

A conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication within online social movements

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Dissertation accepted for the degree *Master of Arts* in
Communication at the North-West University

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Graduation: April 2024

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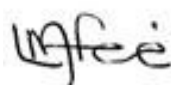
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PREFACE

The research topic of this study was inspired by findings from research I conducted to receive my Honours degree in Communication. In my previous research, supervised by Mx. Hannelie Otto, I applied a synthesised framework of principles from the participatory approach and assumptions from the new social movements theory to the online communication of the South African #MenAreTrash movement. I found that a synthesised approach provided insight into how communication in the movement was participatory or could be more participatory. However, I also realised that the added assumptions of other contemporary social movement theories from the sociology discipline, like that of the resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective and framing theory, would produce valuable additional concepts that can be utilised in a reconceptualisation of my own discipline's approach to analysing online social movements.

I chose to employ a literature study in my current research, because I wanted to gain deeper insight into how social movement scholars have approached the online social movement phenomena and draw inspiration from their approaches to develop a more comprehensive communication-based approach to analysing online social movements. I hope that this study's framework will, in the future, serve as a means for myself and other scholars in both communication and sociology to understand online social movements on a deeper level and adequately explore the fascinating, ever-changing contemporary phenomena of online activism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been possible without the Higher-Degree Bursary awarded to me by the Faculty of Humanities and the additional financial assistance of the Social Transformation Focus area. With this additional financial assistance, I was able to present my current research to fellow scholars at the inaugural National Humanities Higher Degree Conference hosted by the Faculty of Humanities of North-West University at the Riverside Sun Resort in Vanderbijlpark. I am grateful for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Transformation Focus Area's financial and academic support in my completion of this study.

My post-graduate journey was also supported by numerous individuals in my personal and academic life. Thank you to:

- My supervisors, Mx. Hannelie Otto and Prof. Lynnette Fourie, for endless hours of reading and feedback even in the busiest of times. Your knowledge and contributions have been a much-needed guiding light throughout this journey, and your commitment to this study, academically, and to me personally, has been invaluable.
- My language and technical editor, Ruan Fourie, for your attention to detail as an editor and a shoulder to lean on as a fellow scholar.
- My family, friends, and colleagues for the prayers, encouraging phone calls, check-ins and coffee breaks. Special thanks to my parents, who supported me financially and morally in all my academic endeavours, always inspiring me to give my best and all.
- My partner, Cilliers, for your persistent motivation, patience, and moral support throughout the years - "Tough times never last, only tough people last."

ABSTRACT

Contemporary activists increasingly engage in communication for social change through participation in online social movements. Acknowledging the value of participatory communication for social change in bringing about sustainable empowerment, this study argues for the application of participatory principles to the communication that occurs during online social movement mobilisations. The participatory approach to social change was conceptualised before social media existed as a space for engaging in communication for social change. The approach is traditionally applied in and conceptualised for a project-based setting. It is therefore not conceptually nor analytically entirely sufficient for understanding online communication for social change in the contemporary setting of online social movements.

To gain points of departure for applying the principles of the participatory approach to communication in online social movements, this study explores how scholars have successfully applied assumptions from contemporary social movement theories to online social movement phenomena. These already contextualised contemporary social movement theories include resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective, new social movements theory, and framing theory. Following a comprehensive literature study of publications surrounding online social movements and social media, the application of contemporary social movement theories to the context of online social movements, and the relevant principles of the participatory approach to communication for social change, this study puts forward a new conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication for social change in online social movements.

The newly conceptualised framework is based on valuable insights gained regarding the unique contextual occurrences of participation communication for social change in an online social movement setting. The synthesised framework reflects a more comprehensive understanding of the digital mobilisation processes that contemporary social movement theories value and the online communicative participation that the participatory approach assigns to sustainable empowerment toward social change. The application of this framework's assumptions to online social movement's communication for social change should lead to both successful movement mobilisation and long-term empowerment of an online social movement's members.

Key terms

Online social movements; communication for social change; communication for development; participatory approach; resource mobilisation theory; political process perspective; new social movements theory; framing theory

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CHAPTER 1 OBSERVING THE NEED FOR A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN AN ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENT CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

In today's "social media-active society", citizens increasingly engage in online communication about unjust circumstances or social issues (Chon & Park, 2020:72). This has led to an increase in specifically online social movements and digitalised communication for social change (see section 2.5.3). Social movements are appearances of collective protest or activism by those who have been marginalised or oppressed and intend to transform or disrupt the existing power structures responsible for inequality and injustice within a society (Martin, 2015:1; Smith & Wiest, 2012:ii). As Taylor (2017:1) puts it, "the states in which we live have been made and remade the actions of social movements" and social movements are "drivers of social change".

Scholars from the sociology discipline have applied assumptions from contemporary social movement theories to analyse and understand how and why online social movements mobilise (Egner, 2022:365; Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8; Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:207; Romary, 2017:60). These theories include the resource mobilisation theory, the political process perspective, new social movements theory, and framing theory. Contemporary social movement theories have been valuable in understanding how online social movements go about using social media to bring about mobilisation for social change (see Chapter 3). However, given the communicative opportunities social media affords online social movements (see section 2.6) and the subsequent apparent value of an online social movement's communicative actions, this dissertation approaches online social movements from the communication for social change discipline. The current study seeks to understand online social movements' communication for social change, rather than just their mobilisation for social change. Communication for social change is also broadly referred to as communication for development or development communication (Dutta, 2019:315; Servaes & Malikhao, 2020:64; Shah, 2020:158; Thomas, 2014:7). The term "development" is often associated with the modernisation paradigm, while the term "social change" is often favoured among scholars from the participatory paradigm (Melkote & Singhal, 2021:2; Tacchi, 2020:101). The participatory approach is arguably regarded as the normative approach to communication for social change (see section 4.3). Consequently, this study will use the term "social change".

This normative approach posits the value of participatory communication in bringing about sustainable social change. From a participatory perspective, sustainable social change is only achieved through the long-term empowerment of an initiative's participants. The purpose of communication for social change then traditionally involves creating an environment in which individuals are empowered to participate actively and continually in the critical reflection, communication, and decision processes regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a project aimed towards social change (Burger, 2015:22; Moemeka, 2000:13; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005:94). Due to their occurrence on social media, online social movements have been described as temporary or short-lived occurrences of collective action or mobilisation (Adi *et al.*, 2018:323; Chakraborty & Mattoni, 2023:82; Earl, 2019:215; Romary, 2017:42-45). For this reason, participation in online social movement mobilisation does not necessarily imply the long-term empowerment of a social movement's members.

Principles of participatory communication have been valuable in guiding practitioners to facilitate the sustainable and long-term empowerment of development projects' participants (Hilbruner, 2004:32; Purdey *et al.*, 1994:334; Qasmi & Ahmed, 2020:1362). This study departs from the argument that it is not online social movement members' participation in mobilisation that would bring about their long-term empowerment, but rather, their participation in communication surrounding mobilisations. Analysing the extent to which an online social movement applies participatory communication for social change would provide valuable insight into the long-term empowerment of online social movement members beyond occurrences of mobilisation. However, the participatory approach was conceptualised before the use of social media for communication for social change, and, given the contemporary context in which communication for social change occurs in online social movements, concern arises when one considers if the approach should be the normative approach to communication within online social movements.

1.2 The participatory approach to communication for social change: a need for recontextualisation

This study identifies four main principles of the participatory approach to analyse the extent to which communication for social change can be regarded as participatory. First, the approach suggests the active participation of participants on all levels and phases of a project aimed toward social change, with self-governance as the most advanced form of participation (Basu & Dutta, 2008; Burger, 2015:22; Dutta, 2011:9, 13, 40; Morris, 2003:226; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005:94, 96; Waisbord, 2001:20). Second, participants should engage in dialogical, two-way

communication during a process toward social change, and should critically reflect upon their circumstances to come to a conscious realisation of their ability to bring about social change (Freire, 1970:32; Servaes, 1995:46; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:2; Mefalopulos & Grenna, 2004:29; Moemeka, 2000:7). Third, participants should show consideration of cultural diversity within a project, and the process towards bringing about change should be informed by the cultural contexts in which participants find themselves (Basu & Dutta, 2008:108; Dutta, 2011:11; Melkote & Steeves, 2025a:371; Tufte, 2017:43; Servaes, 2020:11). Fourth, participants should be empowered in the long run by continually reflecting and acting upon the need for change and taking ownership and control of the process toward social change (Melkote & Singhal, 2021:3; Petersone, 2007:11; Svensson, 2020:227; Waisbord, 2001:21).

The concepts within these principles apply to a more traditional context of communication for social change – one that fundamentally differs from an online social movement setting. Traditional development contexts, such as agriculture, health communication, or community development, usually imply a certain project or programme that is initiated by an organisation and that is led by project leaders from the organisation or community (cf. De Villiers, 2016; Jonker, 2016; Kigbu, 2019). Studies of participatory communication therefore usually take on a project-based approach and focus on how agencies or actors follow a participatory approach in their communication with the beneficiaries of their programmes or projects (Burger, 2015:23; Kigbu, 2019:3; Otto & Fourie, 2016:22).

Social movements, however, are not necessarily based around the organising of a project and are usually not monitored or created by an organisation – especially when they occur online (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012:714; Earl & Kimport, 2011:28; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). Online social movements are not projects as the traditional participatory approach would categorise them, but rather a new contextualised form of communication for social change – one that has not yet been applied to the participatory approach. Because the participatory approach was conceptualised for more traditional contexts of development, its principles cannot fully apply to the contemporary context of online social movement communication and need to be recontextualised and reconceptualised to consider the unique nature of online social movement organisation.

It is also important to note the significance of the participatory approach's conceptualisation before the occurrence of digitalised communication for social change. The characteristics of social media have some considerable implications for the nature of social movements that occur online, and therefore also have implications for the nature of communication for social change within online social movements (see section 2.6). Consequently, this study also posits that the participatory

principles will not fully apply to the contemporary context of online social movement communication unless it is recontextualised and reconceptualised to consider the characteristics of online communication for social change in online social movements. What follows are some more specific examples of why a recontextualisation and reconceptualisation of the participatory approach should be considered to allow for its application in the context of online social movements.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the participatory approach involves that all participants should participate equally on all levels and phases of a “project”. Not only do online social movements not necessarily have all these traditional phases of project planning within their movement organisation processes, but the number of participants within online social movements is continuously changing and increasing (Al Hasan *et al.*, 2019:84). Some members may have only joined the movement a few months after the movement was initiated and organised, and some only join due to the movement’s already existing organising tactics and successes. Participation and the processes toward enabling, motivating, and enhancing participation in a social movement may therefore be more nuanced than in a traditional development project and call for new ways to consider how online social movements engage in processes that relate to organising and participating in a movement.

Furthermore, because some of the project-based assumptions of the participatory approach imply that a process towards communication for social change consists of change facilitators and beneficiaries who work together to achieve social change goals, the approach also posits the need for two-way communication processes between these actors (see section 4.3.2). However, social movements often occur in instances where those who would be considered “beneficiaries” of social change engage in movements precisely because they are not part of communication processes regarding their circumstances. Therefore, communication in online social movements between those who should facilitate development (i.e. policymakers or powerholders in society) and those who posit the need for social change (i.e. members of a movement) is often not two-way communication processes. Rather, online social movements use social media to send messages to those in power to make demands for change – messages that may not always receive replies. This study argues that the phenomena of online social movements and members’ use of social media as a communication method consequently call for new ways to consider the spaces and modes in which members participate in communication to bring about social change (see section 4.3.1.1).

The participatory approach suggests that participants should be empowered in the long term (see section 4.3.4). Because social movements are working toward bringing about social change, they

already imply the applicability of the notion of empowerment as the participatory approach suggests. Since the participatory approach was conceptualised for traditional development contexts in which participants are recommended to embody the assumptions regarding participation, dialogue, and consideration of cultural diversity to be empowered sustainably, the question arises of what a process towards sustainable empowerment would entail in a non-project based online social movements context. The phenomena of online social movement call for inquiry regarding what sustainable empowerment in an online social movement would entail and an investigation of the ways in which movement participants ensure the creation of sustainable empowerment through online communication for social change.

Following a brief analysis of literature related to online participatory communication in social movements, the participatory approach's principles (as is) have rarely been used as a comprehensive and applicable framework for the analysis of communication within online social movements. Instead, participatory communication for social change concepts manifest themselves through frameworks derived from other theories and notions, such as the dialogical framework of transnational diffusion (Frazao, 2017), Bickford's (1996:200, as cited by Bosch, 2016) conceptualisations of listening, Foucault's (1996:200, as cited by Bosch, 2016) notions of counter-memory, the research mobilisation approach and the new social movements perspective (Carrol & Hackett, 2006), and the framing theory (Navarro & Coromina, 2020).

Most of these studies also exhibit how the characteristics of social media (see sections 2.3.1.1-2.3.1.5) may facilitate communication that directly and indirectly adheres to principles and concepts derived from the participatory approach (cf. Alaggia & Wang, 2020; De Villiers, 2016; Leong *et al.*, 2020; Miladi, 2016; Wilkins, *et al.*, 2019). Frazao (2017), Bosch (2017b), and Carrol and Hackett's (2006) studies show the relevance of existing concepts of the participatory approach to communication for social change in an online context. Social media applications enable members of a social movement to partake in decentralised information gathering to increase their advocacy efforts and to coordinate and take collective action toward social change – functions that could be helpful in enabling participatory planning and implementation of social change (cf. Bosch, 2017b:224; De Villiers, 2016:12; Edwards & Hoefer, 2010:223-226; Gleason, 2013:969; Guo & Saxton, 2012:58). While social media may enable the manifestation of some participatory aspects in online social movements, a lack of recontextualisation of the participatory approach as mentioned above implies some theoretical and conceptual gaps in the approach, which could be problematic for its empirical application in this specific context. Notwithstanding, as already noted in section 1.1, social movement scholars have already contextualised contemporary social movement theories to the contemporary context of online social movements.

1.3 Contemporary social movement theories: contextualising participation

To address some of the participatory approach's contextual and conceptual gaps as discussed above, this study proposes the use of assumptions from the already contextualised contemporary social movement theories as points of departure to gain an understanding of participation in communication for social change within online social movements. Contemporary social movement theories respectively take on a structural or cultural approach to understanding how and why social movements mobilise (Romary, 2017:20; Chesters, 2015:352). On the one hand, resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective set out to understand the objective structural factors like resources or political opportunities that determine a movement's mobilisation success (Buechler, 2011:111, 139; Kriesi, 2019:70; Ozgul, 2020:73; Romary, 2017:21). On the other hand, new social movements theory and framing theory aim to determine the cultural factors, like perceptions of a movement and its moral appeals that influence its ability to bring about mobilisation (Benford & Snow, 2000:613; Romary, 2017:21; Williams, 2019:92).

1.3.1 Resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective

Both the resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective were established to help scholars understand how social movement members mobilise toward collective action (Chesters, 2015:351, Della Porta & Diani; 2002:15). With its focus on the organisational aspects of social movements, the resource mobilisation theory regards social movement mobilisation as the result of a movement's ability to garner the resources necessary to participate in collective action (Bertuzzi, 2020:284; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Ozgul, 2020:14, 68). Resource mobilisation theory allows scholars to determine the ways in which social movement members participate in organising resources and the value of social media as both a resource and a means to obtain other movement resources (see sections 3.3.1.1 & 3.3.1.2).

The political process perspective regards social movements' mobilisation successes as the result of their ability to seize political opportunities and engage in negotiations with powerholders in a political structure (Buechler, 2011:130; Eder, 2015:41; Morris & Herring, 1987:10; Peoples, 2019:26). The political process perspective enables scholars to consider the broader political context that plays a role in a movement's members' participation in a social movement, and the role of social media in enabling online social movement members to participate in negotiations with powerholders (see sections 3.3.2.1 & 3.3.2.2).

1.3.2 New social movements theory and framing theory

To understand why social movement members participate in mobilisation actions, social movement scholars employ assumptions from the new social movements theory and framing theory (Chesters, 2015:352; Buechler, 2011:142; Diani, 1998:5; Eder, 2015:34; Williams, 2019:92, 93). The new social movements theory argues that social movements can bring about mobilisation due to their creation of a collective identity among a movement's members (Almeida, 2019:59; Buechler, 2011:15; Melucci, 1995:43; Williams, 2019:92). This theory enables scholars to determine the cognitive formulation processes that online social movement members engage in to form a collective identity and relational network that bring about cultural changes to society (see section 3.3.3.1).

