out of inactivity into an aroused state (Hallahan, 2001). During this process, activities may take many forms, including actively seeking information, validating the problem is genuine, building a consensus with others that the problem can be addressed, and labeling the problem in order for affected publics to talk about it easily.

Activation. According to Hallahan (2001), “the ultimate outcome of issue arousal is the recognition of the need to take collective action to rectify the problem” (p. 39). To do so, individuals engage in purposeful, detailed, and specific information seeking in order to identify solutions and share knowledge. Usually late in the solution-seeking process, aroused publics enter the active public state as their levels of involvement and knowledge increase. However, not all aroused publics become active; some may remain in the state whereas others may retreat back to inactive status. During this state, organizing is imperative. Gamson (1992) defined organizing as the activities which increase “the capability of potential challengers to act as a unit” (p. 72). Activist organizations rely heavily on coordinated activities, including establishing an organizational structure, permitting leadership to emerge, acquiring staffing, and fundraising.

Awareness of emerging issues by groups. The model thus far focuses on individuals who perceive an issue as relevant (Hallahan, 2001); however, other individuals may also become aware of a problem and observe the actions of active and
aroused publics. These aware publics may not seek out problems or issues but will scan their environment to determine what is happening and identify problems. People in this category are often influential opinion leaders; through sharing information, aware publics can influence the thought process of individuals in the inactive or aroused states. Aware publics may also be “drawn into the public debate” (Hallahan, 2001, p. 40) through intervention or coalition building. Intervention occurs when members of aware publics recognize a problem with a sufficient consequence, requiring correction. Coalition building involves “direct solicitation by activists to engage publics in an issue” (p. 41) and requires mutual self-interest as coalition members advance their goals by promoting others’ interests. To increase awareness of the issue and their issue stance, activists frequently involve the media and/or government officials.

Hallahan (2001) identified three benefits associated with activists’ attempts to involve aware publics. First, aware publics often become opinion leaders who can reach other publics. Second, obtaining support from the media and the government encourages aroused and active audiences to become involved or continue the fight. Third, strategic coalitions, media coverage, and governmental interest help legitimize the activist cause.

Issues do not progress through the various stages on their own, but rather depend heavily on the concept of legitimacy.

**The Centrality of Legitimacy to Issues Management**

Legitimacy derives from public perception that an organization’s policies and actions align with societal expectations, leading to public acceptance of these activities (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). Because publics often question whether corporate interests align with theirs, Heath and Palenchar (2009) claimed legitimacy is “the stone on which
[issues management] was honed in the 1970s” (p. 10), and argued that legitimacy “is a (perhaps the) central theme in issues management” (p. 9). In a seminal work highlighting the relationship between issues management and legitimacy, Coombs (1992) analyzed the effectiveness of President Ronald Reagan’s task force on food assistance, positioning legitimacy “as a resource used to affect the resolution of public policy issues,” noting that “legitimacy can be a valuable resource when one is involved in a struggle over how an issue should be resolved” (p. 102).

In his study, Coombs (1992) outlined the need for legitimacy in issues management in three areas: the issue itself must be perceived as a public concern, the issue manager must be viewed as capable of speaking on and managing the problem, and the policy proposal must be considered an appropriate and feasible solution. In his study, the hunger issue was unquestionably viewed as legitimate whereas the acceptance of both the issue manager (task force) and policy proposal (grant) were questioned by Congress and the media, jeopardizing the task force. By failing to gain legitimacy in all three areas, the proposal was unsuccessful.

Adopting a more rhetorical perspective to explain how issue managers could establish legitimacy for their issue(s), Coombs (1992) identified ten bases for legitimacy from sociology, social movement, and persuasion literature. *Tradition* draws legitimacy from history, noting “things have always been done this way” and should not change. *Charisma* relies on the characteristics of an individual, which set them apart from and above others, to establish legitimacy. *Bureaucracy* uses accepted rules, laws, and statutes to establish legitimacy. *Values* may be absolute or societal. Absolute values are accepted by all individuals as just and right; societal values reflect the norms of a specific social
system. Symbols are things that stand for something else, such as the American flag or peace sign. De-legitimacy entails boosting one’s legitimacy by eroding or attacking the legitimacy of one’s opponent, such as when an activist group questions a corporation’s motives. Credibility reflects a speaker’s personal characteristics, focusing on expertise and trustworthiness. Rationality uses empirical evidence and logic to persuade individuals whereas emotionality invokes emotion to persuade an audience. Finally, entitlement involves direct experience with the issue.

De-legitimacy has proven particularly vital to helping activists achieve their goals (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). As noted, these groups must establish legitimacy for their issue(s) early on in the issue life cycle (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). One key approach to establishing this legitimacy is by questioning the legitimacy of the target firm, to generate a legitimacy gap. Legitimacy gaps derive from two possible sources (Sethi, 1978): societal expectations have changed and the organization’s actions no longer meet those standards, or publics learn information about the organization’s irresponsible activities. A legitimacy gap provides the motivation for activism and the “grounds” for Heath’s (1997) stages of activism. Heath and Waymer (2009) posited this “strain is the motive that attracts followers and sustains nonprofits in their efforts to correct what they target or frame as the evils of society” (p. 213). Often, this de-legitimization process occurs in small increments because activists challenge their target’s legitimacy by “chipping away at the premises that are needed by the business to sustain its current means for generating revenue” (p. 197). And thus, the opposing forces perform a “legitimacy dance” by questioning the other’s issue stance, motives, and right to operate. In some instances, the target may choose not to acknowledge the activist organization’s claims but rather choose
to downplay the controversy for fear that responding may legitimize the activist group (Deegan, 2001; L. A. Grunig, 1992).

In addition to integrating legitimacy into issues management, Coombs (1992) also demonstrated that non-governmental or corporate agencies are involved in co-constructing public policy. Coombs found that negative media portrayals did not provoke publics to pressure Congress to accept the task force. Thus, the term “issue manager” is not limited to corporate management but applies to “any individual or group who initiates issues management efforts to affect public policy decisions” (Coombs, 1992, p. 104), expanding the theory’s boundaries to encompass any organization or group aiming to shape policy. Coombs (1998) later emphasized the need for activists to use socially acceptable standards as the basis for challenging their targets and carefully frame an issue to ensure audiences view it as appropriate, important, and compelling. Without legitimacy, he contended activists are “annoying latent stakeholders who never find a wider audience for their concerns” (p. 300) and will continue to struggle to persuade audiences to accept their view of the issue. Research suggests activists are heavily dependent on mass media to establish legitimacy (Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003), either through staging events to attract media coverage or providing information on their websites (Taylor et al., 2001).

In his early application of issues management, Coombs (1992) focused only on one government program’s quest to establish legitimacy. Often, two or more opposing ‘sides’ simultaneously fight to gain legitimacy for their issue stance, and even the existence of the issue. This claim has been explored more extensively in recent research; two examples are provided for illustration purposes. Smith and Ferguson (2013)
highlighted competing issue stances in their examination of how activists and an energy industry trade group fought to shape public policy in a state-level fracking debate. In their case study, they explained “claims and counter claims about the legitimate locus of public policy decision making” often arose because advocates on all sides of the fracking issue employed issues management to gain legitimacy for their position, state-level legislators, and regulators (p. 379). Activists and the energy industry also strategically employed de-legitimacy by questioning the policy, and the motives, decisions, and inaction of regulators and legislators. Smith and Ferguson’s application also highlighted the ability for issues management to create a democratic process so that individuals can engage in discussion surrounding the subject and influence outcomes.

Shifting away from the corporate-activist dynamic, Jaques (2013) examined competing issue legitimacy campaigns by observing opposing activist organizations’ reactions to a provocative safe gay sex poster in Australia. The Queensland Association of Healthy Communities harnessed both traditional and social media to portray the issue as a matter of free speech, gaining legitimacy for their position. Comparatively, the Australian Christian Lobby’s campaign to remove the poster was ambiguous and inconsistent, failing to frame the debate or generate legitimacy for their position, resulting in reputational problems. Jaques built on Coombs’ (1992) acknowledgement that legitimacy is necessary for issues management and failure to attain legitimacy for a cause or a stance can have dire consequences. In both studies (Jaques, 2013; Smith & Ferguson, 2013), each activist group had to not only legitimize itself, but also the issue at hand to gain public support, stressing the social construction of issues (Crable & Vibbert, 1985) and strategic nature of issues management. By positioning an issue as socially significant
through the use of compelling frames (Coombs, 1992; Hallahan, 2001), activists can gain public support, permitting them to upset the status quo by inciting change at the firm or industry level. One theory explaining changes in patterns of organizational activity is punctuated equilibrium (Gersick, 1991; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985).

**Punctuated equilibrium.** Adopted from the biological sciences (Eldredge & Gould, 1972), punctuated equilibrium proposes organizations do not evolve gradually but alter between relatively long periods of stability when things basically stay the same (equilibrium) punctuated by short periods of revolutionary change (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Organizations operate in patterns, creating “deep structure,” a set of “fundamental, interdependent ‘choices’ of the basic configuration into which a system’s units are organized, and the activities that maintain both this configuration and the system’s resource exchange within the environment” (Gersick, 1991, p. 15). Through establishing organizational culture, this deep structure “persists and limits change during equilibrium” and is what “disassembles, reconfigures, and enforces wholesale transformation during revolutionary punctuations” (Gersick, 1991, p. 12).

Resistance to change is key to punctuated equilibrium theory; by resisting change, organizations prevent small changes in subunits from “taking hold or substantially influencing activities in related subunits” (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994, p. 1144). Thus, small changes will likely not accumulate to generate transformation; rather, change, when it happens, is usually “rapid and discontinuous” (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994, p. 1141). These changes occur through internal disruptions (e.g., acquisitions) or changes in the organization’s environment that “threaten its ability to obtain resources” (Burke, 2008, p. 69) such as crises (Kuhn, 1970), performance pressures, and replacement of top
management (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985).

Revolutionary change results from the “jolt” to the system, a perturbation which can alter the deep structure (Burke, 2008). Burke (2008) explained that “the fundamental mission of an organization is to survive. Most of the time, organizations survive by continuously fixing problems and trying to improve the way things are done. Sometimes, however, survival depends on an entirely new raison d’être” (p. 69). For activists, harnessing power and resources to force this “jolt” may be the key to altering corporate activities.

**The Power Struggle**

In addition to establishing legitimacy for their issue(s), their organization, and their solution(s), activists and their targets seek to influence each other through the use of power (Smith & Ferguson, 2010), defined by Coombs (1998) as the “ability to get an actor to do something the actor would not do otherwise” (p. 293), such as change organizational practices. Alinsky (1971) noted the importance of power early on, advocating that only once individuals have power can they confront issues. Heath and Palenchar (2009) emphasized the role of power resource management within issues management. Often, the group able to access and mobilize the most appropriate power resources will gain the upper hand in issues management; as one group gains the ability to influence, the other party’s power to resist is diminished (Coombs, 1998). Power resource management is the “ability to employ economic, political, and social sanctions and rewards” through methods including boycotts, strikes, lockouts, legislation, regulation, police action, and executive orders (Coombs, 1998, p. 171). The goal, then, is for activists to gain access to power resources when confronting corporations they
perceive to be socially irresponsible; issues management is necessary for acquiring and maintaining these resources.

Although corporations and activists can both influence the public policy agenda (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), not all groups have equal access to this influence because of different levels of resource access (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Activists, particularly smaller organizations, often claim that corporations yield high amounts of power which influences their interactions with activists (Coombs & Holladay, 2014), who “rarely possess power in and of themselves” (Coombs, 1998, p. 293). Corporations are presumed to have more financial capital, leading to a greater ability to promote issues and influence issue discussion through access to controlled media, such as issue advertising, engaging in lobbying, contributing to campaigns, and paying legal fees in response to activists’ court challenges (Smith & Ferguson, 2010).

Despite often having fewer financial resources than their corporate adversaries, activists are not necessarily “powerless” and have proven adept at increasing leverage in a variety of ways (Coombs, 1998). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Internet has offered vast new opportunities for activist groups. Jaques (2006) argued one of its key attributes is its capacity to change the balance of power, placing activists and their targets on a more even playing field. However, power may also derive from more traditional channels. L. A. Grunig (1992) claimed activists often receive media coverage from sympathetic news outlets. Activists may not always challenge the target firm directly; rather, they may shift their efforts to other stakeholders on whom the corporation depends, such as suppliers or customers (Zietsma & Winn, 2008). Additionally, activists may target the firm’s competitive position by focusing on its reputation and/or image.
(King, 2008). Spar and LaMure (2003) explained that the “stronger and cleaner this image, ironically, the more enticing the target” (p. 84). An organization’s reputation “is crafted and used to legitimize the person’s or organization’s ability to have and exert power” (Heath, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, by attacking its reputation, activists seek to diminish an organization’s power.

To exert their own power, activists rely on gathering and mobilizing resources (Sommerfeldt, 2013). Sommerfeldt (2011b) identified three categories for resources: tangible, intangible, and coalition building. Tangible resources include the material resources required by all activist groups such as money, space, and a way to publicize the organization and its issues. Intangible resources are the “human assets that form the central basis for activist groups” (p. 430); these include people, their support, and the activities they execute to advance the organization and its issues (Freeman, 1984). Finally, coalition building with other groups provides a new set of resources through referencing or linking to organizations that have similar interests or ascribe to similar value premises (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). For instance, the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, and medical researchers worked together to challenge the tobacco industry (Heath & Waymer, 2009).

Through coalitions, activists can “draw on the power and resources of stakeholders in other groups and are strengthened by participating in coalitions that add to their legitimacy” (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 353). Coalitions assist early-stage activist groups by increasing their legitimacy (Coombs, 1998) and also help well-established activist groups increase issue legitimacy by working together to share resources and increase the supporter base (Sommerfeldt, 2013). By helping activist groups harness
resources to increase power and establish issue and activist legitimacy, coalitions ensure activist organizations are better equipped to force corporations to change by sparking a need for corporations to alter their practices. The impact of 10,000 individuals boycotting a company’s products has significantly more influence than ten individuals (Smith & Ferguson, 2010), aiding activists in their quest to “move from the margin to claim the attention of organizational leadership” (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 72).

A Relational Approach to Issues Management

Establishing and maintaining relationships with supporters, potential supporters, other activist groups, and even corporate targets is central to the activism process (Taylor et al., 2001), and has received increased attention in issues management research. A little over a decade after Jones and Chase’s (1979) influential article, Heath and Cousino (1990) reflected on the contributions of issues management to public relations. They identified four elements compromising issues management. First, organizations must engage in strategic planning, keeping abreast of threats and opportunities identified by key publics who can influence the public policy arena. Second, organizations must ‘get the house in order’ by understanding and meeting stakeholder expectations for corporate social responsibility. Next, organizations must ‘scout the terrain,’ which entails issue scanning, monitoring, analysis, and priority setting. Finally, Heath and Cousino proposed organizations may play “tough defense and smart offense” by becoming involved in public discussion about issues, thereby adding a dialogic component to issues management (p. 11).

Whereas early literature on issues management positioned it as a tool for persuading publics and influencing the public opinion in favor of the organization,
beginning in the 1990s, research within public relations reflected a greater ethical association with issues management. According to Kent et al. (2011), ethical issues management “solicits, listens to, and is the basis for the organization to adapt to public concerns and interests” (p. 538). By focusing on the foreseeable future, organizations viewed issues management similar to an insurance policy, aimed at maintaining their legitimacy without truly acknowledging the implications of their actions in the long-run, which could be detrimental not only to the organization, but to society. Thus, literature extended issues management from a relational perspective (Taylor, et al., 2003) in which organizations seek to cultivate mutual interests with publics (S. A. Bowen & Heath, 2005; Veil & Kent, 2008). In doing so, theorists emphasized the ability of issues management to facilitate harmony between organizational and stakeholder interests as a “task aimed at preserving the proper balance between the legitimate goals and rights of the free enterprise system and those of society” (Ewing, 1987, p. 5). This approach requires dialogue (Heath, 1998) rather than simply persuading publics and stakeholders to accept the organization’s decisions.

Embracing dialogue permits activists, corporations, and government agencies to increase understanding and reduce conflict (Heath, 1997) by allowing issue leaders to present their perspectives to publics and increase participation in the issues management process through conversation (Heath, 1998). Through this opportunity for engagement, issues management can divorce itself from one-way, persuasive campaigns and adopt a more ethical approach (Taylor et al., 2003; Veil & Kent, 2008). Taylor et al. (2003) advocated for an engagement framework of issues management wherein organizations rely on dialogue with publics to manage issues, considering and involving these
individuals in organizational decisions. Taylor et al. noted three key assumptions associated with the approach. First, an organization’s interests are based on its relationships with publics; organizations are most effective when listening to stakeholders and adapting to meet public expectations or needs. Second, publics may extend beyond activists or influential policymakers; for all organizations, including activist groups, publics are critical resources that continue to exist even once an issue may be resolved. Third, ongoing communication with these publics is vital as it permits organizations to establish long-term relationships, generating continued support for the organization (J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

As previously noted, this engagement approach is important not only for the corporation-activist relationship, but also for activists and their publics. To be effective, activism requires building relationships among individuals with shared values and constructing alliances with other organizations to incite change (Reber & Kim, 2006). Like corporate public relations, research advocates that activist organizations must also move beyond “simple public relations activities,” such as writing press releases, to a more “cooperative and dialogic response” (Kernisky, 1997, p. 848) with supporters, members of the media, interested publics, and potentially their opponents. One of the most popular (and criticized) models for examining the relationships from a public relations perspective is J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) four models of public relations.

**Models of public relations.** J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) outlined the progression of public relations in the U.S. The earliest stages, press agentry and public information models, focused on one-way distribution of information; the more advanced (and ideal) models incorporated two-way communication. The first of these advanced
models, two-way asymmetrical, seeks feedback from stakeholders to adapt its messages in an effort to persuade the public to accept its perspective. Therefore, this model largely reflects earlier versions of issues management, whereby organizations set out to persuade publics. The second, two-way symmetrical, states both the source and receiver shape one another via dialogue and potentially compromise since each party may be expected to change its stance to resolve an issue, contributing to the development and sustainment of relationships. This quadrant has been positioned as a normative theory, the most ethical and effective approach to public relations as an “organization and a public each must be willing to accommodate the interests of each other” (J. E. Grunig, 2001, p. 15).

However, when dealing with critics, accommodating the other party’s interests may not always be optimal, or even possible. Previous research offers mixed perspectives on the similarities between activists and corporations. Some scholars (e.g., L. A. Grunig, 1992; Jaques, 2006; Murphy & Dee, 1996) asserted these perspectives are closely related in their ideology and practices. L. A. Grunig (1992) contended, “they might not be so far apart as they think” (p. 517). Others (e.g., Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Stokes & Rubin, 2010) disagreed.

Given activist organizations seek to incite change, accommodation of corporate activities or policies at any level may not be accepted by these corporate critics, challenging the application of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations within activism (Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Cancel et al. (1997) argued that privileging the symmetrical approach as the best both “tortures the reality of practicing public relations” and “fails to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the public relations environment” (p. 33). Activist groups have also proven unwilling to accommodate corporations (Pratt,
J. E. Grunig (2001) admitted the symmetrical model may be less effective in certain circumstances and clarified that while it may be unethical for a corporation to “accommodate a repugnant public,” or in the case of this dissertation, for an activist group to accommodate a repugnant corporation, “it is not unethical to talk with its representatives” (p. 15). Defending the theory, J. E. Grunig claimed symmetrical communication occurs when opposing interests “come together to protect and enhance their self-interests. Argumentation, debate, and persuasion take place. But dialogue, listening, understanding, and relationship building also occur because they are more effective in resolving conflict than are one-way attempts at compliance gaining” (p. 18).

Still, other scholars suggested this approach is not feasible. Spicer (2000) argued, “not all differences are subject to what we might call traditional collaboration of compromise” (p. 120). Rather, in some instances, activists or their opponents may reject compromise. An example is provided by Stokes and Rubin’s (2010) examination of the battle between Philip Morris and the Group to Alleviate Smoking Pollution (GASP) over smoke-free restaurant ordinances in Colorado. Stokes and Rubin demonstrated the differences between the two forces and claim activists adopt a social justice approach and aim to challenge the status quo whereas “corporations operating within a capitalist system frequently invoke freedom and choice” (p. 42). Throughout the conflict, GASP worked at the local, grassroots level to connect with stakeholders, constructing symmetrical relationships with each group to revive the issue of smoking in public within the political arena, as well as build national support for their perspective that smoking in public is unacceptable. In comparison, Philip Morris’ response focused largely on reputation management, such as donating to charity, rather
than engaging in the public debate, thereby adopting an asymmetrical approach. Internal documents showed the tobacco giant focused on strengthening their information base to de-legitimize activists’ claims rather than focusing on its publics’ desires and altering its behavior accordingly. By remaining outside of the bargaining zone, where the organizations could reach a solution representing both parties’ interests, compromise in any form was never an option. Thus, the authors questioned if J. E. Grunig’s (2001) calls for dialogue, listening, and understanding are even possible in certain situations.

Further research is necessary to better understand the various relationships activists must build and maintain, and construct theory that recognizes the unique practices of activist organizations. Much of the research on activism from a public relations perspective focuses on the relationship between activists and opposing organizations (e.g., Coombs, 1998; Heath, 1998; Jaques, 2013; Smith & Ferguson, 2013; Taylor et al., 2003). Little research examines how these groups establish relationships with the media or interested publics, such as supporters or communities (Adi, 2015; Ryan, 1991; Sommerfeldt, 2011b; Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Furthermore, given the contradictory claims made by scholars regarding the utility of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations in an activist context, and the general dearth of public relations research on activism, additional research is needed to clarify the nature of interactions and conflicts between these parties. By focusing on these areas, this dissertation seeks to apply and expand theories in public relations from the activist perspective.
Chapter Three: Methods

This dissertation examines how activist organizations promote issues and construct relationships with key publics in a strategic effort to influence corporate activities. The primary research question that guided this dissertation was: *How do activist organizations use communication to incite corporations to change practices and policies?* The following research questions were posed to aid in analyzing data and answering the overarching research question:

RQ1a: How do activist organizations identify and promote issues?

RQ1b: How do activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues?

RQ2a: What communication strategies and tactics do activist organizations use to challenge corporate policies and/or practices?

RQ2b: Why do activist organizations use certain communication strategies and tactics to challenge corporate policies and practices?

RQ3: How do activist organizations establish and maintain relationships with key publics?

RQ4: How has the Internet altered the communication strategies employed by activist organizations?

Qualitative methods guided this study because qualitative approaches are “preferable in exploratory research where the goal is to understand a process or phenomenon” (White & Raman, 1999, p. 407). By providing descriptions and explanations, qualitative research seeks to understand how a process works (Stake, 2010), including discovering and describing communication and interaction patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Thus, for the purposes of this dissertation, the use of qualitative methods
permitted an exploration into how activist organizations locate and assign significance to perceived problematic corporate behaviors, gather and provide resources to address these behaviors, and use communication to pressure corporations into altering their behaviors.

**Study Design**

Qualitative research uses various forms of data and methods to “capture the nuance and complexity of the social situation under study” (Janesick, 2000, p. 381). This dissertation drew from three forms of data: 1) semi-structured interviews conducted with members of activist organizations, 2) organizational documents, including press releases, collected from the organizations’ websites, and 3) media reports of activists’ activities collected online from LexisNexis and Google News. Previous research on activism also used these methods (Jaques, 2013). The majority of communication-driven research on activism relies heavily on examining texts, such as organizational press releases, reports, websites, and social media pages (Adi, 2015; Coombs, 1992; Heath, 1998; Kent et al., 2003; Reber & Berger, 2005; Reber & Kim, 2006; Smith & Ferguson, 2013; Sommerfeldt, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; Taylor et al., 2001; Stokes & Rubin, 2010; Zoch et al., 2008). Many of these studies aimed to identify how activist organizations framed their messages and involved content analysis of activist organization’s websites. Other studies have drawn largely from interviews to understand how activists foster a sense of identification (Henderson, 2005), make decisions (Murphy & Dee, 1996), and use their websites to disseminate information and mobilize resources (Sommerfeldt et al., 2012).

Few studies on activism have employed a combination of qualitative interviews, organizational texts, and/or media reports to understand these organizations’ strategies (Jaques, 2013; Veil et al., 2015). Collecting data produced by the organizations and
external sources permits data triangulation, increasing the rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth of the qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claimed that triangulation is a form of, or alternative to, validation as it permits the “display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously” (p. 6). Through triangulation, sources provide corroborating evidence “to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). To examine the complexities associated with how activist organizations challenge corporations and establish legitimacy, this study used a combination of respondent interviews, organizational documents, and media reports. Each method is outlined below, including the data collection method, the research question(s) each method seeks to answer, and data analysis procedures.

**Interviews.** Qualitative interviews permit researchers to better understand the world from another’s experience and perspective through stories and explanations of respondents behaviors (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), describing “how they understand the worlds in which they live and work” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 3). More specifically, interviews can “inform the researcher about key features and processes” as the researcher defines the purposes for the interviews and identifies individuals who can contribute to these goals (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 176). Thus, the researcher anticipates the respondent’s experience to generate insight that could only be provided by someone who has “been there” (Denzin, 1970), permitting the researcher to better understand experiences and reconstruct events in which direct participation was not possible (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Interviews permit researchers to travel deeply and broadly into a subject area, making it a preeminent method in communication research as it can provide a more in-
depth understanding of a phenomenon that cannot be observed through other methods, such as analyzing texts from an activist organization’s website. Interview respondents can serve as “the observer’s observer” by providing knowledge about situations that a researcher may not be able to experience firsthand (Zelditch, 1962). This dissertation incorporated respondent interviews to better understand the communication-based practices of activist organizations. Respondent interviews entail open-ended questions where participants speak only for themselves and their organizations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The goals of respondent interviews include determining what influenced individuals to engage in a specific action and understanding the interpretations that individuals attribute to their motivations to act (Lazarsfeld, 1944). To better understand how activist organizations identify and promote issues in an effort to alter the behaviors of corporations, interviews were conducted with a member of the activist organization’s communication team. Information derived from these interviews was used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1a: How do activist organizations identify and promote issues?

RQ1b: How do activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues?

RQ2a: What communication strategies and tactics do activist organizations use to challenge corporate policies and/or practices?

RQ2b: Why do activist organizations use certain communication strategies and tactics to challenge corporate policies and/or practices?

RQ3: How do activist organizations establish and maintain relationships with key publics?
RQ4: How has the Internet altered the communication strategies employed by activist organizations?

Participants. Appropriate experience in a scene is often a key determinant in selecting participants for respondent interviews; this experience may include an individual’s career experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Study participants included individuals involved with the design and implementation of communication efforts for activist organizations. Twenty-one practitioners representing 21 activist organizations (see Appendix C) were interviewed about their organizations’ communication efforts. Because of ongoing corporate negotiations, a representative from an international environmental organization asked to not be named in the study; a practitioner from a progressive organization also asked to not have quotes attributed to the group in the dissertation.

Participants included individuals who work on larger communication teams, individuals who serve as the manager for the communication department, and, for smaller activist organizations, the executive director. Titles for participants included Campaign Manager, Communications Director, Communications Manager, Deputy Communications Director, Director of Development, Executive Director, Media and Communications Director, Media Officer, New Media Director, and Senior Communications Specialist. Participants had been with their respective organization from five months to twenty-four years. Five of the participants were involved in the activist organization’s founding.

At time of analysis, the 21 activist organizations represented in this study were challenging a corporation to change its policies and/or practices or pressured a
corporation to incite change within the past year. Activist organizations were first identified through Google News; a search was conducted using the term “activist” along with “boycott,” “petition,” or “protest.” Other activist organizations were identified during interviews (e.g., by asking respondents if they collaborate with other organizations). To gain an understanding of activists’ efforts in a variety of industries, the sample included representatives from activist groups whose efforts focus on issues such as animal rights, the environment, food safety, worker’s rights, LGBTQ rights, health-based issues, gun reform, corporate funding of “liberal advocacy,” and the pro-life movement (see Appendix C for a complete list of organizations and issues). Interviews also included multi-issue groups, which focus on topics including human, animal, and environmental rights or issues associated with “progressive change,” such as the pro-choice movement, economic equality, and the environment.

Participants were primarily identified using the activist organization’s website or the media contact listed in press releases. If this information was not available, requests for interviews are sent to the email address or online form for press inquiries. All participants were initially contacted via email or the press inquiry form. A copy of the study parameters, including the confidentiality statement, was provided upon initial contact (see Appendix A). If responses went unanswered, participants were contacted via their organizational phone number.

**Conducting interviews.** During qualitative interviews, the researcher “explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). This approach adopts an emic rather than an etic approach as the participant’s responses
on the subject should unfold from his or her perspective. Marshall and Rossman (2006) note, “The most important aspect of the interviewer’s approach is conveying the attitude that the participant’s views are valuable and useful” (p. 101). Although the interviewer may guide the conversation, the transaction must be seen as equal (Denzin, 1970).

