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CAP! Comcast: The Framing and Distribution Strategies
of Policy Advocates Within Networked Communications

GINO CANELLA[1]
University of Colorado Boulder, USA

This article presents a case study of the CAP! Comcast campaign produced and distributed by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) in Philadelphia. The framing and distribution strategies of this campaign, which fought for and won concessions from Comcast during the 2015 franchise negotiation with the city, are analyzed to foreground the labor of policy advocates working within networked communications. The author complicates the often-celebrated potential of social movements that use digital technologies and social media by detailing the multifaceted frame-setting and distribution tactics employed by MMP organizers throughout this campaign. Rather than analyze what frames the news media applies to SMOs, this article reviews how activists developed campaign messages, through media, that challenged existing narratives. Understanding the political and socioeconomic conditions that underlie the work of social movements is necessary for a review of the messaging, organizing, and relationship-building efforts of activists working toward meaningful media policy reform.

Keywords: media policy, framing, social movements, social media, networked communications, net neutrality

Social movement organizations (SMOs) that employ media making for social justice is not a new phenomenon (Downing, 1984; Rodriguez, Ferron, & Shamas, 2014). A renewed interest in social movements and participatory communication from journalists, activists, and scholars has occurred for perhaps several reasons: the relevance and use of social media by SMOs, the ubiquity of digital technologies such as camera-enabled smartphones and easy-to-use video-editing software, and the political polarization exacerbated by increasing global income inequality (see Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Harvey, 2005). While the video production technologies, editing programs, and online distribution

platforms used by social movement activists are alluring as potential sites of study, this article applies framing and social movement theory to the struggle over power and resources within networked communications to demonstrate how the political and socioeconomic conditions that underlie networked communications affect the messaging and distribution strategies and organizing labor of media policy advocates.

Castells (2012) describes social movements as autonomous, networked organizations that best represent social "counterpower." Although its autonomy "allows the movement to be formed, and . . . enables [it] to relate to society at large beyond the control of the power holders" (p. 11), the construction of meaning, according to Castells, remains "largely dependent on the messages and *frames* created, formatted and diffused in multimedia communication networks" (p. 6, emphasis added). Social movements, according to della Porta (2007), are "interactions of mainly informal networks based on common beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize on conflictual issues by frequent recourse to various forms of protest" (p. 6). These definitions provide a framework for analyzing how activists craft campaign messages that advocate for fair media policies, and how the power relations embedded in networked communications must be negotiated to distribute these campaigns and organize with allies. This article addresses the following research questions: How are the frames social movements use to advocate for media policy reform developed? What strategies do media-making activists use when distributing these frames through online social networks and local networks of activist organizations? I rely on Castells's concept of counterpower to understand how these frames are contested within networks and della Porta's definition of SMOs provided in her analysis of the Global Justice Movement to understand the ways in which media policy activists collaborate with community organizations to develop and distribute campaigns aimed at media policy reform.

The CAP! Comcast (Corporate Accountability Project) campaign organized in 2015 by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) in Philadelphia is analyzed as a case study to understand two distinct yet interconnected forms of labor conducted by media policy advocates: (1) the developing of frames, through media, to define the terms of the campaign and (2) the consideration for and use of various distribution options available to grassroots organizers. The MMP is a community media center that describes its mission, in part, as one that "exits to build a media, education and organizing infrastructure that will cohere and amplify the growing movement to end poverty" (Media Mobilizing Project, n.d.). The MMP was cofounded in 2005 by media scholar and community organizer Todd Wolfson and displays the social movement logics outlined in Wolfson's book *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left* (2014). Wolfson's cofounding of the MMP was informed by his "disquiet with the logic of the Cyber Left" (p. 8)[2] and both celebrates and challenges the organizing strategies and structures of contemporary networked social movements while remaining critical of the political, historical, and social conditions that influence these movements' activities.

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[2] Wolfson cofounded the MMP with Mica Root and Shivaani Selvaraj. Wolfson studied the work of indymedia activists within networked communications and argued that while the horizontal structures of new social movements allow for rapid membership growth and multiple struggles to be heard, a lack of leadership often leads to movements that are unable to sustain long-term campaigns of social justice.

Although Wolfson did not lead the CAP! Comcast campaign, his role at the MMP is as a supportive colleague, and *Digital Rebellion* serves as a blueprint for how the CAP! Comcast campaign was conducted and distributed. The complications Wolfson posed about networked social movements that rely heavily on new information technologies and online media inform my understanding of how the campaign used digital and social media in concert with traditional forms of organizing to build a broad coalition based on relationships with city councilmembers, local and national media advocacy organizations, labor unions, and journalists.