Framing theory argues that social movement members use meaning-creation processes, i.e., collective action frames, to bring about mobilisation (Buechler, 2011:142; Williams, 2019:93). From a framing theory perspective, a movement's ability to bring about mobilisation is a result of its interpretation of certain aspects of reality in a way that culturally resonates or aligns with the perspectives, beliefs, or experiences of those who it attempts to mobilise (Abdul Reda *et al.*, 2021:6; Almeida, 2019:8; Gahan & Pekarek, 2013:763, 766; Katelaars, 2016:6). The theory enables scholars to investigate how online social movements use social media to diagnose issues, blame certain targets for issues, offer solutions, and motivate others to participate in mobilisations for change (see section 3.3.4.1). The theory also allows scholars to determine the cultural expressions and interpretations at play when social movements communicate with mobilisation targets (see section 3.3.4.2).

1.4 Problem statement

As the relevance of online social movements in today's digital age increases, so does the need to analyse communication for social change within this context. Online social movements are often referred to as temporary occurrences of mobilisations. They therefore often do not imply the long-term empowerment of a movement's members or enable sustainable social change. The participatory approach exists as the normative approach to communication for social change. If a movement's communication is conducted following this approach's principles, communication for social change and empowerment should be manifested sustainably. However, the approach was conceptualised for traditional project-based settings of development and before the use of social media as a tool for communication for social change. It is therefore not conceptually nor

analytically entirely sufficient for understanding communication for social change in an online setting.

To address the theoretical and conceptual gaps in the participatory approach and put forward a new conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication for social change in online social movements, this study suggests an integration of already conceptualised contemporary social movement theories. By integrating these various theories, the framework should offer a more comprehensive understanding of occurrences of online communication for social change and how activists communicatively participate in mobilisations like resource or political opportunity mobilisation, collective identity creation, or collective action framing.

Reconceptualising principles of the participatory approach with insights gained from contemporary social movement theories will produce a new synthesised framework that offers a communication-based approach for analysing online social movement mobilisation. A communication-based approach is valuable because it will appreciate the long-term empowerment of an online social movement's members beyond occurrences of temporary mobilisation. The reconceptualised principles of the participatory approach that this study sets out to put forward should acknowledge the unique characteristics of social media and social movement mobilisation. At the same time, it should provide valuable guidance on how online social movements can engage in participatory communication for social change to bring about sustainable changes in ways that differ from both traditional or offline social movements and traditional project-based approaches to social change.

1.5 Research questions

The subsequent sections are the general and specific research questions that were derived from the problem statement.

1.5.1 General research question

What should a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication within online social movements entail?

1.5.2 Specific research questions

1.5.2.1 How did online social movements emerge?

- 1.5.2.2 What are the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories and how can they be applied to the context of online social movements?
- 1.5.2.3 What are the principles of the participatory approach and how can they be applied to the context of online social movements?

1.6 Research aim and objectives

The following statements are the research aim and specific research objectives that were derived from the problem statement.

1.6.1 Research aim

To determine what a framework for analysing participatory communication within online social movements should entail.

1.6.2 Specific research objectives

- 1.6.2.1 To examine the emergence of online social movements employing a literature study.
- 1.6.2.2 To determine the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories and how they can be applied to the context of online social movements by employing a literature study.
- 1.6.2.3 To determine the assumptions of the participatory approach and how they can be applied to the context of online social movements by employing a literature study.

1.7 Research design

The research of this study was conducted through the means of a literature study of publications relevant to the topic of participatory communication within online social movements. Below is an overview of the method, its justification, and how sources were found and analysed.

1.7.1 A literature study

Hart (1998:13) defines a literature study as the gathering of published and unpublished literature on a specific topic that offers content, ideas and arguments derived from certain viewpoints that adhere to certain aims or that give way to specific views regarding the “nature of the topic” and how it should be investigated and evaluated. Based on this definition, the proposed research

method enabled this dissertation to offer a comprehensive understanding of the already existing literature and respective studies completed relevant to the participatory approach, the nature and functions of social media in a context of communication for social change, the resource mobilisation theory, the political process perspective, the new social movements theory, the framing theory, and, ultimately, the occurrence of participatory communication within online social movements. An in-depth exploration of this literature enabled the research to offer a diversely informed perspective and insight into the phenomenon and how it may be evaluated in relation to the existing findings and contributions of these studies.

Extending the study of online social movements beyond literature informed by just the participatory approach brought to light the areas in which perspectives like that of the contemporary social movement theories as well as the functions of social media within a communication for social change context can inform the current area of interest (i.e., online participatory communication within social movements) and fill the areas in need of reconceptualisation. This research method allows the researcher to better recognise or establish the context in which the subject of study exists (Hart, 1998:27). In the case of this study, a literature study enabled the researcher to understand the context of online social media in which the phenomenon of communication for social change exists.

Snyder (2019:334-335) determines three types of literature study methodologies. These are: (1) a systematic literature study, wherein all relevant research and data from this research is identified based on certain strict criteria, to answer a specific research question or hypothesis; (2) a semi-systematic study, wherein the progression of a topic across traditions is overviewed by a qualitative thematic content analysis of relevant research and the themes of this research; and (3) an integrative study, wherein research data that is relevant to a specific question is collected and identified to analyse, critique, and synthesise literature to provide a new framework or perspective relating to the topic. However, because this is an inductive qualitative study, the researcher was not limited to one specific methodology of literature study, but rather developed the methodology as the study progressed. Because this is a fairly new research topic, and the search for relevant literature was already limited to specific keywords and credibility criteria (see the next section), it was beneficial to not further limit the researcher through a certain type of literature study methodology.

Conducting a literature study enables a researcher to (1) recognise the existing literature and what is missing; (2) gain insight into significant variables regarding the occurrence and study of the subject; (3) rationalise the importance and relevance of the problem; (4) discover and point out the relationships between the findings and assumptions of the respective studies, theories,

and notions; and finally (5) synthesise the findings and assumptions of the respective studies and theories to ultimately offer a new perspective of the subject (Hart, 1998:27). The literature study in this dissertation enabled the researcher to specify the literature that already exists surrounding online social movements, social movement theories, and the participatory approach to communication for social change. The study also allowed the researcher to investigate and determine the gaps within the current literature's theorisation and application of these theories' assumptions in the context of online social movements. Furthermore, by employing a literature study, the researcher gained valuable insight into the different ways in which the phenomena of online social movements have been approached by contemporary social movement scholars, consequently determining how participation in communication for social change occurs in online social movements. The discovery of new occurrences of participation in communication for social change led to a rationalised approach to determining ways in which principles from the participatory approach can be synthesised with assumptions from contemporary social movement theories to understand online communication for social change in social movements. The literature study therefore enabled the researcher to offer a new perspective for analysing online social movements and theorising online communication for social change.

The following databases were consulted, which indicated that there was enough applicable literature available to complete the study: EbscoHost; Google Scholar; SAE Publications, ProQuest; NRF Nexus Database; and Boloka: NWU Institutional Repository. These databases cover academic books and journal articles. Key research includes work by Al-Hasan *et al.* (2019), Ardèvol-Abreu (2015), Arnstein (2019), Benford and Snow (2000), Bennet and Segerberg (2012), Cornwall (2002), Della Porta and Diani (2006), Diani (1992), Earl *et al.* (2015), Earl and Kimport (2011), Edwards and McCarthy (2019), Egner (2022), Eltantawy and Wiest (2011), Freire (2005), Fuchs *et al.* (2010), Huesca (2001), McAnany (2012), McCarthy and Zald (1977), Melkote and Steeves (2015a & 2015b), Melucci (1980), Mundt *et al.* (2018), Obar and Wildman (2015), Otto and Fourie (2016), Peoples (2019), Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2010), Servaes (2020), Servaes, and Lie (2020), Snow and Benford (1988), Tilly (1979), Tufte (2017), Van Dijk (2013), and Zimmerman *et al.* (1992). These scholars have respectively researched the participatory approach to communication for social change, as well as the resource mobilisation theory, the political process perspective, the new social movements theory, the framing theory, and utilising social media to facilitate social change. Although the research of Frazao (2017) and Bosch (2017b) both conducted studies on the phenomenon of South African social media movements (i.e., #ZumaMustFall and #RhodesMustFall) the theoretical framework of the participatory approach combined with contemporary social movement theories has not yet been applied to the setting of online social movements. The current study is theoretically unique in its research focus.

1.7.2 Search for sources: databases, keywords, and criteria for credibility

The databases that were searched for literature relevant to the topic of participatory communication within social media movements include EBSCOhost; Google Scholar; SAGE Publications; ProQuest; NRF Nexus Database; Boloka: NWU Institutional Repository (NWU-IR); and more. In a study of the evolution of the field of social media research and communication, Gálvez (2019:69) found the following keywords relevant to this study's topic to be the main focuses of literature produced between 2013 and 2017: "social networking sites", "content analysis", "social movements", "activism", "user-generated content", "participatory culture", "identity", "Twitter", "social networks", "online communities", "discourse analysis", "interactivity", "democracy", and "social networking". These and the following keywords, i.e., search terms, were used to search the databases: "Facebook", "Twitter", "participatory approach", "communication for social change", "development communication", "social change", "new social movements", "framing theory", "collective action framing", "collective identity", "resource mobilisation theory", "political process perspective", and "online participation". These search terms were used in several different combinations with the use of Boolean operators (i.e., "and", "or", and "not") to narrow down the search for relevant publications. In addition to this, a snowball method was applied during which additional sources were located through the reference lists of relevant publications. The relevance of a source was determined by reading through the abstract of the publication. Key sources were identified by determining which of the sources are cited the most in publications relevant to the topic.

The credibility of sources was determined by the following criteria (see Gahan, 2020):

- **Currency:** the content of the publication had to be relevant and up to date. Sources published between 2015 and 2023 were automatically deemed as current. The currency of sources published before 2015 was evaluated according to their prevalence in the reference lists of current studies.
- **Relevance:** the content of the publication had to be relevant to the topic researched in this study. This was determined by reading through the abstracts of publications that contain the above-mentioned keywords.
- **Authority:** The publisher and the author(s) of the study had to be deemed as credible sources in the academic field. To ensure this, searches for sources were done using the above-mentioned academic and accredited databases. Furthermore, a source that was cited in numerous other relevant studies and an author with a background in existing publications and co-publications was regarded as a source with authority.

- Accuracy: The content of a publication was evaluated for accuracy by establishing whether it is supported by evidence (empirical research) and/or other credible sources (citations).
- Purpose: The purpose of a study had to be academic. To evaluate this, the research problem, questions, aims, and the publisher of the content were evaluated accordingly.

1.7.3 Analysing sources

Sources were analysed through a comprehensive reading of the publications. Attention was given to the research aims of the study, key concepts used and their definitions, the theories, notions, and methodology used to study the topic, and the findings of the study. In addition to this, to identify the study's contribution to the existing literature and the understanding of the topic, the publication's relation to the other literature covering the same topic or similar research aims was evaluated.

1.8 Ethical and research integrity considerations

The researcher submitted their proposal for this study to the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) for ethical review. The BaSSREC cleared the study as a no-risk study and granted permission to the researcher to conduct the study using the ethics number NWU-00644-21-A7. Given that it is a literature study, the researcher did not interact with human participants. All quotations in this study that reference statements made by online social movement members are already accessible to the public either through the public domain of social media or publications of existing studies.

Integrity aspects considered while conducting the proposed literature study related to (1) the selection of sources and (2) the analysis of sources. Regarding the selection of sources, a diverse range of literature relevant to the topic was reviewed to produce arguments that are as unbiased and informed as possible. This included works of critique against the arguments and theories used in this study to offer a balanced representation of literature covering the topic. In addition to this, publications that have been retracted were included in the literature study. Regarding the actual analysis of the literature, the researcher evaluated the literature with the intent to fully understand the author's arguments and the reasoning behind them. This entailed the comprehensive reading of the publication as well as researching and defining terms that may be unknown to the researcher. The study shows respect for the existing literature and authors.

1.9 Significance of the study

Because the phenomenon of online communication for social change is increasing in its occurrence and its relevance within the field of communication for social change and the world at large, this study is significant in that it offers a means of analysing the extent to which members of an online social movement practice participatory communication by using social media. In addition to this, the study gains significance in the field of communication for social change, as it makes use of contemporary social movement theories to conceptualise the normative principles of participatory communication. By utilising the knowledge of scholars from the field of social movement studies and the sociology discipline, the study offers a unique lens through which the phenomenon of online communication for social change is analysed and ultimately offers a deeper understanding of participatory communication in the context of online social movements.

1.10 Conclusion: chapters layout

The current chapter argued for both the need and recontextualisation of a participatory approach to communication for social change in an online social movement context (see section 1.1). The relevance of a participatory approach to the phenomenon of online social movements was argued for based on its valuable insights regarding participation, dialogue, and culture in bringing about the long-term empowerment of individuals and communities and subsequent facilitation of sustainable social change (see section 1.1 and 1.2). However, it was pointed out that online social movements occur in a digitalised contemporary communication context to which the normative participatory approach has not yet been contextualised or conceptualised (see section 1.2).

Firstly, the participatory approach was conceptualised before the use of social media for communicating toward social change. To determine the relevance of social media to the phenomenon of online social movements, chapter 2 of this study employs a literature study to define the concept of a social movement and social media and offers a narrative history of the emergence of online social movements, concluding with the characteristics of online social movements based on the characteristics of social media.

Secondly, the participatory approach usually applies to more traditional project-based settings of communication for social change. However, as noted in section 1.2, online social movements do not necessarily embody the same project-based qualities of a traditional initiative aimed toward bringing about social change. As will be elaborated in chapter 2 of this study, the movements' occurrence on social media has implications for the nature of online social movement organisation

and mobilisation. In section 1.3, it was argued that the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories, which have already been applied to the contemporary context of online social movements, may provide valuable insight into the mobilisation processes that online social movements participate in. To fully understand the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories that sociology theorists apply to the phenomena of online social movements, chapter 3 of this study investigates the emergence of contemporary social movement theories and employs a literature study to determine their assumptions and how scholars apply them in the context of online social movements.

Since it was argued that a communication-based approach will offer valuable insights into the sustainable empowerment of online social movement members by means of participatory communication surrounding social movement mobilisations, chapter 4 of this study sets out to conduct a literature study regarding the emergence and assumptions of the participatory approach to communication for social change. To investigate how these assumptions can be applied to an online social movement context, this chapter utilises the contemporary social movement theory assumptions derived from chapter 3 as points of departure. The chapter offers arguments for how a synthesised framework comprising of perspectives from both the sociology and communication disciplines offers a more comprehensive understanding of the communication processes that surround social movement mobilisation.

As stated in section 1.4, the purpose of this study is to provide a framework to analyse participatory communication for social change in the context of online social movements. The concluding chapter of this study, chapter 5, will comprise of this study's findings regarding what such a framework should entail.

CHAPTER 2 THE EMERGENCE OF ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was indicated that the participatory approach to communication for social change was conceptualised before the use of social media in a development setting and that traditionally, the approach is not applied in the contemporary context of social movements (see section 1.2). It was also argued that the use of social media within social movements has had an impact on the nature of online social movements and therefore also has implications for the nature of communication for social change (see section 1.2). To gain a true understanding of the nature of online social movements and the contemporary context in which online communication for social change occurs in these movements, Chapter 2 aims to answer the research question: *How did online social movements emerge?* (see section 1.5.2.1). The chapter sets out to investigate the relevance of social media to the phenomenon of online social movements and its implications for the possible nature of communication for social change online.

This chapter proceeds to explore the two concepts – social movements and social media – separately. Section 2.2 investigates the idea of the former and its definition, while section 2.3 deals with the concept of social media. The latter section discusses the emergence and definition of social media by exploring its characteristics. After discussing the two concepts separately, arguments will be made for the relevance of social media to social movements in section 2.4. Then, the following two sections focus on the phenomenon of online social movements. Section 2.5 explores the emergence of the latter through a historical account. Section 2.6 investigates the characteristics of online social movements based on their occurrence on social media. The latter section serves as a basis for the conclusive argument of this chapter in section 2.7 regarding the relevance of social media to the emergence of online social movements.

2.2 What are social movements?

Social movements are collective or shared actions by people who position or assert themselves as actors who, under their own direction, have set out to seek more broad or inclusive alternatives to the existing dominant cultural, economic, and social systemic beliefs or attitudes (Farro, 2014:15). While this definition of social movements may seem uncomplicated and broad, it is representative of social movement characteristics that scholars such as Della Porta and Diani (2006:20), Van Aelst and Walgrave (2002: 466), Duyvendak (1995: ch. 2, par. 12), Diani and

Eyerman (1992:9) and Snow *et al.* (2019:5) emphasise in their conceptualisations of the term. Social movement literature shows a broad set of approaches to defining social movements, and the field has undergone processes of reconceptualisation throughout its historical development (Buechler, 2011:111; Peoples, 2019:23; Morris & Herring, 1987:28). The current section only aims to define the concept of a social movement to ultimately enable an investigation and understanding of the contextual element of this study, namely, online social movements. This section sets out to determine certain concepts or characteristics relevant to social movements by exploring numerous scholars' conceptualisations of the term. These concepts will be valuable for investigating online social movements by the end of this chapter.