When and where interviews take place is an important consideration because the comfort of the participant is vital to an interview, including the ability of the researcher to establish rapport (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). For the purposes of this dissertation, interviews were conducted via telephone at the convenience of the participants. Telephone interviews provide the best source of information when the researcher does not have access to speak with the individuals in a face-to-face setting (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were scheduled to last approximately 60 minutes, but some were shorter depending on the participant’s availability. Interviews ranged in length from 21 minutes to 78 minutes.

Interviews were audio-recorded to confirm the accuracy of information (Patton, 2002). Notes were also taken to aid the interviewer in formulating follow up questions and facilitating later analysis, including locating important concepts or quotes from an interview (Patton, 2002). Consent for recording the interviews was obtained verbally as part of the interview guide (see Appendix B).

**Interview guide.** To ensure research questions are answered, a degree of systematization in questioning is often necessary for interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006); interviews followed an interview guide (see Appendix B). When using a semi-structured interview format, the researcher introduces the topic and guides the discussion by asking certain questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). An interview guide helps the
interviewer determine how best to use the limited time available, making the most
efficient use of the respondent’s time (Patton, 2002). In respondent interviews, questions
often follow a standard order so responses can be compared and combined across the
sample (Denzin, 1970; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). An interview guide helps ensure
participants hear the same questions, although follow-up questions may be asked for
clarification or elaboration (Lazarsfeld, 1944; Patton, 2002).

Once the general research questions have been established for the study, the
researcher can then design the interview guide (Creswell, 2013). Denzin (1970) outlined
criteria for researchers to adhere to when developing questions: 1) questions should
accurately convey meaning to the respondent, 2) questions should motivate the
respondent to become involved and to communicate his/her attitudes and opinions
clearly, 3) questions should be precise enough to exactly convey what is expected of the
respondent, and 4) each question should relate to the overall intent of the project and
should be ordered in a logical manner so that they make sense to the respondent (p. 129).
Patton (2002) adds that questions should be open-ended, neutral, and singular. The
primary types of questions used in this study were experience and behavior questions.
These questions, as defined by Patton (2002), ask about an individual’s actions and aim
to “elicit behavior, experiences, actions, and activities that would have been observable
had the observer been present” (pp. 349-350). Other question formats used in this
interview guide were knowledge questions, which inquire about factual information, such
as the structure of an organization’s communication department, and
background/demographic questions, such as the practitioner’s role within the
organization and time employed by the organization.
Interviews began with collecting general information about the practitioner, the organization, and the organization’s communication efforts (e.g., can you describe your role within the organization; can you tell me a little about your organization’s mission and goals; who managers your communication efforts). Next, the discussion centered on how these organizations identify and promote issues (e.g., how does our organization monitor for and identify issues; what types of resources do you use to gain support for your issues). Then, questions about the organization’s communication strategies were asked (e.g., what communication strategies have you found to be most successful in raising awareness about your issue(s); what communication strategies have you found to be most successful for challenging your target’s policies or behaviors). Some questions focused specifically on the communication channel (e.g., how has the Internet and social media altered your communication efforts). Finally, the interview concluded with questions about the relationship with the corporation (e.g., how do target organizations typically respond to your messages; have you ever negotiated with a target organization).

**Organizational and media documents.** In addition to interviews with organizational members, 1,086 organizational and media documents supplemented the analysis (see Appendix D). These documents are important for qualitative analysis as they are the “paper trail” recording events and processes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), thereby permitting the researcher to establish knowledge of the history and context surrounding the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through these documents, an organization can indicate how it informs or instructs its members, explains past or future actions, memorializes its achievements, and tracks its activities (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). When these documents are related to other evidence, such as interviews, they can help
researchers understand or reconstruct events or processes that may not be available for observation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). These texts were used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1b: How do activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues?

RQ2a: What communication strategies and tactics do activist organizations use to challenge corporate policies and/or practices?

RQ2b: Why do activist organizations use certain communication strategies and tactics to challenge corporate policies and/or practices?

RQ3: How do activist organizations establish and maintain relationships with key publics?

RQ4: How has the Internet altered the communication strategies employed by activist organizations?

Organizational documents. In addition to interviews, 473 organizational documents were collected for analysis (see Appendix D). These texts included press releases, reports, promotional materials, and website content that provided additional insight as to how activists communicate with their publics and use communication to challenge corporate activities. The campaigns included in the sample were those discussed during the interview with the activist practitioner and in the initial online news articles used to identify the sample of activist organizations. These organizational texts were collected by going to the activist organization’s website and conducting a search for the campaign. For example, to learn more about Greenpeace USA’s campaign targeting Kimberly-Clark, a search using the term “Kimberly-Clark” was conducted on
www.greenpeace.org/usa. Only texts focusing on the campaigns were included in the analysis. For instance, a search for “Ben & Jerry’s” on www.peta.org returned results mentioning the company’s products, such as a story on a vegan wedding reception where ice cream was served. One activist organization also supplied written materials. After contacting the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) for an interview, a representative provided a copy of the organization’s *Guide to Effective Advocacy* and an Activist Starter Pack to deliver additional insight into their processes.

**Media reports.** To provide a secondary perspective of activists’ efforts, media reports were collected using LexisNexis and Google News. Keywords for searches included the name of the activist organization (e.g., “People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals”) and the targeted firm (e.g., Armani). Duplicate articles were removed from the searches, resulting in 613 reports for analysis (see Appendix D). To ensure organizational documents, such as press releases, were not included in the Google News search results, the –[site] operator was used (e.g., -site:peta.org). Again, only media reports focusing on campaigns were included for analysis. For example, results for a search about PETA’s campaign against Armani included a story about a professional football player who supports PETA and has a son named Armani. This report was not included in the analysis. The dates and number of the documents varied based on the length of the campaign by the activist organization.

**Data Analysis**

Prior to analysis, all organizational documents and media reports were chronologically organized to provide an overview of how the campaign progressed. Following each interview, the audio recording of the conversation was transcribed
verbatim. Transcribing allows the researcher to become immersed in the data (Patton, 2002) by permitting “the researcher to listen to the interview in a more studied way” thereby serving “as a portal to the process of data analysis” (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 205). Rubin and Rubin (1997) describe data analysis as the “final stage of listening to hear the meaning of what is said” (p. 226). After identifying themes and concepts, the researcher can discover connections between themes and integrate the themes into theory. Through analysis, the researcher transforms data into findings (Patton, 2002).

I employed thematic analysis to analyze information gleaned from respondent interviews, organizational documents, and media reports to identify recurring themes within the data (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis began by considering 1) the research questions presented during the conceptualization of this study prior to collecting data, and 2) analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during the data collection process (Patton, 2002).

Reading and interpretation of the data was guided by the research questions. First, to get a sense of the information available, I conducted an initial reading and note-taking of the data (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis occurred across all texts (interviews, organizational documents, and media reports), but was organized based on activist group (e.g., As You Sow) and by campaign (e.g., McDonald’s, Starbucks, Trader Joe’s). All data within each campaign were read repeatedly to “achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole as one would read a novel” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). During this stage, data were highlighted in different colors to correspond with the research question they answered; for example, a data segment addressing relationships
(RQ3) was highlighted in purple whereas a segment pertaining to the influence of the Internet (RQ4) was highlighted in green.

Second, careful and repeated reading of the data occurred to identify themes and relationships among the data pertaining to each research question. During this step, transcripts and other documents were studied line-by-line to identify themes and determine relationships among the themes. Both deductive and inductive analysis were used to analyze the data. Although qualitative researchers frequently rely on inductive methods (Hyde, 2000), Patton (2002) argued the researcher may use both inductive and deductive approaches. Hyde (2000) expanded on this claim, arguing that “A balance of induction and deduction is required in all research” as utilizing only inductive methods “could deprive the researcher of useful theoretical perspectives and concepts that can help guide exploration or a phenomenon” whereas “extreme deduction could preclude the researcher from developing new theory” (p. 88). For the following research questions, analysis was guided by deductive analysis, comparing activist strategies to the existing models of issues management (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Hallahan, 2001; Jones & Chase, 1979) and bases of legitimacy (Coombs, 1992):

RQ1a: How do activist organizations identify and promote issues?

RQ1b: How do activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues?

Patton (2002) notes some data may not fit within the predeveloped categories. To address this concern, a category (e.g., “other” or “miscellaneous”) was established for these data for additional analysis (Kuckartz, 2014).

For the remaining research questions (RQ2a, RQ2b, RQ3, and RQ4), inductive analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and categories present in the data through
locating and defining key phrases, terms, and practices (Patton, 2002). With inductive analysis, findings emerge from the data rather than analyzing the data in accordance with an existing framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, inductive analysis permits the researcher to derive themes from the texts provided by participants without “imposing preconceived categories” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280). This process is beneficial when the research project aims to describe a phenomenon and existing theory on the topic is limited. Analysis followed the inductive analysis process outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

First, after reading through the data to gain a general understanding of its contents, I read the data word by word to obtain codes, which are often captured using the exact words from the text to “capture key thoughts of concepts” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). Next, I made notes of the initial impressions, thoughts, and early analysis; during this process, “labels for codes emerge that are reflective of more than one key thought” (p. 1279). Third, I sorted these codes into categories (themes) based on the relationships between the codes. For each category, I crafted a label, often employing in-vivo coding by using the participants’ own words, and identified exemplars from the data. Fourth, once the patterns, themes, and categories were established, the “final, confirmatory” stage of analysis followed a deductive approach by “affirming the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive content analysis, including carefully examining deviate cases or data that don’t fit the categories developed” (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Fifth, the constant comparative method was used for each category to ensure each category was mutually exclusive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sixth, the final themes were recorded and supported using thick, rich description drawn from interviews,
organizational documents, and media reports (Patton, 2002). Finally, these themes were described in relation to existing research findings to connect the findings to the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013) and derive lessons for activist organizations and target corporations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

This chapter outlined the rationale for the study design (including the use of respondent interviews along with organizational documents and media reports) and a description of the study design, data collection, and data analysis procedures employed in this dissertation. These methods were designed to yield insight into activist organizations that are challenging, or have recently challenged, corporations to alter their behaviors in some way. Through these methods, this dissertation aimed to better understand how activist organizations identify problems they perceive as problematic, establish legitimacy for these issues, and pressure corporations through communication while also building and maintaining relationships with their own publics.
Chapter Four: Findings

This dissertation examined how activist organizations identify and promote issues, establish legitimacy for these issues, and build relationships with publics while also pressuring corporations to change practices and policies. This dissertation answers the question: *How do activist organizations use communication to incite corporations to change practices and policies?* Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants representing 21 activist organizations (see Appendix C). Because of ongoing corporate negotiations, a participant from an environmental organization asked the group not be named in the dissertation; similarly, an interviewee from a progressive organization asked no quotes be attributed to the group by name. Organizational documents and news articles ($n = 1,086$) supplemented the interviews.

This chapter provides the findings for this dissertation. First, I outline how activists identify and promote issues. Next, I illustrate how activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues. Third, I describe the strategies and tactics employed by activist organizations and how activist practitioners choose which strategies and tactics to use. Fourth, I explain how activist groups build relationships with publics and the target corporation. Finally, I conclude with an overview of how the Internet has altered the communication processes adopted by activists to achieve their goals.

Issues Management

This dissertation examined how activist organizations use issues management to achieve their goals and establish legitimacy for their issue(s) throughout the process. To understand this practice, data collected from interviews, organizational documents, and news articles were used to answer the following research question:
RQ1a: How do activist organizations identify and promote issues?

According to Tracy (2013), qualitative research often privileges inductive analysis. However, researchers may “hold on loosely” to developed models during data analysis. Although data may not fit within these preconceived frameworks, emergent findings can extend existing theories. Analysis was guided by the life cycle model (Jones & Chase, 1979), the catalytic model (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), and the issues process model (Hallahan, 2001) to understand how activists identify and advance their issue(s).

The findings revealed eight themes pertaining to activists’ campaigns: 1) issue identification, 2) issue analysis and selection, 3) target corporation identification, 4) target corporation analysis and selection, 5) strategy development, 6) strategy implementation, 7) reprieve, and 8) evaluation. Five of these themes relate to Jones and Chase’s (1979) issue life cycle model: identify issues, analyze and prioritize issues, develop an issue strategy, implement the issue strategy, and evaluate the campaign. The reprieve stage corresponds with the dormant issue status advanced by Crable and Vibbert’s (1985) catalytic model. Finally, the strategy implementation stage encompasses subthemes from both the catalytic model (potential, imminent, current, and critical status) and Hallahan’s (2001) issue process model (problem recognition, arousal, and activation).

**Issue identification.** The analysis revealed that activist organizations employ five methods to identify issues: 1) adopting a commodities approach, 2) monitoring unregulated industries, 3) monitoring industries, 4) addressing community needs, and 5) adhering to “our issues.”
First, activists may adopt a commodities or market-based approach. Used frequently by environmental groups, activists ask, “What are the commodities that are having the greatest impact on the environment?” (unidentified environmental group). Second, groups monitor unregulated industries. The Environmental Working Group (EWG) identified cosmetics because these products are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and companies “can use virtually any kind of ingredient” without testing its effects on the environment or human health.

Third, organizations focus on particular industries because they know violations are likely to occur in those sectors. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) focuses on four major industries “in which the largest number of animals suffer the most intensely” (Levesque, 2017, para. 1): the food industry, the fashion industry, the entertainment industry, and laboratories. Fourth, environmental organizations work closely with communities and consider their needs when identifying issues. Appalachian Voices places staff “on the ground in communities” to learn “what kind of problems they’re having on a day-to-day basis.” From there, the group determines “the biggest problems,” such as mountaintop removal mining. Finally, many organizations have issues they perceive to be “our issues.” For years, Greenpeace “separated our interest areas into very specific categories that we sort of treat as ‘our issues’: oceans, forests, climate, toxins, whales…” and monitors for “key developments” in these areas.

Findings also show activists employ six resources to identify issues: 1) the Internet, 2) coalitions, 3) the news, 4) supporters, 5) volunteers or staff members, and 6) employees of the target firm. First, many groups use the Internet. The Other 98 uses Google Alerts, Moms Demand Action will “scour” social media, Gays Against Guns
monitors the website of their adversary and its allies, and 2nd Vote searches for financial disclosures and IRS filings. Second, groups rely on their networks, or coalitions, of like-minded activists. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) is part of a listserv where “allies around the world are reporting back what they’re seeing.” Third, activist organizations follow the news. DeFund DAPL’s partners identify issues using a subscription news monitoring sources. Fourth, supporters will often bring issues to the group. 18 Million Rising began its American Girl Doll and Marvel campaigns after being alerted by members. Fifth, groups may rely on volunteers or staff members; Greenpeace has staff internationally who monitor forest activities (Paul, 2009). A final source is the target firm’s employees, such as whistleblowers, although Life Decisions International notes “that’s rare.”

**Issue analysis and selection.** After identifying an issue, the activist organization must analyze the issue and decide whether or not to take action based on six criteria distinguished in this study: 1) relevancy to the organization, 2) ability to contribute, 3) novelty of the issue, 4) potential to gain traction, 5) organizational capacity, and 6) resource access.

First, practitioners decide if the issue is relevant to their organizational mission. Life Decisions International always considers “if we are really qualified to talk about it.” Second, activists contemplate if “there’s something that we can actually do to influence the outcome of the decision” (unidentified progressive organization). Third, organizations may choose not to adopt an issue because it has been addressed repeatedly and “there’s nothing new to add to a debate or discussion” (EWG). Fourth, activists analyze the issue to see if it exerts potential for resonating with publics. The Center for Food Safety does
this by analyzing “what issues are popular in the media,” and how those issues are portrayed and received by audiences.

Fifth, activist organizations must assess their capacity. A participant from Appalachian Voices noted that the group may choose not to address an issue because it “can’t handle [the issue] or we’re not in a good position to do so right now,” citing the opioid epidemic as an example. Lastly, activist organizations have access to few resources and must choose where to direct their efforts. Gays Against Guns emphasizes the need to determine if they have the resources to sustain the campaign, recognizing campaigns can drag on for years. If the activist organization determines it is equipped to promote an issue, activists then turn to identifying a target firm.

**Target corporation identification.** Activists must find a face for their campaign, requiring they identify a corporate target. To do so, the activists interviewed in this study used six approaches: 1) tracing a supply chain, 2) identifying egregious violators, 3) selecting a large, recognizable firm, 4) identifying firms engaged in corporate social responsibility, 5) choosing a firm because of its physical location(s), and 6) locating “charismatic villains.”

First, groups like Greenpeace that adopt a commodities or market-based approach identify “on the ground producers whose actions are contributing to the problem” and then “follow the supply chain to a multinational corporation that peddles a widely known consumer product” (Gell, 2014, para. 22). Second, activists may identify the egregious violators within an issue area. An unidentified environmental group focusing on palm oil located “the major users of palm oil in the snack food industry” and “the ones who have the farthest to go in terms of sourcing sustainable or responsible palm oil,” leading the
group to PepsiCo. Activists must often prioritize firms. The Sierra Club begins by focusing on coal plants that are more threatening to the environment and health, such as Colstrip in Montana, which was the “dirtiest coal plant west of the Mississippi.”

Third, choosing a large, recognizable firm may draw attention to the campaign and induce an industry spillover effect. An unidentified progressive organization identified Google as a prime target. In addition to supporting the 2016 Republican National Convention (RNC), “Google is a very recognizable brand. Just about everybody in the United States knows about Google; the vast majority use it…. that makes it a great target for us.” 2nd Vote focuses “on companies that a regular person would do business with on a regular basis.” Greenpeace selected Procter & Gamble because if “a well-known company like Procter & Gamble can show leadership to clean up supply chains, we expect other companies will follow” (Gies, 2014, para. 1-2). A week after Procter & Gamble announced changes, Johnson & Johnson followed (Talocchi, 2014).

Fourth, activists target corporations because of their corporate social responsibility efforts (CSR) or issue stances. Greenpeace selected Kimberly-Clark partly because the company was developing “a sort of sustainability discourse…and they were vulnerable in large part because they cared.” Some firms are chosen because their actions fail to align with their rhetoric. 18 Million Rising targeted Gap “because they have sort of built a reputation on being the most ethical of the fast fashion companies when in reality they’re not.” Other firms are selected because they adopt a stance on an issue. 2nd Vote contended that Target inserted “itself directly into such a radical movement” when issuing its widely publicized bathroom policy (2nd Vote, 2016b, para. 5).
Fifth, activist groups will choose targets based on their location. An unidentified progressive organization noted Google’s location was “in our backyard,” making it easy to stage events. Collectively Free and Moms Demand Action have chapters around the United States and both often focus on national chains, such as Starbucks. Moms Demand Action explained it wants “to engage folks no matter where they live.” By picking a national target, activists can hold events at multiple locations.

Sixth, according to the Other 98, certain firms are “easier sales” because they are “charismatic villains” that “make a really good bad guy to rally around” because of vulnerabilities. If a corporation is “already in the news and we feel like we can take that and pivot it and turn it into something, that makes for a good target” because “people are already watching them.” When determining which banks to focus on with the Dakota Access Pipeline, the organization included Wells Fargo because of its recent scandal.

**Target corporation analysis.** Once the organization has identified a potential target, activists analyze the firm. A participant representing an unidentified environmental group explains it conducts a “deep dive where we try to learn everything about that company,” beginning with the power structures, the financial makeup (investors and shareholders), supply chains, emerging markets, and weaknesses, such as struggling products. Moms Demand Action researched Chipotle’s leadership to determine “whether we felt they would be aligned with us.” Finally, activists investigate the history of the firm to see how it responded to activists in the past (Other 98).

**Strategy development.** After conducting research, activists build a campaign, which includes identifying a goal, incorporating research, and selecting strategies. First, goals exist on “a few tiers” (DeFund DAPL). For some activists, corporate campaigns are
a stepping stone to achieving larger goals. Moms Demand Action’s goal is to “push back against the culture, the laws, and policies that allow the culture of gun violence to exist in the United States;” their “corporate work” aims to shift the culture. The primary objective of a corporate campaign is to persuade a firm or industry to alter a particular behavior. Greenpeace remarked that its Kimberly-Clark campaign was “not about changing a roll of toilet paper in my bathroom. This is about changing an industry” (Covert, 2009, p. 51).

Second, campaigns must be informed by research. The Other 98 used the example of its campaign to stop a Shell oil rig from embarking on a drilling mission. Through conducting research on the drilling process, the group learned the rig had to make it to the Arctic by a certain time before parts of its route froze; as a result, the group aimed to delay the rig from leaving port. Many activists articulate specific campaign goals. The Sierra Club Beyond Coal campaign aims to “end the use of coal produced energy in the United States within the next two decades” and transition America into a fully clean energy economy, noting smaller objectives exist along the way, such as eliminating individual coal plants. Several activists also aspire to hold a conversation with the firm, hoping its actions “will lead to the establishment of a dialogue” (Collectively Free).

Lastly, Appalachian Voices works backward, mapping out strategies and tactics that support its goals, beginning with identifying a feasible solution for both the activists and the target. The group will “put up a board and draw a map that shows who the power players are. Who are the decision makers, who are the allies, who can get us basically to where we’re trying to go?” After identifying these key players, the group charts strategies and supporting tactics. The Center for Food Safety added that it identifies the outcomes and then builds a timeline, plotting strategies (e.g., media relations) and tactics (e.g.,
action alerts). When choosing strategies and tactics, activists must recognize their organizational strengths (Greenpeace) and identify what approaches have been effective, or ineffective, on the target in the past (Other 98). Other considerations for symbolic actions or civil disobedience include the laws and regulations in a certain area (Gays Against Guns).

**Strategy implementation.** After formulating an approach to target a corporation because of its role in an issue, activists implement the campaign using a variety of strategies and tactics to inform publics and motivate them to take action. This process incorporates five steps: 1) awareness, 2) problem recognition, 3) arousal, 4) activation, and 5) commitment. Three of these stages (problem recognition, arousal, and activation) derived from Hallahan (2001); the other two emerged from the data. Throughout this process, activists aim to promote issues from potential to critical status (Crable & Vibbert, 1985).

**Awareness.** The first step for any activist organization is to generate awareness about the issue. Appalachian Voices noted that while individuals recognize mountaintop removal occurs nearby, they “don’t realize the scale of it” because it is “hidden away from the main roads and everything.” As a result, the organization “has to get that story out within the region.” To do so, activists rely on the news media and other information channels, including websites and social media. At this stage, individuals do not engage in any actions or non-routine information seeking; rather, activists are just aiming to spark initial interest in the topic and see if it will gain traction, reflecting the potential stage of the catalytic model to generate initial attraction among publics (Crable & Vibbert, 1985).
Problem recognition. Next, activist organizations must present a message in a “way that makes sense to people” in an effort to get them to understand and care about the issue and its potential impacts, moving the issue to imminent status (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). For As You Sow, this challenge is daunting because “it’s hard to explain what we do in a way that can easily be written about or explained in the media sphere.” The Center for Food Safety finds it must present “a direct point of reference from A to Z, to put the pieces together in a way for them that just kind of makes sense.” Framing entails describing the impact so that publics can visualize the gravity of the issue. Greenpeace linked rainforest destruction to palm oil, claiming “forests are disappearing at a rate of more than nine Olympic swimming pools each minute” (Craighill, 2014, para. 3). Images are also powerful. Moms Demand Action used photos of people walking into establishments with their guns, including 60 pro-gun advocates carrying firearms into a South Dakota Starbucks (Daniels, 2013; Watts & Beck, 2013). During this stage, activists identify opinion leaders in different communities, including “mommy bloggers,” city council members, tribal leaders, and other individuals who can champion a message.

Arousal. Once activist organizations have shown audiences an issue exists and defined it as a problem warranting attention, the next stage is to prompt individuals into seeking information and convincing them that their actions will help. The issue reaches current status once a large number of stakeholders are aware (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). To aid individuals in these efforts, many activists offer tools, such as databases and email distribution lists so individuals can actively seek out additional information.

An obstacle in this stage for activists is dispelling misperceptions to convince individuals that actions are necessary and will be fruitful. The Center for Food Safety
faces challenges with genetically modified organizations (GMOs), including a “gaping divide” between public perceptions of GMOs and research (Hughlett & Spencer, 2015, p. 1D). The public may believe action is unwarranted because the issue is waning or defunct. ASH faces this struggle because individuals do not see smoking as a pressing issue because it is forbidden in most restaurants today. Issues also compete with other issues; according to ASH, individuals are more interested in “big issues” such as guns or oil. Corporate responses may also de-escalate an issue. According to the Other 98, “it is easy for them to put out fake solutions and then kill momentum,” adding that “Shell Oil gives a lot of money to indigenous communities in Alaska…People bring that up against us all the time.”

A second factor in arousing publics is demonstrating how the issue pertains to individuals. Activist organizations tell stories about individuals affected by the firm (Collectively Free; Gaworecki, 2008a; Other 98, 2015b) or have individuals share their stories (DeFund DAPL). Activists rely on “charismatic megafauna” to rouse publics, emphasizing the threat to animals (Gell, 2014). A Greenpeace campaigner explained, “It’s easy to say, ‘If you’re destroying forests, you’re destroying tiger habitats,’” whereas saying “Do you know that forests store carbon and if we save the peat bogs we will trap all this carbon and methane in the soil?” is harder (Gell, 2014, para. 20). Thus, Greenpeace starts with “the thing they care about the most first” (para. 20) because “We’re not going to win by telling people what they should care about.” (para. 21).

**Activation.** After arousing publics, activist organizations must activate audiences, prodding them to engage in actions to elevate the issue to critical status (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Activists often relay a sense of urgency. Environmental and gun reform
groups present their issues as a public health crisis. The Sierra Club (2014a) emphasized coal pollution generates more than $100 billion in health costs annually.

Activist organizations provide steps to engage publics. According to PETA, the “critical” first steps are “about creating a buzz.” Activists must offer steps for “the everyday people who are engaging with us.” These steps should be “easy and quick” and “give them a sense that they did something meaningful.” In doing so, groups increase their numbers, which practitioners claim is a key source of power (Other 98). Given the variety of tactics offered by activists to get involved, individuals may vary in their level of activation from tweeting to protesting. Ideally, supporters become so invested in a campaign that they can organize without prompting from the activist organization.

Animal rights activists hijacked the marketing campaign, #AskSeaWorld, by taking over the hashtag with questions about SeaWorld’s practices, before PETA became involved.

**Commitment.** Movements require sustenance and growth. Activists must continue to promote the issue to inspire more individuals to join the cause and retain supporters. Activists often rely on media coverage as “that’s how our stories get a lot of traction” (As You Sow) and social media. An unidentified environmental organization encourages individuals to take photos during actions and share them on social networks. Even if the corporation does not see the photo, members of the participant’s social circle will. Interpersonal interactions between activists and supporters are also important so that they “see that you’re a real team of people and not just a Facebook page” (Other 98).

**Evaluation.** Practitioners must also measure the effects of their efforts through evaluation. For many activist organizations, evaluation is ongoing, although a few organizations noted they will sit down at the end of a campaign to discuss “what could
have gone better, what could have gone worse” (Other 98). Social media metrics and media mentions frequently serve as evaluation methods. Greenpeace alters campaigns based on “developments on the ground.” The Other 98 also uses summative evaluation because it receives grant funding from other non-profits and individual benefactors and must incorporate the results of the campaign into its reports.

While campaigns may have an overall goal, activists reach milestones along the way. At Greenpeace, “winning isn’t necessarily achieving your policy target. Winning is like having a successful protest, making some news together, things that are about relationships and trust.” A participant from 2nd Vote echoed the sentiment, noting campaigns can ensure that you’re “constantly growing.” The group also keeps its primary goal in mind, and “when a company does something to stop funding or stop advocating for a liberal position, we would consider that to be a success.”

Activists also evaluate using the firm’s response, such as an invitation to converse with representatives. Corporations respond in other ways, such as cease-and-desist letters (18 Million Rising). A participant noted tobacco companies sued its partners, which activists often “see it as a badge of honor that ‘the tobacco industry sued me over this. That’s how I knew I was getting close on something’” (ASH).

**Reprive.** Several activist groups reached agreements with their targets on issues, including Campus Pride with Chick-fil-A and Greenpeace with Kimberly-Clark and Procter & Gamble. While issues never are fully resolved (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), targets may be given a reprieve from pressure. Activists remain vigilant in monitoring issues and firms. A Greenpeace campaigner stated, “We don’t have permanent friends or enemies. The only thing we’re loyal to is the cause. If Kimberly-Clark screws up
tomorrow, we’ll be right back at their throats. And they know that” (Gies, 2014, para. 20).

Issues may become inactive following a ‘partial victory.’ Moms Demand Action’s efforts often lead to corporations, such as Starbucks, requesting customers leave guns at home rather than implementing a ban (Moms Demand Action, 2013b). The group backs off but pledges to continue monitoring the firms and resume campaigns if any gun-related incidents occur. Issues may also be resurrected because a corporation fails to fulfill its promises. In 2015, Walmart announced it was raising its minimum wage to $9 per hour; shortly thereafter, store managers cut hours so “they wouldn’t have to pay their employees as much as they should.” In response, Making Change at Walmart revived its minimum wage campaign.