I begin by providing theoretical perspectives on power, framing, and social media to inform my analysis of how organizers working on the CAP! Comcast campaign navigated the political and socioeconomic conditions in Philadelphia to organize, frame its messages, and distribute those messages in ways that would connect citizens, community activist organizations, and elected officials. I then proceed to the case study of CAP! Comcast, which includes a brief overview of the MMP and examines three key aspects of the campaign: the political and economic context in Philadelphia that affected the organizing efforts of campaign volunteers; the framing of campaign literature; and the distribution strategies used to link the messaging and local organizing efforts. I close with reflections on how this study might encourage scholars and activists to approach social movement media, networked communications, and community organizing through more nuanced and critical perspectives.

Theoretical Perspectives on Power, Framing, and Social Media

Applying literature on networked power and counterpower, framing, and the political economy of social media allows for a dialectical understanding of social movement media and organizing. This approach highlights the processes—rather than the outcomes—of policy labor and how these processes are interconnected, not separate or distinct, phenomena.

Power and Organizing

The power structures that underlie the labor of campaign organizing and the activists who wish to frame and distribute a narrative of social justice is examined here through Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony and Castells' (2011) concept of counterpower. This critical approach to the labor of media policy advocacy presents the challenges SMOs face when mobilizing publics in contemporary networked society. Castells argues that power cannot be viewed as a "single entity" because of the complexity of social and network relations, and "counterpower" is a necessary component of the framing contests that take place within networked communications. Castells says that "social power throughout history, but even more so in the network society, operates primarily by the construction of meaning in the human mind through processes of communication" (p. 779).

Exploring meaning making through hegemony and counterpower provides a complication to the emancipatory potential some have given to social movement media operating within networked communications (see Juris, 2012). Stuart Hall argued that hegemony operates "not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but by 'winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural'" (as cited in Hebdige, 2006, p. 150). Hall (1980)

referred to "dominant codes" embedded in language and images that support the existing economic, political, and social orders and how they are contested through "counterstrategies." Raymond Williams (1977) described hegemony as a relational process that "does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all of its own" (p. 112). By reviewing CAP! Comcast's messaging strategies, the various methods used to distribute them, and how these messages supported local organizing efforts, this study considers how the campaign challenged the notion that a private corporation dictates access to media and communications resources.

Addressing the imbalance of resources between a large corporation like Comcast and community organizers also informs my analysis of how the production and distribution of media texts are managed by policy advocates. Castells (2012) contends that the "perceptions of capitalism and socialism have changed little since 2010" (p. 197) in his analysis of Occupy Wall Street, but credits the movement with introducing the concept The 99% and raising awareness of the financial influence of corporations on the American political system.[3] These activities point to the symbolic value of frames and how challenging the dominant or preferred reading and proposing an alternative frame is possible. The problem, however, is that horizontal networked movements (like Occupy) typically do not pursue specific policy agendas or systematic political and economic reforms, and they avoid institutionalizing themselves in an effort to critique the commercialization of politics. Organizers with CAP! Comcast, however, connected the campaign to city councilmembers, who ultimately approved the franchise agreement unanimously, and exhibited what Frances Fox Piven (2008) called "interdependent power." This concept speaks to the ways in which social movements and subaltern classes negotiate their impact on politics, which Piven defines as "the perennial contests over the allocations of material and cultural benefits that result directly or indirectly from the actions of governments" (p. 3). Power, for Piven, is "not concentrated at the top but is potentially widespread" and "social life is cooperative life, and in principle, all people who make contributions to these systems of cooperation have potential power over others who depend on them" (p. 5). Examining how SMOs interact with local government officials and cooperate with community groups to form an interdependent State considers how the framing and distribution processes are connected to the labor of community organizing.

Frame Theory and Frame Setting

Goffman (1974) described primary frameworks as the processes through which we make sense of our social and natural worlds. Framing is often associated with the agenda-setting function of the news media and focuses on how narrative styles and genres normalize perceptions of individuals and communities. For mass communication scholars, framing analysis has largely been used as a way to study how the news media present social movement actors and political protests (see Ashley & Olson, 1998). These studies have shown that the narrative frames applied to SMOs by the news media typically depict

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[3] The success of Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign has been an important moment in changing perceptions of capitalism and socialism in the U.S. A recent Harvard University poll of young adults between 18–29 years, for example, found that 51% of respondents do not support capitalism, while 42% said they support it (Ehrenfreund, 2016).

SMOs as unlawful and dangerous and suggest that movement actors and political protesters operate outside of the normal social order (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Koopmans, 2004; McLeod, 1995).

Social movement media is often seen as a valuable resource for SMOs wishing to use media production to create original content that challenges the existing (often negative) frames applied to them by the mainstream news media. Despite this potential, Couldry (2012) cautions that "regardless of the expansion of political actors, political change requires changes in the distribution of political *authority . . .* which in turn depends on how the space where society's concerns and political needs get defined is itself *framed*" (p. 123, emphasis in original). Frames rely on the symbolic efficiency of (mediated) texts—images and words—and their ability to successfully convey meaning(s) to a diverse audience.