2.2.1 Conceptualising social movements: an outline

Contemporary social movement theorisation has four main strands that are still prevalent in literature today. These theoretical strands include the collective behaviour perspective, approaches of resource mobilisation theory, the political process perspective, and the new social movements approach (Atkinson, 2010:7; Diani, 1992:3; Fominaya, 2019:432; Harrebye, 2016:52; Morris & Herring, 1989:2; Snow *et al.*, 2019:12). The ensuing discussion is a representation of definitions of social movements that represent concepts that the main theoretical strands have in common. These definitions will be used as a point of departure to explore the concept of a social movement.

After a comparative analysis of aspects of social movement dynamics within the strands, Diani (1992:13) proposed a synthesised definition, emphasising some aspects of continuity between the theoretical strands surrounding social movements. He and Della Porta (2006:20) reiterate this definition in later literature and describe a social movement as a social process wherein members – i.e., individuals, groups and/or organisations – participate in collective action through (1) engagement in conflictual relations with certain identified opponents, (2) forming connections within informal networks, and (3) creating a shared collective identity.

Similarly, Snow *et al.* (2019:5) argue that social movements can be understood by exploring certain characteristics that have been determined through social movement conceptualisation processes within the field of social movement studies. These characteristics include collective or joint action; change-oriented goals or beliefs; non-institutionalised collective action; organisation; and a sense of temporal continuity. Snow *et al.* (2019:10) describe social movements as “collectivities” that act with some sense of organisation and continuity outside of institutional or organisational channels with the intent to promote or resist change, and in either a political, social, economic, or cultural context.

Echoing the two conceptualisations above, several other scholars define a social movement as an organising network of activists that is based on a shared collective identity and that mobilises people to join unconventional actions to reach goals for social or political change (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002:466; Duyvendak, 1995: ch. 2, par. 12; Diani & Eyerman, 1992:9). Considering these definitions, the following concepts or characteristics relevant to social movements are apparent: (1) members participate in collective action and create a collective identity, (2) challenging and mobilising against existing power structures and dominant ideologies, therefore acting in either political or cultural contexts, and (3) create informal networks that exist outside of institutional or authoritative structures.

2.2.1.1 Collective identity and collective action

The concept of collective identity within a movement refers to the shared belief in a cause, purpose, and definition of an issue among its members (Fominaya, 2019:430; Thomas, 2019:101; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002:466). Collective identity and a sense of belonging among members within a social movement may strengthen the impact of their advocacy and continue to exist even after demonstrations or acts of public protest, consequently potentially prolonging the movement's span and scope (Diani, 1992:9 & 2000:399; Harrebye, 2016:48). Participants of social movements give voice to their collective identity through their collective action. Accordingly, scholars describe social movements as forms of collective action (Almeida, 2019:1; Horn, 2013:19; Snow *et al.*, 2019:5). Collective action is a goal-directed pursuit of a common objective through joint action by two or more people (Snow *et al.*, 2019:1).

Collective action entails that those who participate in a movement's mobilisations believe that their joint actions may bring them to meet their goals (Snow *et al.*, 2019:5). However, collective action may not only be rooted in social movement members' association with a movement's collective identity. Scholars (Bertuzzi, 2020:284; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Ozgul, 2020:14, 68) also argue that social movement members participate in collective action based on the resources available to allow such action, such as time, money, alliances, or alliances with professionals, or the political climate that offers opportunities to take collective action, such as election times, threats of environmental and public health, or when a government uses violence to intimidate citizens (see section 3.3.1 and section 3.3.2 for an in-depth exploration of resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective).

Almeida (2019:20-29) proposes six types and levels of collective action, namely:

- Everyday forms of resistance, where oppressed individuals participate in “micro-acts of defiance” or noncompliance because it would be too dangerous to openly challenge their oppressors.
- Local grassroots movements, which entails the involvement of members from closely situated communities that aim to reach very specific goals such as bringing an end to pollution problems in a specific geographic location or demanding changes in a single workplace.
- National social movements, which represent struggles of a broader national scope and directs resources at a wide range of goals to bring about changes in social and political systems, as well as the public’s attitudes – usually through campaigns.
- Waves or cycles of protest, that occur when numerous social movements or groups participate in “sustained protest clustered in time and spanning a wide geographical boundary” (Almeida, 2019:25), regardless of the community they are part of (e.g., students, farmers or industrial workers, etc.).
- Revolutionary movements that are not focussed on just changing policies, but rather to overthrow an entire existing political regime or governance.
- Transnational social movements that consist of participants from multiple countries and coordinate their actions to address issues that affect communities globally. It has been argued that the increased use of internet technologies for communication for social change has significantly led to a rise in the amount of transnational social movements around the globe (Almeida, 2019:29; Bob, 2019:115).

Collective actions within social movements, such as those pointed out above, entail applying alternative meanings to existing practices within a system (Farro, 2014:15; Wright, 2004:77). Participating in collective action therefore usually entails challenging existing power structures or dominant ideologies.

2.2.1.2 Challenging existing power structures and dominant ideologies

During their collective action, a social movement’s members attempt to introduce the beliefs or alternative meanings of the collective identity to the public and those in power. Applying such alternative meanings to a system involves changing and challenging its dominant ideologies or interpretations of the world, freedom, equality, and societal progression (Thomas, 2019:101). Consequently, members’ actions and mobilisations that are meant to challenge certain opponents

are inevitably conflictual (Diani, 1992:13; Farro, 2014:15). The opponents of social movements are the power structures that members believe to have normalised the systemic practices that do not coincide with that of the movement's identity (Farro, 2014:15; Snow *et al.*, 2019:7). Social movements aim to transform or disrupt those power structures through collective protest mobilisations or activism (Wright, 2004:77; Martin, 2015:1). As chapter 3 of this study will demonstrate, the contemporary social movement theories applied in the sociology field today emerged because scholars could no longer ignore social movements' presentations of discontent against the power structures and ideologies that oppressed certain members of societies.

Social movements exist as channels for members of a society to voice their grievances to those who uphold specific systems and practices in that society. If the power or authoritative structures within a system served all the needs, value, and practices of the members, there would be no need for social movement mobilisation or collective action. Therefore, the conflictual nature of collective action or the act of challenging authoritative structures to bring about social change seems integral to the emergence of a social movement. Because social movements challenge existing power structures or institutions, they are often unstructured or non-institutionalised.

2.2.1.3 Informal networks that exist outside of institutional or organisational structures

As determined earlier in section 2.2.1, social movements mobilise people to join unconventional actions to reach goals for social or political change. These unconventional actions in social movements refer to acts by members that usually exist outside of the formal political structures within a system (Anderson, 2000:94; Duyvendak, 1995: ch. 2, par. 12). There has been much deliberation about the organisational nature of social movements and the role of formal organisations in social movement mobilisation. Most scholars would agree that social movements are organised activities, since groups need to organise themselves to reach a particular goal. The point of deliberation, however, is whether social movements need formal organisations, also referred to as social movement organisations, to mobilise (see Bennet & Segerberg, 2012; Earl *et al.*, 2015, Gerbaudo, 2012; Den Hond *et al.*, 2015; and Selander & Jervenpaa, 2016, for such explorations).

In section 2.6.2, it will be argued that in the case of online social movements, members do participate in organising themselves, and may do so with or without the involvement of a social movement organisation. Section 3.3.1.2 will elaborate on the concept of organising as it relates to the activities of online social movements, whether done by individuals or social movement organisations. For now, three arguments emerge. Firstly, social movement members organise themselves to bring about collective action. Secondly, social movements exist outside of

institutional structures. Thirdly, social movements are distinguishable from other social organisations, e.g., parties, interest groups or religious sects, and other informal networks of collective action, like political mobilisation campaigns and coalitions. To differentiate social movements from other informal networks of interaction, such as loosely structured, isolated protest events, Diani (1992:16) refers to the new social movement approach's notion of collective identity (see section 2.2.1.1) within a social movement. Social movements differ from brief protests or political mobilisation campaigns, as the collective identity within a social movement is based on a sense of belonging, which may persist even after collective actions are performed (Diani, 1992:16). In addition to enforcing tangible changes, like a singular protest event may aim to do, the collective identity within social movements may bring about the creation of a new permanent reality through its disruption of dominant social-relational ideologies (Johnston *et al.*, 1994:276; Melucci, 1994:110). The notion of collective identity will prove valuable in this study's framework for ensuring the sustainable empowerment of an online social movement's members (see section 4.3.4).

However, as pointed out in section 2.2.1.1, other contemporary social movement theorisations do not propose the concept of collective identity as the only factor at play in organising collective action. Social movements may organise themselves by means of resource and political opportunity mobilisation or by employing collective action frames (see sections 3.3.1, 3.3.2 and 3.3.4). A movement may thus also differ from other occurrences of informal networks of collective action or unstructured protest events by employing assumptions from the resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective. It is due to these instances of theoretical divergence that this study takes a synthesised approach with multiple contemporary social movement theory perspectives to determine how communication for social change should be analysed.

The above explorations of the concept of a social movement, and the characteristics that have been presented, prompt the question of whether online social movements emerged in a manner that presents the same characteristics. Scholars have accredited the increase in citizens' participation in social movements and the phenomena of online social movements to the rise of social media activity (Anduiza *et al.*, 2014:762; Chon & Park, 2020:72; Cosby, 2018:1; Davies *et al.*, 2016:2). The forthcoming section explores the second concept relevant to the emergence of online social movements, namely, social media.

2.3 Defining social media: emergence and characteristics

Scholars posit that the Web and social media have revolutionised how we communicate (Jenkins, 2006:11; Miladi, 2016:36; Milton & Mano, 2017:168; Wyrwoll, 2014:27). With vast possibilities for its applicability and use, social media has generated literature within a broad set of disciplines, some of which include crisis communication; journalism; non-profit fundraising; education; health care communication and medicine; public relations; information science; mass media; and communication for social change (Carr & Hayes, 2015:47-48; Cosby, 2018:233, 241, 259, 263; Cox, 2013, ch. 2, par. 3; Gleason, 2013:966). However, despite no shortage of social media definitions, scholars still note the difficulty of defining the term and literature does not yet have a clear-cut or complete conceptualisation of social media (Aichner *et al.*, 2021:215; Bayer *et al.*, 2020:473; Carr & Hayes, 2015:48; De Villiers, 2020:4; Fuchs, 2017:38-39; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:25; Obar & Wildman, 2015:745; Weller, 2015:282).

The lack of clear conceptualisation may be due to the speed at which technology develops and continuously shifts the boundaries of social media and its field, and the similarity of communication forms facilitated by social media and other technologies (i.e., e-mail services or the telephone) (Aichner *et al.*, 2021:215; Bayer *et al.*, 2020:473; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:25; Obar & Wildman, 2015: 745; Weller, 2015:282). Social media and the definition thereof constantly evolve as the functionalities and features of social media grow and the ways in which people use social media change (Aichner *et al.*, 2021:215; Freberg, 2019:7; Weller, 2015:282). Sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.2 of this chapter aims to provide an understanding of social media and how it is defined in communication and social movement literature with an investigation of its emergence and its characteristics. Guided by a historical account of the emergence of social media, the section explores the characteristics and definitions of Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and finally, Web 2.0's social media.

2.3.1 Social media emergence: from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

The internet we know today is mainly a result of developments at the start of the 21st century until now. These developments are referred to as the shifts from Web 1.0 to the current Web 2.0. We are currently in a process toward the next evolutionary step, developing Web 3.0 – also referred to as the semantic web (Anwar, 2023:173 -174). It is important to note that these terms for Web 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 do not refer to a temporal order of the Web, but are used for an analytical distinction to, as Fuchs *et al.* (2010:43) state, “describe and characterise the social dynamics and information processes that are part of the internet”.

Although developments of Web 3.0 may become increasingly relevant to social movement studies as online social movement members utilise social media based on Web 3.0 characteristics, this study deals with social movements that occur on Web 2.0's social media. The reason for said focus is due to the lack of studies exploring online social movements that use Web 3.0 social media. All studies referred to in this dissertation relate to social media application based on the functions of web 2.0 (see chapter 3). At the time of this study, a theoretical and contextual exploration surrounding the phenomena of social movements occurring on Web 3.0 would only be hypothetical and premature. Studies like that of Anwar (2023), Prabhu (2016), and Hiremath and Kenchakkanavar (2016) offer an exploration of the characteristics of Web 3.0 that will allow users to share and access information across the web and between each other in a more decentralised, less controlled manner. Future research on online social movement organisation and communication at a stage where Web 3.0 is applied in the context of online activism should be considered. The subsequent section in this study details the development and characteristics of Web 1.0; Web 2.0 and Web 2.0's social media.

Until breakthroughs in the development of the world wide web (WWW), which was invented in 1991, the Internet was regarded as a source of static, 'read-only' information, known as Web 1.0 (Anwar, 2023:174; Gregor & Kubiak, 2013:4; Van Dijk, 2013:5). This first generation of the WWW consisted of web pages connected by hyperlinks (Bosch, 2017c:47). Users of Web 1.0 had limited means to interact with each other and the web-based information on these pages, as this version of the internet did not yet allow for user participation in content creation (Aghaei *et al.*, 2012:1; Anwar, 2023:177; Bosch, 2017c:47; Gàlvez, 2019:61; Obar & Wildman, 2015:746). Web 1.0's web pages were initially mainly used by businesses to broadcast information to users in a one-way form of communication (Aghaei *et al.*, 2012:1).

By the mid-'90s, however, with an increased number of internet service providers (ISPs) that enabled users to access the internet from their home computers, online conversations became more common. Still, computer-mediated communication consisted mainly of textual conversation (Bosch, 2017c:47; Marwick, 2013:357; Taprial & Kanwar, 2012:3). Users could not, for instance, see photographs or videos of one another (Marwick, 2013:357). Although Web 1.0's weblogs, list servers, and electronic services did start to enable networked communication that could form online communities or be of service to offline ones, Web 1.0's services did not automatically connect users (Van Dijk, 2013:5). Users had to be deliberate in their search for other users to connect with certain communities or content. By the late 1990s, however, people's increased use of the internet to find and connect with other users and to share content online started to show the potential social dynamics of the Web (Van Dijk, 2013:5).

The rise of a new online era, the participatory social web, or Web 2.0 occurred when the focus shifted toward the audience's online interaction and their creation of online content – also referred to as user-generated content (UGC) (Anwar, 2023:173; Bosch, 2017c:47). In other words, the term Web 2.0 refers to websites that are created for and enable UGC (Bosch, 2017c:40). Anwar (2023:177) points out that Web 2.0 is not different from Web 1.0 in a scientific sense, but rather in the way web pages are built and used. With the development of Web 2.0, the internet came to exist as more than just a means for users to retrieve networked information as with Web 1.0 (Van Dijk, 2013:5). Web pages and the online services they offer evolved into “two-way vehicles for a networked sociality” (Van Dijk, 2013:5). Web 2.0 is focussed on the end user's experience and ability to participate in content creation online (Anwar, 2023:177).

Web 2.0 has three distinguishing features: (1) it is user-friendly, (2) it enables social interaction, and (3) it allows users to upload content in various forms – i.e. pictures, text, or videos – on free publishing and production platforms (Lovink, 2011:5; Duong, 2020:114). Web 2.0 shifted internet users' status from mere consumers of information broadcasted over a one-way communication channel to active participants in creating communicative social networks on the internet (Adornato, 2018:7; Obar & Wildman, 2015:746). The shift in the internet user's role has led to the use of the term prosumer, which means to be both a consumer and producer of content (Schackman, 2013:106). The coevolution of Web 2.0 and its users resulted in what Van Dijk (2013:6) refers to as a “mediated sociality” that has become part of “society's institutional fabric” and users' everyday lives.

Through the years, mediated communication and the technology that enables it have coevolved with society's cultural and communicative practices and tactics (O'Brien, 2014:9; Van Dijk, 2013:5). Like O'Brien (2014:9) states, “the technology itself ... is not the driving force of change Without an active human element, the communication device does not have a purpose. There is a medium, but no message.” Web 2.0 displayed an increased investment in the human element of the internet: the connection and interaction between its users (Bosch, 2017c:48). This focus on online sociality is also shown in Fuchs *et al.*'s (2010:43) distinction of Web 1.0 as “a tool for cognition”, and Web 2.0 as “a medium for human communication”. It is the human desire for connection that motivated people to become more active online, and, in turn, platform creators of Web 2.0 became considerably more focused on facilitating the new social element of the internet (Van Dijk, 2013:4). Social media emerged as the mode or means for this facilitation of online sociality.