Reprieve may also be unachievable, depending on the activist group. The Other 98 recognized that “because we’re in sort of the business of culture shifting, it’s rare that things reach a resolution.” While some organizations might consider the issue of big banks resolved through new legislation, “we would consider it resolved when there are no more big banks and everyone is in credit unions.” As a result, “we’re just always pushing for more,” indicating that even partial victories may actually spawn new issues.

**Issue Legitimacy**

Because activists are “an outside group,” they struggle with “appearing more mainstream” (PETA). Thus, activists must establish issue legitimacy (Coombs, 1992). The second research question inquired about how organizations establish legitimacy:

**RQ1b: How do activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues?**
Analysis followed a deductive approach, guided by Coombs’ (1992) legitimacy bases: 1) tradition, 2) charisma, 3) bureaucracy, 4) values, 5) symbols, 6) de-legitimacy, 7) credibility, 8) rationality, 9) emotionality, and 10) entitlement. Because all data did not fit into the existing categories, another category was added: 11) external factors.

**Tradition.** As a pro-life organization, Life Decisions International emphasizes traditional issue stances, encouraging young people to practice abstinence. Groups such as the Center for Food Safety also fight to protect farmers who grow “traditional crops” from “contamination” by genetically engineered crops (Center for Food Safety, 2016d). However, for some activists, tradition may be an obstacle to procuring legitimacy for an issue or an issue stance. An activist with the Sierra Club noted the organization often faces this challenge with its anti-coal campaign because individuals are less willing to consider alternate approaches “because this is the way things have always been done. ‘Well, what do you mean that we can retire this coal plant and still have the lights on?’”

**Charisma.** Charisma relies on the characteristics of an individual that sets them apart from others; celebrities are a key example. PETA relies on celebrities, involving a plethora of individuals on its Ringling and SeaWorld campaigns, including television host David Letterman (PETA, 2007b), actor Alec Baldwin (Kretzer, 2013a), entertainer Justin Timberlake, and actress Jessica Biel (Kretzer, 2014b).

**Bureaucracy.** Activists will frequently cite legal rulings supporting their issue stance, such as when Ringling Brothers was forced to pay a $270,000 fine to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a violation (PETA, 2011d). Regulations also help activists’ efforts. In 2015, Duke Energy was charged with nine counts of violating the Clean Water Act after its mishandling of the Dan River coal ash spill.
(“Duke Energy proposes $102M settlement,” 2015), lending legitimacy to efforts by the Sierra Club and Appalachian Voices.

Values. Activists also use values to establish legitimacy (Coombs, 1992). The first value mentioned by activists is fairness. According to the Other 98, “When you can say ‘this situation isn’t fair for me. That’s not fair to me,’ that’s powerful.” The Center for Food Safety and EWG also invoked values to show Americans are at a greater, involuntary risk for health problems compared to European nations, where GMOs are labeled (Hughlett & Spencer, 2015), two out of three harmful neonicotinoids are banned (Walker, 2013), and certain chemicals are not permitted in cosmetics (Page, 2005). A second value is diversity. In its Marvel campaign, 18 Million Rising pled with the firm to cast an Asian actor in Iron Fist. The group asked Marvel to “add more diversity” and “help remove some of the character’s more problematic elements such as Orientalism and cultural appropriation” (18 Million Rising, 2015, para. 2).

Third, animal rights organization PETA frequently relies on a value premise for campaigns by highlighting the values associated with keeping animals in captivity for human enjoyment. The group invoked an absolute versus social values argument when comparing circuses to cockfighting, which the group deemed “ass-backwards” (PETA, 2007a, para. 1). Fourth, an unidentified progressive organization relied heavily on values when pressuring Google to withdraw from the 2016 RNC because of then-candidate Donald Trump. The group asked Google not to “align your brand with Donald Trump’s hateful, racist campaign,” “divisive and bigoted platform” (Press Release 21, 2016a, para. 1), and “hateful and violent” rhetoric (News Article 11, 2016, para. 1).
Symbols. Making Change at Walmart invoked the use of symbols in its minimum wage campaign by incorporating *The Hunger Games*. Specifically, the organization used the franchise’s three finger solute during protests, to demonstrate respect for those fighting for the cause, and a revised version of a protest song from the first *Mockingjay* film, representing rebellion (“Hunger Games salute,” 2014).

De-legitimacy. Activists rely heavily on de-legitimacy, whereby groups attack the legitimacy of their opponents to build their own legitimacy (Coombs, 1992). First, activists expose the organization’s greenwashing and front groups. Both the Center for Food Safety and U.S. Right to Know revealed front groups for Bayer and Coca-Cola; Coca-Cola’s front group shut down soon after. Second, activists depict corporations as irresponsibly putting publics at risk. 2nd Vote claimed Target “seems to care more about a radical political agenda than common sense and safety of its own customers” (2nd Vote, 2016b, para. 3) while Moms Demand Action raised concerns about bringing children to restaurants where customers can openly carry guns (Sheridan, 2014).

Third, activists portray corporate practices as inhumane. PETA obtained and released USDA inspection reports that claimed Ringling Brothers did not adhere to the Animal Welfare Act, including failure to provide adequate care to an elephant with an infection (J. O’Connor, 2011, para. 1). Making Change at Walmart positions its nemesis as heartless in its treatment of employees, calling Walmart’s decision to increase wages and then cut hours a “cruel PR stunt…all so Walmart can pad its bottom line” (Mendoza, 2005, para. 11). Corporations are also portrayed as villains. 18 Million Rising accused Gap of trying to “villainize a small non-profit organization with a staff of only three” rather than “answer hard questions” (18 Million Rising, 2014b, para. 4).
Fourth, activists point out corporations’ hypocritical actions. When Moms Demand Action pressured Starbucks to ban firearms from its stores, the company claimed it abided by local and state laws. The group emphasized the coffee chain’s recent decision to prohibit smoking within a 25-foot radius of its stores, which is not required by law but was an act of “public health safety.” The group “countered with the message that second hand bullets are just as dangerous as second hand smoke, if not more so” and “gave us a very clear way to call out that they were standing up for public health and safety on one side and they weren’t on another.”

Finally, activists undermine research used by corporations to justify practices and policies. U.S. Right to Know exposed “independent academics” associated with Coca-Cola. Noting that “The public really trusts independent, white coat academics,” the participant explained firms are “finding ways to really put those folks out front as spokespeople while hiding connections of their direct financial contributions.” In 2016, the group uncovered a relationship between Coca-Cola and a top level official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) who were “working in secret” when “Coca-Cola asked for ways to influence the World Health Organization to back off their strong stance on sugar and the health problems related to sugar.”

**Credibility.** Several groups mentioned engaging in activities to demonstrate expertise and trustworthiness. Gays Against Guns conducts significant research “because the last thing that we ever want to happen is to be accused of not knowing what we’re talking about.” Organizations dealing with scientific issues, often in human health, claim they strive to ensure their work is “credible” and “backed up, in our case, by science and by facts” (EWG). Credibility may also be bestowed by subject experts. Travel guidebook
series creator Arthur Frommer apologized for promoting SeaWorld in his books, backing PETA’s claims about the company’s alleged inhumane practices (Mullins, 2010).

**Rationality.** Activists also use empirical evidence to persuade audiences (Coombs, 1992). Several organizations emphasized the role of research in substantiating their issue stances. The Center for Food Safety is proud of “generating thoughtful, factual evidence-based, grounded in science reports.” While some groups conduct their own research, others rely on third-parties; Collectively Free cited an academic, peer-reviewed study that claimed cows are as intelligent as dogs and cats (Kaplan, 2015).

**Emotionality.** PETA relies heavily on emotionality to establish legitimacy. Known for its graphic imagery (Carta, 2009), PETA recognizes that emotional stories and photos of animals often evoke more empathy than statistics (Chattoo, 2016). Among its emotional appeals are photos of a baby circus elephant “screaming bloody murder” (Montgomery, 2009, p. C01). Gays Against Guns aims to induce an emotional response through its use of “Human Beings,” silent protestors who dress in all white, complete with a veil over their face, and carry a plaque with the photograph and name of a gun violence victim. Following the Orlando nightclub shooting, 49 “Human Beings” marched in the Pride Parade, creating a “very powerful” visual.

**Entitlement.** Entitlement involves establishing legitimacy based on direct experience with the issue. However, because audiences may not have experience with a particular issue, activists will often incorporate firsthand accounts of those who do by having Walmart employees (Making Change at Walmart) or having the victims of gun violence (Moms Demand Action) share their stories with audiences.
**External factors.** Several of the campaigns gained or increased their support through factors beyond the activists’ control, including current events, other campaigns, corporate crises, documentaries, and opposing activist groups. First, activist campaigns benefit from current events, allowing activists to latch onto the larger media narrative. For example, As You Sow connected the lead found in chocolate to the Flint water crisis (Costa, 2016). Campaigns with similar premises can also work in tandem to build legitimacy, such as PETA’s efforts against SeaWorld and Ringling-Brothers. The group crafted complimentary narratives about values and the treatment of orcas and elephants (Greenhouse, 2015), and Ringling’s decision to retire the elephants raised questions about whether or not SeaWorld would follow suit and respond in kind with its orcas (Daly, 2015).

Second, activists may benefit from events occurring at their target’s physical locations. Moms Demand Guns benefitted from gun-related incidents. During its Facebook campaign, an Ohio man was indicted on charges of illegally selling a gun to a 15-year-old Kentucky teen he contacted via Facebook (Hayesb, 2014). In another example, an individual claiming to be a transgender woman was arrested for voyeurism at a Target while 2nd Vote was encouraging individuals to boycott the company (2nd Vote, 2016a).

Third, organizational missteps also generate vulnerability, helping activists. Amid the Other 98’s campaign against Shell, the company tore a 3-foot gash in its icebreaker, raising concerns about drilling in the Arctic (Other 98 Team, 2015a). This phenomenon also occurs at the industry level in a spillover effect. Coal ash spills, including the Dan
River spill, helped movements against large energy companies such as Duke Energy (Appalachian Voices, 2014; Dodson, 2014; Henderson, 2014)

Fourth, documentaries have bestowed legitimacy to activist campaigns. For PETA, the documentary *Blackfish* was instrumental in altering its SeaWorld campaign’s trajectory because it set off a chain of events, such as failing attendance and falling stock prices, later known as “the Blackfish effect” (Ferdman, 2016). A PETA representative called it a “breath of fresh air,” noting “I don’t think any of us expected how big it was going to get.” Following the film, donations to the animal rights group increased substantially, and its microsite, SeaWorldofHurt.com saw an increase in visitors from an average of 30 per day before *Blackfish* to more than 1 million in 2015 (Chattoo, 2016). A columnist noted that before Blackfish, “fringe” activists attacked SeaWorld for decades and it was “easy to dismiss them as loons” but after the documentary, SeaWorld “realized just how far this activists’ narrative had traveled in the public’s minds” (Berman, 2016, para. 2), prompting the company to end breeding and overhaul its orca shows.

Finally, activists can gain legitimacy using an unlikely external source: opposing activists. Moms Demand Action gained the attention of Starbucks after using photos of pro-gun advocates posing in the stores with firearms to show the company had “become, unwittingly, a darling of gun extremists.” Taking Starbucks’ lack of response as an endorsement to carry, gun advocates held a Starbucks Appreciation Day, prompting CEO Howard Schultz to ask individuals to leave their guns at home (Fineman, 2013).

This section outlined how activist organizations use issues management to achieve their goals by identifying and analyzing issues, selecting a target associated with that issue, and planning, implementing, and evaluating a campaign in an effort to reach
some form of resolution. To do so, activists invoke a number of legitimacy stances identified by Coombs (1992), in addition to relying on external factors.

Strategies and Tactics

Activist organizations employ a variety of strategies and tactics to increase issue awareness and generate pressure to invoke a response from the target firm. The second set of questions posed for this dissertation focused on these strategies and tactics, asking:

RQ2a: What communication strategies and tactics do activist organizations use to challenge corporate policies and/or practices?

RQ2b: Why do activist organizations use certain communication strategies and tactics to challenge corporate policies and practices?

Strategies. The communication strategy is the “heart” of the campaign, providing a roadmap for how the organization plans to achieve its goals through actions and message content (Smith, 2009). Seven themes emerged from the data: 1) “getting the news out there,” 2) message framing, 3) empowering supporters, 4) the shame game, 5) engage multiple stakeholders, 6) “be very annoying,” and 7) engage the target corporation.

“Getting the news out there.” Activists must strategize about how to disseminate information to publics; this process may take many forms, including 1) serving as a resource, 2) involving the media, and 3) selecting an appropriate channel.

Serving as a resource. First, several participants noted their organization desires to be a resource for consumers. The Center for Food Safety representative claimed, “we particularly pride ourselves on being a knowledge source,” providing access to scientific reports and literature, in addition to blog posts explaining that information.
Involving the media. Second, activists involve the media to extend their reach. A representative for U.S. Right to Know, who worked on the coalition with EWG challenging Johnson & Johnson, explained the media attention was a turning point:

The company still wasn’t moving until we were able to show that they were already using a safer formula in other countries, and within one hour, they were announcing that they were changing their baby products as soon as they heard from a reporter from the Associated Press about our report. I think that’s just a really clear example of just taking information and getting it out to the public and changing corporate practices. And relatively quickly, I mean, it took years, but it was just amazing that once they had the information that we were going to report that they were selling different formulas in different countries that they were instantly ready to announce that they were going to be changing their formula.

The participant added the group was successful in employing the same strategy against companies such as L’Oréal over chemicals in nail polish, noting “the media is a really important partner in holding institutions accountable.”

Selecting an appropriate channel. According to 18 Million Rising, “the best messaging in the world still needs the right vehicle of conveyance to be impactful.” Activists must communicate on channels where the firm’s publics will see the information (unidentified environmental organization). Activists will often stage protests at the corporation’s headquarters and use public channels, including social media.

Message framing. How activists frame a message is also important to ensure the message gains traction. The five approaches mentioned by participants are 1) timeliness, 2) “craft the pitch,” 3) culture jamming, 4) “keeping it simple,” and 5) positivity.

Timeliness. In addition to explaining why a story is important, a representative from the Sierra Club notes reporters always want to know “why should my outlet report on it at this particular time in history?” The 2nd Vote representative mentioned the challenges associated with remaining timely, noting campaigns “typically run the course
of a weekly news cycle and then taper off.” To keep a campaign in the news, activist practitioners must identify “ways to react to the coverage or response in order to shift the story and keep it relevant,” including new developments in the story or related events.

Activists often orchestrate campaigns around various occasions to increase their timeliness, such as holidays, anniversaries, and corporate initiatives. Making Change at Walmart frequently stages protests on Black Friday (Hines, 2012; DePillis, 2014; Rushe, 2013) because it is not only “a day when Walmart needs their workers most,” but also “a symbolic day” (Velasco, 2012, para. 7), allowing the group to “use the Black Friday spotlight to sway shoppers to their side” (Hines, 2012, para. 2). As You Sow released its chocolate report shortly before Easter to coincide with Easter candy sales (Cauguiarn, 2016; Costa, 2016). Activist organizations will also observe anniversaries. Gun reform groups frequently hold events on the anniversary of the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting (Trykowski, 2016; Watts, 2013). Other actions are timed based on corporate events. 18 Million Rising incited a hoax against Gap on the day of its annual shareholder meeting, ensuring shareholders and executives would hear about and discuss the event during the meeting (Feldman, 2014; C. O’Connor, 2014b).

“Craft the pitch.” Obtaining media attention can be difficult for many activists. 18 Million Rising tries to “come at problems from a different angle,” and was successful in generating attention about net neutrality by framing it in terms of social movements, explaining “how this would affect organizers on the ground in Ferguson or Flint.” Other activists may be able to provide access or information others cannot. Making Change at Walmart arranges one-on-one interviews where workers can “counteract the information coming out of the executives.” Campus Pride has college students “give voice to some of
the issues and challenges.” PETA noted “the biggest issue is really getting just the right hook” because “in all honesty, it’s not always necessarily the story that matters. It’s how you craft the pitch.”

Culture jamming. Culture jamming enables “organizations to use a company’s own elaborately planned marketing campaigns against it, often to devastating effect” (Gell, 2014, para. 22). Culture jamming may entail using the corporation’s motto, which a progressive organization did with Google’s “Don’t be evil” when protesting its sponsorship of the 2016 RNC. Activists can also hijack a corporation’s hashtag; an unidentified environmental organization used PepsiCo’s #LiveForNow to argue that the campaign tells individuals “not to worry about climate change, the fact of the last wild orangutans, and the children that are forced to work in slave-like conditions” (Action 25, 2014, para. 3; Blog Post 11, 2014). Moms Demand Action used Facebook’s “Look Back” video, implemented by the firm for its tenth anniversary, to show gun sales, complete with the same stock music. The participant noted, “We basically took Facebook moments and turned them to our advantage” which “really got Facebook to sit up and take notice.”

“Keeping it simple.” Because activists often address complicated issues, the Other 98 representative emphasized the importance of “keeping it simple.” As You Sow’s work on the chocolate industry “focuses on highly tweetable nuggets of information, easily understood by the masses” to make the message “more digestible” (Cahalan, 2015, para. 45). While simplifying messages without losing the complexity of the issue is a struggle, “it’s also important to make it easy to understand” (para. 46). Because messages are often disseminated over multiple channels, and often across coalitions, consistency is key to avoid confusion. The Center for Food Safety emphasized
consistency permits activists to “hammer the same messages over and over so people are seeing them again and again and understanding them.”

**Positivity.** Multiple participants emphasized the need to stay positive, or hopeful, in campaign messaging. A representative from Appalachian Voices explained that “trying to turn a sad feeling about something into action can be really tough…That doesn’t make [individuals] want to do anything” The Center for Food Safety tries to “offer a bright side or solution by being able to say, ‘Yes, this is happening, but here’s how we can make a positive impact.’” This optimism “really, really jumps those engagement numbers… Positivity is certainly a great communication strategy.”

**Empowering supporters.** Activists must seek to empower supporters so “they feel like they’re part of the solution” (Center for Food Safety). To engage supporters, activists must 1) provide “easy and quick” steps and 2) offer convenient actions.

“**Easy and quick.**” Individuals often fail to take action because they do not know what to do (Moms Demand Action). Therefore, activists try to offer “easy and quick” steps to get involved (PETA). For example, Appalachian Voices helped individuals living near coal plants contact the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA; Kellogg, 2013). Activists frequently provide scripts for individuals who want to contact a corporation (Gays Against Guns, 2016a; Press Release 23; Shen, 2016) or engage social media (Moms Demand Action, 2014a). Groups also offer alternatives, including other shopping locations when boycotting a retailer (2nd Vote, 2016c; Moms Demand Action, 2014b).

**Convenience.** Convenience is crucial. Social media works because “People feel like they’re doing something without taking too much time out of their day” (Center for Food Safety). An unidentified environmental organization prompted supporters to
bombard a new Pepsi product on Amazon with negative reviews (Blog Post 14, 2014; News Article 3, 2014). However, activists should be careful not to oversell on the campaign’s outcomes. According to the Other 98, they must “avoid the temptation to bullshit and say ‘Hey sign this thing and everything’s going to be fine again’” because of a petition.

**The shame game.** Activists frequently try to embarrass a firm into altering its policies and practices. This approach may take multiple forms, including 1) “shame and blame,” 2) praising the “forward-thinking” corporations, and 3) “spank and thank.”

“Shame and blame.” Activists often call out corporations engaging in what the activists perceive to be irresponsible behavior. Gays Against Guns (2016b) notes that it likes to “shame and blame” its targets (p. 2). Activists may publish a list of companies engaging in improper behavior, such as Life Decisions International’s “Boycott List,” which contains information about corporations funding Planned Parenthood.

**Praising the “forward-thinking” corporations.** Another strategy entails “lifting up the work of the forward-thinking” corporations (Sierra Club). Greenpeace provided a list of responsible tissue providers (Gaworecki, 2008b) in an effort to “recognize the more progressive members of the industry who are making change” (Brooks, 2009, p. A9). Often, this praise is combined with a reprimand for the target firm. An environmental group called out PepsiCo, claiming that competitors Nestle and Mars “are committing to plans that include transparency, tractability, and full safeguards,” making Pepsi “stand out for the wrong reasons” (News Article 3, 2014).

“Spank and thank.” When activists are successful in their mission to alter corporate policy, many “spank and thank,” praising the corporation they once shamed
Greenpeace recently adopted the strategy, hoping the positive publicity would encourage other corporations to follow suit. This strategy is often difficult because “It’s this huge multi-national that fucks up the resources. So how do we, after spending six months demeaning their product, come away with a mediocre policy change and celebrate them?”

**Engaging multiple audiences.** Activist organizations disseminate information to multiple audiences to increase pressure on the corporation, including 1) consumers, 2) shareholders, 3) key decision makers, 4) employees, and 5) partnering agencies.

**Consumers.** A key audience for activist organizations is consumers. An unidentified environmental group explained “we try to motivate general consumers to apply pressure onto major corporate brands to convince them that they need to take responsibilities for the impact of their supply chains or their brand will be hurt.” Activists employ a variety of public tactics to reach this audience, including protests.

**Shareholders.** A second stakeholder group for activist organizations to incorporate is corporate shareholders because “corporations are more beholden to their shareholders than to us” (Other 98). As You Sow (n.d.) stated that “shareholders are the single most powerful force for positive, lasting changes” by pressuring corporations to examine their long-term risks and make decisions accordingly (para. 1).

**Key decision makers.** Activists also identify decision makers. Regulators are a key target; according to the Sierra Club, “if we know regulators are going to make a decision that would affect a coal plant’s ability to operate, like EPA regulators, then we’ll target those folks.” Legislators are also important. An unidentified progressive group is “constantly updating our records of who we should be sending these things (petitions)
to.” Local government officials are also integral in some cases, as when the Other 98 pressured the Seattle port commission to revoke the docking permit for a Shell oil rig.

**Employees.** Employees are becoming a popular audience. An unidentified environmental group delivered petitions to Abercrombie & Fitch store managers in an attempt to “reach their leadership team by going up their chain of command.” A Kimberly-Clark spokesperson admitted that while Greenpeace’s campaign failed to affect the bottom line, it impacted employee morale because of activists’ increasing presence at the corporation’s various offices and facilities (Penzenstadler, 2014). The Center for Food Safety noted this strategy only works for certain companies. When targeting Bayer, the organization recognized that a factory employed many area residents, whose main priority is “bringing home a paycheck,” emphasizing that “You have to be aware of who the demographics are in a given area and what they depend on that company for.”

**Partnering agencies.** Recognizing corporations engage in partnerships with other businesses, activists frequently identify and pressure those firms. DeFund DAPL focuses on the banks funding the Dakota Access Pipeline, attacking the lines of credit that serve as the financial “bedrock.” PETA’s representative explained, “By working at the roots, you can bring down a company’s bottom line a little bit almost.” Activists may also engage universities, a large partner for several industries. Greenpeace used this strategy when pressuring Kimberly-Clark. An Appalachian Voices representative, who worked for Greenpeace at the time, noted, “That’s a huge deal when the University of Texas says, ‘We’re not going to buy your paper products anymore.’ They had a massive contract.”
Secondary targets. If the firm does not engage, activists may focus on “secondary targets.” Moms Demand Action used this approach after failing to make headway on its Kroger campaign, shifting to regional chains like Albertsons and Fresh Market.

“Be very annoying.” All activist groups must exhibit persistence; most strategies and tactics “are just meant to be very annoying and non-violently confrontational so that it’s not an issue they can ignore” (unidentified environmental organization). For Greenpeace’s Kimberly-Clark campaign, inflicting economic damage would be challenging given Kleenex’s prominence in the tissue market. The “nuisance” was “much larger” than the economic effect, according to a Kimberly-Clark representative as the CEO eventually said, “I’d like this to go away” (Gell, 2014, para. 54).

Engagement with the target corporation. For many activists, engagement with the target firm is the first step. Greenpeace sends letters to the organization to request a face-to-face meeting (Paul, 2009) to ensure the conflict is “over questionable policies or actions, not a lack of information” (Linaweaver, 2009, para. 18). Known for its flashy campaigns, PETA acknowledges it would prefer to solve concerns “before we even print signs” because “Then we can put our funds, our very limited funds, toward more obstinate targets.” Moms Demand Action believes reaching out “is a good faith effort to not blindside companies.” Failure to engage with the activist group, or stalled conversations, will often result in activists executing a variety of tactics.

Tactics. Tactics are “the specific activities and outputs through which strategies are implemented” (Botan, 2006, p. 226). Although tactics were identified using an inductive approach, tactics are organized deductively using Jackson’s (1982) taxonomy,
comprised of 1) organizing activities, 2) informational activities, 3) symbolic activities, 4) civil disobedience, and 5) legalistic activities.

**Organizing activities.** Organizing activities entail largely interpersonal forms of communication including town hall meetings, public hearings, and leafleting.

**Town hall meetings and public hearings.** Environmental organizations often use town hall meetings and public hearings to generate awareness and action. In 2015, the Sierra Club hosted a town hall meeting to discuss a utility company’s reliance on coal power (Kramer, 2015). Appalachian Voices also encouraged individuals to attend public hearings about Duke Energy’s coal ash pits leaking dangerous materials into groundwater (Appalachian Voices, 2016; Elmes, 2015; Staff Report, 2014).

**Leafleting.** When leafleting, individuals will hand out flyers or brochures. The Center for Food Safety orchestrates events in which individuals pass out literature about the presence and effects of antibiotics in meat to “motivate the company to do its part” to protect the public (Center for Food Safety, 2016, para. 1). Leafleting is often done in conjunction with other symbolic activities, such as protests and demonstrations.

**Informational activities.** Informational activities help activists disseminate messages, enabling them to generate awareness about their issue, issue stance, and proposed solutions. Activists mentioned six tactics: 1) reports, 2) press releases and press conferences, 3) advertising, 4) websites, 5) social media, and 6) films.

**Reports.** Reports are commonly used by organizations dealing with scientific topics. EWG published a report on the prevalence of chemicals in Johnson & Johnson’s children’s products (Environmental Working Group, 2009). According to the participant
representing EWG, such reports have a “major impact in the media” by gaining not only the firm’s attention, but raising awareness among regulatory bodies and the media.

*Press releases and press conferences.* Nearly every participant discussed the role of press releases or press conferences as a tactic to share information with the goal of generating media attention. A few groups (Appalachian Voices and Life Decisions International) hold press conferences to generate media coverage. PETA (2007a) noted the attention received by one press conference on Ringling’s practices was refreshing:

> It was really nice to see some members of the media show up to hear about this breaking news—sad as it sounds, normally with this sort of thing we have to take all our clothes off (or at least show a little leg) to get some attention (para. 1).

These events try to publicly shame firms, such as when the Sierra Club held a press conference at the Washington State capitol and presented Puget Sound Energy with a report card, complete with an “F” on the company’s use of coal (Sierra Club, 2014b).

*Advertising.* Activists with financial resources or crowdsourcing abilities incorporate advertising. After losing a court case against a Land O’Lakes supplier, PETA aired commercials (PETA, 2010d), but the ads only aired twice because of the number of complaints received by stations about their graphic content (J. O’Connor, 2010). Moms Demand Action launched an advertising campaign against Kroger. The ads showed customers carrying firearms in grocery stores beside individuals carrying objects prohibited by most Kroger stores, including a skateboard (Moms Demand Action, 2014c) captioned, “Guess which one isn’t allowed at Kroger?” (“Mom’s group calls out,” 2014).

*Websites.* Websites are also prominent tools for activist organizations to share information in an effort to increase visibility (2nd Vote). Organizations, including Collectively Free, produce materials (posters, brochures, and flyers) that are easily
accessible for supporters (Trenkova, 2015). Some organizations publish correspondence with targets, which EWG did with L’Oréal (Malkan, 2004) and the Center for Food Safety did with Orville Redenbacher (Walker, 2016). 2nd Vote, Greenpeace, and PETA set up “microsites” for particular campaigns so individuals can “get caught up for news on that single issue” rather than reading through the entire website (PETA).

*Social media.* From an information dissemination standpoint, social media is similar to websites in that “It’s a channel of communication to get some basic images or information out to supporters” (unidentified environmental organization). Social media can expand the reach of campaigns, according to the representative from 2nd Vote, who claimed the sites are “another tool to gain the eyeballs, to gain the following, to reach more people” because users can post and share information with their networks.

*Films.* Thus far, the informational tactics discussed largely reflect channels of mass media. Some tactics invoke interpersonal elements, such as film screenings. Appalachian Voices showed a series of film screenings on the effects of coal (Bellamy, 2014). Following the film, individuals were given an opportunity to sign a letter for state legislators or write their own. A spokesperson explained that once the lights come up, “the initial reaction is typically to ask ‘What can I do’”? (Lacy, 2014, para. 3).

*Symbolic activities.* Like informational activities, symbolic activities also seek to advance an issue, not only demonstrating a group’s position but also “how strongly it feels” (Jackson, 1982) while embarrassing the target firm. For Greenpeace, “they’re a detriment to companies because they expose their actions.” These activities manifest in nine forms: 1) email campaigns, 2) letter writing, 3) call-ins, 4) hijacking, 5) guerilla activism, 6) petition deliveries, 7) protests, 8) performances, and 9) boycotts.
**Email campaigns.** Activist groups ask supporters to email a company. Efforts may be directed at a specific executive, such as the CEO. PETA sent over 80,000 emails to Macy’s CEO asking to pull SeaWorld’s floats from its Thanksgiving Day parade (Dobnik, 2013; PETA, 2013a, 2013c). Campaigners also contact members of Congress to spawn legislation. The participant from EWG explained, “I worked for several senators. When they get emails, a large number of emails about a particular issues, they notice.”