Scheufele (1999, 2009) presents an approach to framing that incorporates frame building, frame setting, and individual-level framing. He encourages empirical research that examines framing as a "process model" (1999, p. 118). Rather than investigate how news media produce narratives about social movements, Carragee and Roefs (2004) suggest exploring the relationship "between framing processes and hegemony . . . [social movements'] ability to challenge hegemony is tied directly to framing processes and to their effectiveness in influencing news discourse" (p. 224). Approaching framing research from the point of view of social movements, Benford and Snow (2000) refer to "master frames" and examine how certain generic frames are applied or adopted by SMOs depending on their credibility and salience. This struggle over meaning represents "frame contests," which Benford and Snow explored through Hall's "politics of signification." My analysis of the framing strategies of the CAP! Comcast campaign provides clarity into how advocacy organizations can "articulate frames with broad cultural resonance . . . [and] engage in framing contests" (Ryan, Carragee, & Meinhofer, 2001, p. 181). Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) "logic of connective action" provides a framework for analyzing how the personal narratives—or *personal action frames* (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 744)—CAP! Comcast used in its campaign videos and literature provided an opportunity to expand its base of support and engage with community organizations, public officials, and citizens of Philadelphia.

Approaching the policy advocacy performed by the MMP through framing and power will, as Carragee and Roefs (2004) suggest, avoid an analysis that emphasizes story structure, theme, and genre, and focus instead on the "media hegemony thesis" (p. 215). Rather than investigating the frames applied to social movements by the news media, this article demonstrates how the socioeconomic conditions in Philadelphia influenced CAP! Comcast's framing decisions in its campaign that challenged and won concessions from the largest cable and Internet provider in the United States.

Digital Distribution and Communicative Capitalism

As SMOs increasingly turn to social media as a way to distribute campaigns and engage with publics, some scholars remain skeptical of these platforms' democratic potential. Baudrillard (1987) lamented the loss of private space as it related to television, adding that "communication networks [are] one of superficial saturation" (p. 131). This critique continues to be useful for understanding how the overwhelming amount of information delivered in our contemporary media environment presents a

challenge for activists. SMOs must decide how and where to connect their messages of social, political, and economic justice with an audience immersed in the "superficial saturation" of digital and social media.

Jodi Dean (2009) challenges the structures of networked communications by defining online message boards, hashtags, and comment sections as activities that contribute to "communicative capitalism"—the "participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism" (p. 2). Dean is concerned with how social media, Web 2.0, and other participatory communication platforms further the personalization of politics. Dean critiques the democratic potential of social media and the actors working within these sites by arguing that Facebook, Twitter, and other websites that rely on user-generated content have been bureaucratized in ways similar to electoral politics, the justice system, and law enforcement. This, Dean says, reinforces our separation from a collective or communitarian approach to social justice.

While Dean's critique of online activities that pursue social change leaves little room for exploring the value online networks have for organizing and policy reform, an attention to the political economy of networked communications and the "spectacle" of "media-stream" (Dean, 2009, p. 21) informs how we understand policy advocates' online activities and distribution strategies. Evaluating the framing and distribution processes used by SMOs demonstrates how these efforts coincided with and complemented its on-the-ground organizing efforts to affect policy change.

Reviewing the power relations and cultural hegemony that exist on- and offline requires an understanding of the political economic conditions that shape the work of policy advocates, and I strike a balance between Dean (2009), on the one hand, and the participatory politics described by Castells (2012) on the other. To effectively synthesize the work of scholars who believe networked media systems are either an egalitarian space where activists fight for and achieve social justice or a space dominated by corporate interests and political elites, media and cultural studies scholars must consider the power relations within and between these networks, the labor of media policy activists using these networks to enhance and distribute an effective, long-term campaign, and the frames that define and shape their messages.

The Media Mobilizing Project (MMP)

The MMP is a nonprofit community organization staffed by local organizers and media practitioners with the mission of connecting multimedia production and political education with working-class communities in Philadelphia fighting for social justice (Funke, Robe, & Wolfson, 2012). The MMP has produced multimedia campaigns on issues such as the rights of taxi drivers, the funding of Philadelphia public schools, and union negotiations for health care workers. CAP! Comcast—one of these campaigns—was launched more than one year in advance of the franchise negotiation process that considered whether the city of Philadelphia would permit Comcast to continue providing cable and Internet services in the city for another 15 years. The city reached an agreement with Comcast in December 2015, and many concessions proposed by CAP! Comcast, which are discussed throughout this paper, were written into this contract.