2.3.2 Social media definitions and characteristics

With Web 2.0 came the increased use and development of social media sites or applications. By the early 2000s, the use of social media for social networking and sharing content online became a mainstream concept. Millions of Web 2.0 users were on sites or applications like Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Facebook to build and interact with online communities (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012:18-19). As widely cited in the literature (Bosch, 2017c:40; Duong, 2020:114; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2014:386; Van Dijk, 2013:4; Wyrwoll, 2014:18), Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:60) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. Because of Web 2.0’s technological design, the internet had a newfound capacity for two-way communication between its users. This capacity allowed for the creation of potentially participatory social media (Van Dijk, 2013:10). Since these platforms are based on Web 2.0, they were created with the intent to enable a process of interaction, collaboration, and a shared experience of creating and consuming online content (Obar & Wildman, 2015:746-746). The social software of Web 2.0 and social media (i.e., websites, platforms, and online applications) led to increased online participation, collaboration, and engagement between individuals (Bosch, 2017c:41).

While the characteristics of Web 2.0 play an integral part in the nature of social media, Carr and Hayes (2015:45) argue that definitions such as that of the widely cited Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:60) are problematic, as they are also applicable to other digital communication technologies of Web 2.0, like email, that do not have the distinguishing uses or features of social media. Carr and Hayes (2015:49) more specifically, and also widely cited, define social media as “Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content” (Aichner *et al.*, 2021:219; Alhabash & Ma, 2017:1; Bayer *et al.*, 2020:473; Nabity-Grover *et al.*, 2020:1; Rhee *et al.*, 2021:2). Therefore, while social media are built on the foundations of Web 2.0, not all communication technologies that embody the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 are social media.

As will be argued in the sections that follow, social media are distinct because they embody the following characteristics guided by Carr and Hayes’ (2015:49) definition of social media, which exists as a steady point of departure to explore other scholars’ ideas on the phenomena: (1) communication on social media is persistent, asynchronous and synchronous; (2) communication on social media is masspersonal in nature; (3) social media facilitates interactivity and engagement between communicators; (4) social media derives its value from users sharing and

interacting with UGC; and (5) social media facilitates the creation of social and information networks. The characteristics as laid out above also allow this study to approach the concept of social media from a communication perspective.

2.3.2.1 Communication that is persistent, asynchronous and synchronous

Social media communication channels are desentrained and persistent because of their continued availability even if the communicators are not present in real-time to participate in the communication process (Bayer *et al.*, 2020:473; Carr & Hayes, 2015:50; Duong, 2020:117). The desentrained nature of communication on social media refers to users' ability to choose to participate in communication at their own time, as opposed to face-to-face communication settings that require both communicators to be present and committed to communicating at the same time (Hopkins, 2017, par. 9). Accordingly, these sites allow for asynchronous and synchronous creation of content, meaning users can catch up with content at any time, or have a shared experience of consuming and interacting with content in real-time on the site (Duong, 2020:117; Mahoney & Tang, 2017:106). Users can "time-shift" and engage in conversations when it suits them, as opposed to face-to-face interactions, or even other online communication methods like Skype that require communicators to be active participants in a communication process simultaneously (Kent, 2010:645).

For example, a social media site like Facebook still holds its value and functions while a user is offline, because the site's service continues to operate and collect content from other users until the user can or wants to log back on and engage with content in their own time (Carr & Hayes, 2015:51). To add to the notion of channel persistence, social media users can also sustain dialogue without having to rely on proximity, which is a usual prerequisite for face-to-face interaction. Users can communicate with each other from across the globe. For Schackman (2013:111), social media relies on the internet's ability to bring people together and allow users to build communities based on their shared interests rather than their proximity.

Another argument that emerged due to social media's transcendence of space and time synchronicity is the notion that users' persistent access to communication channels, audiences, and messages speeds up the process of public information sharing. Scholars like Adornato (2018:5), Wyrwoll (2014:27), and Duong (2020:115) argue for the increased value of content created by social media users in relation to information shared with the public through traditional broadcast and print media channels. The communication devices used by the public, such as smartphones that have access to social media, have sped up the process of specifically spreading newsworthy content around the world (Adornato, 2018:6; Wyrwoll, 2014:27). For example, when

United States Airways flight 1549 made an emergency landing on the Hudson River, the news was spread by social media users first, with the first photo of the crash tweeted only a few minutes after the plane went down. The first traditional news media report on the event, in this case, a CNN television broadcast, aired 30 minutes after the crash (Adornato, 2018:6; Wyrwoll, 2014:28-29). Due to its ability to rapidly disseminate information among its users regardless of place or time, the social media site X, previously referred to as Twitter¹, has become a channel for emergency communication, a means to follow events, and a tool to facilitate societal uprisings (De Villiers, 2020:28; Rogers, 2014:xxi). Social media's persistent availability and public accessibility as a communication channel give rise to another one of its defining characteristics – the notion that it facilitates masspersonal communication.

2.3.2.2 Communication that is masspersonal in nature

Masspersonal communication is communication that embodies characteristics of both mass and interpersonal communication (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018:1172). Social media facilitates communication interpersonally between users, but it also allows communication from an individual *with* the masses and communication *between* the masses (Bayer *et al.*, 2020:472; De Villiers, 2020:27; Duong, 2020:117; Freberg, 2019:10). Users can share personalised UGC with a mass audience, while other users can reply either directly to just the sender of the message or make their response visible to the rest of the audience. For example, Facebook combines numerous features that facilitate communication at different levels and contexts. Communication on Facebook can be intrapersonal, by sharing thoughts through status updates; interpersonal, by chatting on the site's private chat or messenger section; organisational, in Facebook Workplace or Groups used for internal communication; business-related, through Facebook Marketplace, Pages and WhatsApp Business button; and public, by simply posting content on the site or responding to that of others (De Villiers, 2020:27; Meta, 2023). In the case of X, users can use the at symbol (@), followed by a specific users' username, to tag or mention them in a post or reply to a post they made (Rogers, 2014:xiii). Because the post is publicly visible, but the other user receives a notification of the tag, @-posts on X can be masspersonal.

¹ X, previously referred to as Twitter, was rebranded in July 2023, after Elon Musk bought the company in 2022 (Mac & Hsu, 2023).

Before social media, traditional media, such as print, broadcasting, and entertainment media, would be the main means of mass communication. However, traditional media usually only allow for a small group of people to create content, report on events, or form opinions, while social media allows all its users – individuals – access to public communication networks and mass audiences (Agichtein *et al.*, 2008:1; Duong, 2020:115; Schackman, 2013:106; Wyrwoll, 2014:1). Scholars note that social media have transformed the one-way mass communication model of traditional media into one that is multidirectional and allows everyone with access to the web to participate (Adornato, 2018:6; Agichtein *et al.*, 2008:1; Jenkins, 2006:278; Wyrwoll, 2014:1). Social media represents a more democratised public communication model. A model wherein the information or online content is diversified, instead of selectively amplified as with traditional media (Adornato, 2018:6; Jenkins, 2006:278). For example, users can use content creation and publishing tools like Blogs, X, Wikis, Podcasts, WordPress, and Tumblr to publish short or small amounts of content, podcasts, opinions, articles, and links to other content freely to mass audiences that can then react to it (Gálvez, 2019:63; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:31). The public visibility and creation of messages and responses to UGC (see section 2.3.1) give rise to two other defining characteristics of social media, namely the facilitation of interactivity or the perception of interactivity and the idea that UGC sustains social media sites.

2.3.2.3 Interactivity and engagement between communicators

Scholars posit that social media brings about increased interactivity between online participants (Freberg, 2019:7; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:24; Obar & Wildman, 2015:746; Van Dijk, 2013:10). Social media users can witness, analyse, and participate in the interactions generated by UGC. One should note Carr and Hayes' (2015:51) argument that the mere perception of interactivity is needed for a site to be regarded as social. Interactions on social media do not have to be interpersonal, as with a traditional understanding of interaction. Users merely need to feel a sense of “interactive engagement” (Carr & Hayes, 2015:51). This perception of interaction on social media may foster parasocial interactions or relationships. Some users may perceive the content they receive and their reactions to it as interpersonal, even if the messages are not solely and specifically directed at them and the sender does not respond to their reactions (Shariffadeen & Manfah, 2017:641).

On the other hand, some social media sites, like Facebook and X, rely significantly on user interactions. To become well-connected, users need to interact with each other rather than just experience a sense of interaction. With its various features and opportunities for engagement, Van Dijk (2013:51) argues that Facebook has become a tool for users to organise their social lives, as they use it “first, to get and stay connected and, second, to become (well) connected”. X

has been described as a *conversational* microblog (Barash & Golder, 2021:144). For millions of users, X has become a channel for public communication with networks, a source of real-time information and news, and a platform for social and political debate (Bosch, 2017a:67; Rogers, 2014:xxi). Users' frequent use of the platform to debate current affairs and news stories made X gain public attention to shape the news agenda (Deller, 2011:219). These debates also require actual interaction between X users.

Whether interaction occurs or users merely perceive their receipt and response to UGC as interactive, the notion of interaction and the online social networks that interaction occurs in, make social media valuable and sustain it (Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:13; Obar & Wildman, 2015:746-747). The interaction and engagement on social media are generated through the UGC that users post to the sites.

2.3.2.4 Sharing and interacting with UGC

Numerous scholars acknowledge social media's facilitation and display of UGC (Carr & Hayes, 2015:49; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:13; Van Dijk, 2013:8; Wyrwoll, 2014:12). Social media content can be UGC, user-created (UCC), or user-driven (UDC), the latter of which refers to content created by one user that another user simply shares from one location or platform to another (Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:19). Some social media sites are specifically designed toward the creation of and interaction with UGC. UGC sites, otherwise referred to as content-sharing sites or multimedia social media, such as YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, and Pinterest, promote creativity, highlight cultural activity, and enable users to produce professional and amateur content for their online audiences (Gálvez, 2019:63; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:42; Van Dijk, 2013:8). Platforms for participatory or citizen journalism, called social news sites, enable their users to share information or news with the public and to react or contribute to information that has been shared online (Albarran, 2013:4; Gálvez, 2019:63). Collaborative projects, such as Wikipedia, facilitate the collective or collaborative creation and exchange of UGC (Gálvez, 2019:63; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:51).

Users often derive a social media site's value (i.e., benefit or enjoyment) from the UGC that is shared on it (Carr & Hayes, 2015:52). Social media sites usually offer some feature that enables users to share UGC and interact with that content, like comment sections (Gálvez, 2019:63; Schmidt, 2014:10). Users may also base the value of a site on the interactions generated by the UGC. In some cases, the interactions on a platform, like the comments on a photo or article, are the primary source of value for the user (Carr & Hayes, 2015:52). Therefore, social media sites are often sustained by the UGC, which users share and interact with. The interactions generated

by the UGC on social media also often lead to the occurrence of online social and information networks – another defining characteristic of these sites.

2.3.2.5 Social and information communicative networks

In the context of social media, social networks can be defined as the visual presentation of user's online connections (Bayer *et al.*, 2020:479; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:20). Some of the most prominent social media sites are geared explicitly toward displaying and facilitating social networking on the internet. They enable users to maintain and build new social networks and promote themselves within them (Gálvez, 2019:63; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:31). These sites, like Facebook and LinkedIn, are referred to as social networking sites (SNSs). SNSs are social media's most predominant form (Cosby, 2018:17). As widely cited in the literature (Albarran, 2013:1; Bayer *et al.*, 2020: 474; Bosch, 2017c:41; Duong, 2020:118; Freberg, 2019:11; Lietsala & Sirkkunen; 2008:47), Boyd and Ellison (2008:211) define SNSs as online services that allow users to (1) create a public or semi-public profile on the site; (2) display a list of their connections to other site users; and (3) view and explore the connections other users have on the site. The increased ability to connect with fellow users results from SNSs' capacity to keep track of a user's online activity and share it with their social networks (Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:47-48). Numerous scholars refer to social networking as an essential characteristic of social media in their description of the term, arguing that social media facilitates the development and maintenance of online networks, connection, and interaction through online participation and the use of services offered by these applications (Albarran, 2013:2; Freberg, 2019:10; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008:24; Obar & Wildman, 2015:746-747).

The social networks on social media allow users to access other users and form connections with them and serve as a means for information to travel freely between individuals. Therefore, social media also enables the creation of information networks. While SNSs are geared toward enabling and enhancing online social connections, other sites, like X, are more focused on enabling and improving information access and sharing. Although scholars (De Villiers, 2020:27; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013:140) still refer to X as a microblogging site, the site has also been described as a space for real-time social networking rather than just a space for information sharing (Deller, 2011:217). The reference to X as an SNS stems from the site's shift toward discursive participation, as it has become a platform for "rolling news" rather than a "static blogging environment" (Deller, 2011:217). Like the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, X's evolution showcases how social media sites can also enhance and emphasise online social networking between users. In X's case, social networking is rooted in information dissemination between users. Hence the use of the term information network.

Ultimately, what makes social media revolutionary is its ability to facilitate mediated social interaction, information dissemination, and communicative participation in various contexts – may it be news coverage, entertainment, politics, activism, or connection between friends. The development of Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and social media has impacted the way both individuals and institutions communicate with their audiences. It has opened a new world of means for connecting and building social and information networks among individuals with similar interests and needs. With numerous different types of social media (see Table 2-1), users can access other users, news sources, and information, regardless of their location or the time they choose to engage in communication. Online social movements have emerged from the new avenues social media has opened for user participation in democratised public communication, community building and collaboration. The next section of this chapter will explore the relevance of social media to social movements based on explorations of the two previous sections (sections 2.2.1 & 2.3.1).

2.4 The relevance of social media for social movements

Social media offers different platforms that embody the above-mentioned characteristics in different ways and to different extents. These sites and their characteristics are relevant to social movements in a few ways. Firstly, social media sites are persistent channels for communication (see section 2.3.1.1) and can also exist as persistent channels for activism. Social media users can access content and participate in communication processes on the sites at any time from any place, can speedily and publicly disseminate information, and can form connections based on a shared interest in information on the sites. These elements of social media are relevant to social movements, as they may allow social movement members to connect from different locations and time zones and quickly share information about their movement's cause, offering an opportunity for rapid and global mobilisation. While users of social media sites connect based on shared interests, members of a social movement connect based on a shared identity and set of beliefs (see section 2.2.1.1). Members of social movements may be able to share information related to their beliefs in a cause and use social media sites like Facebook or X (see table 2-1) to connect with others who share the same beliefs, building a collective identity online.

Secondly, social media sites facilitate masspersonal communication (see section 2.3.1.2) and can also enable masspersonal social movement communication processes. Social media users can participate in communication at different levels and contexts – both interpersonal and to mass audiences. The masspersonal nature of communication on social media facilitates a multidirectional communication model that has democratised public communication. This

characteristic is relevant to social movements, as it may allow members to further democratise their organisation processes, lessening the need for the involvement of a social movement organisation (see section 2.1.1.1) and allowing more people to participate in movement organising, possibly increasing opportunities for mobilisation. Since publishing tools like X and social news sites like Reddit (see Table 2-1) offer the opportunity to communicate publicly beyond the gatekeeper channels of broadcast and print media, social movement members may be able to challenge authoritative figures and systems more freely (see section 2.2.1.2) in a public communication sphere.

Thirdly, the public visibility of communication on social media facilitates user interaction and engagement (see section 2.3.1.3) and may also do so in a social movement context. This characteristic is relevant to social movements, as the visibility and transparency of connections and interactions on SNSs (see table 2-1, e) may create a sense of engagement and interaction among members and further allow the democratisation of a movement's communication processes while also enabling more individuals to access information regarding a social movements collective action tactics (see section 2.2.1.1). Fourthly, while social movements derive their strength, impact, and continued existence from the act of creating a collective identity (see section 2.1.1.1), social media sites derive their value from and are sustained by the UGC that users share or interact with on the sites (see section 2.3.1.4). As SNSs like Facebook and X or UGC sites like YouTube or Instagram (see table 2-2) continue to promote and facilitate the creation of UGC to sustain these sites, social movement members may continually share UGC that builds a collective identity, possibly prolonging their movement's span and scope. Lastly, because the interactions generated by social media sites often allow for the creation of online social and information networks (see section 2.3.1.5), social movement members may use social media to create their own networks of information and supporters to facilitate mobilisation or gain access to the resources needed for collective action (see section 2.2.1.1).

In its most prominent form, social media enables users to develop, maintain, witness, and participate in online social networking, connection, interaction, and information dissemination. These are all features that users can employ in a social movement context. The next section will focus on the emergence and characteristics of social movements that occur on social media or are facilitated by communication on these sites. It will allow an exploration of the arguments made above, noting how the characteristics of social media relate to the characteristics of online social movements.