**Letter writing.** Although emails are easy to send, they are also easy to delete and filter, prompting some activists to use traditional letter writing campaigns. The Other 98 estimates around 60,000 letters were sent to representatives of banks funding the Dakota Access Pipeline (Mears, 2017). Sending letters enables individuals to include tangible objects. PETA also sent copies of Blackfish to members of Congress in an effort to “spur legislation banning the breeding, importation, and sale of orcas” (Kosman, 2016, para. 2). Others encouraged supporters to write letters to their local newspapers, providing a list of media contacts and online tools (Moms Demand Action, 2013a; Sierra Club, 2015).

**Call-ins.** During call-ins, activist organizations encourage supporters to call the target firm (Greenpeace, the Other 98), regulatory agencies (PETA), or representatives (Center for Food Safety). These efforts may occur during a designated time frame, such as a Global Call-in Day (unidentified environmental group) or over a period of time (Moms Demand Action). A representative from an unidentified progressive issues organization explained, “A phone call is harder to ignore than a petition signature or an email” because someone “has to actually answer the phone.”

**Hijacking.** Hijacking is an online and offline tactic used by activists. Greenpeace activists accessed the audiovisual equipment at an event where Kimberly-Clark’s CEO
was scheduled to speak, swapping out his PowerPoint for slides on deforestation. The “flustered” CEO “cut the talk short, and guests were ushered into a luncheon, where they were greeted at their table settings with satirical menus further hammering home Greenpeace’s message” (Gell, 2014, para. 53). Activists also hijack hashtags. The #AskSeaWorld campaign backfired when animal rights activists, and other critics, used Twitter to inquire why the park’s parking lots were bigger than its whale tanks (Grisham, 2015; La Monica, 2015). A PETA representative suggested, “I feel like our followers and members and supporters are just better at social media than SeaWorld.”

**Guerilla activism.** Environmental organizations often employ guerilla activism tactics. An unidentified environmental organization developed a sticker campaign, where supporters would place stickers on the tags of clothing at Abercrombie & Fitch stores containing information about the campaign and the firm’s practices (Action 1, 2014). Greenpeace engaged in a technique called “shopdropping,” where activists placed notes inside Kleenex boxes about Kimberly-Clark’s environmental practices (Mui, 2008).

**Petition deliveries.** To amplify the effect of petitions, a legalistic activity, activists stage petition deliveries, taking the petition to the company’s headquarters or storefront to give it to a corporate representative. By delivering petitions to stores, activists gain an opportunity to interact with customers (unidentified environmental organization). An unidentified progressive organization orchestrated an elaborate petition delivery at Google’s headquarters. Taking roughly 500,000 signatures to the campus, the group staged a “mini press conference” in front of Google’s headquarters; the company sent out a representative (“I think it was their head of public policy”) to accept the petition. As she walked out of the building, a plane flew over with a banner that said, “Google don’t be
evil. Dump Trump” while the “Google exec stared at the plane in disbelief.” The practitioner added, “I think it really got their attention. And it led the nightly news on every network in San Francisco that night.” He added that because the event gained so much attention, the target “can’t really ignore it. Well, they can ignore it. But we’re certain that they know about it,” which “certainly puts some more pressure on it.”

Protests. A popular and highly visible tactic invoked by activists is a protest. Storefront protests are often effective because these events frazzle customers, who may leave the store, such as when Collectively Free protested at Starbucks with their hands covered in fake blood, chanting “Starbucks, it’s blood on your hands” (Trefethen, 2015). These actions may also take place at the locations of corporate partners, such as when Greenpeace targeted one of Procter & Gamble’s advertising agencies, Saatchi & Saatchi (Taube, 2014). Protests can also be coordinated on a larger scale. In 2005, Greenpeace held a day of action focusing on Kimberly-Clark, staging 350 protests in 200 cities across North America (Greenpeace, 2005; Teotonio, 2005) and events in other cities globally, including London and Hamburg (Greenpeace, 2009), permitting activists to attack their target in a coordinated effort on multiple fronts.

Protests can also take on various forms, including picketing, which occurs when individuals convene outside a place where an event is occurring. More than 50 environmental activists participated in Abercrombie & Fitch’s 5k race near its headquarters, which is its “biggest event of the year” (Blog Post 8, 2016). During the race, activists shared information and sticks with the crowd and hired a plane to fly over with the message “Is A&F with #TeamRainforest?” (Action 6, 2016; Action 7, 2016). Groups will also picket shareholder meetings (Life Decisions International). Because
mothers have become an influential demographic for social movements, protests called “stroller jams” have become popular (Blog Post 12, 2014). Members of Moms Demand action held “stroller jams” at both Starbucks and Target locations nationwide to protest open carry (“Stroller-jammin’ moms beat gun lobby,” 2013). Some groups, including Life Decisions International and PETA, frequently buy shares of their targets’ stock to gain admittance to these events. A popular tactic at these meetings is a concept called bird-dogging, which entails going to a forum where an executive is speaking and asking them a difficult question (unidentified environmental organization).

Activists also use highly publicized events. Collectively Free targeted a televised event when they ran onstage at the annual Nathan’s Hot Dog Eating Contest and threw fake blood at some participants (Kaplan, 2015; “Protestors attack,” 2016). Activists also protest at industry conventions and trade shows to ‘expose’ corporations among peers and partners (Blog Post 22, 2016; Press Release 6, 2014; PETA, 2015a). Animal rights organizations visit the homes of CEOs. PETA protested in SeaWorld CEO Joel Manby’s neighborhood (PETA, 2015b). Collectively Free did the same outside the New York City residence of Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz to protest its use of animal products. The group was unaware if Schultz was at home, but the purpose of the protest “is to kind of rile up the neighbors too and to make them aware that this person is responsible for all of these issues that we care about.”

Regardless of the protest format, a spokesperson for Gays Against Guns noted that “Nothing still has the impact of a live protest. There’s something about bodies in a space that holds an impact no amount of tweeting or petitions can achieve” (Trykowski, 2016, para. 17). Even if the action fails to generate immediate change, if it generates
media attention, “you’ve raise the profile of the issue and build the groundwork for changing whatever it is that you’re trying to change” (Other 98).

Performances. Activists design “performance style actions,” enabling them to “mix things up and get people’s attention and not make them feel like we’re yelling at them” (Collectively Free). An unidentified environmental group and ASH staged flash mobs (Press Release 7, 2015; Stiffler, 2015). ASH and Gays Against Guns also use mascots and puppets. Working with HBO’s Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, ASH created a satirical mascot called Jeff the Diseased Lung (Stiffler, 2015). Gays Against Guns has a puppet with a head of NRA chairman Wayne LaPierre. Another action is a die-in, where activists pretend to be dead. Gays Against Guns staged a die-in outside BlackRock’s offices on the anniversary of the Aurora shooting (Trykowski, 2016).

Boycotts. Boycotts are “always a good one” according to the Other 98, who encouraged individuals banking with Wells Fargo to close accounts (McClure, 2017). DeFund DAPL placed a tracker on its website; as individuals report that they divest from a bank, the counter increases. Moms Demand Action claimed its two-year boycott of Starbucks cost the company $11.5 million a year (Applebome & Maker, 2016).

Civil disobedience. Activists, particularly progressive groups, also engage in more extreme actions, such as blockades, illegal activities, or simply questionable approaches.

Blockades. In an elaborate blockade, the Other 98 and its ‘kayak-tivist’ allies attempted to blockade Shell’s Arctic drilling rig in a Seattle port, impeding its exploratory drilling project (Hackman, 2015; Other 98 Team, 2015c). Termed the “paddle in Seattle” (Bellisle, 2015), the disruption forced Shell to stop all incoming and outgoing tankers for three days (McClure, 2015a). When the rig attempted to pull away
from the dock, the kayak-tivists formed a blockade in the water as “they just paddled in front of this rig so it couldn’t move.” The rig eventually “did get out. But then what was really amazing was as they travelled up the coast, more fleets were waiting for them…And so it was tricky for them to make their way out.”

*Illegal activities.* Activists will also stage more extreme forms of protests. In a large protest receiving international news coverage, Greenpeace infiltrated the Cincinnati headquarters of Procter & Gamble (Brunsman, 2014b; Horn & Zimmerman, 2014; Perry, 2014). The activists broke the windows, allegedly causing $17,000 worth of damage, climbed out, and rigged the windows so they could not be opened from the inside before rappelling down the two towers and unfurling banners. One activist, wearing a tiger costume, hung on a zip line strung between the towers. The activists were indicted by a grand jury on counts of burglary and vandalism (“Greenpeace activists plead not guilty,” 2014), which were later reduced to misdemeanor trespassing at the urging of Procter & Gamble (Robison & Reel, 2015). A judge reprimanded the protestors for putting “people in danger” as the act diverted more than 30 police officers and firefighters from other duties (“Police release details,” 2014). Greenpeace considered the stunt a victory because it was a “huge embarrassment to Procter & Gamble to have a banner dropped in their headquarters by people wearing tiger costumes.”

Hoaxes and impersonations. As part of a hoax campaign targeting Gap, 18 Million Rising created a faux website and Twitter account for the fictitious GapDoesMore. The group released a press release on behalf of Gap, claiming the corporation would compensate the families of the workers who died in a Bangladesh factory fire and working with other firms to prevent further tragedies (Feldman, 2014). 18 Million Rising (2014a) justified its actions, claiming “it’s about justice for the workers who make the company possible. Gap Inc. has refused so far to ‘do more’ for the most vulnerable workers in its supply chain, so now we are demanding more” (para. 5).

According to a Greenpeace representative, the “high risk, both bodily and also legal risk, that’s the point” because individuals are “showing courage, showing bravery, showing the power of creativity and willingness to stand for something.” These efforts also demand attention. Collectively Free claimed that “the media is definitely into the most dramatic stories, things that are more unusual.” However, a representative from an unidentified environmental group suggested these tactics are becoming less effective because “the press are sort of wearing and tiring of reporting on manufactured events.”

Legalistic activities. In addition to these flashier demonstrations, activists may use legalistic actions to engage corporations; such efforts have been successful in provoking firms such as Land O’Lakes and Facebook to respond (Hayes, 2014a, 2014b; C. O’Connor, 2014a; PETA, 2009). These approaches include 1) petitions, 2) shareholder resolutions, 3) regulatory and administrative agencies, 4) legislation, 5) lawsuits, and 6) requests for information.

Petitions. Petitions are often used early in campaigns by multiple organizations. Some petitions may gain hundreds of thousands of signatures, including the Other 98’s
petition to Mylan (Wilson, 2016) and EWG’s petition to L’Oréa (Tan, 2014). If petitions
gain significant attention early on, firms may quickly respond. When Moms Demand
Action posted a “Burritos, Not Bullets” petition for Chipotle, the petition quickly
received more than 10,000 signatures (Rhodan, 2014), prompting Chipotle to respond
within 24 hours (Sheridan, 2014). Petitions are circulated on social media or among
coalitions, according to a member of an unidentified progressive group, who added once
the petitions gain a significant number of signatures, it becomes newsworthy.

*Shareholder resolutions.* A few organizations that own stock in a company or can
acquire a proxy vote file shareholder resolutions. As You Sow filed a resolution asking
McDonald’s to stop using polystyrene coffee cups (As You Sow, 2011). Although the
measure failed, McDonald’s tested paper cups in 2,000 restaurants (“McDonald’s testing
eco-friendlier cups,” 2012) and later replaced all polystyrene cups in the United States
(Kassing, 2013). As You Sow, Life Decisions International, and PETA claim that
companies want to avoid a vote. The representative from Life Decisions International
expounded, “they hate taking the time out of their annual meeting to have to hear this guy
talk about Planned Parenthood.” As a result, “they end up calling and say, ‘How do we
work this out?’”

*Regulatory and administrative agencies.* Activists often nudge regulatory
agencies. PETA filed a petition with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration
(OSHA) to prohibit humans from physically interacting with animals (DePillis, 2015).
PETA also asked the USDA to suspend Ringling’s license to exhibit animals (“Circus
blows big top,” 1998; Montgomery, 2009; Paden, 2009). Environmental groups, such as
Appalachian Voices and the Center for Food Safety frequently go to the EPA. EWG went
to the FDA in an attempt to force companies to list ingredients in cosmetics and
sunscreens (Boyles, 2008; Fallik, 2004) and regulate cosmetics (Uricchio, 2010).

*Legislation.* Following efforts by EWG, President Obama signed the Frank R.
Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act for the 21st Century, requiring safety findings for new
chemicals before use in consumer products (Feinstein, 2016). The legislation was also
supported by Johnson & Johnson and L’Oréal. Environmental organizations also focus on
legislation at the state and local levels. The Sierra Club pushed a Washington State bill
encouraging Puget Sound Energy to phase out Colstrip (Inbody & Lee, 2015; Storrow,
2015), which provided funding for the utility company to decommission and clean up two

*Lawsuits.* Large activist organizations will often file lawsuits against their targets.
For instance, PETA sued SeaWorld, claiming that five wild-caught orcas performing is a
violation of the 13th Amendment (PETA, 2011a). A judge ruled the amendment does not
apply to nonhumans, but PETA still contended the case was “groundbreaking” because
“captive orcas were represented in a U.S. federal court” (J. O’Connor, 2012, para. 1).

*Requests for information.* U.S. Right to Know frequently submits Freedom of
Information Act requests, relying on public email to “get information behind the scenes.”
Examples include requests for scientists’ emails and documents (Thacker, 2016), such as
a CDC official who had close ties to Coca-Cola (Gillam, 2016b).

*Choosing strategies and tactics.* Activists consider several factors when
determining strategies and tactics for a campaign, including 1) their strengths, 2) their
goals, 3) the target, 4) the target’s response, and 5) the need to keep a campaign “fresh.”
**Strengths.** Activist groups consider their strengths when choosing strategies. Larger organizations can stage more elaborate actions, including blockades, scaling buildings, and occupying oil rigs. Strategies and tactics also depend on the issue. Organizations addressing health-related concerns, such as tobacco and cosmetics, employ legalistic tactics and generate reports rather than using symbolic actions. Environmental groups use legalistic tactics, hearings, reports, films, protests, and guerilla activism. Animal rights organizations gravitate toward actions that generate high amounts of visibility and face-to-face contact. Progressive organizations prefer to build a strong social media presence and are more willing to embrace civil disobedience. Comparatively, conservative organizations showed no signs of organizing or civil disobedience, but depend on boycotts and informational tactics.

**Goals.** Activists also consider their goals when weighing their options, tools, and resources (Campus Pride). As noted, many activist organizations ultimately aim to incite behavior change through engaging with the corporation. However, some targets may not be responsive. According to 18 Million Rising, “one of the challenges of corporate campaigning is that there are I think very few levers that are available to advocates” to challenge corporations in an effort to “hit them where it hurts.”

**The target corporation.** In many cases, activists must spark public criticism and threats to the bottom line (Appalachian Voices). By having customers divest from banks, DeFund DAPL aims to have the firm “take notice” and recognize “that they should probably try and behave a little differently in the future or their bottom line is going to suffer.” A member of the Other 98 added, “as long as they don’t start losing money, there’s no reason for them to give a shit.” Ringling’s decision to remove elephants may
have resulted from “anti-elephant regulation” in cities visited by the circus rather than “moral sentiment” because fighting legislation is “pricy” (Greenhouse, 2015). According to 18 Million Rising, “more drastic things” such as shareholder activism and boycotts tend to be “footholds in those cases” where corporations are concerned more about profits than public opinion.

Recognizing that some corporations are concerned with their reputation, groups also aim for the target’s public relations efforts. These groups often try to “make a PR nightmare” because “it takes up their resources and distracts them, and it makes it much more costly for them trying to do this thing” (Other 98). Because corporations often respond through CSR initiatives, these programs become new fronts for activists to attack, often because such efforts are symbolic as the firm shows “the things they are doing and just hope that’s good enough to shut you up” (Appalachian Voices).

Activists also consider the power of the target firm. Greenpeace defined two types of corporations. The first is willing to negotiate; the second is “so powerful it doesn’t need to negotiate” because they are “insulated from any kind of market impact that we might have on them, like the oil and gas industry…They’re like a cosmic foe. You’re never going to be sitting at the table with them.” For these more powerful adversaries, activists invoke legalistic activities. For corporations willing to negotiate, other tactics, such as informational, symbolic, and organizing activities are implemented; in extreme cases, activists may resort to legalistic and civil disobedience.

**The target corporation’s response.** The corporation’s response to activists influences whether or not groups escalate. According to an unidentified environmental activist, “we sort of match the tone,” using informational tactics if discussions appear to
“be going well.” However, if the firm is “resistant to change,” activists escalate. Resistance may manifest in a number of ways from not responding to meeting invitations (Center for Food Safety) to meeting with groups where “they’re just gonna say what they want, what they think you want to hear” (unidentified progressive organization).

Even if an activist group does move onto more public actions, conversations may continue behind the scenes. An activist with Greenpeace described the process: “You create a public face, you create a corporate villain, you go at them really hard. But you’re sitting at the table with them behind the scenes, working on their corporate policy.” Other organizations claimed they provide updates on their plans to their targets. An unidentified environmental activist declared it is in “fairly regular conversation with PepsiCo” over a three-year campaign, noting the firm often knows the tactics. Although PepsiCo may not know every detail, sharing this information is “part of us being respectful negotiators.”

Many activist organizations have a clear model of escalation. If a resolution cannot be reached or the company ignores requests to converse, activists begin with less obtrusive approaches, including informational activities, like reports, and smaller scale symbolic or legalistic actions, such as petitions and email campaigns. Many organizations begin with online tactics. From there, activists escalate to public hearings, protests, petition deliveries, and organizing activities. In extreme cases, “we’ll ask people to get arrested at a protest” (unidentified progressive organization). As You Sow relies heavily on legalistic actions. When Trader Joe’s was “unwilling to label their products and also not willing to take measures to remove lead and cadmium from their product,” the organization escalated the process “to see what other legal measures we can take.”

Always having the ability to escalate is necessary. According to PETA, “You don’t want
to go all out in your first couple of steps. Any campaign that we plan out, we need to plan for room for escalation” because reaching a resolution in the first months is unlikely.

**Keeping the campaign “fresh.”** Activists will also “switch up the styles of our actions” (Collectively Free). This variety also keeps supporters interested (PETA) and repeating the same actions would “get kind of boring” (unidentified environmental organization). Similarly, activists will use a variety of messaging strategies. A member at the Center for Food Safety noted, “Facebook is certainly a balance of general posts, calls to action, and user engagement. So you don’t want to ask a question every time you’re posting something.” All of these endeavors require various tangible and intangible resources. One activist from an unidentified environmental group pointed out that these groups also escalate “as resources permit.”

**Resources.** Throughout campaigns, activists rely on a variety of intangible resources (people), tangible resources (media coverage, technology, finances, public relations and advertising firms), and coalitions.

**People.** Participants emphasized that the greatest resource is people, including supporters, communities, decision makers, legal teams, and celebrities. A respondent from the Other 98 claimed, “Our audience is our most powerful tool.” Many individuals often belong to certain geographic communities and provide a valuable resource for environmental groups that often wage local campaigns in affected communities. The Sierra Club (n.d.) believes “it takes one person talking to another, and then another, and then another to create a movement” (para. 1), as evidenced when Duke Energy altered its plans for a natural gas plant after hearing from 9,000 individuals (Olaechea & Williams, 2016). Environmental groups also focus on the “key decision makers in the local areas”
to secure “public opinion shifts in local communities” (Sierra Club). Because groups addressing environmental and chemical concerns frequently engage in legalistic actions, some group have a legal team or staff member, including ASH and the Center for Food Safety. Some organizations use celebrities to gain attention for their issues. As previously discussed, PETA often incorporates celebrities into its campaigns. Eleven musicians cancelled concerts at SeaWorld, including Willie Nelson, Pat Benetar, and the Beach Boys (Kretzer, 2013b, 2014a).

**Media coverage.** Many activist groups rely on the media. Internet-based organizations, such as DeFund DAPL and the Other 98, engage significantly less in media relations, preferring to distribute information through social media or email. Op-eds are popular for some organizations (Campus Pride; Center for Food Safety; 18 Million Rising). A Sierra Club activist contended “local opinion pieces are very valuable.” Other activists focus on the “larger” media outlets. Getting a story published on CNN was a “really powerful tool” for As You Sow.

This reliance on the media is riddled with complications. First, extremely progressive or conservative groups (Campus Pride; Life Decisions International) struggle to acquire mainstream press coverage. Second, while the number of activist groups increases, there are fewer reporters “covering a variety of issues, which means they’re getting inundated with information” (EWG). Third, reporters often have little time to devote to stories, resulting in fewer in-depth, investigative pieces (Appalachian Voices), often in favor of click-bait stories (U.S. Right to Know) or “celebrity nonsense” (unidentified progressive organization). Fourth, because reporters are strapped for time, “the corporate media does not do a very good job covering and explaining the important
issues” (unidentified progressive organization). According to Appalachian Voices, “you give them a press release and then the other side gives them a press release, and then they just kind of write a story – if you can call it that – as basically an amalgamation of those press releases.” Several groups voiced that the media will “twist the message around” (Collectively Free). A member of the Sierra Club added that “people want to play into the old narrative of ‘environmentalists against jobs’” because “sometimes controversy is a potent narrative and there are some reporters who will look for the opportunity to make it look like you’ve said something that you haven’t.”

Finances. Activists vary in their access to financial resources. Some groups, like Gays Against Guns, consider small costs, such as copies. Other organizations have greater financial access. Greenpeace has “deep pockets,” raising more than $344 million in donations in 2012 alone, permitting it to “confront P&G in global terms as a brand…Normally one would think of Unilever as P&G’s archrival, but this kind of scope opens up a totally different way of defining archrival” because large groups have more financial resources and greater media access to publicly confront their opponents, making them a greater threat (Pilcher & Hunt, 2014; para. 3). Moms Demand Action was brought under Bloomberg’s $50 million Everytown movement in 2014 (C. O’Connor, 2014c).

Technology. Activists also incorporate various forms of technology. U.S. Right to Know utilizes access to new forms of scientific technology to “do investigations that we just didn’t have before” such as product testing. As You Sow also used independent laboratories to test chocolate products, revealing that 35 of 50 products contained unsafe levels of lead and cadmium (Costa, 2016). Groups of all sizes and issue stances claimed the Internet increased their power, enabling them to inflict more damage on their targets.
**PR and advertising firms.** A few organizations stated they had worked with public relations and advertising firms. Environmental groups often use these services within a larger “coalition effort so that the cost is offset and the messaging can be consistent” (Center for Food Safety). Environmental groups and Moms Demand Action also used them for large advertising buys and to generate advertising campaigns.

**Coalitions.** Every activist group included in this study worked with allies, and most emphasized the necessity of doing so. An activist with DeFund DAPL claimed activists can “become Megatron, a massive coalition, and take over the world” or just “fly in formation” with less impact. Coalitions often pool resources and divide up tasks, such as media relations or litigation. Coalitions also enable groups to combine supporter bases, increasing numbers and power. An unidentified environmental activist elaborated, “We partner with smaller organizations to pack a bigger punch in our campaigns.”

This section detailed the various strategies and tactics that activist organizations employ to pressure their corporate target. Activists vary their approaches based on their issues, the corporation’s response, and their access to resources. Noting people are an important resources, activist organizations must exert effort to establish relationships.

**Establishing and Maintaining Relationships**

Because power often derives from individuals, activists must construct relationships with various audiences. To understand this aspect, this dissertation asked:

RQ3: How do activist organizations establish and maintain relationships with key publics?

Participants identified six publics with whom they establish relationships: target corporations, supporters, reporters, coalitions, communities, and decision makers.
**Target corporations.** For Greenpeace, “when it comes to actually getting corporate policy changed, I think about building relationships.” Most participants discussed their attempts to bring the firm to the bargaining table. These findings largely reflect the perspectives of activist organizations that were able to sit down with their targets, including Campus Pride, Greenpeace, PETA, the Sierra Club, and an unidentified environmental organization. Five sub-themes emerged: 1) “focus on the cause,” 2) give and take, 3) understand and trust, 4) “the right people,” and 5) providing solutions.

**“Focus on the cause.”** A participant from Greenpeace emphasized that “the key to getting corporate policy changed is you just have to recognize that they’re human beings sitting across from you.” A Greenpeace campaigner involved in the campaign against Kimberly-Clark claimed “Greenpeace should always stay focused on the cause. It’s all about the forests, not any given company” (Skar, 2014a, para. 3). Campus Pride’s co-founder discovered that he and Chick-fil-A CEO Dan Cathy “learned about each other as people with opposing views, not opposing people” (Windmeyer, 2013, para. 9).

**Give and take.** Often, activist-corporation interactions are marked by a series of give-and-take. Just as activists often match strategies and tactics to corporate responses, Greenpeace recognizes that the individuals sitting across from the table are “going to respond in stride to the way you respond.”

**Understand and trust.** Participants emphasized the need for both parties to enter into the conversation with a willingness to understand the other’s perspective. During conversations, Chick-fil-A CEO Dan Cathy never asked Campus Pride to stop protesting but “listened intently to our concerns” (Windmeyer, 2013, para. 9) as he “sought first to understand, not to be understood” (para. 10). Even when Campus Pride continued to
question the restaurant chain’s practices, Cathy “welcomed the opportunity to have
dialogue and hear [Campus Pride’s] perspective” (para. 11). Kimberly-Clark’s director of
sustainable strategy explained that “once we understand the culture that Greenpeace
comes from, we could understand why they do what they do” (Gies, 2014, para. 16). She
added that activists must “understand [the target’s] priorities and what drives them”
(para. 27). Then, both sides can begin to build trust, which Greenpeace refers to as “the
main dealer,” entailing respectful and ongoing communication. An unidentified
environmental group claimed that while its campaigns have yet to reach reprieve, it does
“maintain a respectful relationship with [the firms] to work with them to help them solve
the problem.”

“The right people.” According to Greenpeace, establishing trust requires having
“the right people in the room,” such as a high-ranking official of the corporation, whereas
sending in “your lead attorney or PR firm” will mean “odds are slim that trust will be
built” (Gies, 2014, para. 10). According to an unidentified environmental organization,
individuals who do CSR for the corporation are helpful “because they care about what
they do, and they want to see corporations be more responsible in the world.” However, if
the activist organization is able to frame the solution in financial terms, it may find
success with individuals involved in other departments. Several of the Sierra Club’s
victories have come from relationships with “hedge fund guys that are on our side now
who are in no way liberals” but the group finds success in “appealing to their own
interests” by emphasizing things like market opportunities.

Providing solutions. Several activist organizations stressed they offer solutions to
a target. An unidentified environmental organization “developed a clear roadmap for
companies to follow to eliminate Conflict Palm Oil from their products” (Press Release 5, 2013, para. 9). PETA claims that corporations believe “we’re coming to tell them what they can’t do rather than what they can.” PETA maintains it offered SeaWorld “viable models for them to continue in business,” including human and digital entertainment (PETA, 2015c). Some solutions are less practical, such as PETA’s request to Ben & Jerry’s to offer vegan ice cream made with human breast milk (Kass, 2011).

“I don’t want a dialogue.” A few participants noted they were not interested in engaging with their adversary. The Other 98 explained “Exxon can’t do a thing to make us like them. There’s not a thing they can do to make anything about their business model acceptable to us. All we want to do is erode faith in Exxon.” Some organizations noted they inform their corporate opponent of their plans, but Gays Against Guns takes care to avoid giving firms information and time to prepare (Green, 2016).

Supporters. Activist groups must also build relationships with supporters. Because many organizations do not employ a formal way to designate supporters, such as a membership program, practitioners commonly define these individuals as “a regular participant in what we’re doing” (2nd Vote) by signing up for an email list or following the organization on social media. Others may be actively submitting information to the organization (U.S. Right to Know). Thus, these people are individuals with an interest in an issue who engage in a myriad of activities. The keys to maintaining relationships with supporters is through taking them “on the journey” and showing gratitude.

“Taking our supporters on the journey.” Environmental organizations noted the ability to be “supporter-centric” because “we’re working on behalf of their interests” (Center for Food Safety). For Greenpeace, supporters are involved in the process of
selecting strategies and campaigns because the group aims “to be supporter-centric and be responsive to our supporters because we’re fully funded by them.” 2nd Vote frequently communicates with supporters, noting “regular communication and notifications to our membership has built our audience more than any other strategy.” Other groups note that organizations need to regularly communicate and must continue “to be taking our supporters on the journey with us” (Greenpeace). Activists engage supporters through education, simple actions, and building “a sense of community.”

**Education.** Many activist organizations begin by educating individuals about their activities. Online involvement is often the first in supporter outreach (Greenpeace). Depending on the demographics of supporters, a few organizations still use postal mail (ASH; Life Decisions International). The Other 98 gradually integrates supporters through email, “slowly bringing them in.” A few activist groups regularly provide newsletters or use social media to post messages (Appalachian Voices, As You Sow, Center for Food Safety, Making Change at Walmart, unidentified progressive organization).