Throughout the nearly two-year franchise negotiation, the campaign focused on two main concessions from Comcast: increased tax dollars to fund Philadelphia's ailing public school system and eliminating barriers for low-income residents wishing to enroll in Comcast's Internet Essential program. Internet Essentials was initially developed in 2011 while Comcast was in negotiations with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to merge with Time Warner Cable. At the time, Comcast promised it would provide inexpensive broadband Internet to low-income Americans, but because of "roadblocks to enrolling," like having a back bill with Comcast or being a current customer, advocates have called the program "window dressing" for regulators (Morran, 2015). In April 2015, eight months before the final draft of the franchise was written and signed, the campaign fought for and secured the public release of a "needs assessment" report, which surveyed Comcast customers in Philadelphia about their satisfaction with their cable and Internet service and concluded that many subscribers were unhappy with that service (Norton, 2015). The concessions Comcast and the city of Philadelphia agreed upon in the final franchise contract are discussed below so that a review of CAP! Comcast and its organizing and campaign messaging strategies—including its arguing for the public release of the needs assessment report—will illuminate the efficacy of media policy advocacy within networked communications.

I worked with MMP for four months as a media fellow, from January to May 2014, producing videos and multimedia content, strategizing with local and national media activist organizations (such as Free Press, the Center for Media Justice, and MAG-Net[4]), and attending rallies in front of Comcast's corporate headquarters in Center City Philadelphia. I began my volunteer fellowship with the MMP in January 2014, and, after a brief orientation, my responsibilities included assisting with the conceptualization, distribution, and organizing of the CAP! Comcast campaign. A major component of the campaign's launch concerned the production of video and multimedia content. Our team was led by Hannah Sassaman, MMP policy director and the CAP! Comcast campaign director, and consisted of four media fellow volunteers, including myself. We met regularly at the MMP headquarters in West Philadelphia to discuss the story structure and theme of the video, the logistics and scheduling of public demonstrations, and strategies for distributing the video, campaign website, petitions, and other literature.

In May 2014, I relocated to Colorado but remained in close contact with the MMP staff and CAP! Comcast campaign organizers, primarily via social media and e-mail. Following social media and the news coverage surrounding the franchise negotiation informed me of the latest news and events regarding the campaign and how organizers were engaging with and growing their audience through social media and local and national news coverage.

To gain insights into the framing of the campaign slogan, "Pay your fair share," the organizing and distribution decisions made by campaign staff and volunteers, and the labor required to mobilize activists and citizens on media policy issues, in-depth interviews with campaign staff members were essential. I conducted three interviews, approximately one hour each, via Google Hangout in July and

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[4] These organizations share a common mission in that they pursue policies that argue for a more "democratized media system." Their issues often include media ownership, access to communications resources, and fair representation in the media.

August 2015 with Sassaman; Bryan Mercer, executive director at MMP; and Jeff Rousset, campaign organizer working on CAP! Comcast. In my role as a media fellow, I built professional rapport with the MMP staff and, therefore, was able to engage in candid conversations that explored in significant depth the decisions made concerning the campaign's key issues. Limiting the number of interviews to the individuals listed above was deliberate and provided descriptive context about the policy work conducted by this campaign, as opposed to generalized conclusions about all media reform campaigns.

Additionally, my work as a researcher/activist is informed by communication activism research (Frey & Carragee, 2007). Intervening in this campaign by producing videos, signing petitions, and attending meetings and rallies is consistent with the idea that a "social justice sensibility entails a moral imperative to *act* as effectively as we can to do something about structural sustained inequalities" (Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, & Murphy, 1996, p. 111, emphasis in original). The unequal distribution of communication resources and access to information due to a lack of competition among cable and Internet providers in the United States as well as political favors granted to Comcast by local elected officials in the form of tax breaks were my motivations for participating as a video producer and volunteer organizer. My research focused on understanding how the campaign framed and distributed its messages so that other grassroots activists and media policy advocates can use some of the MMP's strategies and replicate its eventual successes.

The CAP! Comcast Campaign: A Case Study of Communications Activism

CAP! Comcast was a local campaign designed to advocate for a fair franchise between Comcast and the city of Philadelphia. While this case study analyzes the campaign's framing, distribution, and organizing strategies within this local context, the broader themes concerning the labor of grassroots activism may be applied to networked SMOs fighting for systemic social justice issues.

Power and Organizing: "We're Up Against Capital"

To understand how the CAP! Comcast campaign developed its message, it is important first to understand Comcast's relationship with the city of Philadelphia and how this political economic context affected the campaign's messaging decisions and organizing efforts. Philadelphia is Comcast's corporate headquarters, which employs thousands of people throughout the tristate area, and donates millions to local foundations and charitable causes. This corporate social responsibility, according to Mercer, causes "people [to] have a real complicated relationship with Comcast" (B. Mercer, personal communication, August 24, 2015). Sassaman said she constantly gauged public interest in the franchise to determine which message would resonate most with city officials. Ultimately, she said the campaign decided "to get our flies with honey rather than vinegar" and tell "a high road story," in part, to navigate the local political landscape (H. Sassaman, personal communication, July 13, 2015). By organizers acknowledging local politics they demonstrated how the campaign was not concerned simply with framing any message but one that would connect to the "State" or, more specifically, Philadelphia city council. "I have to try to analyze . . . what will be the most impactful at moving decision makers, people in power, and building a base of powerful people to do that, so that's been challenging," Sassaman said. "I think that we've hit most of the right notes. I see what we're saying resonating with those decision makers and with them

meeting and giving me information and moving what I ask them to do, what we ask them to do" (personal communication, July 13, 2015).