2.5 A narrative history of the emergence of online social movements

During the 1960s, studies of social movement phenomena surged remarkably due to an almost revolutionary transformation of societies and politics at the time (Almeida, 2019:47; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:1). The current section indicates how societies' political, economic, social, cultural, and technological changes impact social movements, their goals or grievances, and their tactics for mobilisation toward social change. The narrative exploration of the emergence of online social movements that ensues will discuss developments that occurred in the 1960s and 1990s, as traits of social movements from the sixties and those in the nineties are still prevalent in the contemporary online social movements we witness today. Chapter 3 of this study will offer a more comprehensive investigation of contemporary social movement theories that emerged during these times and the relevance of their assumptions to the context of online social movements (see section 3.3).

2.5.1 The 1960s: a new Left and new social movements

Following the massive loss of lives and destruction of World War II, North America, Europe, and other countries experienced the post-war period of the 1950s as a time of prosperity. Countries started rebuilding markets and expanding their economies (Spector, 2019:152). However, as economies started to boom, access to higher education increases, more women enter the workforce, and those from oppressed or minority groups – i.e., members of minority racial groups or women – take advantage of new possibilities to enforce structural conflict (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:1; Spector, 2019:153). Some of the most notable movements in this time include the American Civil Rights movement; Anti War movements (most notably those led by student protestors); labour movements; women's rights movements; a counter-culture movement; student protests in Germany, Britain, and Mexico; and the worker-student coalitions of 1969, "Hot Autumn", in Italy (Almeida, 2019:47; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:1; Spector, 2019:153).

The term "new Left" is often used concerning movements from this time, characterising them with traits such as the opposition to racial, political, and patriarchal domination; embracing self-governance; protest activities that include the youth, students, minorities, or even unpolitical individuals; and a celebration of pluralism – as opposed to the "old Left's" notion of monism (Taylor, 2017:43). Social movements of the sixties differ from traditional movements that previously mainly focussed on labour issues. The new social movements of the sixties did not limit themselves to demands for financial security. Instead, they demand intervention in politics and society, and their members rally for the inclusion of 'different' identities and lifestyles to better their day-to-day lives and uphold their sense of personal autonomy (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:6;

Taylor, 2017:43). Through the course of the twentieth century, the notion of individual autonomy gave rise to increased resistance to neoliberalism (Taylor, 2017:43).

2.5.2 The 1990s: uprisings against neoliberalism and cyberactivism 1.0

By the nineties, numerous social movements were inspired to challenge the notion of neoliberal globalisation (Berberoglu, 2019:9; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:2). One of the most famous uprisings against neoliberalism and the first signs of the emergence of a global movement against the governmental control of economic and political institutions is that of the Mexican Zapatistas movement in 1994 (Taylor, 2017:45). The “global justice movement” or “movement of movements” represents a new surge of uprisings globally. Some of the diverse components of this movement include critiques of the social and environmental consequences of capitalist-interest-based globalisation practices; solidarity with the poor and demands for debt cancellation of poor countries; farmers’ and poor agricultural labourers’ rejection of trade agreement consequences; indigenous people’s movements; environmental movements; and women’s movements (Castells, 2010:150).

Uprisings against global economic domination peaked in the famous “Battle of Seattle” in 1999 (Berberoglu, 2019:10). The Indymedia network, an activist information website that would later grow into more than a hundred outlets for activist journalists, was set up to offer alternative news coverage of the Seattle mobilisations (Atton, 2002:7; Bennet, 2003:144). By the end of the century, protest actions in both Seattle and uprisings of the Zapatistas showed how technology such as telephones, fax machines, and specifically services of Web 1.0, like list servers, websites, e-mails, and electronic bulletin boards could be used to mobilise collective actions within the networks of a social movement (Castells, 2010:151; Earl *et al.*, 2013:432; Juris, 2012:260; Schulz, 1998:595). Movements that used Web 1.0 during the nineties gave way to the emergence of the term “Cyberactivism” (later referred to as Cyberactivism 1.0), a concept used to describe the use of internet technologies within social movement organisation activities (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:367).

2.5.3 The twenty-first century: mass diffusion of protest and cyberactivism 2.0

In 2011, the twenty-first century introduced another surge in global social movement activity, which continued the growth in social movement literature and, more specifically, studies surrounding social movement members’ use of internet technologies. Most notably, North Africa and the Middle East experienced mass mobilisations and protests, known as the Arab Spring movement, that overthrew and challenged regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and

Syria (Berberoglu, 2019:10). With participants' use of social media to mobilise and facilitate protest actions, 2011's Arab Spring movement would later become the subject of numerous social movement studies (Al Hasan *et al.*, 2019; Al-Rfouh, 2017; Jamali, 2015; Klein, 2013; Rane & Salem, 2012). Berberoglu (2019:10) refers to the events of the Arab Spring as an "unprecedented development in the history of the Middle East". The Arab Spring movement played an integral role in the increased study of social movements that occur online. Chapter 3 offers more insight into the movement and scholars' studies thereof from different theoretical social movement perspectives (see sections 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.2.1).

Due to the global economic crisis by the end of the century's first decade, 2011 saw an increase in protest mobilisation, which sprouted from the Arab Spring movement to working people worldwide (Berberoglu, 2019:10). One of the European countries that were worst affected by the economic crisis, Spain, experienced mass protest actions from the "Indignados" or the "15M movement" in 58 of the country's cities (Gerbaudo, 2012:76). Like the members of the Arab Spring, Indignados utilise Web 2.0's social media to mobilise assemblies of public protest (Gerbaudo, 2012:76). Also using social media, members of the anti-corporate globalisation movement, #Occupy or Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, draw inspiration from earlier protest actions in Seattle in 1999 and that of the then more recent Arab Spring movement. With protests against income inequality that increased at the expense of the "99%", the #Occupy movement led to mobilisation in 80 countries across the world in the same year of the Arab Spring and Indignados protests (see Ancelovici *et al.*, 2016:23; Berberoglu, 2019:10). Juris (2012:260) argues that the mass demonstrations of #Occupy serve as a testament to the possibilities for mass diffusion of protest in the age of social media.

As with the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 in the development of the Internet, a shift occurred in social movement literature's reference to Internet activism. Movements of the twenty-first century now display Cyberactivism 2.0, described by Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014:367) as the use of Web 2.0 technologies (like social media sites such as X and Facebook) to quickly facilitate advocacy and communication for social change within a movement and to globalise local information. The characteristics of social media (see section 2.3.1) were being employed by online social movement members to communicate, organise, and disseminate information. Following above mentioned global uprisings, social movement mobilisations made history again, as it did in the sixties. Accordingly, *Time* magazine named the "Protester" the "Person of the Year" in 2011 (Andersen, 2011).

The events of 2011 "reaffirmed the ever-present transformational potential of collective action and social movements" (Davies *et al.*, 2016:2). Like in the 1960s, people in societies from all over the

world mobilised together to bring about social change and development and amplify and defend their rights, identities, and values; rise against oppression and challenge oppressors; and improve their living conditions (Davies *et al.*, 2016:2). Almeida (2019:1) argues that the continued and recent growth of social movement literature is primarily due to increased collective action among protest communities globally. During more recent years, peaks in and emergences of online social movements include cases such as the #MeToo movement, which allows victims of sexual assault to publicly share their stories on social media (Alaggia & Wang, 2020:1); the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which emphasises instances of police brutality against African Americans by sharing videos of such instances, among other forms of online activist tactics (Chon & Park, 2020:72); and the youth climate change movement (Wielk & Standlee, 2021:23).

The above historical account of the emergence of online social movements shows the relevance of the developments from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 to the development of Cyberactivism 1.0 to Cyberactivism 2.0 (also see Table 2-2). To further investigate the relationship between these developments and the relevance of the characteristics of social media to the nature of online social movements, the next section of this chapter will offer a comparative analysis of the characteristics of online social movements.

Table 2-1 Timeline of the emergence of social media and online social movements

Developments toward the emergence of social media	Developments toward the emergence of online social movements
1960s: A new left and New social movements (see sections 2.5.1)	
	• Oppressed or minority groups take advantage of new possibilities to enforce structural conflict. • Movements of the time: American Civil Rights movement; Anti War movements; labour movements; women's rights movements; a counter-culture movement; student protests in Germany, Britain, and Mexico; and the worker-student coalitions of 1969, "Hot Autumn" in Italy. • New social movements or movements of the "New Left" demand intervention in politics and society as a whole. They rally for the inclusion of "different"

	identities and lifestyles to better their day-to-day lives and uphold their sense of personal autonomy. • The notion of individual autonomy gives rise to increased resistance to neoliberalism.
Mid-1990s - Late-1990s: The emergence of Web 1.0 and Cyberactivism 1.0 (see sections 2.3.1 & 2.5.2)	
• Increased number of internet service providers (ISPs) that enable users to access the internet from their home computers; online conversations become more common. • Web 1.0's weblogs, list servers, and e-services start to enable networked communication that could form online communities or be of service to offline ones. • People's increased use of the internet to find and connect with other users and to share content online start to show the potential social dynamics of the Web.	• Numerous social movements are inspired to challenge the notion of neoliberal globalisation. • Movements that make use of Web 1.0 give rise to the emergence of the term "Cyberactivism 1.0". • First signs of the emergence of a global movement against the governmental control of economic and political institutions – the Mexican Zapatistas movement – arises. The so-called "global justice movement" or "movement of movements" represents a new surge of uprisings globally. • Uprisings against global economic domination reach a peak in the famous "Battle of Seattle". • The Indymedia network – an activist information website – is set up to offer alternative news coverage of the Seattle mobilisations. • Protest actions in both Seattle and uprisings of the Zapatistas show how the internet can be used to mobilise collective actions within the networks of a social movement.
The 21st century: The emergence of Web 2.0, social media, and Cyberactivism 2.0 (see sections 2.3.1 & 2.5.3)	
• Focus shifts to the audience's online interaction and their creation of online content – also referred to as user-generated content (UGC). • The use of social media for social networking and sharing content online become a mainstream concept – millions of Web 2.0 users are on sites or applications	• The twenty-first century introduces another surge in global social movement activity. Cyberactivism 2.0 emerges as the use of Web 2.0 technologies to quickly facilitate advocacy and communication for social change within a movement and to globalise local information. • North Africa and the Middle East experience mass mobilisations and protests, known as the "Arab Spring" movement. Participants use social media to mobilise and facilitate protest actions.

to build and interact with online communities. • Due to Web 2.0's technological design, the internet has the newfound capacity for two-way communication between its users and the creation of potential participatory social media. • With numerous types of social media applications, Web 2.0's sites facilitate social interaction in various contexts like news coverage, entertainment, politics, activism, or connection between friends. Users have access to persistent channels of communication to take part in masspersonal communication processes that are democratised and multidirectional. They can post or interact with UGC and build online social and information networks.	• Spain experience mass protest actions from the "Indignados" or the "15M movement" in 58 of the country's cities. Indignados utilise Web 2.0's social media to mobilise assemblies of public protest. • The anti-corporate globalization movement – #Occupy – leads to mobilisation in 80 countries across the world. The mass demonstrations of #Occupy serve as a testament to the possibilities for mass diffusion of protest in the age of social media. • Scholars continue to see peaks in and emergences of online social movements. Recent movements include the #MeToo movement; the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the youth climate change movement.
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2.6 Characteristics of online social movements: the relevance of social media

In section 2.3.1, the characteristics of social media were outlined. Consequently, it was argued that these social media characteristics may have particular relevance to social movements (see section 2.4). To understand the nature of social movements that started to emerge on social media in the twenty-first century, the current section details the characteristics of online social movements. Using the social movement characteristics that were determined earlier as guidance, this section investigates the validity of the notions about the relevance of social media for social movements that were proposed earlier in this chapter (see section 2.4).

2.6.1 Rapid global mobilisation

Social media sites are persistent channels for asynchronous and synchronous communication that allow rapid information dissemination (see section 2.3.1.1). Accordingly, the subsequent text will argue that this characteristic of social media may reduce the cost of resources and time to participate in a social movement and thus gives rise to a few traits of online social movements: (1) members communicate and act without the constraints of place, time, and resources and, therefore, (2) members can mobilise rapidly and globally.

Due to the persistent accessibility of social media channels for communication, members of a social movement can coordinate their actions toward social change without being bound to physical space and time (Earl & Kimport, 2011:11). For more traditional, offline social movements, the cost of participation – i.e., time and money – may limit the extent to which people are willing to participate in movement actions (Earl & Kimport, 2011:29). These movements are usually sustained and powered by a small number of members dedicated to their movement's cause in the long term (Earl *et al.*, 2015:356). Online social movements, however, allow for rapid, global mobilisation with easier short-term commitment (Chen, 2019:1787; see Frazao, 2017:24). Individual actions of online social movement members, which are scattered across the world at different times, have the possibility to form into major global collective action toward change (Earl *et al.*, 2015:355-556; Earl & Kimport, 2011:28; Frazao, 2017:23; Rucht, 2013:263; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:368).

For example, the global reach of online advocacy actions from the #Occupy movement led to mobilisation in 80 countries across the world (see Ancelovici *et al.*, 2016:23; Berberoglu, 2019:10). In the case of the online Guatemalan social justice movement, members used Facebook and X to circulate a petition calling for their president to step down and, in doing so, received over 5000 signatures in less than a week (Harlow, 2011:227). Online, cost-effective collective actions, such as that of the #Occupy and other social justice movements, show the value of movement members' ability to participate in advocacy efforts on their own time and from anywhere (see Earl *et al.*, 2015:355-356).

Other social media features, like X's hashtag and in-the-moment search functions further enhance social movement members' ability to transcend time constraints (Gleason, 2013:967). These two functions combined have served as a fundamental component of online advocacy movements, as they collect all the messages containing a hashtag and enable users to partake in real-time conversations regarding a specific topic (Delli Carpini, 2000:347; Gleason, 2013:968). Movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #Occupy show online social movements' use of X's hashtag feature. The feature enables users to tag their Tweets based on keywords or topics. Users can add the hashtag symbol (#) before a keyword or phrase in their Tweet to categorise the Tweet together with other Tweets with the same hashtag. Therefore, online social movement members can easily search and find information related to a certain topic, like information on #Occupy protest events or new stories that #BlackLivesMatter members publish and receive the information in real-time. When UGC includes a movement's hashtag, users can click on the hashtagged word and access all the other UGC from a movement that contains the hashtag (see Twitter Inc., 2021a). While social media generally enables connection outside users'

physical communities, the hashtag feature allows users to share and access information outside their existing online community. Members can use hashtags to form group conversations within a community that was formed specifically for that discussion (Bosch, 2017a:68).

It is important to note that although social media offers individuals a means to easily participate in online communication for social change at a low cost and need for resources and without constraints of time and place, it is constrained by people's access to technology. Unequal access to technology and the extensive use of social media to disseminate information to the public may widen the digital divide and further disadvantage those who do not have access to social media (Bonfadelli, 2002:66; Harlow & Guo, 2014:471). The act of receiving and disseminating information is particularly important to social movements because increased access to information often translates into social power and improves the probability of bringing about social change (Bonfadelli, 2002:66; Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). Fittingly, Harlow and Guo (2014:473) found that immigrant activists and organisations used social media to reach other activists or the general public. Still, because most immigrants lack access to technology and social media, they communicated with these communities offline. In this instance of a digital divide, social media was used to spread awareness of social issues to the public, but it was not used for mobilisation. As participants in Harlow and Guo's (2014:475) study pointed out: although it is undeniable that the digital divide will constantly challenge the transition to online activism, advocates can and should attempt to use social media in a manner that is regulated by its applicability to certain audiences.

2.6.2 Horizontal and democratised movement organising and communication

Two characteristics of online social movements regarding the decentralised and democratic nature of their organisation and communication will be discussed in the following section. Firstly, online social movements are horizontally and democratically structured and are organised in a more decentralised manner. Secondly, public communication from an online social movement is more democratised due to its emergence outside of the traditional media context.

With its low cost and fewer constraints of space and time (see section 2.6.1), social media has allowed social movements to expand the voices that represent them and the number of people who participate in a process of organising toward mobilisation. The increased ability for people to participate in a movement facilitates a higher degree of personalisation and a decreased need for social movement organisations or unions to help represent a movement's cause and organise its

collective actions (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012:714). The process of movement organising for online social movements does therefore not necessarily require a social movement organisation's involvement to bring about mobilisation, but can do so by engaging in a process of free flow of information and participation in discourse between all social movement members or actors (Earl & Kimport, 2011:28; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). That is not to say that social movement organisations cannot be part of an online social movement. Social movements can comprise numerous actors, like individual activists, groups, or social movement organisations that organise themselves toward social change (Cammaerts, 2021:4). Online social movements just do not necessarily require a social movement organisation to establish itself or to lead the mobilisation of large amounts of people toward social change (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012:714). Rather, online social movements may have emergent communicators that help to informally facilitate collective action, such as Facebook group moderators or online petition creationists (Cammaerts, 2021:12). The ability of online social movements to organise without the involvement of a social movement organisation therefore also leads to less decentralised and less organisational structures within online social movements (Cammaerts, 2021:11).