**Simple engagement tools.** Some supporters, however, may seek to become more involved than simply receiving information, reflecting active publics (Hallahan, 2001). A first step to engagement is often through mediated forms of communication in which the campaigner exerts some form of pressure on the target firm. Supporters may share information on social media to “amplify stories” (Making Change at Walmart) and tell their own stories (DeFund DAPL). At this stage, individuals also sign petitions or write an email (EWG). Through these actions, “we can reach a broader audience and offer them simple engagement tools that make them feel invested in a movement that are
simple, they can do from home, but also have a high yield” (PETA). Even if actions fail
to elicit a response from the target, “it allows us to keep our email list engaged”
(unidentified progressive organization).

“A sense of community.” Supporters vary in terms of their activity from
individuals who regularly make phone calls to those who attend regular meetings and
meet up “on the ground” (Moms Demand Action). Some individuals may engage with
activist groups through emails or social media (Other 98). PETA is adept at using
mediated communication to build “one-to-one relationships,” by offering “personalized
responses, which is one of our biggest strategies when dealing with members” rather than
“a generic email.” Some activists still seek to establish face-to-face relationships.
Collectively Free frequently holds social events after actions so individuals can get “to
know all of the people that you’re protesting with” in an effort to create “a sense of
community in that we know one another and can trust one another and rely on each other
better.”

Showing gratitude. Building relationships with supporters entails not only
engagement opportunities, but also thanking them for being part of the campaign and
communicating the successes (Center for Food Safety). An unidentified environmental
group claimed this step is often “easy to forget” even though it’s central to “maintaining
the relationship.”

Reporters. While building relationships with supporters is crucial, “they’re not
the only people we have to convince. We also need to be contributing to a larger media
conversation” (Greenpeace). Participants identified two ways in which they establish
relationships with this critical audience: demonstrating respect and regular outreach.
First, activists emphasize the need for demonstrating respect, recognizing the “difficult needs of journalists, who are always under deadline, who are always overworked, who are doing this really, really important civic work for not a lot of pay” (Greenpeace). Therefore, “it’s just about really treating their station with the honors that it deserves. And also recognizing that you are gaining a lot from them in coverage.” Practitioners should be “making sure [reporters] are getting the information that they need on the matter” (EWG) and ensure they are “on top of everything” because “They need things now. They needed things yesterday. And if they’re coming to you as a source, you sure as hell better be ready” (Center for Food Safety).

Second, activists should avoid “blasting out a press release to 500 reporters” (EWG) and “not constantly barrage people with phone calls and faxes and emails” (PETA). Rather, activists should “know the journalists enough to know who to give the scoop to first” (Greenpeace). Thus, practitioners engage in a “considerable outreach investment,” beginning with emails and phone calls, regularly following up, in an effort to “earn the opportunity to make a pitch” (2nd Vote).

**Coalitions.** As previously mentioned, activist groups are often reliant on one another, establishing relationships to tackle a common issue or opponent. Through coalitions, groups coordinate their communication efforts and empower one another. According to Appalachian Voices, “we’re not just Appalachian Voices. We’re dozens of groups. And we can all kind of take different tactics and can coordinate.” An environmental group teams up with others to enact a good cop/bad cop scenario as some groups protest outside while others sit at the negotiating table. For smaller organizations, coalitions are particularly instrumental. A practitioner with Collectively Free commented,
“We are a smaller fish in the LGBTQ pond. And so the only way a small fish can look bigger is by partnering and trying to magnify through media.”

These relationships also generate friction, including internal strife between organizations competing for the same resources. The practitioner with Life Decisions International asserted the group often fails to gain media attention because reporters will go to a larger organization who will “give a comment about something they know nothing about,” such as funding Planned Parenthood, but “don’t just refer to us, like they should.” Although the activists often claim infighting is a myth, stories circulated about strife within Greenpeace, causing co-founder Patrick Moore to leave the group; Moore continues to speak out about Greenpeace’s target selections and tactics (Pilcher & Hunt, 2014) and has publicly feuded with the group (Cox, 2005; Gell, 2014; Moore, 2009).

Affected communities. Environmental organizations often work at the community level, presenting a unique set of considerations and challenges. These groups “make sure that our campaigns are accountable for the local allies and the local partners on the ground, such as in Indonesia and Malaysia, who are actually experiencing the impacts of deforestation” (unidentified environmental organization). Because activists are largely outsiders in these situations, they should ensure they are “devoted to speaking with as opposed to speaking for the community” (Greenpeace). Developing this approach requires several steps and considerations. Activists should develop relationships “well ahead of time and sort of use those relationship as ways of kind of organically being part of grassroots movements before the movement of our arrival.”

Being able to speak with the community requires the activist organizations fully understand the community, including its needs and concerns Thus, organizations must
listen rather than coming in and saying “This is what needs done” (Sierra Club). The participant added, “Local folks on the ground understand the realities on the ground better than the national folks.” When negotiating with targets, an unidentified environmental group ensures “our demands are coming from our local allies.” Through listening, understanding, and demonstrating accountability, organizations begin to establish trust, the foundation of these relationships. From there, organizations should show a committed, long-term effort to “co-building power with these people.”

**Decision makers.** Activist groups relying on legalistic strategies maintain relationships with decision makers. Appalachian Voices works to sustain relationships with staff in every office on Capitol Hill and in many statehouses. To establish these relationships, the key is to begin the process with having the decision maker “hear that story directly from someone face-to-face.” The relationships are then maintained through consistent communication, including regular trips to the Capitol. An unidentified progressive group works closely with several decision makers, soliciting feedback and coordinating with them to determine how to gain the most impact for their efforts.

This section described how activists build and maintain relationships with a number of publics, including their target firm, members, and the media. Although the goals vary, similarities exist across many of these relationships, including the need to listen and understand the public’s needs, establish trust, and maintain respect.

**The Internet and Social Media**

To establish relationships and pressure corporations, activists embraced the Internet, which offers abundant opportunities for these organizations. To explore this concept more in-depth, the final research question for this study was:
RQ4: How has the Internet altered the communication strategies employed by activist organizations?

Several activists touted the platform’s low cost (“it’s been really cost effective”) along with its ability to rapidly share information (“it’s a very important way for us to communicate our thoughts with a large number of people very fast”). While many well-established activist organizations incorporate social media into their efforts, younger organizations (18 Million Rising, the Other 98, Defund DAPL, and 2nd Vote) depend on these sites. A member of Gays Against Guns, which formed in 2016, attributed the organization’s rapid growth to social media. Within two months, the organization gained national presence, a feat that “would have taken us ten years” without it. The Internet allowed activists to adapt their strategies through 1) direct delivery, 2) media relations, 3) mobilization, 4) visual power, 5) conversation, 6) the ripple effect, and 7) anonymity.

**Direct delivery.** First, the Internet permits activists to bypass gatekeepers and “reach people directly.” In doing so, practitioners can “tell the story yourself, build up your own audiences” and become less “reliant on traditional media gatekeepers just to get our story out there” (unidentified progressive organization). One audience that activists can directly contact is the target corporation. Such efforts may occur by emailing the corporation, posting on its Facebook page (unidentified environmental group), commenting on its Instagram posts (Moms Demand Action, 2014a), sending tweets, or using any combination of these strategies. The Sierra Club (n.d.) encouraged supporters to “create a dialogue with Duke Energy” via social media (para. 7).

Activist organizations can send specific messages to certain audiences. One delivery method is an email list. Although social media is popular, “Everybody does have
email. People are more likely to have an email address than they are to have a Twitter account” (18 Million Rising). Activists use email to easily contact individuals who are “interested in the issues that we talk about” (As You Sow). Supporters can also designate how often they would like to receive emails and on what topics.

Practitioners can also segment audiences using demographics. Age is often an important consideration because “how we would reach young kids in high school is very different than how we would reach college students. Because high school students are maybe on different social media platforms than college students” (Campus Pride). Moms are among the most active Facebook users (Berman, 2014), which Moms Demand Action attributes for much of its online success, including its #SkipStarbucksSaturdays campaign (Lynch, 2013). According to one respondent, petitions are more likely to be signed by “old, white people” (18 Million Rising). Another practitioner claimed engagement varies by the social media site as “people on Twitter don’t click links, they don’t sign petitions the way they do on Facebook” (unidentified progressive activist organization).

Finally, activists target audiences by location. Through geo-fencing, organizations can purchase online advertisements appearing on smartphones in a geographically defined region (News Article 12, 2016). Similarly, geo-targeting permits activists to deliver content to individuals within a defined radius who meet specific criteria, such as interests or demographics. An unidentified progressive organization used Facebook to target 10,000 Google employees in the San Francisco and Washington, D.C. who listed Google as their employer. The organization was “pretty confident that it was a topic of conversation at Google that week.” The participant noted the group could not accomplish this task with email because “they would delete it.” The Sierra Club also employed geo-
targeting when it used a Facebook ad to target a city block where decision makers lived. The practitioner noted while this ability benefits larger groups, it is particularly helpful for smaller organizations who may not be able to run a multi-thousand dollar ad campaign but can “spend a few hundred on Facebook ads targeted directly at the building where you know the decision makers work. It’s going to amplify your reach.”

**Media relations 2.0.** Several groups, including Campus Pride, use social media for “pitching news stories.” Twitter is particularly instrumental for reaching journalists because “all of the really influential reporters are on Twitter and a lot of them prefer to be engaged that way” (As You Sow). Many journalists covering issues follow activists’ social media and reach out via email and say, “I saw on Twitter you’re doing this campaign. Can you tell me about it?” (unidentified progressive organization). For groups that often struggle to attract “mainstream media” using press releases, social media is influential to “get those messages and those stories out” (18 Million Rising). Several groups, including Collectively Free and an unidentified environmental activist organization, encourage followers to take photos at events and post on social media.

**Mobilization.** The Internet also makes it easier for activists to mobilize. First, activists can find “kindred spirits” who share their values online (Moms Demand Action). Life Decisions International recognizes that “it’s encouraging for everybody because we’re kind of a little community there. We care about the same issue.” Second, activists often use hashtags to assemble online. Many groups will designate a specific hashtag for their campaign and ask individuals to use these when posting a message because hashtags “create broader visibility” for the campaign (Campus Pride), hopefully gaining the target firm’s attention while showing public support for the campaign. Examples include
#AnywhereButTarget (2nd Vote) and #MyHungerGames (Making Change at Walmart). Activists may also adopt the hashtag of a larger movement in an effort to connect with additional audiences, such as #DumpTrump (unidentified progressive organization) or #MakeAmericaSafeAgain (Moms Demand Action). Activists may hijack a corporation’s hashtag, which an unidentified environmental group did with Pepsi’s #LiveForNow.

Activists also use the Internet to mobilize offline. Because of its widespread reach and quick delivery, participants (e.g., unidentified environmental organization, Collectively Free, Gays Against Guns, and PETA) discussed using the channel to plan and organize actions such as protests and email campaigns. Collectively Free has a secret Facebook group to “discuss ideas or alert people to upcoming events.” Social media adds a degree of flexibility to actions because “we can redirect our actions if they change in the middle… We can keep in constant contact with our volunteers because we no longer have to worry about a way to reach people individually” through the use of a Facebook event page (Gays Against Guns).

**Visual power.** The Internet permits activists to incorporate more visuals in their communication, including photos, videos, gifs, and memes. Social media posts with graphics often “illustrate the problem” (Moms Demand Action) and “do better than just solely text” in terms of eliciting likes and shares (Center for Food Safety). Moms Demand Action relied on “jarring images” of individuals carrying guns into public facilities after “we mined social media again for images because these folks were proud of what they were doing, and we found a couple of really iconic images.” These images generated significant attention, including coverage on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. Appalachian Voices experienced a similar situation following the Dan River coal
ash spill. The photos the group posted to Facebook “were shared everywhere and then the news was calling us. And that’s how things got moving on a spill that really was slow to get attention… So for things like that, [social media]’s been not just helpful, but necessary.” Videos are also popular on social media and used by groups including Collectively Free, Gays Against Guns, and Greenpeace. One benefit of social media is that individuals can often generate their own content for a campaign, such as taking a photo with a sign saying “DeFund DAPL” after closing their bank account.

**The conversation component.** A primary draw for social media is the ability for “people to feel like they can be part of the discussion” (Center for Food Safety), which may be picked up by media personnel. This capability is an advantage for groups addressing more “niche” issues, such as 18 Million Rising’s campaign against Marvel and Netflix to cast an Asian actor for *Iron Fist*. Although the group was not successful in its goal, the effort still spawned “sprawling conversations” on social media and generated news coverage without the group sending out a press release. The practitioner claimed the success came from “being able to leverage those organic conversations.” These conversations can also generate awareness throughout individuals’ social networks.

**The ripple effect.** Along with the power of networks, social media also adds a public dimension to actions, increasing its value to activists. By posting or sharing information on one’s social media page, individuals increase awareness about both the issue and the organization (Appalachian Voices), which may convince others to get involved. A practitioner at an unidentified progressive organization explained that “One powerful thing about having an activist share something on social media is that all of their entire network receives it,” which “makes the act of advocacy a public thing.”
Collectively Free tags people in posts so “their friends see it.” The Other 98 emphasizes the interpersonal value of social media sharing because “when people hear messages from their friends, that’s more powerful than hearing it from an organization.” An unidentified environmental organization encourages supporters to make their posts public so corporations can see the volume of posts.

**The anonymity aspect.** For 18 Million Rising, the ability to be anonymous online is significant for activist organizations, as demonstrated by its hoax campaign against Gap, during which the group was “able to use social media to move people by pretending to be the Gap and really, sort of publicly embarrassing them.” The participant acknowledged this approach “comes with some risks and certainly it’s been weaponized in ways that aren’t kind of proper.” He compared the action to other activists who parade as corporate executives and attend conferences, noting implementing the strategy online is a way to “push a corporation’s buttons in that same way for much lower costs.”

**Challenges.** While beneficial, the Internet also poses challenges to activist organizations. The first challenge is evaluating the impact of online efforts. Several organizations mentioned a need to devise, or locate, an effective measurement system “to track and help expand the reach and return on investment” (EWG), demonstrate that a strategy or tactic is effective (Sierra Club), and track “the actual reach” of a campaign on the Internet (2nd Vote). Appalachian Voices questioned the accuracy of online metrics because “we don’t get peoples’ full attention.” While social media post linking to a blog may garner “20,000 likes and over a 100,000 views and 500 shares,” the practitioner noted “1,000 actually click” the link. As a result, “it’s really tough to know how much of that is effective.” In some cases, messages may never reach audiences because some
email service providers “don’t like it when you send as much email as we do, and they make it hard for you to do so” (unidentified progressive activist organization).

A second challenge is the “ever-changing landscape…there’s always a new platform coming out and you can’t do them all” (EWG). Because of this challenge, a practitioner from 2nd Vote contested claims that social media “makes everything easier because it’s quick and it’s free…in reality, you need full time personnel who are engineering it on a regular basis.” Younger organizations with heavily concentrated social media efforts, such as 18 Million Rising, often engage in “experimental work,” which makes activism “less pure advocacy and more and more like working in a laboratory.” Following Facebook’s introduction of algorithms, DeFund DAPL and other organizations had to determine how to leverage the process to their advantage. Innovation is even more important to activists because corporations are starting to “sort of see through” tactics used with high frequency, such as online petitions (18 Million Rising).

Third, part of the challenge associated with “being able to outsmart the big corporations” is that Facebook and Twitter are corporations. This dependency “on Facebook and Twitter as a platform is also giving a corporation a lot of power over what you can and can’t do. Those platforms themselves are not neutral…it’s a complicated relationship. It concerns me a lot” (18 Million Rising). A representative from the Other 98 voiced the same concern, particularly when the group campaigned against Facebook, noting while “they’re not fascist,” Facebook could potentially shut down the group’s page or tamper with links to the petition. She elaborated that after Facebook went public and became accountable to stakeholders, “there have been times when we’ve been at Facebook’s mercy.” Citing Facebook’s algorithm, the practitioner claimed, “All of a
sudden, not everyone was seeing all of the posts on the pages that they liked. And for us, for our sort of model, it was like ‘shit.’” PETA and 2nd Vote’s microsites were shut down by the host company; PETA’s website was closed for copyright infringement whereas 2nd Vote’s was called “discriminatory.”

Noting these challenges, along with the ability for individuals to delete posted content (Greenpeace), offline actions are still an integral part of the activist playbook. Only one organization, 18 Million Rising, relies solely on the channel. Thus, the Internet largely serves as “an amplification tool.” As shown, activists will use social media to fuel petition drives by using hashtags in an effort to get the phrase trending and offline actions may generate a spike in online conversations (Moms Demand Action). However, rather than replacing traditional activist tactics, this medium supplements them, permitting activists to attack a target on multiple fronts and escalate strategies and tactics.

**Summary**

Using data collected from interviews with activist practitioners and supplemented by organizational documents and news stories, this chapter examined the process behind anti-corporate campaigns. First, I showed how activist organizations use issues management, beginning with identifying an issue, followed by analyzing and selecting an issue, identifying a potential target firm, analyzing and selecting a target firm, developing strategy, implementing strategy, potentially reaching a reprieve, and evaluating results. Second, I demonstrated how activists establish legitimacy for their issues using tradition, charisma, bureaucracy, values, symbols, de-legitimacy, credibility, rationality, emotionality, entitlement, and external factors. Third, I outlined the various strategies (“getting the news out,” message framing, empowering supporters, the shame game,
engage multiple stakeholders, “be very annoying,” and engage the target firm) and tactics (organizing activities, informational activities, symbolic activities, civil disobedience, and legalistic activities) employed by activists to pressure corporations. Fourth, I described how activists establish relationships with six key audiences: target corporations, supporters, reporters, decision makers, coalitions, and communities. Finally, I explained how the Internet has influenced the practice of activism through direct delivery, media relations, mobilization, visual power, conversation, the ripple effect, and anonymity. The next chapter expounds on these findings, offering implications for theory and practice.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

This dissertation examined how activist organizations use issues management to incite corporate change and establish relationships with key publics throughout the process. To better understand these practices, I conducted interviews with 21 practitioners representing 21 activist organizations. To supplement this data set and permit triangulation, I also analyzed organizational documents (e.g., press releases, websites, and annual reports) and news coverage pertaining to the campaigns. Chapter four outlined the findings for each research question, incorporating support from interview comments, organizational documents, and news reports. The data collected for this dissertation aimed to answer the overarching research question: *How do activist organizations use communication to incite corporations to change practices and policies?*

The previous chapter described how activists employ issues management to identify issues that are pertinent to their organization’s mission and within their capacity to address before identifying and selecting an appropriate corporate target. Next, activists plan and implement a campaign, during which they aim to define a problem, generate awareness, and establish legitimacy to inspire individuals to take action. Throughout the campaign process, and at the end of the campaign, activists evaluate these efforts to gauge their effectiveness and make adjustments as needed. Activists incorporate a variety of communication strategies and tactics, which vary depending on the ideological stance of the organization and access to resources. During this process, activist organizations also build relationships with audiences, including target corporations, supporters, communities, coalition members, the media, and decision makers.
This chapter elaborates on these findings, providing implications for theory and practice. First, I outline implications for theory, focusing on issues management and relational theories within public relations, and how this dissertation adds new interpretations to these frameworks. Next, I address implications for practice. I begin with the need to differentiate activist communication strategies from public relations practice, followed by distinguishing between different types of activists. Then, I provide implications for activist organizations engaging in anti-corporate campaigns, offering a model of corporate activism informed by the findings. Finally, I conclude with implications for corporations that are challenged by these groups.

**Issues Management: An Activist Approach**

This dissertation examined activist organizations’ campaigns against corporations through the theoretical lens of issues management. Although issues management was designed to help corporations shape public policy as a result of activism, ironically, activists quickly became issue managers, using the process to challenge firms. Process models soon emerged to outline the stages of issues management (Jaques, 2010), including Jones and Chase’s (1979) canonical issue life cycle model. The life cycle model largely influenced future models; Ewing (1997) claimed all subsequent models were “variations” (p. 174). This model, along with those presented by Crable and Vibbert (1985) and Hallahan (2001), was used as a foundation for data analysis in this dissertation. While the life cycle model outlines the phases of the issues management process, Crable and Vibbert’s (1985) catalytic model describes the role of communication in elevating issues while Hallahan’s (2001) issues process model identifies how publics aid in the progression of issues.
The findings from this dissertation reflected many components of existing cyclical issues management models (Jaques, 2010; Jones & Chase, 1979; Weiss, 2009): issue identification and analysis, strategy development, strategy implementation, and evaluation (a summation of these models is presented in figure 5.1). However, because this dissertation focuses on how activists use issues management to challenge corporations, this study identified a few key differences. The first distinction posed by this dissertation is the need for issue scanning and monitoring to be ongoing. Second, anti-corporate activists must not only identify and analyze an issue, but also find a corporation that engages in this perceived misbehavior, is widely recognizable, has a poor reputation, or is known for its socially responsible programs, adding an additional step to the model. Third, campaigns may enter a stage of reprieve where the campaign goes dormant. Finally, campaign evaluation occurs throughout the issues management process.

Figure 5.1: Traditional Models of Issue Life Cycles (Jaques, 2010; Jones & Chase, 1979; Weiss, 2009)
Based on the findings of this dissertation, I propose the Issue Advancement Model (see figure 5.2), which outlines the seven steps of issues management employed by activists:

1) issue identification and selection, 2) issue scanning and monitoring, 3) target firm identification and selection, 4) strategy development, 5) strategy implementation, 6) reprieve, and 7) evaluation.

Figure 5.2: Issue Advancement Model

**Issue identification and selection.** Activists begin by identifying issues through scanning and monitoring their environments, as depicted in multiple issues management models (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Jaques, 2010; Jones & Chase, 1979; Weiss, 2009). In this stage, activists employ multiple tools and methods, including news stories, the Internet (e.g., social media and Google alerts), coalition networks, supporters, and staff members. Activists also employ multiple strategies during this stage, honing in on certain industries or commodities known for problematic practices, working with affected communities, or monitoring certain issues that compromise the group’s identity.

After identifying potential issues, groups analyze each issue to determine whether or not to continue with any further action. The key determinants in this stage are the issue relevancy to the group’s mission, ability to contribute and ‘do something,’ a lack of focus
on the issue by other groups, the potential for the issue be perceived as legitimate by publics, and whether or not the activist organization has the resources to engage in a campaign. Because of limited resources, groups prioritize issues, placing efforts in areas requiring urgent attention or where they can have a greater impact.

**Issue scanning and monitoring.** Many issues management models place scanning within the issue identification phase (Bridges, 2000; Jaques, 2010; Jones & Chase, 1979; Weiss, 2009). However, this dissertation supports the model proposed by Heath and Palenchar (2009), where scanning and monitoring are ongoing. As Coombs (1992) noted, activist organizations require legitimacy to operate, and therefore, must work to establish legitimacy for their issues. Coombs initially proposed ten bases for legitimacy; this dissertation also identified a new base: external factors.

This dissertation showed that activists do not only rely on their own rhetorical abilities to position an issue as compelling and legitimate (Coombs, 1992), but also latch onto external factors. These factors, as identified in this data set, include related incidents and campaigns, organizational missteps and crises, documentaries, and opposing activist organizations. Focusing on corporate issues management, Heath and Palenchar (2009) contended corporations must “look at the edges of opinion rather than at mainstream thinking” (p. 100) when scanning for and monitoring potential issues, noting these issues may shift to the mainstream and pose a potential threat to the firm. Comparatively, activists must tie their issue to the mainstream to establish legitimacy, thereby positioning the issue as more central to public opinion, moving from the fringes. To do so, these groups must be aware of external occurrences that they can then link their issue to in an effort to gain more attention and be perceived as more legitimate. In doing so, activists
are not only able to gain attention for a new issue, but also re-define an issue. By emphasizing that an individual sold a gun to a 15-year-old using Facebook, Moms Demand Action invoked a real-life example that illustrated their concerns. By linking an issue to these events, activists’ claims gain credence. To make these connections, activists must constantly scan and monitor their environment to identify opportunities.

**Target identification and analysis.** The first stage this dissertation adds to the issues management process is identifying a target corporation. After choosing an issue, activists then locate a corporation entangled with the issue that can serve as a symbol for the campaign. These firms are selected often because of the extent of their perceived irresponsibility in relation to the issue, their size and recognition within the industry (in hopes of inciting industry-wide reform), use of CSR practices or stances on social issues, proximity (based on feasibility of staging in-person events), and recognizable weaknesses (such as existing image or reputational problems). Next, activists research the target to gauge the likelihood of success, from the chances of inciting change (based on firm leadership) to analyzing the firm’s strengths and weaknesses in an effort to uncover the weaknesses in the armor where attacks will be most effective.

**Strategy development.** As shown in traditional models of issues management (Jaques, 2006; Jones & Chase, 1979; Weiss, 2009), the next stage is to craft a strategy based on activists’ research findings in the following areas: 1) goal-setting, 2) strategy identification, and 3) tactic selection. First, activists begin by determining the goals for the campaign, often in relation to the organization’s overarching mission. For instance, shutting down one coal plant is a step toward the grander goal of ending use of fossil fuels. Second, activists map out the necessary steps they must take to achieve these goals
and identify the publics involved in that process, including key decision makers, reporters, and publics. These steps vary based on activists’ capacities and the extent to which the corporation is concerned about its reputation and bottom-line. Finally, groups determine the tactics used to carry out strategy.

**Strategy implementation.** After selecting strategies and tactics, activists enact their plan. This stage marries the phases articulated by Crable and Vibbert (1985), who focus on moving the issue from potential status to critical status to force a response from the target firm, and Hallahan (2001), whose model relies on the activation of publics, moving from unaware to active. This phase entails five steps: 1) awareness, 2) problem recognition, 3) arousal, 4) activation, and 5) commitment. The first four phases derive from Hallahan’s model, while the fifth emerged from the findings.

**Awareness.** For publics to assign significance to a perceived problem (Jones & Chase, 1979), they must first be aware of its existence. This stage corresponds with the potential status from Crable and Vibbert’s (1985) model, where audiences begin to demonstrate interest in an issue. At this stage, individuals passively receive information through routine uses of information channels rather than actively seek information. Thus, activists must disseminate information through multiple channels, including social media and traditional media, to reach audiences.

**Problem recognition.** While audiences may encounter a message, activists want to ensure the message appeals to individuals (Hallahan, 2001), framing the message so that it resonates with audiences in a way that they understand the issue and its impact on their lives. Activists often re-frame an issue during a campaign to retain attention or attract new audiences. Ideally, this message propels an individual into the next stage, but
if not, the connection may be reactivated at another point in time. This stage corresponds with the *imminent status* (Crable & Vibbert, 1985) as the issue begins to gain attention with a few potential supporters but fails to capture widespread attention.

**Arousal.** During the arousal stage, individuals move beyond passively receiving information to actively seeking information about the issue (Hallahan, 2001); for example, individuals no longer receive information about an issue because it appears in their social media news feed, but actively visit websites or social media pages to become informed. At this stage, individuals contemplate how they can contribute to the campaign. This stage also presents challenges for activist organizations as they must present convincing arguments as to why the issue and the activists’ proposed solutions warrant support; individuals must also begin to believe that their actions will have an impact. This stage reflects the *current status* from the catalytic model (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), as the issue receives more widespread attention.

**Activation.** Individuals who are convinced the issue is legitimate and urgent, and that they can do something about it, are more likely to proceed to the activation stage (Hallahan, 2001), wherein they engage in an action, officially becoming an issue supporter. Through public actions, they not only seek to gain the attention of the target firm, but also aim to inspire others to join the cause as well. The goal of this phase is to reach *critical status*, invoking a response from the corporation (Crable & Vibbert, 1985).

**Commitment.** Campaigns against corporations can wage on for months, years, or decades. Thus, if these campaigns are to be sustainable, activist organizations must persuade not only their supporters to remain engaged with the campaign but also recruit more individuals to increase numbers and power. To aid in this endeavor, activists must
ensure they have a clear plan of escalating their strategies and tactics and regularly rotate these efforts.

**Reaprieve.** As Crable and Vibbert (1985) note, an issue is never fully resolved, though it can reach *dormant status*. Activists and their target firm may reach an agreement regarding the issue. In these instances, the campaign reaches the reprieve stage as both sides lower their weapons. Often, reprieve begins with sides gradually lowering their weapons, as activists may reduce their public actions as talks with the target firm begin. Once an agreement is met, activists cease campaigning. This reprieve can be temporary should corporations revert to their old ways or if activists decide to push for further change on the same issue or a new issue; in these cases, activists often return to earlier stages of the model. For scenarios in which a reprieve is not reached, the activist organization may remain in the campaign implementation phase or revert to an earlier stage, such as target identification and analysis, to identify secondary targets. Others alter their strategies or stop pursuing the issue altogether.