Developing a relationship with councilman Bobby Henon, chair of the franchise committee, and other members of council through one-on-one meetings as well as meeting with representatives in the city's technology and policy offices was key to the campaign's strategy. Sassaman called Henon "a champion for us," which gave campaign organizers a much-needed "seat at the table" during the negotiations. The public interest the campaign generated through its multimedia literature put pressure on local elected officials with the capacity to define the terms of the franchise. Sassaman spoke to the limited resources available to CAP! Comcast and how these resources determined how the campaign sought publicity, galvanized support, and reached city councilmembers. "Comcast is sending its own lobbyists and they've hired two different lobbying firms to fight us and a communications firm, and then generally just me walking around city council," she said. "We're up against wealth. We're up against capital. What we have are people, but it's hard to organize people. People are busy, people are working three jobs, but we're doing it slowly" (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Building a coalition of willing and available participants is something Mercer echoed as a major challenge for grassroots campaigns. He said:

> One of the things that's happened in the past 50 years since the Civil Rights movement is that folks have less time to organize because they're working two or three jobs, because they're getting less and less of a wage as profits have skyrocketed, because of the pressures of trying to meet the high cost of healthcare, of childcare, and all these other basic necessities. . . . So as more is taken from us, how do we fight back in resistance? (personal communication, August 24, 2015)

To compete with this resource imbalance and build a network of local, regional, and national media policy advocates, it was essential that CAP! Comcast develop a strong message of fairness that resonated with citizens and organizations across political, economic, and social spectrums.

Framing the Campaign

The slogan, "Pay your fair share," used by CAP! Comcast to frame the campaign's launch, is a valuable place to begin my analysis of the frame-setting work of this campaign. Because of the political history between Comcast and Philadelphia, and despite the fact that consumers in Philadelphia are largely unhappy with the price and performance of the cable television and broadband Internet service provided by Comcast, the significant political clout the company carries with state and local government officials made striking a balanced tone in this campaign crucial. After numerous production meetings, group e-mails, and script revisions, we agreed that an approach that was critical of Comcast's business practices, yet remained hopeful in encouraging citizens they had the ability to enact change through the franchise process, would connect most effectively with the campaign's core constituency, which, according to Rousset, was "a broad sector of working-class people in Philly" (J. Rousset, personal communication, August 24, 2015). Catchy slogans like "The Tower of Power" were proposed as a way to gain attention, but it was agreed that emphasizing Comcast's relationship to the city would be most effective because consumers would relate to the issue of fairness. Campaign staff agreed that the franchise negotiation

offered a tangible opportunity to win concessions from Comcast and, to make an emotional and impactful connection with our audience, we connected this message of fairness to the budget crisis affecting Philadelphia public schools. This sacrificed "an insider relationship with Comcast," Sassaman says, but it ultimately resonated with our intended audience. "If we had started with a, 'Working together to improve Philadelphia,' kind of message or something like that, we would've had less people connected to it, especially less poor and working people" (personal communication, July 13, 2015).

Personal consumer stories describing negative experiences with Comcast's customer service and products highlighted much of the campaign's messaging. Consumers were interviewed outside of Comcast's customer service center in South Philadelphia and asked to describe their experiences as a cable and Internet customer. This made the fight over the franchise agreement relatable, Sassaman said, because "everyone has a story like that" (personal communication, July 13, 2015). The campaign, therefore, used what Kitts (2000) calls an "identity" approach that relied on "informal relations [to] activate feelings of solidarity and a sense of shared identity, which overcome selfish interests and promote contribution to the collective good" (p. 244).

Another medium the campaign used to frame the fairness issue was video.[5] A three-minute video was produced to coincide with the launch of the campaign. It began with four consumers describing their displeasure with the company in a person-on-the-street style format (Media Mobilizing Project TV, 2014). Sassaman said the visual juxtaposition between Comcast's downtown skyscraper and run-down schools was an efficient way to highlight the message of inequality and access to resources. "Being able to show an image of the Comcast tower 30 to 40 blocks away behind a shuttered high school . . . as Comcast's head is in the clouds in front of a ravaged block of North Philadelphia has been incredibly impactful," she said (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Incorporating visual imagery and personal narrative guided the launch of the campaign, but it was crucial that the "Pay your fair share" slogan moved beyond the personal to connect with the larger social context. Sassaman said:

> [Personal stories are] the beginning of every organizing conversation. But the point with this—and I would say this is true of all media policy—is to try to go from the narrow, personal experience to the broader sense of power, or lack of power, over these big media companies. (personal communication, July 13, 2015)

To do this, CAP! Comcast expanded its demands for the franchise negotiation to the funding for public schools and expanded Internet access for low-income residents. The goal was to frame a campaign that connected "media infrastructure and communal power over it," Sassaman said (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Rousset agreed that the campaign was largely successful in framing the