Individuals on social media can easily join the movement and its collective actions toward change through self-mediation and the UGC that they share in the sites' masspersonal communication spaces. For example, members of the #Occupy movement used Facebook and X to organise locations and share information about their protest events (Al Hasan *et al.*, 2019:84). The Arab Spring activists used Facebook Pages to mobilise people to attend protest events. The Facebook Pages feature allows members even to reach individuals who are not Facebook users, as you do not need a Facebook profile to view the content on a Facebook Page (Harlow, 2011:226). Online social movements can use social media as a low-cost resource (see sections 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.1.3) to engage in organisational processes and can sustain mobilisation through democratic participation from a vast number of users, rather than relying on the dedication of a small group of individuals from, say, a social movement organisation to facilitate and organise mobilisation processes. Like online social movement members' ability to communicate amongst themselves and with the public without relying on authoritarian figures or a social movement organisation, they also do not have to rely on traditional media reporters to gain access to mass audiences.

Earlier in this chapter, it was stated that social media facilitates communication that is masspersonal in nature (see section 2.3.1.2). It was also mentioned that before the emergence of social media, traditional media would have been the primary means of communicating with mass audiences. Even then, traditional media allowed only a small group of individuals to participate in message creation (see section 2.3.1.2). The way social media has democratised

and diversified the public communication model plays an integral part in the nature of communication coming from online social movements.

Although traditional mass media may disseminate content and information outlining actions taken regarding a social issue, social media enables the public to receive and observe content directly and individually from the activists who carried out those actions, and then decide whether they want to participate in the movement or protest actions (Earl & Kimport, 2011: 25; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). Online social movement members can use social media as an alternative media to either fulfil their needs for coverage or to correct reports made by mass media that the movement deems as distortive (Downum & Coyer, 2007:3-4; Downing, 2010:490; Rohlinger & Corrigan-Brown, 2019:135).

The opportunity for masspersonal communication is especially valuable in countries with restraints on freedom of speech and a censored press within traditional media. It can be valuable for citizens on social media to have the ability to base their views on an issue on more than just the information that their government approves (see Wyrwoll, 2014:29). This value was shown in the use of social media within the Arab Spring social movement on X and Facebook. The movement's members were able to share a significant amount of "uncensored and accurate information" about events unfolding in their autocratic countries (Al-Hasan *et al.*, 2019:84). The examples above show how members of online social movements can participate in masspersonal communication – that is, communicating with each other and with the public through UGC – to organise their movements horizontally and to disseminate information to mass audiences. One may argue that members also experience a sense of empowerment when they freely express their beliefs to mass audiences.

2.6.3 Free expression and a sense of empowerment

Online social movement members utilise social media for acts of self-mediation (Cammaerts *et al.*, 2013:3). As will be showcased in section 3.2.1.4 on social media, these sites offer numerous means for users to participate in communication – primarily through uploading or creating UGC. Through social media, online social movement members acquire platforms for free expression and, consequently, a sense of empowerment. UGC tools equip online social movement members with the means to give voice to their beliefs, show the public their interpretation of dominant ideologies and plan ways to apply pressure to their opponents. The possibilities for disseminating UGC to the public and the value thereof is shown in Jared Cochen's quote from an activist of the Egyptian revolution in 2011: "Facebook used to set the date, Twitter [X] used to share logistics, YouTube to show the world, all to connect people" (as cited by Gerbaudo, 2012:3).

Those with access to technology and social media applications are empowered with a wide range of opportunities to participate in communication for social change. Individuals can read, watch, create, tag, share, or react to content, follow hashtags on X or take part in discussion forums in groups or fan pages on Facebook (Bosch, 2017b:225; Al Hasan *et al.*, 2019:84; Harlow, 2011:226). Social change is only possible when disadvantaged or marginalised groups protest existing social order or power structures (Smith & Wiest, 2012:11). Those who uphold unjust power structures are more easily exposed by the pressuring acts of social movements in times of social crisis (Smith & Wiest, 2012:ii). For example, members of the online social movements, #BlackLivesMatter and #TakeAKnee, used Facebook and X to amplify their marginalised voices (Cosby, 2018:iv). Cosby (2018:iv) argues that the sites they used promoted the members' ability for free expression and enabled them to share their purpose and plans for mobilisation. Once again (see section 2.6.1), it is important to note here that marginalised groups who do not have access to social media may be marginalised even further when they are not able to participate in online mobilisations against powerholders.

In other cases of online social movements, X activism within the #RhodesMustFall movement and the #ZumaMustFall movement showed that social media promotes participation in actions towards social change as it provides a sense of personal empowerment among the users (Frazao, 2017:9; Bosch, 2017b:225). Sites like X facilitate the exchange of UGC and especially facilitate the exchange of UGC that can support social change (Gleason, 2013:968). Social media's facilitation of UGC creation can nurture participation in online social movements and bring about the communicative empowerment of its users (De Villiers, 2016:12). Bosch (2017b:222) mentions that online social movement members can post UGC to set "the agenda for public debate" (Bosch, 2017b:222). The facilitation of online public debate brings to light another characteristic of online social movements that departs from the interaction – that is, public debate and reaction – garnered through UGC on social media: using social media, online social movements members construct activist networks and a collective identity.

2.6.4 The construction of an activist network and collective identity

As mentioned in sections 2.3.1.4 and 2.3.1.4.5, social media facilitates interactions between users, and the interactions generated by the UGC on these sites often lead to online social and information networks. In online social movements, the interactivity of social media sites may allow individuals from diverse audiences to form a network of activists who share a collective identity around a social issue.

The ease of participation in social media interactions and discussions and the speedy and effective nature of exchanging information within online social movements allow members to feel more empowered to express their viewpoints on a social issue. Interactive social media features increase users' ability to engage with each other and the public based on shared or opposing identities (Frazao, 2017:26). Harlow (2011:239) argues that interactive features, like Facebook's "like" or "comment" functions, allow online social movement members to strengthen ties with one another and create a shared identity within their online community. Kavada (2015:886) found that these Facebook features allowed key activist members of the #Occupy movement to measure and reflect on their movement identity's relatability and expand its appeal to the public. One may also argue that the X hashtag feature mentioned earlier (see 2.6.1) may also serve as a means for online social movement members to construct social and information networks based on their interaction with UGC categorised according to a movement's identity. For example, members can construct an activist network around the belief that #BlackLivesMatter and access that network through the hashtag. Therefore, social movement members can construct, sustain, and expand their activist networks through the UGC that express their collective identity.

Earlier in this chapter (see section 2.2.1.1), it was argued that collective identity and a sense of belonging among members within a social movement might strengthen the impact of their advocacy and continue to exist even after demonstrations or acts of public protests, consequently prolonging the movement's span and scope (Diani, 1992:9 & 2000:399; Harrebye, 2016:48). With continuous online participation and interaction based on their collective identity, online social movement members can sustain their movement and carry on with advocacy (see Leong, *et al.*, 2020:4). After its first successful campaign to remove the statue of a British colonialist, the South African student-led #RhodesMustFall movement was sustained and continued to stand against institutionalised racism in general (Bosch, 2017b:222). The movement played an integral role in the student-led #FeesMustFall movement and its protests the increase of South African university tuition fees, sustaining their advocacy and expanding it to address new issues (Bosch, 2017b:222). In another case, one of the Facebook Groups within the Guatemalan social justice movement, which centred around one man's death, sustained their movement after their physical demonstrations by expanding their advocacy to act against violence and injustice in general (see Harlow, 2011:227). As pointed out in section 2.2.1.3, collective identity will become a useful concept for analysing how online social movement members engage in communication that empowers online social movement members in the long run (see section 4.3.4). At this stage of the argument, however, one should note that not all scholars are convinced of the value and validity of online activist actions.

Collective action within a movement stems from members' eagerness and dedication to participate in actions that require all members to contribute to its success (Diani, 2000:391). Physical (offline) participation in movement actions is traditionally regarded as one of the requirements for collective action (Earl & Kimport, 2011:125). There have been doubts about whether online interactions can generate the kind of commitment that brings about physical participation in mobilisation efforts from a movement's members (Diani, 2000:391). The ease of online participation and the emotional and cognitive release it brings to movement participants has led to the concern that individuals only use social media to express their feelings and opinions, rather than channelling their emotions into actions that form part of a collective. This is referred to as *slacktivism* or *clicktivism* (Harlow & Guo, 2014:466; Leong *et al.*, 2020:4, 9).

Consequently, Earl and Kimport (2011:126) propose a redefinition of collective action - one that does not rely on participants' physical presence or togetherness to participate in a movement's collective action. Notably, they do not claim online collective action should replace or alter offline collective action. Online advocacy actions should rather be regarded as a way for members of a movement to participate in the creation of a collective identity and collective action without having to be constrained by barriers of the physical (see Earl & Kimport, 2011:125). Harlow (2011:230) found that the construction of a collective identity online often leads to the offline mobilisation of a movement's protest actions. Similarly, Diani (2000:391) notes that online interactions on social media may increase and support face-to-face physical interactions. Some of the most successful online social movements consist of members willing to participate in both physical and online interactions, with the added willingness of members to disclose their personal identity to fellow online participants (Diani, 2000:391). The importance of personal identity disclosure online may be because mobilisation, collective action, and collective identity are often based on trust and committed relationships between a movement's members (Diani, 2000:931). Therefore, members of an online social movement may sustain participation in both online and offline collective action if they utilise the unique features of social media, like the ability to create a personal profile and share information about their beliefs and values publicly, to build connections and finally a collective identity within their activist network (see section 2.3.2).

Following the investigation of the characteristics of online social movements, the relevance of social media's features to the context of social movements is clear. However, findings in all the sections above generate a certain theoretical intrigue, which will be discussed in this chapter's next and final section.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to investigate the emergence of online social movements. It was argued that two concepts should be explored before investigating the emergence of said phenomena. Section 2.2 defined the concept of social movements. The subsequent main ideas came to light.

- Members of a social movement form a collective identity based on their shared belief in a cause, purpose, and definition of a social issue. They give voice to their collective identity by taking collective action.
- These collective actions are often institutionalised and challenge certain opponents that the movements' members have deemed responsible for normalising practices that cause or relate to the issue they aim to solve. Because the collective actions of social movements are usually non-institutionalised and often target societal systems or institutions, social movements consist of informal networks outside formal political and social organisations.

The second concept defined in this chapter (see section 2.3) is that of social media. The following characteristics of social media were determined (see sections 2.3.1.1 - 2.3.1.1):

- Social media allows for persistent, asynchronous and synchronous communication, which enhances users' ability to interact with UGC no matter the time or their location, therefore speeding up the process of public information dissemination.
- Communication on social media is masspersonal in nature, transforming the one-way mass communication model of traditional media into one that is multidirectional and allows everyone with access to the web to participate.
- Features of social media facilitates interactivity and engagement, even if just the sense of interactive engagement between users.
- Social media sites are sustained by the UGC that users share and interact with and users often base the value of a social media site on either the UGC they receive or the interactions generated by the UGC.
- Social media enables the creation of online social and information networks as users are able to witness and participate in interactions online.

Based on an investigation of the concept of a social movement and the characteristics of social media, it was argued that the characteristics of social media have relevance to the social

movement context (see section 2.4). Notions such as rapid, global mobilisation social movement mobilisation, online information sharing and collective identity formation; increased opportunity for horizontal and democratised movement organising and communication; and the construction of information and support networks were presented. A historical account of the emergence of social movements on social media was offered to investigate the validity of such notions and to get a contextual understanding of online social movements (see section 2.5). It was noted that scholars continue to see peaks in and emergences of online social movements that practice Cyberactivism 2.0 (see section 2.3.5).

Following a historical account of the emergence of social movements, the last section of this chapter offered an overview of some of the characteristics of online social movements and how they relate to the characteristics of social media (see section 2.6). The following arguments were made:

- Communication and protest actions within online social movements are without the constraints of place, time, resources, or costs and allow for rapid, global mobilisation (see section 2.6.1).
- Social movements can be organised horizontally without the need for leadership or permission from an authoritarian figure or a social movement organisation to participate in movement organising (see section 2.6.2). Social movement members can communicate to mass audiences beyond the gatekeepers of traditional media and use social media to fulfil their mass-communication needs (see section 2.6.2).
- Social movement members acquire platforms for free expression and a sense of communicative empowerment through sharing UGC online (see section 2.6.3).
- Online social movement members comprise of diverse audiences to form a network of activists who share a collective identity around a social issue, enabling them to expand their advocacy efforts to offline spaces and maintain the movement in the long run (see section 2.6.4).

Two main arguments can be made based on the notions above. Firstly, on account of the relevance of social media's characteristics in exploring online social movements, social media played an integral role in the initial and continued emergence and existence of online social movements. The emergence of social media allowed for the evolution of traditional social movements to more contemporary online social movements. Based on the relationship between

characteristics of social media and social movements, it is almost inevitable that the characteristics and features of social media, specifically that of information sharing, interaction and social networking would serve as an avenue for people to engage in social movements.

The second and perhaps most crucial argument from this chapter is that characteristics of social media play an integral part in the literature's account of the characteristics of social movements and the way online social movement members communicate and organise. The next chapter of this study will explore the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories and how they are used to explain the unique characteristics of online social movements.

CHAPTER 3 CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY: EMERGENCE AND APPLICATION IN AN ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENT CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter (see section 2.2), a social movement was defined as the process whereby a group of people that share a collective identity around a cause, purpose, and definition of a social issue participate in noninstitutionalised collective actions within informal networks of organisation to challenge certain opponents, societal systems or institutions and bring about social change or development in a society.

Section 2.5 also offered a historical overview of the emergence of online social movements. It used movements of the 1960s as a point of conceptual departure since movements at the time gave way to a wave of revolutionary protests, invigorated social movement studies, and led to the start of a paradigm shift within the field (Almeida, 2019:48; Jenkins, 1983:528; Peoples, 2019:17). Due to the paradigm shift in social movement theorisation at the time, literature reviews typically divide social movement theories into that of either *classical* or *contemporary* approaches to social movement studies (Atkinson, 2017:12; Buechler, 2011:59; Manski, 2019:38; Oliver *et al.*, 2003:2; Peoples, 2019:17, 23-30).

In their account of classical social movement theorisation, several scholars mainly refer to the collective behaviour perspective, as it existed as the dominant approach within the field before the paradigm shift occurred (Atkinson, 2017:12; Buechler, 2011:59; Peoples, 2019:17). In the contemporary social movement context, scholars mainly refer to the resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective, new social movements theory, and framing theory (Manski, 2019:38; Oliver *et al.*, 2003:2; Peoples, 2019:23-30). The previous chapter's arguments raise the question of the theoretical implications for social movement literature when social movements occur online. In other words, how social movement theorists understand specifically online social movements is called into question. Still, given the contemporary context of online social movements, scholars who investigate the phenomenon often use assumptions from contemporary social movement theories in their studies (Charrad *et al.*, 2021:15; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1208; Ozgul, 2020:14; Zhou & Qiu, 2020:353).

Accordingly, this chapter sets out to answer the research question: *What are the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories and how can they be applied to the context of online*

social movements? (see section 1.5.2.2). To understand the theoretical context in which contemporary social movement theories emerged, the ensuing section will first explore the development of assumptions from classical social movement theory – specifically that of the collective behaviour perspective. After that, in section 3.3, follows an investigation of the assumptions of the contemporary social movement theories identified above. To showcase the relevance of these contemporary theories to an online social movement context, examples of their application in current literature will be offered throughout the exploration of their assumptions.

3.2 Classical models of social movement theory: a collective behaviour perspective

Throughout history, the classical social movement approach has taken on various theoretical variations in scholars' investigation of social movements – such as mass society theory, collective behaviour theory and relative deprivation or strain theory (Almeida, 2019:46, Gurney & Kathleen, 1982:33; McAdam, 1982:6). The collective behaviour perspective existed as the dominant approach of social movement studies from the 1920s until the 1970s (Buechler, 2011:59; Morris & Herring 1987:11). Theorists within this perspective regarded a social movement as a sociological phenomenon and a form of collective behaviour among other forms, such as mobs, hysteria or panics, riots, cults, and religious revivals (Blumer, 1951:170; Buechler, 2019:47; Crossley, 2002:11; Morris & Herring, 1987:6, 12; Smelser, 1962:7). This perspective posited that typical day-to-day human behaviour within a given society is based on existing social structures, understandings, rules and cultures, while collective behaviour is not (Almeida, 2019:47; Diani, 1992:4). Petitioning, voting, and approaching authorities to act on behalf of a community to solve problems were regarded as actions taken by 'rational' citizens (Almeida, 2019:47). Contrarily, actions taken outside of the structures contingent on a society's political institutions, like marches, were regarded as 'illegitimate' and, by implication, 'irrational' (Almeida, 2019:47).