**Evaluation.** Similar to issue identification and analysis, issues management models often place evaluation as the ‘final’ step in the process (Bridges, 2000; Jaques, 2006; Jones & Chase, 1979; Weiss, 2009), before the process begins anew. The findings from this dissertation suggest activists rarely wait to evaluate efforts after reaching the end of a campaign. Rather, they engage in evaluation throughout the strategizing and implementation phases of a campaign. Jaques (2010) suggested issues are “evolutionary” (p. 440). Activists’ comments support this claim, noting developments occur in the campaign, on the ground, or with coalition members that affect the proposed strategies. For example, a message may not be as effective as activists intended, failing to attract
corporate attention or gain traction with important publics, such as group supporters and the media. Therefore, activists need to adjust their communication efforts to ensure the issue does not recede into previous stages (Crable & Vibbert, 1985).

Because activist organizations generally have limited resources (Smith & Ferguson, 2010), they must direct these resources where they will be most effective. The Internet increased the prevalence and feasibility of ongoing campaign evaluation as activists can routinely check to see how social media content is performing, what petitions are being signed, and what emails are being opened. Some groups pre-test messages or email subject lines with audiences, at little to no cost, before launching a campaign messaging strategy. Based on this ongoing evaluation, activists could also choose to focus on a secondary target in hopes of inciting industrial or peer pressure, as Moms Demand Action currently does in its Kroger campaign. Activists generally only conduct a summative evaluation when they reach the reprieve stage, in which the target firm and activist organization agree to a truce, suspending activity or the activist organization must provide a comprehensive update to stakeholders, such as benefactors.

Jaques (2010) contended models of issues management must be cyclical. As the proposed model outlines, once a campaign has reached a reprieve and the group has conducted a summative evaluation of its efforts, the organization takes one of three steps. First, it may look for a new issue pertaining to its mission and goals. Second, if the activist group emerges victorious, it could funnel this energy and issue legitimacy into attacking another target; rather than returning the first stage, the group can select a new firm engaging in the same perceived misbehavior. Even if the group is not successful in altering corporate policy, it may recognize the salience of the issue in public opinion and
choose a different target. Third, if the group fails to identify a new issue or a new
corporate target, it may disband. Activists derive power primarily from audiences through
engaging and empowering supporters. If activists are simply maintaining their existence
without engaging supporters in a meaningful way, the group will likely lose any
momentum gained by the victory and will struggle to maintain its newfound power.

Some campaigns never reach a full or partial reprieve. A partial reprieve occurs
when activists reduce their efforts in the public campaign because the target firm is
willing to negotiate. Other campaigns never reach a reprieve because the corporation
refuses to engage or because the activist organization ultimately aims to obliterate the
firm. Activists will then revisit their strategy, escalating or implementing different
approaches. In some cases, a partial reprieve occurs because the activist organization
recognized the campaign lost traction; as a result, the group chooses to temporarily
refocus its efforts elsewhere with the intention to revive the campaign at a later date.

In summary, the Issue Advancement Model reflects earlier versions of issues
management process models (e.g., Jones & Chase, 1979), but is adapted for the needs of
activist organizations, whose communication efforts vary from those of corporations.
This model recognizes that activists must not only identify and select an issue, but repeat
the process to locate and research a corporate target as well. Additionally, this model
emphasizes that scanning and monitoring must be ongoing as activists often tie their
issues to external factors to increase legitimacy. This model also demonstrates that
activist campaigns may reach a stage of reprieve, which can vary from activists reducing
their public actions to reaching an agreement with the target firm. Finally, this model
notes that evaluation is not only summative, but occurs during the strategy
implementation process as well. Scholars (e.g., Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Kent et al., 2011; Taylor, et al., 2003) note issues management from a public relations perspective requires engaging individuals, adding a relational component. The relationships developed by activist organizations are outlined next.

**Building Bridges: The Role of Relationships**

Activists are unique in that they are both a public (of a corporation) and have their own publics (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Thus, they must engage in building and maintaining multiple relationships, which form when the involved parties hold “perceptions and expectations of one another, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, and when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate” (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, p. 95). Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) added relationships also form when one party can affect the other. Ideally, relationships should focus on common interest and shared goals (Ledingham, 2003) to “involve the exchange of resources between organizations… and lead to mutual benefit, as well as mutual achievement” (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000, p. 91). This section begins by discussing how activists build relationships with their own publics before focusing on how activists build relationships with their targets.

**Activists and their publics.** This dissertation examined how activists build relationships with 1) supporters, 2) communities, 3) coalitions, and 4) reporters and decision makers.

**Supporters.** Relationships with supporters are unique in that they begin with a common interest and shared goals (Ledingham, 2003) as activist organizations are largely
issue-based and individuals join based on their shared interests, values, or concerns (sympathy) or a collective distaste for an adversary (antithesis; Sommerfeldt, 2011a). Several activist organizations noted the importance of ensuring their efforts aligned with supporters’ interests. This dissertation adds that the keys to building relationships with supporters are engagement and empowerment, which occur over four stages: 1) education, 2) connection, 3) involvement, and 4) recognition. Individuals remain at one stage or move between stages throughout an issue or campaign life cycle.

First, activist organizations must educate relevant audiences to ensure they are aware of an issue that either affects them directly or is of interest to them. Because activists are hard-pressed for resources, they must focus on ways to identify individuals who are already interested in their issues. A member from an unidentified progressive organization explained, “We don’t spend a lot of time trying to persuade people” to take interest in a subject. Individuals who are aware and invested in the issue may be unaware that the activist organization is addressing it. Thus, activist organizations seek to entice these individuals to affiliate with the organization.

Second, after individuals associate with the activist organization, the activist organization must engage them to establish a connection. To facilitate this relationship, organizations regularly supply supporters with information about the issue, campaign updates, and the actions they can take to become involved. During this phase, organizations foster a sense of identification through antithesis, sympathy, or “unawareness,” which entails using pronouns such as “we” (Sommerfeldt, 2011a). By constructing these links between the organization and supporters, activists move beyond mutual understanding and interests to establish association and loyalty to the group and
its mission. Some activist organizations, such as PETA, personally reach out to these individuals to build “very personal, one-to-one relationships.” As a result of these early connections, the organization forms a “very solid, personal relationship” with individuals, increasing the likelihood they will engage in online and offline actions.

Third, having established a connection with individuals, activists involve supporters in their actions through incremental steps, providing opportunities for them to engage in the activism process. Not only do these actions help the activist organization gain power, but they also help foster a sense of community among supporters (Weaver, 2010). At this stage, empowerment is crucial so supporters feel they are capable of taking an action, and that it will yield an impact. Activists recognize some individuals need to begin with simpler steps, such as signing an online petition or posting a tweet, rather than starting with a protest. While online forms of communication are often dismissed as “slacktivism” or “clicktivism,” these methods should not always be so easily disregarded. Arguably, some of these activities do not translate into offline behavior (such as boycotting), but they still serve an important role in elevating the issue, engaging additional audiences who may not be willing or able to take part in offline demonstrations, and generating collective action. Actions can be easily shared on social media; thus, if a person sees others in their network signed a petition, these actions lend legitimacy to the issue (and the activist organization), prompting others to join because they feel it is socially acceptable. Additionally, engaging in these actions empowers individuals by increasing their confidence that they can participate in more intensive activities, such as offline actions like protests or boycotts.
Fourth, and finally, to propel this sense of empowerment, activist organizations must recognize the efforts of their supporters. Activists often emphasize and celebrate the victories achieved, even the lesser milestones, to show supporters how their efforts are having an impact. Activist organizations also express gratitude, thanking the individuals for being a part of the campaign and recognizing their contributions. For some campaigns, this process continues for years. However, if an agreement is reached with the target firm, the activist organization then consults supporters on selecting campaigns and strategies, beginning the process again.

**Communities.** Certain activist groups work with communities directly impacted by corporate activity; the prevalent example throughout this data set was environmental groups. Unlike supporters who voluntarily join an activist cause, a community is often involuntarily placed within a situation because of its physical proximity to an issue, such as coal ash pits. Thus, establishing these relationships follows a different approach as nearly all activist groups are outsiders, connected to the community only by the issue bringing them to the area. Consistent with Heath and Palenchar’s (2009) claim that understanding leads to trust, this dissertation suggests that for these relationships to be effective, they must progress through four stages: 1) listening, 2) understanding, 3) empowering, and 4) establishing trust. Activist organizations must recognize that accountability to and respect for these communities are the bedrock for these relationships, co-constructing and implementing the strategies with community members.

First, upon arriving in a community, activists must begin by listening, ensuring the voice of the community is privileged throughout the process. Second, through listening, activists come to understand the plight of the community, including its
concerns, needs, realities, and culture, in addition to how the corporate behavior affects the community members. Third, by understanding the community, the activist organization can then work with community members to establish a course of action, empowering the community through the provision of information, skills, and resources (Couto, 1990) to help the community achieve its goals. As with any campaign, activist organizations must recognize the effort will take time and demonstrate commitment to the community (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998). By completing these steps activists earn the trust of the community, building a relationship and co-creating power.

**Coalitions.** Establishing relationships with coalitions is also unique to activism because these groups already share similar values and goals. Further, by working jointly, activist organizations boost their numbers and resources, amplifying their reach and increasing their power. Often, these individuals work together throughout the activism process, from identifying issues to implementing campaigns. In addition to having shared goals, groups must also frequently communicate to ensure consistency across messaging and be certain their efforts correspond rather than conflict. The length of these relationships vary; some exist solely for a particular campaign while others are ongoing.

**Reporters and decision makers.** While activists build power with supporters and communities, they are also reliant on other publics to gain power, including reporters and key decision makers, who inherently yield more access to power than activists. Although activists do not seek to empower these publics, activists must still provide information to demonstrate the importance of their issue and campaign, requiring the maintenance of personal relationships by engaging in outreach and identifying points of convergence. At times, activists’ aims overlap with these audiences, as reporters rely on trustworthy
sources of information while decision makers coordinate efforts to gain visibility for an important shared issue. Further, activist organizations must demonstrate respect for these individuals, who are less reliant on activists than activists are on them, by being mindful of the demands placed on journalists and decision makers.

In summary, activists’ relationships with their publics most closely resemble the calls for communication to establish mutually beneficial relationships for the involved parties (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2012; PRSA, 2017b) with trust, credibility, openness, and mutual understanding (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992). However, relationships with corporations often prove more difficult. This process is described next.

**Activists as a public.** While all activist groups highlighted their dependency upon publics, namely supporters and the media, not all participants expressed an interest in establishing a relationship with the target corporation. The bulk of research within public relations focuses on the relationship between the activist organization and its target corporation, offering mixed findings on the role of two-way communication. Whereas some scholars advocate forms of two-way symmetrical communication “can successfully mitigate conflict” (Anderson, 1992, p. 164; J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1989; Smith & Ferguson, 2001), others contend the approach is too idealistic because of power imbalances, permitting the corporation to ignore the activists with little to no repercussions, or the activists’ unwillingness to compromise (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Hung, 2003; Roper, 2005; Stokes & Rubin, 2010), eliminating any attempt to establish dialogue, much less mutual understanding and mutual benefit.

This section explores this complicated relationship; following an overview of the role of dialogue, this dissertation notes that activists must often resort to strategies other
than dialogue to achieve their goals. Next, this dissertation identifies the seven components (listening, understanding, respect, reciprocity, trust, agreement, and feasible solutions) required for these relationships. Additionally, this dissertation contests claims that some activists and corporations “might not be so far apart as they think” (Deegan, 2001; L. A. Grunig, 1992, p. 517; Jaques, 2006; Murphy & Dee, 1996), and thus, may be unable to build relationships grounded in “mutual benefit” and “mutual achievement” (Broom et al., 2000). Depending on the activist organization, engagement with the corporation is not a viable option; for some, maintaining the conflict is more fruitful than reaching any form of agreement as it sustains the activist organization. This section concludes by arguing that some targets and activists may be unable to engage because of their conflicting obligations to publics.

**Role of dialogue.** Emerging out of the two-way symmetrical model of communication (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), dialogue entails “true organization-to-public discourse” through “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 323) as “publics are consulted in matters that influence them” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). Dialogue offers “a tool for effective and mutually rewarding interpersonal communication” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 267), requiring multiple, ongoing interactions between the parties. Through dialogue, parties foster engagement with one another as organizational goals are secondary to gaining understanding and “being open to new possibilities” (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 389), which public relations scholars argue is the “most effective way to manage issues” (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 260) and the most ethical form of public relations (Taylor et al., 2001). For activists and corporations, dialogue is more realistic than two-way symmetrical communication. Two-way symmetrical
communication aims to ensure that the decisions reached benefit both parties (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Alternatively, dialogue is not solely about reaching an agreement, but rather about “the process of open and negotiated communication,” recognizing that parties do not have to agree, but merely share “a willingness to try [emphasis added] to reach mutually satisfying positions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325).

Nineteen of the 21 activist practitioners interviewed for this dissertation claimed his or her organization desired to engage in a dialogue with the target corporation. As a result, these groups reach out to the target firm to clarify information and/or request a meeting before going public. A handful of activists noted that corporations respond to these requests and meet with the groups. In some cases, the corporation altered its behavior; for most, the firm issued a perfunctory response, promising to change or largely paying lip-service to the activists’ concerns rather than following through or inciting substantial alterations. As a result, many organizations that eventually did meet with the firms and employ dialogue (e.g., Campus Pride, Greenpeace, Sierra Club) only did so after the use of informational, organizing, symbolic, and civil disobedience tactics up to a period of five years. Thus, while dialogue may be useful, it is seldom the only tool activists will employ in campaigns against target firms.

Corporations must often be publicly challenged before they will agree to meet with activist organizations. Although Chick-fil-A reached out to Campus Pride shortly after the launch of the campaign, other corporations, including Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson, responded to groups only after reports or demonstrations generated media involvement through approaches resembling the publicity or public information models (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In some cases, such as Moms Demand Action’s
Chipotle and Target campaigns, the parties never engaged in dialogue. Rather, the corporations adjusted their policies in response to the public campaign. These findings imply that while dialogue may be a goal, it is not the only lever to incite corporate change, supporting the claim that dialogue only “increases the likelihood that publics and organizations will better understand each other” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 33).

For campaigns that do reach the dialogue stage, however, interactions entail seven components: 1) listening, 2) understanding, 3) respect, 4) reciprocity, 5) trust, 6) agreement, and 7) feasible solutions. Previous research on activism underscored the importance of understanding and trust (Heath & Palenchar, Taylor et al., 2003); this dissertation introduces the other five components to the literature.

Similar to establishing relationships with communities, the process begins with both parties listening to one another in an attempt to understand the other’s perspective by acknowledging their concerns or hesitations without pushing them to conform to the other party’s beliefs or desires. These interactions must be guided by reciprocity and respect as activists and corporate representatives respond in-kind, taking cues from one another. An activist from an unidentified environmental organization noted, not doing so may result in faltering or failing negotiations where “they get really mad at us and just refuse to talk to us for a while.” Multiple study participants reflected that disclosing information, such as their upcoming plans for the public campaign, demonstrates respect. Openness on both sides can build understanding and trust, which are key to these relationships (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Taylor et al., 2003).

From there, the parties begin to identify areas of agreement. Over the course of discussions, both parties should work toward establishing trust by committing to any
agreements reached, maintaining the lines of open communication, and keeping the focus of discussion on the issue at hand rather than allowing discussions to become personal. Many of these practices adhere to the recommendations posed by literature focusing on integrative negotiation (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011), including separating people from the issues, focusing on interests rather than positions, and generating options, including looking for potential areas of mutual benefit.

Furthermore, in keeping in line with negotiation literature (Fisher et al., 2011; Thompson, 1998), preparation for interactions with the target is critical, including identifying solutions. To be successful, solutions must be feasible. For some scenarios, this process may be simpler, such as when As You Sow convinced McDonald’s to adopt more sustainable packaging for its products and was able to demonstrate how this change would eventually be more cost-effective. For other cases, however, solutions may require more maneuvering and more expense. In some instances, such as PETA’s request that Ben & Jerry’s use human breast milk to produce vegan ice cream, solutions are impractical, stalling negotiations and potentially precluding any agreements from being reached in the future. Importantly, dialogue assumes that both parties want to reach a solution and that mutual benefits can be found (Kent & Taylor, 2002), permitting the sides to collaborate, compromise, or accommodate, which may not be true in all cases.

**Failure to communicate.** While corporations may ignore activists, previous research (Spicer, 2000; Stokes & Rubin, 2010) shows activists may refuse to compromise on issues. Dialogue can only occur if publics “are willing and able to articulate their demands to organizations” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). As Taylor et al. (2001) noted, relationships begin with a desire to interact. In such cases, the issue stances of activists
and their targets are too far apart, providing no ability for these parties to identify areas of shared significance and prohibiting them from building “mutually beneficial relationships” (Cutlip et al., 2012; PRSA, 2017b). This divergence may generate from a goal standpoint (Stokes & Rubin, 2010) or a value-driven perspective (Spicer, 2000).

This dissertation supports these claims based on evidence supplied by groups such as the Other 98, which argues their targets cannot satisfy their progressive stances, and the activists are calling for the demise of their targets. Similarly, a spokesperson for Moms Demand Action stated she had no inclination to engage with pro-gun advocates because such engagement would fail to result in any solutions. The findings from this dissertation also suggest other forces may be at play, such as 1) maintaining conflict as a self-sustaining measure, 2) avoiding reputational damage, and 3) conflicting public or stakeholder perspectives on an issue.

First, as research on activism shows (L. A. Grunig, 1992), generating significant attention for an issue elevates that issue in the minds of publics. In addition to forcing publics and the target firm to take notice, this promotion also helps activists in their quests of achieving corporate change but also maintaining their own operations. Reaching a resolution may cut down on the number of supporters for an issue, directly impacting the group’s access to valuable resources, and thus, its overall power.

A prime example of this claim is PETA’s campaign against SeaWorld. Chapter four noted the documentary Blackfish gave new life to PETA’s anti-SeaWorld campaign, reaching new audiences and energizing the issue’s supporters. This rejuvenation also filled PETA’s coffers. Before the film, PETA reported an operating deficit of $28,000; two years after its release, the group received $43.5 million in contributions and posted
an annual operating surplus of $4.5 million (Martin, 2016), allowing the group to finance additional strategies. In a media interview, SeaWorld CEO Joel Manby contended PETA and other animal rights activists would likely never be satisfied and declare a truce with the company, not only because of irreconcilable differences over SeaWorld’s business model, but because PETA “depends on a target like SeaWorld to help it raise funds” (Weisberg, 2016, para. 3). Furthermore, as Sommerfeldt (2011a) found, many activists depend on the rhetorical use of antithesis, attracting support and building identification with an organization based on a common enemy. While slaying the giant may inspire confidence in the organization and cause, if the target is an appealing enemy that sustains interest, eliminating it may reduce organizational support. Thus, for some groups, perpetuating the conflict may be productive so long as the campaign remains prosperous.

Second, just as corporations may refuse to acknowledge activists fearing the action will lend legitimacy to these groups (Heath & Palenchar, 2009), working with corporations may tarnish the activist group’s image or reputation. Following Campus Pride’s agreement with Chick-fil-A, other gay activists claimed the agreement “sullied” Campus Pride’s reputation (Avery, 2012; McGonnigal, 2013). Similarly, conservative commentators claimed Chick-fil-A’s CEO “sold out” by working with the group (Labarbera, 2014). Sommerfeldt (2011a) reported sympathy was the second most common rhetorical identification strategy used by activists, which aims to present shared interests, values, and concerns. Thus, by working with the target organization, activists not only damage their image and reputation, but also risk losing supporters who believe the group strayed too far from its mission and values.
Finally, as Taylor and Kent (2002) suggested, dialogue may not be the most appropriate solution in all circumstances. One such circumstance is when a corporation’s stakeholders or publics have conflicting perspectives on an issue. For instance, companies like Starbucks that have openly taken stances on issues such as gay marriage or healthcare, and been applauded for their decisions to do so, are unlikely to entertain the perspectives of activists pushing for more conservative stances. Using stakeholder theory, scholars (Coombs, 1998; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997) emphasized corporations must balance conflicting stakeholder demands; in most cases, activists are considered secondary stakeholders because they yield less power, legitimacy, and urgency. Activists tend to be seen as demanding or dependent stakeholders, possessing only urgency or legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). Should activist demands clash with those of investors, shareholders, and customers, the corporation is unlikely to adhere to activists, and potentially not even engage, out of an obligation to primary stakeholders.

This section provided implications on the relational components of activist organizations. First, I addressed the process of how activist groups build relationships with their own publics, comprised of supporters, coalitions, communities, reporters, and decision makers, linking them to existing relational theories of public relations. Next, I discussed the relational dynamics between activists and their target firms, adding to public relations theory that focuses on the need for dialogue. Specifically, this dissertation established that while most activists claim they seek dialogue with their target opponent, dialogue is rarely the only strategy, or the most successful strategy, for forcing corporate change. Based on cases where dialogue did occur between activists and
their corporate targets, I outlined the process, adding that these relationships require listening, respect, reciprocity, agreement, and feasible solutions in addition to understanding and trust (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Taylor et al., 2003). Finally, I discussed why dialogue does not always lead to an agreement between the parties, building on existing public relations literature (Spicer, 2000; Stokes & Rubin, 2010).

**Drawing Lines: Differentiating Activism and Its Various Forms**

The practices of activism and public relations share commonalities. Both strategically use communication to achieve a goal with a focus on building relationships (Ferguson, 1997; PRSA, 2017b). Further, in their ideal forms, both serve the public good (PRSA, 2017d). However, clarification is needed within this area of public relations scholarship. Activism is often viewed as synonymous with public relations, and activist organizations are perceived to be similar in their use of strategies and tactics (Derville, 2005; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012). Yet, as chapter four depicted, activist organizations incorporate a variety of strategies and tactics. While in some cases, decisions are reflective of their access to resources as larger, more resource-rich groups can sustain larger campaigns for longer periods of time, choices also vary based on the ideology of the activist organization. Thus, a clear need exists to differentiate between public relations practitioners and activists, as well as different types of activists. This section begins by distinguishing between public relations practitioners and activists.

**Activism and public relations.** Data collected for this dissertation found journalists and activists described anti-corporate campaigns as public relations efforts (Brunsman, 2014; Greenpeace, 2009; Lalonde, 2009; Rushe, 2013). The Other 98 noted “we kind of think of ourselves as a progressive PR agency.” Public relations scholars
have also positioned activists as “public relations practitioners in their own right” (Bourland-Davis, Thompson, & Brooks, 2010; Ciszek, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Jiang & Ni, 2009; Smith & Ferguson, 2001; Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 347), noting they rely on both “traditional public relations strategies and tactics” (Reber, Peterson, & Berger, 2010, p. 33) as well as “non-traditional public relations tactics” (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 72; Smith & Ferguson, 2010). The findings from this dissertation, focusing specifically on the strategies and tactics employed by some of these activist organizations, challenge these claims on the basis of ethics.

Public relations practitioners are expected to adhere to a set of ethical guidelines, such as those formed by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the largest organization of public relations professionals (PRSA, 2017a). The PRSA Code of Ethics recognizes the inherent and unique ethical issues posed to practitioners and the need to protect the “integrity and public trust” that are “fundamental to the profession’s role and reputation” (PRSA, 2017c, para. 2). Yet, as the findings for this dissertation show, not all activist organizations adhere to some of the code’s key tenets, including 1) honesty and accuracy, 2) avoiding deception, and 3) adhering to professional conduct.

First, the code requires public relations practitioners to “be honest and accurate in all communications” (PRSA, 2017d, p. 3). Some activists purposefully exaggerate or misrepresent information. These practices range from PETA activists lying about their identities to gain access to a press conference (Siefman, 2000) to dramatizing press releases to gain media coverage because “everyone does that. And that’s just how it is” (Collectively Free). Second, the code commands practitioners “avoid deceptive practices” (PRSA, 2017d, p. 4). The prominent example of a deceptive practice in this data set is
Million Rising’s hoax campaign against Gap, whereby the activist organization masqueraded as the company through a website, Twitter account, and press releases in an effort to shame the organization.

The final violation by some activist organizations involves the code’s general focus on pursuing “excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism, and ethical conduct” (PRSA, 2017d, p. 1) as activists adopt 1) illegal activities, 2) a lack of professionalism, and 3) provocative advertising. First, several organizations in this study (Collectively Free, Gays Against Guns, Greenpeace, the Other 98, PETA, an unidentified environmental organization, and an unidentified progressive organization) are willing to engage in illegal activity and risk arrest. An example is Collectively Free’s disruption of Easter Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City as part of its anti-chocolate campaign, whereby one protestor incited panic because individuals thought a camera strapped to his chest was a bomb (Chia, 2016).

Second, other activities may not be illegal, but nonetheless spark questions about professionalism, including use of good cop/bad cop strategies when teaming up with other activist organizations to pressure corporations. Some groups, such as the Other 98, embrace the role of ‘bad cop’ as part of their identity. A representative explained, “We think of ourselves as the bratty kid sister. A big, established organization can’t say ‘Shell is a bunch of assholes,’ but we can,” as the group adopts more questionable tactics. Similarly, Gays Against Guns claims politeness is ineffective and prides itself on adopting “visceral” actions that are “in your face” (Neate, 2017) rather than “polite and sedate” approaches (Trykowski, 2016, para. 14).
Third, PETA often employs controversial, even offensive, advertising. One of its most scandalous campaigns featured “a man cuddling up to or mounted on an orca-shaped pool toy next to the words, ‘SeaWorld: Where Grown Men Perform Sex Acts on Orcas’” (PETA, 2016a, para. 1) to highlight SeaWorld’s breeding practices. For several of PETA’s advertising campaigns, media companies refused to run the advertisements because of the graphic content (Quach, 2016).

Some activists embrace these actions because they gain the attention of the corporation and elevate the profile of the campaign and the issue. 18 Million Rising referred to its Gap hoax as a “playful activity” and emphasized that Gap’s behavior, from engaging in sweatshop labor to rebuking the activist organization, was more offensive than the group’s actions. Thus, for some groups, the end justifies the means. Further insight was provided by PETA’s representative, who explained that activists are often the victim of “do gooder derogation,” whereby people who see “a group that’s considered to be highly moral” and often “try to bring the perception of the moral goody-two-shoes down into the mud.” Activists align their actions more closely with morality than ethics. Ethics are contextual, reflecting the rules of conduct set forth by a larger social system and guiding the actions of a group or culture, whereas morals are a personal guide to right or wrong, transcending cultural norms (Marks, 2013). Thus, for activists, the moral implications associated with the issue supersede the ethical manner in which activists attempt to resolve it.

These unprofessional behaviors signify a critical distinction between the practice of public relations (in its ideal form) and activism that not only challenges existing conceptualizations of activists within the public relations literature (e.g., Coombs &
Holladay, 2014; Smith & Ferguson, 2001; Sommerfeldt, 2013) but also offers a new perspective on comparing the communication strategies of each entity. However, to imply that all activist organizations engage in questionable behaviors would be remiss, entailing a need to differentiate between these groups.

Activist typology. While all groups represented in this study identified as activists, they differ in not only their ideologies but also their incorporation of communication activities. The previous section outlines how activist organizations may stretch, or break, the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviors. Because not all of the groups in this study employ these questionable strategies or tactics, differentiating types of activists is an important and largely overlooked step for public relations research (Derville, 2005), which prefers to classify activists by their level of awareness and activity (Hallahan, 2001). Yet, activists’ goals and tactics may differentiate how corporations respond to these groups and how publics perceive the activist groups.

In contrast to the previously described unethical and unprofessional approaches, some activist organizations emphasize behaviors such as 1) consideration, 2) candidness, and 3) politeness. First, while activist organizations such as PETA publicly release disturbing visuals or advertisements, others demonstrate consideration when invoking startling imagery. When partnering with the Center for Bio-Ethical reform on a protest, Life Decisions International posted large signs, creating a block radius around the protest to inform parents disturbing images pertaining to abortion were ahead so individuals could alter their course. Second, groups such as 2nd Vote, Life Decisions International, and an unidentified environmental organization noted they not only reach out to organizations before embarking on a public campaign, but also keep their targets
informed of their actions throughout the process to be “open and fair” (2nd Vote).

Finally, some groups emphasize politeness with the target throughout campaigns as “We
don’t ever raise our voices, we don’t ever use a bunch of capital letters. We don’t step
outside of the professional way of doing things” (Life Decisions International). PETA
(2012, 2014, 2016b) asks its activists to be polite when communicating with audiences.

Public relations research on activism draws heavily from two definitions. The
first, introduced by Smith (2005), describes activism as “the process by which groups of
people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices,
or conditions that the activists find problematic” (p. 5). The second, put forth by L. A.
Grunig (1992), defines activist organizations as “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). These definitions
cast a wide net, and some participants in this study voiced a need for differentiation. An
individual from As You Sow commented, “We definitely don’t operate in the traditional
activist organization space where we’re badmouthing [the target firm] and wanting them
to fail essentially.” Rather, groups seeking to incite change exist on a continuum, varying
in their ideology and tactics (Brown, Zavestoski, McCormick, Mayer, Morello-Frosch, &
Altman, 2004; Derville, 2005).

Recognizing these differences, I propose suggestions for how to better
conceptualize activism based on this dissertation’s findings. Based on the level of change
(organizational, industrial, cultural, societal) sought, ability to be satisfied by a firm’s
stance on an issue, and use of tactics, I offer six categories: advocates, promoters,
sponsors, protestors, objectors and militants. These conceptualizations are presented in Table 5.1 and described in the following paragraphs.