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[5] Mercer highlighted the relationship building that occurs through the processes of writing, producing, and editing video. These production processes, he said, can be more essential to the campaign's success than the video itself because "the process of making something is about the social relationships and those social relationships, they can come in really effective and powerful ways through video" (personal communication, August 24, 2015). For a more complete discussion of media-making's role in organizing, see Robé, Wolfson, and Funke (2016).

franchise negotiation with emotional stories that connected on a human level to people's values and communal responsibility. "The underfunding of education . . . is really brought to life when you understand that Comcast is one of the wealthiest companies in the world and is headquartered here in Philly earning tremendous amounts of profits, meanwhile all these schools are going bankrupt," he said. "It paints a clear picture of economic inequality in a way that resonates with people's values around basic fairness" (personal communication, August 24, 2015).

In addition, Mercer said the slogan "Pay your fair share" and the personal stories that framed the campaign kept the complicated aspects of a cable franchise negotiation from overwhelming the audience and reinforced a message of public and social accountability. "We're talking about the relationship of a corporation to a city, we're talking about not just political but economic responsibilities to that city," he said. "In part, the need for the campaign slogan to be sticky is to be able to make the campaign accessible beyond all of the technical and legal issues that were a hurdle in the process" (personal communication, August 24, 2015). The campaign showcased specific consumer experiences, which, in turn, emphasized that shared responsibility that exists between citizens, government, and private corporations. To work toward achieving concessions through the franchise negotiation, CAP! Comcast also made a concerted effort to frame the campaign as one of "opportunity." To do this, the campaign used a "theory of change," according to Rousset, which connected the franchise process with residents' ability to get engaged and demand more from Comcast. The campaign wrapped this change in a hopeful frame connected to a specific call to action. "The bridge between those things is the fact that this 15-year franchise is about to expire and we have a chance to participate," Rousset said. "So it was always couched in the language of democratic participation which again connects with people's values" (personal communication, August 24, 2015). Initially, CAP! Comcast's messaging was used to focus on consumers' dissatisfaction and frustration with Comcast, but as it moved forward, the campaign used the emotional reactions these messages elicited to build relationships with members of the public and elected officials and stress the opportunity the franchise negotiation presented.

CAP! Comcast also used Comcast's own messaging from television commercials and brochures to attack the company, reiterating how framing processes are contested by various actors within networks. When Comcast announced it would be improving Internet speeds for subscribers, the campaign challenged Comcast for not improving the speed of its Internet Essentials program. "I love hitting Comcast when they feel really proud about something," Sassaman said (personal communication, July 13, 2015). In August 2015, Comcast announced it would be doubling the speed of its Internet Essentials program from 5 Mbps to 10 Mbps.

Distributing the Message

Once the campaign message is framed, activists are faced with the difficult task of choosing how to best reach their audience. Recognizing its limited resources, the campaign developed a multifaceted distribution strategy that did not focus entirely on social and digital media. The staff instead focused its energy on organizing public demonstrations, building relationships with city government, and working with national and regional journalists from mainstream news outlets. Despite Facebook and Twitter's usefulness as distribution platforms and organizing tools, the local news media continue to be relied upon by policy

advocates and activists. How the MMP used local news coverage as a way to distribute its message is therefore explored in addition to its online efforts. Ryan, Carragee, and Schwerner's (1998) work with the Media Research and Action Project (MRAP) informs my analysis of CAP! Comcast. MRAP is an advocacy organization consisting of sociologists, communication researchers, and activists that works with community groups to help them frame advocacy campaigns and influence news coverage to promote political change. Its work provides an understanding of how CAP! Comcast used the news media for distributing its message and framing the franchise negotiation as an issue of corporate accountability and fairness. Ryan et al. argue that "some journalists continue to equate the advocacy of social movements and community groups with special interest pleading," which leads them to dismiss their campaign demands (pp. 178–179). CAP! Comcast, however, strategically leveraged Comcast's negative reputation among Philadelphia consumers—evident in the needs assessment report—as an opportunity to build relationships with journalists and government officials and connect the story of corporate accountability with a sympathetic audience. Pushing for the release of the needs assessment report in the news media, for example, was an important moment for the campaign, according to Sassaman, because it was when then-mayor Michael Nutter "turned his position [in the franchise negotiation] to an aggressive one" (personal communication, July 13, 2015).