Regarding social movements as a type of crowd behaviour, this classical approach to social movement analysis attempts to explain an individual's participation in collective behaviour (Almeida, 2019:46; McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:468; Peoples, 2019:22). It regards such behaviour as relatively rare, short-lived, and decidedly contrasting to institutionalised behaviour in society (Jenkins, 1983:518; Snow *et al.*, 2019:6). It argues that collective behaviour arises when a society's structures, institutions, and organisations do not enable members of that society to adequately deal with social integration, lack of social control, or structural strains (Buechler, 2019:49; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:7; Morris & Herring 1987:12; Smelser, 1962:6; 48; Turner & Killian 1972:30). Since the collective behaviour perspective attempts to understand why people

take part in collective behaviour, theorists with this perspective essentially set out to understand why people behave 'irrationally'.

Early theorists from the Chicago School of Collective Behaviour theory saw the 'irrational' nature of collective behaviour as a product of psychological distress caused by some strain or breakdown within a societal structure (Buechler, 2011:61; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:7; Peoples, 2019:22). They argued that, when people in a society act without the guidance of these structures, they participate in spontaneous, emotionally driven, non-rational communication processes, and collective behaviour to take collective action and reconstruct some sense of meaning (Buechler, 2011:61; Blumer, 1951:171; Morris & Herring, 1987:13). In essence, people engage in collective behaviour when the society they live in does not offer a defined structure or norm to guide their actions toward seeking societal change. From a collective behaviour perspective, without a predetermined structure or channel for seeking social change, people are not able to behave or function in a way that would be regarded as the norm within their society.

However, later scholars from the so-called 'second' Chicago School of Collective Behaviour theory described collective behaviour as innovative, and possibly beneficial to social life (Buechler, 2019:49; Rule, 1988:97; Morris & Herring, 1987:13). For example, Turner and Killian (1972:22) argued that collective behaviour arises when people attempt to come to a new understanding or norm for how they should behave when societal structures break down. Consequently, when members of a social movement participate in collective behaviour that is guided by an emergent norm, society gains a sense that the norm should be integrated into its structure or replace some other established norm that is causing a break or strain (Turner & Killian 1972:259). In other words, the emergence of a social movement marks the creation and application of new norms that guide participants' actions and provide a way of thought and practice that differs from existing societal norms. Despite Turner and Killian's view, scholars' (see Almeida, 2019:47; Atkinson, 2017:13; Buechler, 2019:49; Morris & Herring, 1987:22; Peoples, 2019:22) account of collective behaviour as 'irrational', 'disruptive', and 'non-functional' within a functional societal structure gained prevalence in the field of social movement studies. Consequently, the perspective began to receive critique from other scholars in the field.

Structural collective behaviour theorists show influences from a functionalist perspective (Buechler, 2019:48; Crossley, 2002:12; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:7; McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:469). The functionalist perspective valued existing structures and maintenance of the status quo of society above what was seen as so-called 'dysfunctional crowd behaviour', that is to say, social movements (McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:468; Peoples, 2019:22). Hence, the notion that social movement participation is viewed as 'irrational' behaviour that disrupts a society's existing

structures (Crossley, 2002:11; McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:70). One of the main critiques of the structural approach is that it assumes society is designed and structured to be functional for most of its members, that it has political structures in place for people to voice their grievances, and that those who engage in collective behaviour are simply not yet fully integrated into the societal structure (Almeida, 2019:47, Della Porta & Diani, 2006:8). This perspective leaves little room for scholars to recognise and understand the existence of actual political and social marginalisation of those that participate in social movements (Almeida, 2019:47). Accordingly, the collective behaviour perspective also received critique for its perception of collective action as 'deviant' rather than political (Almeida, 2019:47; Buechler, 2019:71; McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:470).

By the 1960s, it became increasingly difficult for scholars to ignore inequality within society, and social movements of the time made it clear that societal structures were not functioning in a way that benefits all members of a society (Almeida, 2019:47; McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:470; Peoples, 2019:22). During this time, a paradigm shift occurred within sociology and approaches to social movement theorisation, as scholars observed social movements in America and Europe (as mentioned in section 2.5.1), like the civil rights struggle, anti-war and anti-racism protests, feminist movements, and the gay rights movement (Almeida, 2019:47; Crossley, 2002:12; Della Porta & Diani, 2002:1; Jenkins, 1983:528). This resulted in a replacement of the functionalist perspective with a resurging conflict paradigm that allowed scholars to acknowledge the inequalities and social conflict of the time (Crossley, 2002:12; Peoples, 2019:22; Buechler, 2019:71).

While classified as a classical theory of social movement studies, the relative deprivation theory played an important role in the paradigm shift toward recognising inequalities in society as a necessary component of collective behaviour. This theory argues that people need to recognise inequalities in a society in order to mobilise and take collective action (Buechler, 2011:92; Peoples, 2019:22). It was argued that, if people felt deprived relative to objective expectations they have of society, they will take part in collective behaviour (Buechler, 2011:92; Klandermans, 2015:220; Morris & Herring, 1987:25). Although the presence of social inequality as a prerequisite to collective behaviour is obviously integral to social movement mobilisation, this assumption received critique in the wake of movements like that of the civil rights struggle in America, as members were clearly aware of inequality in society long before the 1960s (Buechler, 2011:105; Peoples, 2019:22). Consequently, it was argued that while recognition of inequality or injustice is a necessity for social mobilisation, it *alone* may not be sufficient for bringing about mobilisation and collective action (Buechler, 2011:94; Peoples, 2019:22). Activists do not only mobilise based on the existence of inequality or struggle, since there are constant strains within any given society (Crossley, 2002:12). Rather, as it would later be argued, social movements are part of a given

society's political processes and are formed based on pre-existing networks that enable mobilisation, like that of black churches during the civil rights movement or activists that worked together on other campaigns before the Arab Spring movement (Crossley, 2002:12; McAdam & Tarrow, 2021:470; Ozgul, 2020:68; Staggenborg, 2016:19). These critiques that emerged during the sixties (see section 2.5.1) gave way to the emergence of contemporary social movement theories – specifically that of the resource mobilisation and political process perspectives.

3.3 Contemporary models of social movement theory: emergence and key assumptions

The increased recognition of inequality within societies enabled scholars to theorise social movement phenomena as legitimate and rational occurrences of political action (Buechler, 2011:111, 126; Peoples, 2019:23; Staggenborg, 2016:19; Morris & Herring, 1987:28). While classical social movement models refer to participation in social movements as collective behaviour, the term collective action is more commonly used in contemporary social movement literature. It allows scholars to analyse legitimate and rational actions taken by social movements separately from other forms of collective behaviour, like mobs or riots (Buechler, 2011:111; Morris & Herring, 1987:28). In a contemporary social movement context, collective action derives its legitimacy and rationality from its coordinated and planned nature (Snow *et al.*, 2019:6) (see 2.2.1.1 for types of collective action). Collective actions within social movements are guided by specific goals, strategies, and grievances, and are a result of social movement members' legitimate reasons to pursue social change or development and to pressure institutions to address the political marginalisation of groups (Almeida, 2019:48; Buechler, 2011:111; Morris & Herring, 1987:28; Snow *et al.*, 2019:5-6).

Following this newfound perspective on the nature of collective action within social movements, a few contemporary social movement approaches arose as alternative perspectives to that of the classical functionalist approach. Firstly, the resource mobilisation theory argues that people are motivated to take part in social movements based on the benefit and cost of their participation, consequently pointing out how movements organise to mobilise resources for collective action and how groups that are limited in resources are less able to take part in collective action (Buechler, 2011:111; Morris & Herring, 1987:33; Ozgul, 2020:73). Second, the political process perspective argues that members of a social movement should have political opportunity to take collective action or bring about change (Buechler, 2011:139; Kriesi, 2019:70). Thirdly, the new social movements theory introduces the notion of collective identity as an integral part of movement emergence, organisation, and influence (Almeida, 2019:59; Buechler, 2011:15;

Melucci, 1995:43; Williams, 2019:92). Lastly, framing theory introduces a way for social movement scholars to make sense of how social movement members articulate their grievances and interact with society through movement messages (Abdul Reda *et al.*, 2021:6; Almeida, 2019:81; Benford & Snow, 2000:613). What follows is an exploration of the emergence of these four contemporary approaches to social movement theory and their key assumptions of the phenomena.

3.3.1 Resource mobilisation theory

Not much different from the collective behaviour perspective, two prominent theorists of the resource mobilisation theory, McCarthy and Zald (1977:1217-18), regard social movements as the shared belief or opinion that changes should happen in a society's social structure and/or its reward distribution. Resource mobilisation theory approaches social movement participants as rational actors who work together to bring about social change. Rather than focusing on *why* individuals participate in collective behaviour – i.e., due to societal strains, as the classical perspective suggested – this theory places greater emphasis on the *organisational* elements at play within social movements (Diani, 1992:4; Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016:333). Accordingly, the resource mobilisation theory focuses on *how* people participate in organising social movements, i.e., how they come to the point of taking collective action (Chesters, 2015:351, Della Porta & Diani; 2002:15). Two main assumptions of the resource mobilisation theory will be discussed in the following sections: the importance of resources for bringing about collective mobilisation and the role of organising within a social movement. These two assumptions are particularly relevant to the context of the current study, since, as it will be argued in the discussion that follows, communication plays an integral role in social movement member's actions relating to social movement resources and organising.

According to the resource mobilisation theory, people rationalise their participation or non-participation in a social movement by weighing the cost and reward of collective action and the availability of resources to mobilise against elites that hold power in society (Buechler, 2011:111; Chesters, 2015:35; McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1221). Emerging from this notion is a considerably prominent assumption of resource mobilisation theory: the critical role of resources in bringing about successful collective action and the notion of mobilising these social movement resources (Bertuzzi, 2020:284; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1208; Ozgul, 2020:14, 68). Social movement resources include finances and material resources like office space and supplies; human capital or labour; information, knowledge and the ability for strategic thinking in social movement leaders and teams; relationship or social networks and alliances with other social movements and professionals like lawyers and scientists; and sympathetic support, solidarity, time, and dedication

from the public and public figures (Almeida, 2019: 49; Edwards & McCarthy, 2019:125-128; Yang & Yu, 2019:131).

However, garnering such resources requires some process of organising among movement members and allies. Unlike classical models of social movement theory, the resource mobilisation theory recognises the importance of movement organising before collective action, by arguing that social movements participate in processes of organisation or mobilisation to gain resources for collective action (Almeida, 2019:48; Jenkins, 1983:533; Ozgul, 2020:73). Considering the context of this current study, the ensuing sections present an exploration of online social movement members' use of social media for mobilising and garnering social movement resources and their use of social media itself as a resource for participating in movement mobilisation, as more recent literature also refers to social media as a social movement resource.

3.3.1.1 Using social media to gain resources

Acknowledging the role of resources within social movements, studies of online social movements have shown that online social movement members use social media to gain access to resources needed for mobilisation (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1213; Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8; Romary, 2017:7). For example, during the Arab Spring movement in which activists aimed to challenge authoritarian regimes and police brutality in Middle Eastern countries, Egyptian police officer-turned-activist, Omar Afifi, used social media like YouTube, Facebook, and X to share his knowledge with other activists to avoid police attacks (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1213). This was after the book he published on the topic was banned and he was forced to seek asylum in the United States (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1213). Using social media, Afifi could share videos and posts on how to avoid police brutality and later techniques on how to facilitate an Egyptian revolution, including details of meeting places and dates for protests (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1213). In Afifi's case, social media's ability to transcend space, time, and censorship from authoritarian regimes (as noted in section 2.3.2.1), allowed him to take part in mobilising resources that could facilitate collective action in the Arab Spring movement.

In another instance, members of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement, who used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media in their fight against police brutality in America, used social media to call for donations towards their cause and connect with allies who could offer resources that could support their initiatives or be helpful during their events (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). They received recourse like grants, venues, and ride sharing through communication on social media (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). Furthermore, by using social media as a space to publicly share and demonstrate the success of their activist initiatives and their movement's goals, BLM

activists could make public requests for certain resources, without having to “pitch your idea at the office” (BLM coordinator, as quoted by Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). The mass personal nature of social media (see section 2.3.2.2) allowed activists to garner resources like finances and material resources, sympathetic support, solidarity. However, as mentioned in section 3.1, garnering social movement resources, and mobilising these resources toward collective action, requires some process of organising.

3.3.1.2 Using social media to organise and mobilise resources

Theorists of resource mobilisation theory note the importance of movement organising before collective action (McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1217; Ozgul, 2020:68). The theory also posits the role of social movement organisations in resource mobilisation and collective action. A social movement organisation, as referred to in the previous chapter, is a formal organisation that identifies certain goals based on the beliefs or values that social change should occur, and attempts to implement these goals (Bimber *et al.*, 2012:2; McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1218; Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016:333). Despite resource mobilisation theory’s arguments for the importance of organisations in processes of social movement mobilisations, studies have also argued that social movements exist outside of institutional or organisational structures (see section 2.2.1.3). Accordingly, emphasis on the non-organisational and unstructured nature of social movements has gained prevalence in contemporary social movement writings (see section 2.6.2). This is especially true in the context of online social movements, since they are able to organise without the involvement of social movement organisations (see section 2.6.2). Scholars have noted that current literature tends to neglect the roles of formal organisations like social movement organisations in the social movement context, and there are those who contend with the notion of leaderless social movements, arguing for the use of assumptions from resource mobilisation theory’s organisational perspective to analyse contemporary online social movements (Bimber *et al.*, 2012:2; Den Hond *et al.*, 2015:292; Ozgul, 2020:11; Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016:348; Soule, 2013:108).

Resource mobilisation theory’s consideration of a movement’s organising before collective action played a crucial role in the field’s redefinition of collective action as rational. Consequently, it still seems appropriate and necessary to examine the assumptions of resource mobilisation theory that relate to the organising aspects of social movements. Not only because scholars have been able to apply the theory’s assumptions to online social movements, as illustrated in the above accounts of activists’ use of social media to gain social movement resources, but also because resource mobilisation theory allows one to understand how social movement members organise and mobilise themselves and their resources to take collective action. There are studies that

explore arguments for or against the involvement of social movement organisations in contemporary social movements and how social movement organisations can adapt to social movement members' use of social media (see Bennet & Segerberg, 2012; Earl *et al.*, 2015, Gerbaudo, 2012; Den Hond *et al.*, 2015; and Selander & Jervanpaa, 2016, for such explorations). However, as this specific inquiry will widen the scope of this study, the following discussion will only focus on the concept of organising and how social movement participants, whether it be individuals or social movement organisations, organise resources to mobilise and bring about collective action (Gerbaudo, 2015:75; Den Hond *et al.*, 2015:292).

It is also important to note that given the context of this study, the organising examples that follow all relate to online social movements, meaning they occur on social media. Furthermore, the discussion will be guided by a resource mobilisation theory perspective. Accordingly, the organising actions detailed below relate to the mobilisation of *resources* that enable collective action. Those who use social media to participate in the process of organising within online social movements may do so in a few ways.

Firstly, participants can use social media to build ties with fellow activists, consequently creating an activist network – a social movement resource – that can organise around bringing change to social issues. For example, members of the BLM movement noted that social media allowed them to get in touch with those who share the same grievances about the issue (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:7). Activists shared that they could build internal networks wherein they share problems and solutions to problems without interacting physically (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:7). Given that the BLM movement occurred nationwide, leaders from different cities were able to use social media to share success stories about events they hosted, prompting new initiatives and expansion of existing programmes among coordinators or administrators (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:7). They could therefore also mobilise their social movement knowledge - as a resource - amongst themselves to bring about collective action.