**Advocates.** Advocacy organizations “work within the existing system” and “use tactics other than direct, disruptive action,” choosing to rely more heavily on education (Brown et al., 2004, p. 344). These groups focus on providing information, using formal channels to incite change (e.g., regulatory agencies but not legislation), or directly communicating with the organization through activities with the organization, such as shareholder resolutions or email or letter campaigns. Their most extreme tactics include boycotting and the occasional online petition. They seek change at the organizational or industrial level, from encouraging McDonald’s to adopt responsible packaging (As You Sow) to pressuring the cosmetics industry to label its products (EWG). If the target firm acquiesces, the group is satisfied.

**Promoters.** Like advocates, promoters also seek change at the organizational or industrial level and can be placated with a firm’s policy or practice change, such as Chick-fil-A’s response to its 2012 gay marriage controversy (Campus Pride). However, these activists differ in their use of tactics. Whereas advocates rarely adopt symbolic activities, these groups often organize protests, often in the form of picketing, as seen by Making Change at Walmart’s Black Friday protests, complete with symbolic gestures from *The Hunger Games* franchise. Unlike advocates, these organizations do not use legalistic activities.

**Sponsors.** Sponsors demonstrate a shift from groups seeking change at the firm or industry level to those who also focus on a larger cultural or societal level. Using corporations as a stepping stone, they see no reason for the target firm to cease its
Table 5.1. Typology of activist organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Satisfied?</th>
<th>Tactics</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocates</td>
<td>Seek change at the organizational or industrial level</td>
<td>Can be satisfied with firm’s stance on an issue</td>
<td>Use informational, legalistic, and less intrusive forms of symbolic tactics</td>
<td>2nd Vote, As You Sow, Center for Food Safety, Environmental Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoters</td>
<td>Seek change at the organizational or industrial level</td>
<td>Can be satisfied with firm’s stance on an issue</td>
<td>Use informational and occasional symbolic tactics</td>
<td>Making Change at Walmart; Campus Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors</td>
<td>Seek change at organizational, industrial, cultural, and societal levels</td>
<td>Can be satisfied with a firm’s stance on an issue</td>
<td>Use informational, symbolic, and legalistic activities</td>
<td>Moms Demand Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesters</td>
<td>Seek change at organizational, industrial, cultural, and societal levels</td>
<td>Can be satisfied with a firm’s stance on an issue</td>
<td>Employ informational, organizing, symbolic, legalistic, and civil obedience</td>
<td>18 Million Rising, Gays Against Guns, Greenpeace, PETA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectors</td>
<td>Seek change at organizational, industrial, cultural, and societal levels</td>
<td>Inherently unsatisfied with target firm’s existence</td>
<td>Use informational, organizing, symbolic, and legalistic activities</td>
<td>Action on Smoking and Health, Sierra Club Beyond Coal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militants</td>
<td>Seek change at the social or cultural level</td>
<td>Inherently unsatisfied with target firm’s existence</td>
<td>Employ informational, organizing, symbolic, legalistic, and civil obedience</td>
<td>DeFund DAPL, Other 98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

existence, but ascribe to see it change its policy on an issue. For instance, Moms Demand Action aims to alter the gun culture of the United States and use target firms as a means to this end after having no success with gun control legislation. However, should a corporation change its policy on guns, Moms Demand Action applauds the decision,
stops campaigning, and moves on to another target. These groups employ informational, symbolic and legalistic activities, often lobbying members of Congress to sponsor bills and law changes.

Protestors. Protestors are similar to sponsors. However, activists in this category diverge based on their willingness to employ more radical tactics, such as blockades (Greenpeace, PETA) and hoaxes (18 Million Rising), potentially risking arrest. While they can be satisfied with a firm’s issue stance, they may also have higher demands, such as PETA’s call for SeaWorld to fundamentally alter its business model.

Objectors. Objectors also seek change at multiple levels, but unlike sponsors and promoters, these groups fundamentally oppose the practices of the target firm or industry. For instance, Action on Smoking and Health seeks to dismantle the tobacco industry using informational, organizing, symbolic, and legalistic activities. Similarly, the Sierra Club Beyond Coal campaign aims to shut down all coal plants.

Militants. The final category, militants, are activists seeking to influence society and corporations “through means such as agitative communication with key organizations that contribute to the phenomenon they oppose” (Derville, 2005, p. 528). These resistance-driven groups include more progressive organizations at the extreme end of the spectrum such as DeFund DAPL and the Other 98, that will never be satisfied with the firms they challenge (e.g., banks) because of the perceived corruption these targets embody.

In summary, this section contributed to existing public relations literature by distinguishing between public relations practitioners and activist practitioners based on ethics, which PRSA (2017d) contends “is the most important obligation” (p. 1) in the
profession. However, some of the strategies and tactics employed by certain activists violate this code based on lack of professionalism, distortion, or deception. These practices are no doubt a contributing factor as to why “the perspective that activism is a legitimate public relations practice…has not yet been fully embraced by either scholars or practitioners” (Smith & Ferguson, 2010, p. 405). Recognizing that not all activists engage in these unsavory actions, this section also recognized the need to differentiate between activist organizations, identifying six types ranging on a continuum from advocates to militants (Brown et al., 2004; Derville, 2005). This dissertation also offers other implications for activist organizations, highlighted next.

**Implications for Activist Organizations**

This dissertation responded to Smith and Ferguson’s (2001) call for public relations scholars to examine activists’ strategies and tactics. Although Anderson (1992) contended “the trouble with pressure campaigns is that they are irregular” (p. 153), the data analyzed for this dissertation illustrate patterns in activist organizations’ behavior during these campaigns. Based on these findings, I propose and describe a model that outlines the waves of tactics used in challenging corporations, depending on the target firm. Next, I outline considerations for activist groups when embarking upon a campaign.

**Corporate Campaign Model.** The proposed Corporate Campaign Model (see figure 5.3) differentiates between the type of the firm (profit driven versus “public-facing”), which determines what threat is most likely to be appropriate (e.g., reputational, financial, formal sanctions), influencing the tactics utilized by these groups.

**Corporation priorities.** First, several participants claimed their campaigns differ based on whether the corporation appears to be more profit-driven or “public-facing,”
implying the firm is concerned about its reputation and being perceived as a good corporate citizen (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, Starbucks, Trader Joe’s). Profit-driven firms have low levels of social legitimacy, frequently facing “public animosity” (Hearit, 1995, p. 3); as a result, these firms gain their legitimacy from their financial performance rather than widespread social approval. Examples of profit-driven entities, as identified by activists, include corporations such as Walmart or industries including fossil fuels (ExxonMobil, Shell), energy companies (Duke Energy, Puget Sound Energy), pharmaceuticals (Mylan), and tobacco (Phillip Morris). These stances are often driven by stakeholders, who hold certain expectations for the firms they support (Dodd & Supa, 2015); some may expect a company to support social issues whereas others do not.

Importantly, as all corporations must be profitable to exist (Carroll, 1991), firms range on a continuum. Activists recognize that for some firms, maintaining a positive
appearance is more important than for others (Waldron, Navis, & Fisher, 2013). During the second stage of the Issue Advancement Model (target firm identification, analysis, and prioritization), activists analyze the priorities and culture of the firm as part of their research process. This research includes determining whether or not the firm has taken stances on social issues previously, what types of CSR programs these firms engage in, and how these corporations have responded to activists in the past. According to Waldron et al. (2013), firms leaning toward moralistic culture (“public-facing”) “view the broader interests of society as their primary obligation” and “emphasize organizational integrity over short-term profit maximization” (p. 403) whereas firms with an egoist culture (profit-driven) “tend to view economically interested external stakeholders as their primary obligation” and maximize profits as “social responsibility only matters to managers insofar as it contributes to the externally perceived economic value of their firms” (p. 402).

**Threat type.** Based on whether the firm is more profit-driven or “public-facing,” activists determine whether or not to focus on challenging the firm’s reputation, harming its bottom-line, and initiating more formal change strategies, such as government regulation. Certainly, any combination of strategic approaches can be used; some activists may rely on all three over the course of a campaign. The key is to pose a threat to the target firm (L. A. Grunig, 1992). Thus, while strategies challenging the bottom-line may be effective for both types of firms, reputational pressure will be more effective on “public-facing” firms, which is why many activists try to publicly shame their targets. Groups pressuring profit-driven corporations generally attack the bottom line (e.g.,
boycotts) or engage in formal sanctions (e.g., regulation, legislation, shareholder resolutions). Each of these levers entails specific strategies and tactics.

**Strategies and tactics.** Depending on whether the corporation is more likely to respond to reputational, financial, or formal sanctions, the activist group proceeds with establishing strategies and tactics. Except for militant groups, activists often reach out to the corporation prior to launching a public campaign. If the corporation fails to acknowledge the activists’ concerns or dismisses them, activists then initiate the public side of the campaign. In some cases, activists implement these tactics while beginning negotiations to show their dedication to the cause and put additional pressure on the target firm; this finding contests L. A. Grunig’s (1992) claim that activists will become less aggressive when corporations show a willingness to negotiate. As the model depicts, firms concerned with their reputation are more likely to be targeted by activists using highly-visible strategies (e.g., shaming firms and comparing competitors) and tactics (e.g., protests) that can easily be picked up by the news media because of the imagery and symbolism, generating widespread attention, amplifying the message, and recruiting more supporters. Research on product recalls suggests social pressures may be more effective than formal sanctions, such as regulation, in convincing corporations to disclose past wrongdoing by voluntarily restating their earnings (Pfarrer, Smith, Bartol, Khanin, & Zhang, 2008); this finding holds true for many activist campaigns as well.

While the specific tactics employed vary by type of activist organization, they begin with lower impact informational, legalistic, symbolic activities, including social media posts, petitions, email campaigns, and call-ins. If activists do not receive the response they desire, they progress to less invasive offline strategies (e.g., leafleting,
press releases, advertising). The third step is more invasive offline strategies, including protests (at a corporation’s physical location or potentially the CEO’s home), petition deliveries, or performances. For advocates, and even promotors and sponsors, these activities are more subdued. For protesters, objectors, and militants, these actions are more pronounced, entailing the use of die-ins and flash mobs. For protesters and militants, the fourth stage includes acts of civil disobedience, such as Greenpeace scaling buildings to unfurl banners. Activists may also fluctuate between these strategies and tactics after escalation in an effort to provide opportunities for supporters to engage in actions and maintain the pressure. As a fifth step, some activist organizations (sponsors, protesters, objectors, and militants) may turn to more formal approaches, including regulatory pressure or litigation after other efforts fail.

For firms located closer to the profit-driven side of the continuum, pressure on the bottom-line may also be inflicted through public campaigns. By raising attention about the firm’s behavior, activists of all types may seek to incite a boycott, should other actions (e.g., petitions, social media posts) fail. However, the nature of some of these corporations (e.g., Duke Energy, Mylan) may mean a boycott is ineffective because consumers have no feasible alternatives. Larger industry leaders are also less likely to succumb to pressure from activists, peers, or competitors (Pfarrer et al., 2008; Waldron et al., 2013). Advocates, sponsors, protesters, objectors, and militants resort to formal sanctions, such as regulation, legislation, or litigation. These groups also use shareholder resolutions in an effort to incite change from the inside, generating support among shareholders for their issue stance.
Corporation engagement. As previously noted, all activist practitioners interviewed for this study, except militants, stated their organization aims to engage the target firm in dialogue and negotiations before enacting a public campaign. However, this dissertation found that often this dialogue does not occur until after the campaign goes public, and then drags on for years, requiring significant resource allocation. While the overarching goal and mission for several activist groups is to incite change on a cultural or societal level, the objective for corporate campaigns is to change behavior at the firm or industry level. For instance, Making Change at Walmart’s campaign for minimum wage aims to see the retail titan increase Walmart employees’ annual income. As the Issue Advancement Model (see figure 5.2) shows, once this goal is achieved, the campaign enters a reprieve stage as the group reduces its pressure on the target firm.

In summary, the Corporate Campaign Model outlines the various phase of activists’ corporate campaigns, depending on the firm being targeted. This model proposes that some firms are more likely to be motivated to alter their practices or policies according to various threats (reputational and bottom-line) and formal sanctions. This model also shows that activists determine what threat will be most effective, based on whether the firm is more profit-driven or “public-facing” and then choose appropriate strategies and tactics to incite corporate change, escalating if necessary.

Additional activist implications. In addition to the Corporate Campaign Model, the findings from this dissertation also produced seven implications for activist organizations when challenging a firm. They are: 1) choose targets wisely, 2) conduct thorough research, 3) show respect, 4) keep it simple, 5) keep it positive, 6) reframe and refresh, and 7) do not rely solely on the Internet.
Choose targets wisely. Because activists often have limited resources, they must allocate these resources where they may have the most impact, choosing targets carefully. When considering a target, activists must think about not only the visibility that attacking a target may offer, but also the goals of the campaign. If the group wishes to incite industry-wide change, selecting an industry leader may be more likely to induce a positive spillover effect. However, these firms will likely also prove to be more formidable opponents, as seen in the Greenpeace campaign against Kimberly-Clark. Further, activists must also consider the corporate culture, including stakeholder expectations (Waldron et al., 2013). As participants in this study noted, some firms ‘care’ about issues more, and thus, make better targets. Finally, activists should consider stakeholder loyalty to a company, particularly if hoping to incite a boycott. For example, a member of the Other 98 noted campaigns against Starbucks are often challenging because “people don’t want to hear that Starbucks isn’t a perfect, angelic, progressive company” and are unlikely to give up pumpkin spice lattes.

Conduct thorough research. Research is a crucial component for multiple reasons. First, activists should ensure any information they disseminate about a target firm is correct. Failure to do so will not only mislead the public, but if noticed and publicized, could undermine the credibility of the activist organization. For groups that are already considered to be ‘outsiders’ operating on the fringe of society, credibility is a key component for building issue and organizational legitimacy (Coombs, 1992). Second, research is also critical for developing strategies. Through research, activists can determine if an issue demonstrates potential to resonate with audiences. Furthermore, research should guide decisions about strategies, including what approaches are more
feasible based on the corporate profile, and what publics are more likely to be activated on a particular issue and join the campaign, generating additional power.

*Show respect.* Activists are often perceived as annoying, disrespectful, and obnoxious (Coombs, 1998; Derville, 2005). However, being respectful of the media, communities, and even the target organization, is likely to lead to more fruitful efforts and more goodwill. First, as several participants noted, the media are an important ally for activist organizations; while working with the media may frustrate groups at times, only sending them pertinent, relevant, and timely information and being readily accessible to address their concerns is crucial to establishing relationships. In some instances, activists may want to consider their reliance on symbolic events; as one practitioner noted, the media is growing weary of such events. Too many of these stunts may cause them to be simply another annoying activist event rather than a story that warrants coverage.

Second, as this dissertation pointed out, activists should also be respectful of the affected communities, recognizing that while the group may have beneficial skills and knowledge, the concerns and beliefs of these communities must be privileged throughout the activism process as these individuals are the ones who must live in the aftermath. This audience is unique because unlike supporters, who choose to support a campaign based on their interest driven by antithesis or sympathy (Sommerfeldt, 2011a), affected communities are involuntarily affected by firms and subsequently adopted by activist organizations. Thus, activists have a responsibility to this audience to ensure all efforts reflect the needs and desires of these individuals.
Finally, although activists wage war on corporations, they can do so in a respectful manner by always going to the corporation first in attempts to clarify any misconceptions and keep the lines of contact open as much as possible as a demonstration of goodwill. In some cases, undertaking these efforts may begin to establish trust early on between the two groups, proving to be beneficial during the negotiations, where activists should continue to demonstrate respect by not attacking the individuals across the table but remaining focused on the issue. Certain tactics may backfire. Jahng, Hong, and Park (2014) found publics judge activists based on their tactics and are more likely to support activists that employ more respectful forms of protest compared to humiliation, illegal acts, or violence. Thus, for groups that are genuinely interested in engaging with a corporation to solve problems, they should consider how their strategies and tactics reflect on them and recognize certain actions may be off-putting to audiences.

*Keep it simple.* This dissertation recognized that activists often deal with complex issues. However, effectively delivering complex messages to audiences through third parties or on social media platforms may prove difficult, potentially breeding misunderstanding. Thus, activists should seek to simplify their message as much as possible without compromising the meaning. For organizations dealing with complicated, scientific issues, this implication means presenting the message in a way that lay audiences can understand the issue and its potential effects. Additionally, activists should provide simple steps for publics to engage in as part of campaigns, recognizing that small actions conducted by many people can still yield large results. By doing so, activists can allow supporters to feel involved and empowered, building efficacy.
**Keep it positive.** Multiple activist practitioners interviewed for this dissertation emphasized the need to keep campaigns positive, or hopeful. While uniting against a common enemy may be helpful for attracting people to a campaign (Sommerfeldt, 2011a), focusing on the hope associated with the campaign is more likely to inspire, and empower, activists to take steps. Thus, many practitioners post inspirational or humorous messages on their social media pages as a way to keep the campaigns from being too pessimistic. As noted in chapter four, practitioners from groups focused on “gloom and doom” issues, such as the environment, noted individuals are unlikely to engage with a message or take action if the organization focuses too much on the negative impacts of the situation. Thus, activists must engage in positive messaging to promote a sense of optimism among supporters.

**Reframe and refresh.** Should campaigns drag on, activists will need to identify ways to reframe and refresh its strategies and tactics while maintaining a consistent message. Shifting the message permits activists to ensure the issues does not become stale, particularly for members of the news media, and may also attract new supporters to the campaign. Further, if supporters are asked to perform the same tasks repeatedly, they are likely to tire of the campaign and disengage, and may perceive their efforts as fruitless. Thus, activists, who are often praised for their creativity, should regularly adjust their actions. This adjustment may entail presenting different opportunities to supporters on a regular basis, fluctuating between posting to social media, calling the organization, and writing letters. Some activists may employ more creative activities, such as when Moms Demand Action provided a template for paper turkeys as a craft project with the intent supporters would deliver it to Kroger during Thanksgiving, along with a letter
explaining why the individual would be shopping at Kroger’s competitors. By providing new and creative options, activists can keep supporters engaged, maintaining the momentum.

**Do not rely solely on the Internet.** Finally, this dissertation supports Coombs’ (1998) claim that the Internet is not a panacea for activist organizations. While the Internet may even the playing field between activists and their corporate adversaries (Heath, 1998; Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Smith & Ferguson, 2010), activists require ways to escalate a campaign, often taking efforts offline to stage in-person events. Further, several activist practitioners noted that while their organizations employ online petitions as a strategy, the prevalence of this tactic may be causing it to lose some of its power. Indeed, signing a petition asking Kroger to ban guns from its stores is one thing while actually driving out of the way to stop at another grocery store in an effort to boycott Kroger requires more effort. This implication does not intend to suggest that the Internet is ineffective at raising awareness, inciting dialogue, or gaining a corporation’s attention, thereby denouncing all online activity as ‘slacktivism.’ Indeed, activists can incite reputational damage using the Internet (Veil et al., 2015) and rely heavily on it for disseminating information and organizing events. However, activist organizations should recognize the Internet is often a more effective amplification tool rather than a one-stop shop.

This section outlined the implications for activist organizations. I began by proposing a model grounded in the patterns of activist activities, showing how activists implement tactics based on corporate profiles and escalate these tactics throughout the campaign. Next, I highlighted other implications for activist groups derived from the
findings of this dissertation pertaining to target selection, research, messaging, strategies, tactics, and channels. Because these activist organizations aim to challenge corporations, I provide implications for these targets when responding to activists based on the findings of this dissertation as well.

**Implications for Target Corporations**

Research supplies little information about how organizations should defend their positions and reputations when challenged by activists. Deegan (2001) contended that many, if not most, firms ignore activist organizations because practitioners believe recognizing the activists will legitimize the claim and potentially escalate the situation (McDonnell & King, 2013), feel ill-equipped to do so (Deegan, 2001), or perceive the activist organization poses no threat (L. A. Grunig, 1992). Grounded in the findings of this dissertation, I propose ten implications for companies targeted by activist organizations: 1) conduct thorough research, 2) consider the activist organization, 3) respond early, 4) remain respectful, 5) don’t dismiss certain activist groups, 6) be ethical, 7) consider other publics, 8) use CSR carefully, 9) recognize the ongoing nature of activism, and 10) engage in ongoing issues management.

**Conduct thorough research.** After becoming the focus of an activist campaign, corporations should employ research to gain as much information about the allegations and activist organization as possible. First, the firm should analyze the accuracy of the claim. In some cases, activists may be misinformed, relying on incorrect or outdated information. Should the activists reach out, the company must be prepared to offer the appropriate information and supporting evidence to correct the misperception. However, at other times, the activists may be correct in their assertions, requiring the corporation to
then analyze the extent of the alleged wrongdoing and potentially adopt a process of adaptation and change. Finally, the corporation should also conduct research on the activist organization(s) behind the claims; the profile of the activist group may also shape corporate response.

**Consider the activist organization.** Although some scholars (e.g., Deegan, 2001) contend corporations must respond to all activists, as this dissertation shows, militants demonstrate no intent to work with the target corporation because the group is opposed to the firm’s existence, rather than just its policies or practices. Wang et al. (2016) contended organizations cannot respond to all challenges, and models of issues management (e.g., Jaques, 2010; Jones & Chase, 1979) note that corporations must often prioritize issues. Firms are arguably better positioned to invite in groups that are willing to work with the firm to identify a solution to the discord, particularly if the activists’ claims fail to gain salience with the media or members of the public.

Thus, firms must determine if the activist group has worked with their targets in the past, the strategies and tactics employed by the activist group, the size of the activist group, if the group belongs to a larger coalition, and the success of the group during previous campaigns. Locating this information will help the corporation determine if the activist group is genuinely interested in working with the corporation. Additionally, firms can engage in vicarious learning based on these cases, determining what responses were effective or ineffective in addressing the activist organizations. For activists clinging to inaccurate information and posing no visible threat, no public confrontation may be needed. However, Heath and Palenchar (2009) note that public conflict “can be used to get the corporation’s message across to key publics” and “prove that activists are ill-
informed or are employing shallow reasoning” (p. 183). If claims are accurate, the issue poses a threat, and the activist group is willing to work with the firm, corporations would be well-served to respond quickly and invite activists to the table.

**Respond early.** Although many corporations do not engage with activists (Deegan, 2001), research suggests failing to do so is more often a mistake than not engaging with activists. Representatives at Kimberly-Clark advocated that other companies should not “ignore the fair warning. Take that phone call and just have the conversation” (Gies, 2014, para. 13). Heath (1997) suggested that becoming involved earlier in discussions about an issue may have a greater impact as these issues have yet to become fixed in publics’ minds and generate significant media attention. Furthermore, depending on activists’ demands, corporations have the potential to quickly reach a solution that satisfies both parties, recognizing that activists can present opportunities for organizations to be “more effective and socially responsible” (Hon, 2006, p. 54). Trying to hide the problem rarely works in the firm’s favor, as shown in crisis management literature (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005); if the corporation is guilty of wrongdoing, admission may generate an initial backlash but remains the best choice for long-term performance.

**Remain respectful.** Similar to activist organizations, target firms must also recognize the need to remain respectful throughout the campaign. Part of this respect entails not disparaging the group, referring to them as “bullies, bots, and trolls,” as SeaWorld did during its #AskSeaWorld campaign. Firms should also listen to the concerns of activists in an attempt to understand their concerns (Taylor et al., 2003) without attempting to persuade them to drop the campaign. Some scholars (Nichols,
advocate for firms to use activists’ own tactics against them by being aggressive and launching a media relations campaign to undermine activists. However, I agree with other scholars, such as Deegan (2001), who voice caution against such an approach, recognizing that it will likely only fuel activist organizations, generating more awareness about the issue and possibly shift the power to activists. Further, blatantly dismissing activists’ claims weakens a company’s ability to present itself as ethical and honest (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

**Do not dismiss certain activist groups.** While prominent and resource-rich activist organizations, such as Greenpeace, gain more attention, firms should be cautious not to dismiss activist groups because they are perceived as small (Deegan, 2001) or because they view them as ‘slacktivists’ (Veil et al., 2015). This dissertation demonstrates that small organizations can effectively challenge corporations. A prime example is Moms Demand Action’s campaign against Starbucks, which occurred before the group gained access to former Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s deep pockets and extensive resources, through traditional activist strategies. Similarly, firms should also not ignore ‘slacktivists.’ The SeaWorld case of social media hijacking illustrates how activists can use the Internet to engage new audiences, generate awareness about a target’s activities, and gain mainstream media coverage of social media campaigns, posing reputational challenges and turning an image-building campaign into a digital nightmare.

**Be ethical.** An earlier section of this chapter emphasized that the adoption of and adherence to a code of ethics sets corporate relations practitioners apart from most activists. However, corporate practitioners must also follow this code. The data collected
for this dissertation illustrated some corporations are willing to engage in unethical behavior when battling activists as well. For example, SeaWorld had an employee infiltrate PETA, posing as an animal rights activist to gain information about the group (Bomey, 2016; Luscombe, 2016), directly violating several guidelines including honesty and accuracy in all communication, avoiding deceptive practices, and avoiding actions that compromise good business judgment (PRSA, 2017d). Others, such as Bayer and Coca-Cola, implemented front groups as part of the ‘astroturfing’ process, violating the PRSA Code of Ethics’ stance on failing to “reveal the sponsors for causes and interests represented” (PRSA, 2017d, p. 4). The code notes practitioners have an obligation to “build respect and credibility with the public for the profession of public relations” (p. 6). Thus, corporations should ensure their actions in responding to activists are professional, ethical, and respectful.

**Consider other publics.** This dissertation mentioned firms often balance multiple stakeholders and publics, who may have competing perspectives and needs (Coombs, 1992). At times, the activists’ arguments conflict with those of the organization’s primary stakeholders. Public relations practitioners have a duty to act “as responsible advocates for those we represent” (PRSA, 2017d, p. 3), provided these actions do not harm society. Thus, at times, firms must consider other stakeholders, such as their consumers, shareholders, and employees, when determining how to respond to activists’ demands.

**Use CSR carefully.** Sometimes, corporations will respond to activism, or even attempt to prevent activism, by engaging in CSR (King & McDonnell, 2012; Soule, 2009). Activists are often a factor in shaping a firm’s social responsibility efforts (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Several participants in this study noted that some firms will
respond by emphasizing their CSR campaigns or explaining how the firm generated a CSR campaign in response to an activist organization’s efforts, which interviewees often referred to as “greenwashing.” Although CSR initiatives may generate financial and reputational perks, such efforts should not be implemented lightly as a figurative attempt to suggest change, glossing over concerns. Activist organizations often monitor for this behavior and will attack such programs in an attempt to expose the hypocritical nature of the organization that is failing to live up to its rhetoric. As Heath and Palenchar (2009) noted, “Communication alone cannot solve problems where corporate behavior differs significantly from key publics’ standards” (p. 151). Thus, firms should avoid engaging in ceremonial change in an effort to thwart off activists as publics will often see through this do-gooder façade.

**Recognize the ongoing nature of activism.** In addition to implementing instrumental change programs, corporations should also remain committed to any agreements reached with activist organizations. As this dissertation found, activists will continue to monitor corporate behavior even after the negotiations end; should these firms fail to adhere to the agreed-upon terms, activists will not hesitate to re-ignite a public campaign. In doing so, activists will not only be able to challenge the corporation based on its original misbehavior, but also expand its argument to show that the firm went back on its promises. Thus, firms must recognize activism is an ongoing process and recognize the need to remain alert.

**Engage in ongoing issues management.** The ongoing nature of activism reaffirms the need for corporations to engage in issues management (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Jaques, 2006; Jones & Chase, 1979), monitoring their environment for potential
issues and addressing them early on, if warranted. Because firms are not as nimble as activists, this proactive approach is particularly vital in this context if a company seeks to avoid scrutiny as the target of an activist campaign. Through issues management, firms can respond to activists if a threat manifests and adjust their policies proactively. In doing so, firms may be able to gain a competitive advantage. A company that is not indicted by the activist organization, media, or public may be able to differentiate itself as a better alternative than the firm receiving scrutiny (Veil, Dillingham, & Sloan, 2016). This dissertation also recognizes the persistence of activist organizations, which will relentlessly pursue an issue, even if they must adjust their strategies and select new targets, in an effort to achieve their goals. To prevent these issues from escalating into crises, corporations must be ready and prepared to address these issues quickly and effectively, drawing from the implications presented in this section.

**Summary**

This chapter provided theoretical and practical implications drawn from this dissertation’s findings. First, I outlined how this dissertation contributes to pre-existing knowledge of issues management, proposing the Issue Advancement Model adapted from earlier models (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Hallahan, 2001; Jones & Chase, 1979) to better reflect the process employed by activist organizations. Specifically, this model added the need for ongoing scanning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the addition of phases in which activists identify, analyze, and select a target corporation for the face of their campaign and potentially enter a state of reprieve.