Sassaman understood that by not concerning itself with social media as its sole means of distribution, the campaign was able to explore other ways to circulate its narrative to a broad audience. The decision to work with journalists proved to be CAP! Comcast's most effective strategy for gaining local and national distribution, according to Sassaman. "We don't have the same reach as the [*Philadelphia*] *Inquirer* or the same impact," she said. "I think that our social media has been pretty weak and we don't actually have a distribution plan that ends up impacting members of council in nearly the same way" (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Sassaman, speaking as the MMP policy director as well as the campaign director, was regularly quoted in newspaper columns and local news coverage surrounding the franchise negotiation (Gelles, 2015; Nadolny, 2015). While the "identity" approach developed by CAP! Comcast relied heavily on the salience of its "Pay your fair share" frame, the staff avoided depending exclusively on social media for its distribution because it understood that not everyone they were trying to reach uses social media. CAP! Comcast cultivated distribution channels both on- and offline that furthered our organizing and distribution strategies. We collaborated with members of Free Press, local unions, and other community leaders to plan rallies and campaign events. In June 2015, the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO officially endorsed the campaign. During one rally outside a Comcast shareholders meeting in downtown Philadelphia, campaign organizers joined with supporters to protest the proposed merger between Comcast and Time Warner Cable and marched inside to deliver signed petitions opposing the merger.

Another critique of online and social media is these activities often rely on *feelings*, which may further Hardt and Negri's (2004) concept of "affective labor." This notion describes emotionally driven experiences that mask the material conditions of a capitalist economy. The organizing work of the MMP and CAP! Comcast complicates this notion because the campaign shows how cultivating feelings helped develop an advocacy frame that resonated with Philadelphians. Highlighting the negative feelings consumers have toward Comcast through personal narratives of fairness and translating them into direct action was essential. The campaign attracted over 5,000 signatures to its online petitions—1,548 signed

on its own website and an additional 3,650 signed via a petition circulated by MoveOn.org. CAP! Comcast has 460 Twitter followers and 677 Facebook "likes" at the time of this writing. These online numbers do not necessarily reflect its on-the-ground organizing, as some public rallies would draw between 75 to 150 attendees, according to Sassaman. In soliciting residents to speak at city council's public hearing on the franchise negotiation on November 12, 2015, CAP! Comcast received approximately 70 online signatures but more than 100 people appeared to testify. Online and social media activities do not neatly correlate with community organizing and direct action, but, as Mercer pointed out, the campaign used online spaces to elicit emotions and channeled them into various other venues. "I think what the campaign has tried to do, and been able to do at times really successfully, is tap into what people are already feeling," Mercer said. "Through tapping into that, [we] create some space for people to get engaged and involved around it" (personal communication, August 24, 2015).

While online "spectacle" is a challenge for SMOs working to distribute a campaign about media policy reform, it also influenced CAP! Comcast's news coverage in a positive way. Several online stories featuring the campaign generated significant traffic in the comments sections from frustrated consumers wishing to share similar experiences with Comcast. Sassaman credits this with keeping journalists "pretty much on fire" in their willingness and desire to cover the issue in a way that was favorable to the campaign and its demands (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Because past experiences that did not produce coverage it had hoped for, Mercer said MMP has learned to be more measured in how it seeks to pitch stories to mainstream news outlets. Because consumer outrage expressed online was largely negative toward Comcast, "the coverage [for CAP! Comcast] has been favorable, so the opportunities have been ripe to work with mainstream press," Mercer said (personal communication, August 24, 2015). Some alternative community media producers might have reservations interacting with the local and national news media, but Rousset said CAP! Comcast did not wish to be a "small fringe group. . . . We're trying to change the dominant narrative, so in order to change that dominant narrative you have to be relevant to the dominant institutions. . . . The more avenues that we have to define the message for ourselves, the more that will help our campaign to advance" (personal communication, August 24, 2015). In addition to taking advantage of the reach mainstream news has in organizing others around the campaign, Rousset also pointed to how the coverage in the mainstream news puts pressure on "the people we're organizing against" as well as councilmembers with the power to influence the final franchise.

Another reason CAP! Comcast avoided a one-dimensional distribution plan was because of what Mercer called social media's ability to produce an "outrage of the day" (personal communication, August 24, 2015). CAP! Comcast navigated the "ecstasy of communication" by using social media, the local news media, and partnerships with other grassroots organizations to connect with and grow its core constituency. The campaign managed various platforms and decided which would work best in that instance. Short bursts of online activity may be successful at quickly introducing ideas to the public and mobilizing a direct action, but they may also distract organizers and activists from building a long-term campaign directed at significant policy reform. Relying less on social media for the distribution of its message allowed the campaign staff to focus its efforts on organizing with community leaders, planning public demonstrations and rallies in front of Comcast headquarters in Philadelphia, and cultivating relationships with public officials. "I think we've actually had less of an emphasis on or a drive to become

our own distribution hub," Mercer said. "It's about using partnerships and platforms in smart ways to make content that can get picked up in other places and go further" (personal communication, August 24, 2015). CAP! Comcast did this early in the campaign by reaching out to an editor at Upworthy.com whom Sassaman has a relationship with. The site linked to our video, which dramatically increased the view count on that piece. Promoting our work through existing platforms and online news outlets helped our campaign gain exposure in a crowded and fractured online environment.

One final issue the organizers of CAP! Comcast contended with was how to remain relevant over the course of nearly 18 months, despite the information "glut" produced by an on-demand, personalized media environment (Andrejevic, 2013). This demands that policy activists find creative ways to engage an audience over the long term. CAP! Comcast did this by connecting to other media policy issues that received significant national media attention, like net neutrality and the Comcast–Time Warner merger. By associating itself with issues that were also addressing the fairness and regulation of telecommunications' industries and policies, CAP! Comcast reinforced its message of communal responsibility. By highlighting the failure of the Comcast–Time Warner merger and the reclassification of the Internet as a common carrier during the net neutrality debates, the campaign showed its constituents in the public and within city government that tangible progress against multibillion dollar corporations is possible. The months of news coverage, the distribution of online and paper flyers, and social media posts on these issues, also built momentum that was essential for recruiting and encouraging Philadelphians to show up at city hall and voice their opinions for the concessions demanded in the franchise negotiations. "I try to make sure CAP! Comcast isn't just tweeting about telecomm policy but is actually tweeting about the inequality between rich and poor in Philly," Sassaman said. "And then the role that either access to communications, lack of access to communications, or the corporate largess and power that a communications company has in a political light of a particular market, I try to tweet about that" (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Raising the importance of media policy with a sense of urgency in relation to news stories such as income inequality, immigration, and police brutality is a delicate balance but one Mercer believes has been managed deftly by policy advocates in recent years. He credits the work of activists, journalists, and comedians that have removed the technical complexities that make media policy opaque for most consumers and focusing instead on connecting telecommunications issues to socioeconomic concerns over power. There is now, more than ever before, a "care for people's personal information, privacy, and how they share and connect with each other," Mercer said. "That's very tangible. When we connect to that, then media policy makes sense" (personal communication, August 24, 2015).

The concessions written into the final franchise in December 2015 included, among other things, increased funding for public access channels operating in Philadelphia, hiring 150 to 200 additional customer service workers, and an expansion of the Internet Essentials program (Haver, 2015). While the campaign won victories by influencing public perception, obtaining favorable news coverage, and securing the release of the Comcast needs assessment, Sassaman hoped their efforts would be used "as a precedent around the country" (personal communication, July 13 2015). CAP! Comcast's influence on the Philadelphia franchise has indeed been used as precedent, as Seattle's City Council rewrote its franchise shortly after learning of Philadelphia's "sweet deal" to include "additional benefits for low-income seniors and an extra $450,000 in digital equity grant money" (Soper, 2015, para. 2). The demand that Comcast pay additional taxes to fund Philadelphia's public schools was not included in the franchise, which

demonstrates both the effectiveness and limitations of campaign messaging that connects emotions and values with policy. Drawing on residents' negative feelings toward Comcast because of what it represents in terms of an unequal distribution of telecommunications resources motivated allies to support the campaign and brought added attention to the franchise. As perhaps the most radical proposal of the campaign, however, the demand that Comcast fund public schools was likely the most difficult to realize as policy.

Conclusion

This article analyzed the labor of policy advocacy by documenting how CAP! Comcast's campaign organizers navigated local institutional power structures to conduct campaign organizing work; used individual consumer stories to frame an "identity" approach that connected consumers to a collective, shared struggle of an engaged citizenry against a private corporation; and, finally, how they determined the best platforms and venues to distribute those stories to drive engagement and build relationships with community organizers and public officials. Understanding the impact the MMP and CAP! Comcast had on the local franchise negotiation is important for recognizing how media policy advocates have learned how to navigate existing systems of power to demand fairness from private corporations that provide public goods.

The MMP developed a message built on Comcast "Paying its fair share" and distributed it through networked communications to organize with local and regional activists. Their work shows the potential that a relatively small organization like the MMP can have in challenging wealthy, politically connected corporations with unlimited resources like Comcast. Because Comcast's negative reputation existed before the campaign, I argue that CAP! Comcast did not produce counterhegemonic messages, but rather developed messages that amplified the existing negative feelings toward Comcast and channeled this energy into an opportunity presented by the franchise. The CAP! Comcast campaign did not alter the political or economic structures that allow Comcast to earn considerable profits in Philadelphia, but it exhibited Piven's (2008) concept of "interdependent power" by relying on strong local relationships with community leaders and elected officials to win tangible benefits for the residents of Philadelphia. These efforts also acknowledge Dean's (2009) premise that activism cannot occur solely online, but the campaign's use of social media, video production, and coverage in the local news shows how digital and social media tools may be used strategically to complement public demonstrations and local organizing. Although these victories may not satisfy activists seeking revolutionary change, scholars should continue pursuing empirical research that explains how alterative community media centers fund, produce, and distribute grassroots campaigns that champion media policy reform. The more that is known about the efficacy of the messaging and distribution strategies used by campaigns that produce activist media and organize local protests and demonstrations, the more potential there is for future campaigns to replicate and expand upon their successes in the public interest.

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