The second theoretical component to this chapter focused on the relational aspects of activist organizations. This dissertation explored how activists build relationships with
six audiences: supporters, communities, coalitions, reporters and decision makers, and target corporations. Specifically, I added a four-phase process for the supporter-activist relationship (education, connection, involvement, and recognition) and for the community-activist relationship (listening, understanding, empowering, and establishing trust). Additionally, I demonstrated that dialogue is more realistic than two-way models of communication for understanding the relationship between activists and corporations. Further, I added that in addition to understanding and trust (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Taylor et al., 2003), effective relationship building components include listening, respect, reciprocity, agreement, and feasible solutions. Finally, I noted even dialogue may be ineffective or impossible in certain situations as neither the corporation nor the activist organization benefit from or seek to engage in these discussions.

Next, this chapter outlined practical implications, beginning with a need to differentiate activists from public relations practitioners based on professionalism. Recognizing activist organizations vary, I also proposed six categorizations of activist organizations, ranging from advocates to militants. Additionally, this dissertation offered the Corporate Campaign Model, explaining how the campaigns vary based on whether the target firm is more profit-driven or “public-facing,” identifying which tactics are more commonly employed within these circumstances. Finally, this chapter concluded with recommendations for activist organizations and their targets to consider throughout the activism process.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This dissertation examined how activist organizations use communication strategies and tactics to gain support for their issues and challenge corporate policies and practices. Data were collected using interviews with practitioners representing 21 activist organizations, which varied in their size and issue stances. To supplement the interviews, organizational texts (action alerts, annual reports, blog posts, fact sheets, and press releases) pertaining to the campaigns were collected from the activist groups’ websites, along with news articles covering the campaigns. Collectively, these data provided insight as to how activist organizations pressure corporations.

Activist organizations seek to incite change at the organizational, industrial, cultural, or societal level and enact campaigns to this end. Public relations literature points out that activist organizations are unique because they are dual communicators. Not only must they operate as a public in communicating with the target corporation, but they must also work as a public communicator when interacting with their own publics to establish support for their issue, campaign, and organization while also building and maintaining relationships with these audiences. As anti-corporate activism has grown, public relations research on activists has lagged behind. Although scholars acknowledged activists are adept at issues management, much of the research on issues management reflected the corporate perspective. Further, extant research has only begun to address the changing media environment, including the role of the Internet in activists’ communication efforts; much of this research has focused on the use of websites or message framing, with little literature examining the role of social media.
Given the scarcity of research on activism from a public relations perspective, this dissertation aimed to generate a more thorough understanding of the anti-corporate activism process, adding to literature on how activists establish legitimacy for both their organizations and their issues, use resources to acquire power, and construct relationships with various audiences. This dissertation highlighted activists’ successful practices, noted their challenges, and outlined the lifecycle of corporate campaigns. This chapter provides a summary of this dissertation’s findings and implications, acknowledges the limitations of this study, and offers suggestions for future research.

**Summary of Research Questions and Findings**

The primary research question for this dissertation was: *How do activist organizations use communication to incite corporations to change practices and policies?* To aid in analyzing data and answering this research question, six specific research questions were posed; the findings for each research question are summarized in this section.

The first set of questions inquired about how activists use issues management (RQ1a: How do activist organizations identify and promote issues? RQ1b: How do activist organizations establish legitimacy for these issues?). Findings indicate that activists use a derivative of the traditional issues management process (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Jones & Chase, 1979) proposed as the Issue Advancement Model to identify and analyze issues, identify and analyze target firms, design and implement a strategy, potentially reach a state of reprieve, and evaluate efforts. Throughout the implementation process, activist organizations seek to influence individuals from generating awareness to taking action. As part of this process, activists must establish legitimacy for their issues.
In addition to the bases of legitimacy identified by Coombs (1992), this dissertation introduced another base: external factors. External factors include events that occur beyond the activists’ control, including current events or corporate crises that are relevant to the campaign, positioning the issue as mainstream.

The second set of research questions asked about the campaign methods used to challenge corporate behavior (RQ2a: What communication strategies and tactics do activist organizations use to challenge corporate policies and/or practices? RQ2b: Why do activist organizations use certain communication strategies and tactics to challenge corporate policies and practices?). The strategies identified in this dissertation were: disseminating information about their campaigns and issues through multiple channels (e.g., the media, websites, social media), framing a message so it is relevant and positive, providing action steps that empower supporters, shaming and thanking corporations, engaging multiple audiences, and being persistent. Guided by Jackson’s (1982) taxonomy of activist tactics, this dissertation found activists use organizing activities, informational activities, symbolic activities, civil disobedience, and legalistic activities. However, some organizations are more likely to use certain tactics over others based on their ideology or issue. This study showed that highly progressive groups are more likely to embrace social media and civil disobedience whereas conservative organizations depend on boycotts and informational tactics. Organizations addressing health-related and environmental issues use legalistic tactics more than other groups; while animal rights activists embrace highly visible actions, such as protests. When choosing strategies and tactics, activists consider their strengths as an organization, their goals, the target firm, the target firm’s ongoing responses, and the need to regularly refresh the campaign. To carry out these campaigns,
activists noted they rely on people, media coverage, financial resources, technology, public relations and advertising firms, and coalitions.

The third research question pertained to activists’ relationships with publics (RQ3: How do activist organizations establish and maintain relationships with key publics?). Participants identified six publics with whom they establish relationships: members (supporters), affected communities, other activist groups, reporters, decision makers, and target corporations. With members and affected communities, activist organizations must determine their needs or interests and keep them engaged throughout the campaign process. With coalition partners, activist groups work together to share resources, collaborate on tasks, and increase their power. When working with reporters and decision makers, activists recognize the need to be respectful of the demands placed on these individuals, who can be influential in helping activists gain coverage for their issue or promoting their issue using legalistic actions. Finally, activists often try to directly engage the target firm by reaching out before launching a public campaign; when sitting across from corporate representatives, activists noted the need to focus on the issue, establish understanding and trust, and provide solutions.

The final question referenced the role of the Internet (RQ4: How has the Internet altered the communication strategies employed by activist organizations?). Every activist organization represented in this study uses the Internet because of its low cost, wide reach, and ability to bypass gatekeepers. The activists interviewed noted the benefits of the Internet include the ability to deliver targeted messages, pitch news stories, mobilize publics, include more visuals, incite conversations, and maintain anonymity. However, the activists often struggle with measuring the impact of their online efforts, determining
which platforms are most effective, and relying on corporations, such as Facebook, during their campaigns. These findings provided implications for theory and practice.

**Summary of Theoretical Implications**

Based on these findings, this dissertation offered several implications for theory. First, this dissertation introduces the Issue Advancement Model, noting existing models favor the corporate practice of issues management. Traditional models of issues management present the cyclical process in five steps: issue identification, issue analysis and prioritization, issue strategy development, issue strategy implementation, and evaluation. The Issue Advancement Model outlines how activist organizations engage issues management to challenge corporations and added two steps: 1) target firm identification and selection and 2) reprieve. The model also emphasized that issue scanning and monitoring is not contained to the issue identification stage of the model but is ongoing; likewise, evaluation may also occur along with the strategy implementation phase rather than after implementation is complete. As a result, activist organizations may adjust their strategies based on the findings from this ongoing evaluation. Finally, campaigns may revert to earlier stages in the model; after implementing a campaign against one corporation, activists may identify and add other corporations associated with a particular issue.

Second, this dissertation offers theoretical implications for relational theories of public relations, including how activists develop relationships with members, affected communities, and target corporations. First, this dissertation adds that the keys to building and maintaining relationships with supporters are engaging and empowering these individuals through four steps: 1) education, 2) connection, 3) involvement, and 4)
recognition. Second, this dissertation suggests that activists also engage in a four-step process when establishing relationships with affected communities in an effort to co-construct power: 1) listening, 2) understanding, 3) empowering, and 4) establishing trust.

Third, this dissertation supports previous research that suggests two-way symmetrical communication fails to capture the complexity of the corporate-activist relationship. Rather, the findings of this dissertation suggest the dialogue approach is more appropriate and realistic, adding that most activist organizations rarely use dialogue alone but must employ other tactics to gain the target firm’s attention. This dissertation noted that in addition to understanding and trust (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Taylor, et al., 2003), activist-corporate relationships also require listening, respect, reciprocity, agreement, and feasible solutions. However, this study proposes that in some cases, dialogue may be ineffective as activists do not seek resolution because conflict sustains the activist organization. Further, both activists and target corporations may refuse to engage in dialogue because of potential reputational challenges and conflicting stakeholder demands.

**Summary of Practical Implications**

This dissertation also yielded practical implications for activist organizations and their target firms, differentiating between activism and public relations. As this dissertation shows, activist organizations do not adhere to a professional code of ethics, unlike public relations practitioners. Rather, activists often subscribe to an approach whereby the end justifies the means. Thus, this dissertation calls for a distinction to be made between the practices of anti-corporate activism and public relations. Further, the findings of this dissertation also note activist organizations vary and should be
differentiated based on the level of change they seek, their ability to be satisfied by a firm’s issue stance, and their use of tactics. To address this need, I proposed six activist types: advocates, promoters, sponsors, protesters, objectors, and militants.

**Implications for activists.** This dissertation also offered practical implications for both activists and corporations. Based on the findings, I presented the Corporate Campaign Model outlining how activists challenge firms based on the extent to which the corporation appears to be driven by profits or its reputation, as indicated in research conducted by activists during their analysis. This model highlights the process activist organizations follow, beginning with posing reputational threats, financial threats, or formal sanctions, and outlining the tactics they enlist to pressure the corporation. In addition to the Corporate Campaign Model, the findings from this dissertation also generated seven implications for activist organizations when challenging a corporation: 1) choose targets wisely, 2) conduct thorough research on the issue and the target, 3) show respect, 4) keep messages and actions simple, 5) keep messages positive, 6) reframe and refresh campaign strategies to increase the campaign’s longevity, and 7) do not rely solely on the Internet.

**Implications for corporations.** This dissertation also offers implications for firms targeted by activist organizations as the corporations decide whether or not to respond to, and thereby acknowledge, these critics. Specifically, this dissertation outlined ten recommendations for corporations: 1) conduct thorough research on the issue and the activist organization, 2) consider the activist organization, including their previous campaigns, 3) respond early as the campaign may escalate into a public threat, thereby attracting more attention 4) remain respectful rather than disparaging activists, 5) don’t
dismiss activist groups based on their size, 6) remain ethical, adhering to the PRSA Code of Ethics, 7) consider other publics when determining when and how to respond to activists, 8) use CSR carefully rather than as a ‘quick-fix’, 9) recognize the ongoing nature of activism, and 10) engage in ongoing issues management.

**Limitations**

As with any research project, this dissertation has limitations that must be noted. First, most of the campaigns included for analysis in this study are still ongoing. While the analysis was still able to explore previously resolved cases and the strategies and tactics used in unresolved campaigns, this study does not provide insight as to how, when, or if these campaigns will reach the reprieve stage of the model. Similarly, these unresolved situations are unable to provide additional insight into the dialogue and negotiation processes that corporations and activists engage in to reach the stage of reprieve.

Second, some of the practitioners interviewed for this dissertation were unable to answer certain questions in the interview script. Two practitioners were not directly involved in communication with organizational members or supporters and were unable to speak to how these groups build and maintain relationships with these publics. A few practitioners were unable to provide details about the dialogue process with the target firms because 1) they were not present for these conversations, 2) were unable to disclose information for confidentiality reasons, or 3) engagement with the target corporation(s) had not occurred during the practitioner’s time at the organization. Finally, several practitioners noted that because of their age and limited experience with the activist organization, they were not involved in the activism process before the Internet. Thus,
while they could speak to how the Internet aids them in their campaigns and how they use more traditional forms of activism or media relations, they could not attest to how the Internet has specifically altered their communication efforts.

Third, most of the activist practitioners in this study noted their issue stances tend to be more progressive, or liberal; only two participants defined their organization’s mission as conservative. Several conservative groups were invited to participate but declined the offer or did not respond to requests for interviews. Thus, this dissertation largely reflects the perspectives of progressive activists. Interviews with additional activist groups who do not identify as progressive may have offered additional insight into the strategies and tactics employed by these organizations, permitting additional comparisons among and across groups.

Fourth, although this study included 21 activist organizations, multiple organizations dealt with environmental issues ($n = 5$) or health and human safety issues ($n = 5$), whereas some issues, such as animal rights and gun control, were represented by two organizations apiece. Other issues, including employee rights or LGBTQ rights were represented by one organization. Additional groups were contacted but declined to participate or did not respond. Again, interviews with additional practitioners from other areas might provide further insight as to how activist organizations vary in their approaches by issue.

Fifth, data collected for this dissertation focused on the activist perspective rather than encompassing data from both the activists and their target corporations. While much research within public relations literature does examine the corporate perspective of activism, incorporating interviews and documents collected from both parties in the same
study would provide a more holistic perspective of the process, including the role of dialogue. Including data representing both perspectives would also provide additional information as to why and when corporations choose to engage with activists.

Finally, the findings from this dissertation reflect the practices of activist groups challenging corporations in the United States. Research on activist organizations pressuring political agencies or leaders may yield different results. Instead, Zhang, and Marquis (2016) note that within Western democracies, the press and social movements can hold corporations accountable; however, in other countries, the press may be controlled by the government, hindering activists’ efforts. Thus, the findings from this dissertation may not be applicable in all countries.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This dissertation also offers areas for future research. First, because campaigns may last for years, future research should collect interviews with practitioners over the course of a campaign. Although this dissertation provided an overview of the campaign process from start to finish, the interviews were conducted at one point during or after the campaign. Other research may involve regularly communicating with activists over the duration of the process to yield additional insight about the decision-making process.

Second, additional research should also explore the role of dialogue and negotiation between activists and the target corporation on a deeper level, ideally from the perspective of both the activist organization and the corporation. Such research might provide additional information about whether these discussions vary based on the type of firm (profit driven vs. “public-facing”) and activist type (advocates, promoters, sponsors, protesters, objectors, and militants).
Third, future research should explore the messages implemented by activist organizations throughout their campaigns. Specifically, research should examine what types of messages are most effective at encouraging individuals to identify with an organization, perceive an issue as a problem, view an issue and an organization as legitimate, and take action regarding the issue. Additionally, as this dissertation notes, activists may challenge a very specific issue within a corporation (e.g., McDonald’s product packaging) or focus on broader issues (e.g., PepsiCo’s role in palm oil). Future research should explore the effects of specific messages.

Fourth, although this study focused on how activists build relationships, it did so from the perspective of the activists rather than their publics. Future research should incorporate the viewpoints of these individuals, including members/supporters, as well. Such research would provide insight as to why individuals choose to join a specific activist organization, particularly when multiple groups address the same issues, how they perceive a relationship with these groups, and what they hope to gain from supporting these organizations. The data from this dissertation showed engagement and empowerment are key to building relationships with membership publics, but more research is needed to understand what these individuals desire from the relationship. Similarly, research should also explore activists’ relationships with affected communities, including how affected communities perceive these groups and what they believe activists should be doing (or should not be doing) to assist in efforts. Research is also needed to understand how reporters perceive activists and what content is most likely to be considered newsworthy. One activist claimed the media is tiring of symbolic activities
whereas others claimed these events are necessary to gain media attention. Future research should explore this dynamic more fully.

Fifth, although this study offered the Corporate Campaign Model, explaining how firms differ in their responses based on whether or not they are profit-driven or public-facing, additional research should continue to explore how corporations differ in their responses to activism. Along these lines, researchers should identify if targeting certain firms (e.g., industry leaders) is more likely to induce a spillover effect across sectors. Furthermore, this dissertation focused only on how target firms responded; future research should also examine how, or if, corporations that are similar to the targeted firm adapt their practices during or following an activist campaign.

Finally, although this dissertation offered implications for target firms in how to respond to activists, theoretical models need to be developed to better understand corporate responses to activism. McConnell and King (2013) claimed, “We know little about how organizations defend their positions and reputational standing when challenged by activists” (p. 390). Future research should address this gap, identifying the factors that influence corporate responses (e.g., size and reputation) along with how these firms differ in their responses to activists’ demands.

**Final Summary**

In conclusion, this dissertation contributed to the public relations literature on activism by exploring how activist organizations use communication to both challenge corporations and build relationships with various publics. Specifically, this dissertation offered theoretical implications, introducing the Issue Advancement Model, outlining how activists develop relationships with specific publics (e.g., members and affected
communities), and extending knowledge about the role of dialogue in resolving differences between activists and targets. Additionally, this dissertation offered implications for practice, presenting the Corporate Campaign Model, which outlines the course of activists’ campaigns, and suggests how activists and target corporations can more effectively use communication when engaging with one another. This dissertation concludes with identifying multiple areas of future scholarship, showing a need for additional scholarship on activism.
Appendix A: Interview Request and Informed Consent Information

You are being invited to take part in a research study about how activist organizations generate support and challenge target organizations’ reputations. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I hope to learn about more about how activist organizations form, build relationships with publics, and raise awareness about their issue(s) while simultaneously challenging the reputations and legitimacy of other organizations. You are being invited to take part in this research study because of your role within [activist group].

Although you may not get personal benefit from taking part in this research study, your responses may help communication scholars and practitioners understand more about how activist organizations reach their goals.

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 30 people to do so nationally, so your answers are important to me. Of course, you have a choice about whether or not to participate in the interview. If you do participate, you are free not to answer any questions or to discontinue at any time.

The interview will take about 60 minutes to complete and will be conducted via telephone. Interviews will also be audio recorded to ensure accuracy of direct quotations; however, no comments will be attributed to you by name.

I will make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by the law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study, including representatives from other activist organizations. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private. I may be required to show research which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

If you have questions about the study, please feel free to ask; my contact information is given below. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,

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College of Communication and Information
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EMAIL: chelsea.woods@uky.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Shari Veil, MBA, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Communication
University of Kentucky
PHONE: 859-218-0468
EMAIL: shari.veil@uky.edu
Appendix B: Interview Guide

Before we move to questions, I need to confirm that you are indeed consenting to take part in this interview following the terms emailed to you before we scheduled this call. As explained in the email, we will be recording this interview to ensure accuracy of direct quotes; however, no comments will be attributed to you by name in publications or presentations. All interview responses will be combined to explain how activist organizations use communication strategies to achieve their goals. Do you consent to the interview? [If no, thank them and end the call. If yes, continue.]

Introductory Questions
1) How long have you been with the organization?
2) Can you describe your role within the organization?

About the Organization
3) Can you tell me a little about your organization’s mission and goals?
4) Who manages your communication efforts?
5) How is your organization’s communication department structured?
6) Do you work with an agency? [If not, have you ever worked with an agency?]

Identifying Issues and Target Organizations
7) What primary issue(s) does your organization focus on?
8) How does your organization monitor for and identify issues?
9) Who are your prime targets? How do you identify your targets?
10) What types of resources do you use to gain support for your issue?
11) Do you ever partner with other organizations?
12) When starting a campaign, how do you determine your goals? What do your goals typically include?

Communication Strategies
13) What communication strategies have you found to be most successful for building relationships with your audiences?
14) What are the challenges you face in building relationships with your audiences?
15) What communication strategies have you found to be most successful in raising awareness about your issue(s)?
16) What are the challenges you face in raising awareness about your issue(s)?
17) Once you’ve raised awareness, what communication strategies have you found to be most successful in sustaining your campaigns?
18) Once you’ve raised awareness, what are the challenges you face in sustaining your campaigns?
19) What communication strategies have you found to be most successful for challenging your target’s policies or behaviors?
20) What are the challenges you face in challenging your target’s policies or behaviors?

The Media, Internet, and Social Media
21) How often do you work with the media?
22) What are some of the challenges you face in working with the media?
23) How have the Internet and social media altered your communication efforts?

**Working with the Target Organization**
24) What factor(s) do you take into consideration when confronting your targets?
25) How do your target organizations typically respond to your messages? (Follow up: How did you respond?)
26) Have you ever negotiated with a target organization?
27) How do you determine if an issue has reached resolution?

**Follow Up**
28) Is there anything else you would like to add about your organization’s communication efforts?
29) May I contact you for follow-up questions, should any arise?
## Appendix C: Activist Organizations, Issues, and Target Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activist Organization</th>
<th>Issue(s)</th>
<th>Target Corporation(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 Million Rising</td>
<td>Promoting Asian-American and Pacific Islander community issues</td>
<td>The American Girl Doll Company; Facebook; Gap; Marvel Comics; Netflix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Vote</td>
<td>Exposing corporations that fund “liberal advocacy”</td>
<td>Macy’s; Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action on Smoking and Health</td>
<td>Fighting against the harm caused by tobacco</td>
<td>Philip Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian Voices</td>
<td>Protecting the land, air, and water of the central and southern Appalachian region</td>
<td>Duke Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As You Sow</td>
<td>Promoting environmental and social corporate responsibility</td>
<td>McDonalds; Starbucks; Trader Joe’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Pride</td>
<td>Creating a safer college environment for LGBTQ students</td>
<td>Chick-fil-A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Food Safety</td>
<td>Curbing the use of harmful food production technologies</td>
<td>Bayer; In-N-Out Burger; McDonald’s; Orville Redenbacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectively Free</td>
<td>Promoting animal and human rights</td>
<td>Chick-fil-A; Hershey’s; Nathan’s Famous Hot Dogs; Nestle; Starbucks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeFund DAPL</td>
<td>Stopping the Dakota Access Pipeline by divesting from banks</td>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Working Group</td>
<td>Protecting human health and the environment</td>
<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson; L’Oréal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gays Against Guns</td>
<td>Establishing common-sense gun reform</td>
<td>BlackRock; FedEx; Hertz; Wyndham Worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Sponsors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenpeace USA</td>
<td>Exposing global environmental problems and promoting solutions</td>
<td>Kimberly Clark; Procter &amp; Gamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Decisions International</td>
<td>Exposing and opposing the agenda of Planned Parenthood</td>
<td>Starbucks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Change at Walmart</td>
<td>Making Walmart a more responsible employer and improving lives of employees</td>
<td>Walmart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moms Demand Action</td>
<td>Establishing common-sense gun reform</td>
<td>Albertsons; Chipotle; Facebook; Fresh Market; Kroger; Starbucks; Target; Trader Joe’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 98</td>
<td>Inciting change on issues pertaining to big banks, big oil, and big money in politics</td>
<td>ExxonMobil; Facebook; Mylan; Shell; Wells Fargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals</td>
<td>Promoting animal rights</td>
<td>Armani; Ben &amp; Jerry’s; Land O’Lakes; Ringling Brothers; SeaWorld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sierra Club – Beyond Coal</td>
<td>Replacing coal with clean energy</td>
<td>Colstrip coal plant; Duke Energy; Puget Sound Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Right to Know</td>
<td>Pursuing truth and transparency in the American food system</td>
<td>Coca-Cola; Disney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified environmental organization</td>
<td>Protecting the environment and human rights</td>
<td>Abercrombie &amp; Fitch; PepsiCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified progressive organization</td>
<td>Seeking “progressive change” through reproductive freedom, environmental protection, a healthy food system, and economic equality</td>
<td>Google; Nestle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: List of Organizational Documents and Media Reports

18 Million Rising
American Girl Doll Company


Gap, Inc.


Marvel and Netflix


2nd Vote

Macy’s


Target


2nd Vote (2016, November 28). Cyber Monday is here; Are you shopping #AnywhereButTarget?. Retrieved from http://www.2ndvote.com


**Appalachian Voices**

Duke Energy


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**As You Sow**


Trader Joe’s


**Action on Smoking and Health**

Phillip Morris


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**Campus Pride**

- **Chick-fil-A**  


**Center for Food Safety**

**Bayer**


McDonald’s Center for Food Safety (2015, March 4). McDonald’s announces plan to source chicken raised without medically important antibiotics. Retrieved from http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org


Center for Food Safety (2017, January 5). Consumer group petitions 16 fast food chains to reduce antibiotic use. Retrieved from http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org


Subway begins slow transition away from meats raised using antibiotics. (2015, October 21). *The Denver Post.* p. 0Z.


Orville Redenbacher
Collectively Free


DeFund DAPL


**Environmental Working Group**


L’Oréal


**Gays Against Guns**


FedEx, Hertz, and Wyndham


Greenpeace

Kimberly-Clark


Choi, C. (2011, August 28). Recycled paper not yet on a roll in HK. *South China Morning Post*. p.06


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### Life Decisions International

**Starbucks**  

### Making Change at Walmart

**Minimum Wage Campaign**  


**Moms Demand Action**

**Chipotle**


**Facebook**

DiBlasio, N. (2014, March 6). Facebook takes aim at gun posts. *USA Today*. p.4A.


Kroger


243


Moms Demand Action (2014, October 29). Moms Demand Action takes on Kroger at annual investor meeting. Retrieved from


Panera


Target


Exxon-Mobil


Other 98 Team (2015, April 15). Our top 5 moments from our first 5 years. Retrieved from https://other98.com/top-5-moments-first-5-years/


Facebook


Mylan


Shell


Other 98 Team (2015). Tell the Secretary of the Interior “Shell No!” Retrieved from https://other98action.org/tell-secretary-interior-shell-no/

Other 98 Team (2015, April 15). Our top 5 moments from our first 5 years. Retrieved from https://other98.com/top-5-moments-first-5-years/


Other 29 Team (2015, May 28). Our 10 favorite moments of the #ShellNo flotilla. Retrieved from https://other98.com/10-favorite-moments-shellno-flotilla/


People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)


PETA (2016). This industry is crashing and you’ll love the reason why. Retrieved from http://www.peta.org/blog/industry-crashing-youll-love-reason/


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SeaWorld Animal rights activists say SeaWorld is thwarting their efforts (2014, February 5). *Tampa Bay Times*. p.4B.


Leinwand, D. (2010, February 26). Orca to be spared in trainer’s death. *USA Today.* p. 3A.


Palmer, A. (2016, October 9). This orca has been imprisoned since the Apollo 11 moon landing. PETA. Retrieved from http://www.peta.org


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PETA (2015, March 27). SeaWorld’s #AskSeaWorld campaign backfires spectacularly. PETA.


PETA (2015, October 8). No breeding allowed! Retrieved from http://www.peta.org/blog/no-breeding-allowed/


PETA wants to pay for advertising (2014, September 11). Tampa Bay Times. p. 4B.


Rogers, K. (2016, March 10). Orca whose killing of trainer was focus of film is ailing. The New York Times, p. 2B.


Woodyard, C. (2015, January 5). SeaWorld copes amid PETA pressure over its killer whales. USA Today. p.5B.


Sierra Club: Beyond Coal
Colstrip


**US Right to Know**

Coca-Cola


Disney


**Unidentified Environmental Organization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abercrombie &amp; Fitch</th>
<th>Action 1 (2014)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Action 6 (2016)</td>
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<td>Action 7 (2016)</td>
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<td>Action 8 (2016)</td>
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Action 10 (2016)
Blog Post 1 (2015)
Blog Post 2 (2015)
Blog Post 3 (2015)
Blog Post 4 (2016)
Blog Post 5 (2016)
Blog Post 6 (2016)
Blog Post 7 (2016)
Blog Post 8 (2016)
News Article 1 (2017)
Press Release 2 (2016)
Press Release 3 (2016)
Report 1 (2016)

PepsiCo
Action 11 (2013)
Action 12 (2013)
Action 13 (2014)
Action 14 (2014)
Action 15 (2014)
Action 16 (2014)
Action 17 (2014)
Action 18 (2014)
Action 19 (2014)
Action 20 (2014)
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Action 24 (2014)
Action 25 (2014)
Action 26 (2015)
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News Article 5 (2015)
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News Article 8 (2016)
News Article 9 (2016)
News Article 10 (2017)
Press Release 5 (2013)
Press Release 6 (2014)
Press Release 12 (2016)
Press Release 13 (2016)
Press Release 14 (2016)
Press Release 15 (2016)
Press Release 16 (2016)
Press Release 17 (2016)
Press Release 18 (2016)
Press Release 19 (2016)
Report 2 (2016)

Unidentified Progressive Organization

Google
Action 1 (2016)
Action 2 (2016)
Action 3 (2016)
News Article 1 (2016)
News Article 2 (2016)
News Article 3 (2016)
News Article 4 (2016)
News Article 5 (2016)
News Article 6 (2016)
News Article 7 (2016)
News Article 8 (2016)
News Article 9 (2016)
News Article 10 (2016)
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News Article 12 (2016)
News Article 13 (2016)
News Article 14 (2016)
News Article 15 (2016)
News Article 16 (2016)
Press Release 1 (2016)
Press Release 2 (2016)
Press Release 3 (2016)

Nestle
Action 5 (2015)
Action 6 (2015)
News Article 17 (2015)
News Article 18 (2016)
News Article 19 (2015)
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Retrieved from https://other98.com/10-favorite-moments-shellno-flotilla/

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Education
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2014 - 2016 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Instructional Communication and Research

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2016 – 2017 Graduate School Academic Year Fellowship
2016 Nominee, Teaching Assistant of the Year, College of Communication and Information, University of Kentucky
2016 Top Student Paper Recipient, Applied Communication Division, Southern States Communication Association
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2012 First Place Presentation, Liberal Arts and Sciences Division, Graduate Research Symposium, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

2007 – 2010 Presidential Scholar, Campbell University

Professional Publications