Scholars have also argued for the integral role of pre-existing connections that non-political organisations or groups bring to contexts where individuals do not have connections with one another (Almeida, 2019:48). Those who already have connections and a sense of solidarity with one another based on their organisational ties may be the first to mobilise towards collective action, since collective action often requires a sense of trust and solidarity among movement participants (Almeida, 2019:48). For example, Egyptian activists of the Arab Spring movement got in touch with the Ultras, football club supporters, calling on them to join in on their protests (Gunning & Baron, 2013:177-178). As sports fans, the Ultras joined the Arab Spring protests to offer physical support and safeguard protesters from the police (Jerzak, 2013:240; Naboulsi,

2016:34). An anonymous video posted on YouTube assured protestors that the Ultras would be there to protect them, and the football fans went on to show considerable force against Egyptian police in the Arab Spring protests (Jerzak, 2013:247-248). Thus, the Arab Spring movement mobilised the pre-existing connections between the Ultras group as a resource for protest mobilisations.

Secondly, social movement participants can use social media to organise events by disseminating information regarding an issue the movement is trying to address, garnering interest from other individuals in the issue, and sharing the ways in which a movement is attempting to address the issue. For example, members of the BLM movement used Facebook to share details of their social movement events with one another (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:7). One BLM coordinator noted the speed at which they could inform fellow activists of events they were hosting, saying “we are firm believers in the organising capability of social media to make people come together. You can get 10,000 people together in hours” (as quoted by Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). This speaks to the social media characteristic pointed out in Chapter 2 that information can be shared quickly and easily without the constraints of space and time (see section 2.3.2.1) and the consequent rapid nature of online social movement mobilisations (see section 2.6.1). BLM members used Facebook to create event pages for protest events, where they and the public could see the number of people planning to attend. They also used Instagram and X to share posts with their followers about how, where, and when to attend events (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). The activists were thus able to use social media to organise resources such as solidarity, time, and dedication from protestors (i.e., their willingness to attend BLM events). In another instance, in 2011, when anti-austerity activists in Greece heard the news that Spanish anti-austerity activists were using the phrase ‘Shhh... the Greeks are sleeping’ to bring attention to the austerity and debt crisis that Greece is facing, they turned to social media to organise their own protests (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012:746). On Facebook, Greek activists agreed to all set their alarms for the same time, wake up, and protest, proclaiming ‘We’ve awakened! What time is it? Time for them to leave!’ (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012:746). Using social media, these protestors could organise themselves toward taking collective action.

It is important to note that scholars of resource mobilisation theory posit the fundamental role of social movement organisations in assembling and employing the resources necessary to reach social movement goals – resources that would likely remain isolated were they not garnered by social movement organisations (Atkinson, 2017:22; Edwards & McCarthy, 2019:118; Jenkins, 1983:533). Edwards and McCarthy (2019:117) highlight the recognition of unequal resource distribution among groups that may need them to mobilise, pointing to the role of the state,

nongovernmental organisations, and individuals in redirecting resources to social movements to alter patterns of resource distribution to better serve underprivileged groups (Edwards & McCarthy, 2019:117). Mobilisation of resources between social movement organisations or social movement participants allows social movement actors to alert society that a shift is occurring, and to bring visibility to a movement's cause (Atkinson, 2017:22). A third way that social movement participants use social media to organise and mobilise resources emerges – using social media to build coalitions.

As an example, members of the Arab Spring movement partnered with an organisation called Code Pink to learn how to use a swarming flash mob tactic for protesting (Gunning & Baron 2013:169). They took note of Code Pink's recommendations, studied movies like *Battle in Seattle* and created courses on how to stay safe and protected during protests, which they later shared on YouTube (Maher, as quoted by Gunning & Baron 2013:169). In this case, the movement gained knowledge from other actors on how to protest safely and efficiently, compiled it into resources, and distributed it on social media for other members to access and learn from. In another case, BLM activists used social media to organise groups with the same goals under the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, enabling them to find each other by searching the term online and sharing resources with one another (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). For example, one group shared that they were contacted by an activist from out of state, looking for BLM groups to connect with and ask for help in her area (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). She chose to message the group on Facebook, based on their association with the BLM movement, and was then directed to a BLM group close to her who could offer help (Mundt *et al.*, 2018:8). Through social media, activists of the BLM movement were able to form coalitions between different groups from different areas in the country, ensuring that resources were available to activists despite their location.

The concepts of social movement resources and social movement organising are applicable to the context of online social movements. It accounts for how social movements organise and how certain resources, specifically social media, are employed to bring about collective action. For online social movements, social media exists as a means to collect and distribute other resources such as activists' knowledge, coordinators' problem-solving tactics, financial and material resources, and public support and solidarity. Social media is also a resource for social movement participants to organise and therefore mobilise their movement's resources. They may do so by interacting with other movement coordinators and activists through an online activist network, sharing details of their events, and information on the movement with fellow members, allies, and the public, as well as build coalitions with other groups that share the same belief surrounding an issue. This then enables them to cross-mobilise resources to movement members. However,

resources are not the only factor at play during the emergence of a social movement (Williams, 2019:93). As part of the paradigm shift towards contemporary social movement theory, scholars also began to argue for the importance of political opportunities to take collective action.

3.3.2 Political process perspective

Scholars of the political process perspective regard social movements as the collective action within a society that forms part of its political processes (Almeida, 2019:13; Della Porta & Diani, 2002:16; Morris & Herring, 1987:9). This perspective disengages with the classical notion that social movements are anti-institutional or dysfunctional and proposes a consideration of social movements as indicators of a society's political conditions. The political process perspective argues that social movements are more likely to emerge and succeed in bringing about social change if the political climate poses such opportunity (Abdul Reda *et al.*, 2021:6; Almeida, 2019:13; Peoples, 2019:26). This perspective places an emphasis “on the overall dynamics which determine social unrest and its characteristics, rather than on social movements as specific organised actors” (Diani, 1998:5). It does not focus on the organisational nature of a social movement, as resource mobilisation theory does. Rather, it sets out to understand conditions that lead to the emergence of a social movement. Political process perspective assumptions are relevant to the context of online social movements, since scholars have noted that online social movement members utilise political opportunities to rapidly mobilise collective action and use social media to create such political opportunities (Cammaerts, 2021:6; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). Consequently, the following assumptions of the political process perspective will be discussed in the sections that follow: (1) political contexts that provide opportunities for mobilisation, and (2) social movements as negotiations of power.

3.3.2.1 Political contexts that provide opportunities for mobilisation

The political process perspective calls on one to consider the context in which a social movement exists. Some contextual political opportunities include: (1) institutional access, whereby a political system shows the possibility and encouragement for mobilisation, i.e., political leaders call for change in policy; (2) conflict between elites, which leads to instability in a political system and in turn empower people to mobilise; (3) changes in political alignments from political parties; (4) election times, when political parties are more inclined to listen to demands of society; (5) relief of repression from a government against society; (6) the existence of multiple channels for challenging power, like going to court if legislation turns down attempts to alleviate inequality or injustice; (6) times of economic struggle, which motivates people to take collective action; (7) threats to environmental and public health; (8) diminution of rights for citizens, which leads to

mass discontent; and (9) state repression, when a government uses violence to intimidate citizens (Almeida, 2019:50-56).

Assumptions of the political process perspective are relevant to online social movements, as online social movements are often triggered by a disrupting event that prompts a rapid social reaction in online spaces and creates an opportunity for social movements to mobilise (Cammaerts, 2021:16; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). As mentioned in section 2.6, online social movement members can share information quicker, easier, and in a more uncensored manner. However, while members of online social movements have greater freedom to disseminate information that may highlight political opportunities for mobilising, triggering events can also serve as political opportunities. Triggering events that occur within a society often increase activists' opportunity to share information regarding problematic political circumstances and allow them to successfully mobilise towards bringing change to their circumstances.

For example, mobilisations of the 2011 Arab Spring movement were triggered in Tunisia when a street vendor committed suicide publicly after police prohibited him from selling produce (Dupont & Passy, 2011:1). Citizens of the authoritarian-led country were regularly facing instances of police brutality while living in poverty, so when activists heard of police brutalisation against the individual and his consequential suicide, they used the event as an opportunity to organise protests against corruption, police brutality, poor living conditions, economic challenges and religious oppressions in the country (Charrad *et al.*, 2021:13; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369). Online content shared about these mobilisations and the state's violent reaction towards Arab Spring activists eventually led to waves of protests (mentioned in section 2.5.2) in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries that faced the same challenges under their dictators' rule (Dupont & Passy, 2011:1; Rosiny, 2012:2).

Considering its online context, members of the Arab Spring movement used Facebook to mobilise toward collective action (Al Hasan *et al.*, 2019:94). Activists used the social media platform to share graphic images that portrayed the negative conditions they found themselves in. Moreover, given the nature of social media as a communication channel for online social movement members (see section 2.3.2), activists were able to rapidly spread their beliefs and sentiments to the public – announcing their readiness to take a stand against the government. Al Hasan *et al.* (2019:94) highlight the effectiveness of spreading negative sentiments, as the Arab Spring activists did. The graphic nature of the content Arab Spring activists shared allowed them to prompt stronger, faster public responses (Al Hasan *et al.*, 2019:94).

From a political process perspective, the Arab Spring movement showed how political opportunities like times of economic struggle, diminution of rights for citizens and state repression, as well as triggering events like the street vendor's suicide, encouraged individuals to mobilise and participate in social movement protests. Activists used the political context in which they found themselves to create and disseminate content that portrayed their negative experiences. Social media like Facebook enabled Arab Spring activists to mould their political context into a collective awareness of discontent, facilitating the movement's mass mobilisations toward social change. In other words, their rapid online dissemination of content (see section 2.6.1) allowed them to publicly communicate the need and the opportunity to act towards social change.

Furthermore, Eltantawy and Wiest, (2011:1211), point to the geographical proximity of the countries wherein the Arab Spring movement took place and the commonalities of protesters regarding language and religion, and the fact that they were under strict rule of authoritarian governments. The proximity of countries like Libya and Egypt to that of Tunisia, where the Arab Spring movement first started, may have played a role in the neighbouring citizens' regard of Tunisian protests as a political opportunity for mobilisation against Egyptian and Libyan rulers. As Ozgul (2020:1,98) and Gunning and Baron (2013:168) note, Egyptian protestors were given hope to rally in January 2011, when they saw Tunisian demonstrations in the previous month. Arab Spring activists were able to use their political opportunities as a means to negotiate changes to their circumstances. This highlights the second assumption of the political process perspective, namely, its regard of mobilisations as part of a larger political process and negotiations for power between a movement's participants and national powerholders like political parties (Morris & Herring, 1987:10).

3.3.2.2 Social movements as negotiations of power

For Tilly (1979:12), an eminent political process theorist, social movements are the continual interactions between those in power and those who speak on behalf of a formally unrepresented group, during which demands for change are made publicly and supported by public demonstrations or protests. With a political process view, scholars investigate interactions between a political structure and the individuals within social movements, analysing occurrences of social movements demanding for change; how a movement's members advance their cause through presentations of unity, mobilisation, and strategic action; and how powerholders react to these demands and mobilisations (Buechler, 2011:130; Eder, 2015:41; Morris & Herring, 1987:10). Online social movement members apply pressure to powerholders in society by disseminating advocacy messages to decision-makers and the members of the public, rapidly mobilising protest actions, weakening a government or system's credibility, and exposing the

system's injustices and issues worldwide (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010:221; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014:369).

While members of the Arab Spring movement used social media to mould their negative circumstances into opportunities for mobilisation, they also used these opportunities to call for changes to the regimes that caused the negative circumstances. The then dictatorships of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya existed because power was given to a few select individuals after the end of European colonial rule in the Middle East (Charrad *et al.*, 2021:24). The emergence of the Arab Spring movement portrayed citizens' demand for political change and a redistribution of power within these countries. For example, Charrad *et al.* (2021:22) point out how Arab Spring activists expressed their discontent with the autocratic leaders' corruption and lack of respect for citizens. Protestors set out to portray their leaders as tyrants and thieves, calling out their leaders and their family members by name for their corrupt actions. Attempting to weaken their leader's credibility and exposing their unjust actions against citizens, such as the illegal use of public assets, Arab Spring activists shared stories of corrupt leaders' lavish lifestyles and expressed their discontent through mass burnings of government signs. They applied pressure to leaders to step down with public displays of discontent. Through this, the Arab Spring movement's actions echo Tilly's (1979:12) explanation of social movements as processes of negotiations for power and demands for change, supported by a movement's public demonstrations against powerholders. As another example, when the former president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, appeared on national broadcasts to insist on his reign, activists would raise their shoes at him – a gesture regarded as disgust and insult in the Middle East (Charrad *et al.*, 2021:23 -24). The movement made its demands and continued to reiterate them through their mobilisations in order to bring about change. The political process a movement engages in is one wherein the members continually apply public pressure to powerholders until change occurs.

As a result of the demands and the very public portrayal of discontent by protesters, Tunisian President, Zine El Abdine Ben Ali, was forced to flee the country after his two-decade-long rule, and Tunisia held its first democratic parliamentary elections in October 2011 (History.com Editors, 2020; Sallam *et al.*, 2022:1). Hosni Mubarak stepped out of his presidency after ruling Egypt for three decades, and the country held its first democratic elections in November that same year (History.com Editors, 2020; Ozgul, 2020:93; Sallam *et al.*, 2022:1). Soon thereafter, Libya's dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, was captured and assassinated after his government was overthrown (Sallam *et al.*, 2022:1).

With a political process perspective, one gains insight into how activists use their political, social, and economic circumstances and the events triggered by these circumstances as an opportunity

to enter a political process of negotiating changes like those pointed out above. Furthermore, in an online social movement context, one notes social media's role in enabling activists to claim opportunities for resistance and in turn increase people's willingness to participate in applying pressure to the powerholders that cause grievances.

Both the resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective offer insight into how social movements mobilise. During the paradigm shift within social movement theorisation, these theoretical perspectives allowed scholars to investigate the availability of resources or political opportunities that either enabled or prevented social movement mobilisation (Abdul Reda *et al.*, 2021:6; Diani, 1998:5). In the current context of online social movements, resource mobilisation theory specifically enables one to investigate the actions taken by social movement members on social media to organise resources that enable them to participate in collective action. In analysing social movement members' use of social media as a social movement resource and as a means to access other resources, the importance of social movement members' participation in online communication regarding social movement resources and organisation is shown in a few ways.

Firstly, as already noted (see section 3.3.1) resource mobilisation theory posits the notion that people rationalise their participation in collective action based on the reward of their activism and the availability of resources to mobilise. When social movement members use social media to portray their movement success stories, alliances, and resources online, they communicate to the public not only that their collective actions are bringing about the reward of social change, but also that they have adequate resources to do so. This may, as the resource mobilisation theory suggests, increase people's willingness to participate in collective action.

Secondly, as resource mobilisation theory argues, social movement members need to gather and employ their resources to be able to bring about collective action. This is how they mobilise resources and organise toward collective action. When online social movement members use social media to communicate with one another and the public, like by building connections with one another or sharing protest event details, they are employing social media itself as a resource. Through online movement communication, online social movement members are already participating in a process of resource mobilisation. However, social movement members may also use social media to further gather and mobilise other resources, like sharing activist knowledge or calling for donations from supporters. The resource mobilisation theory allows one to determine how aspects like movement organising and resource mobilisation take place within occurrences of online social movement communication.

On the other hand, the political process perspective enables one to investigate how online social movement members use social media to turn political opportunities into collective action toward social change. In analysing social movement members' use of social media to use political opportunities toward their advantage, the importance of social movement members' participation in online communication is shown in a few ways.

Firstly, as the political process perspective suggests, social movements often arise in contexts that offer political opportunities such as extreme state repression or conflict in a society. This is particularly relevant to the case of online social movements, since the rapid online social reaction to events brought on by these circumstances may be useful in bringing about collective action toward social change. Prompted by certain events in their political, social or economic circumstances, online social movement members may use social media to communicate their beliefs about the issues they aim to address and mobilise others to do the same.

Secondly, the political process perspective posits social movements as negotiators of power. When social movement members show their discontent with powerholders or those they deem responsible for their circumstances, they participate in a political process of bringing about social change. Online social movement members may use social media's UGC and masspersonal communication functionalities to communicate their discontent and demand for change to the powerholders in their society (see sections 2.3.2.2 2.3.2.4). The political process perspective enables one to determine the societal conditions that enable collective action online, such as rapid social reaction on social media, and how a social movement's online collective actions challenge the political forces that caused the social reaction. The perspective allows one to consider online communication from social movements with powerholders as part of the political processes that bring about change within society.

Both the resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective are still currently relevant in analysing the collective actions taken by current online social movements, just as they were helpful in analysing movements in the 1960s that aimed to address inequality based on sex and race, such as the Civil Rights and Women's movement in America. However, during the sixties (see section 2.5.1), European scholars introduced another perspective that recognised movements aimed to address issues of identity and identity recognition, such as the LGBTQ movement and new religious movements. As a result, social movement participants were not only seen as rational, i.e., justified actors of social change, but also defenders of an *identity*, the latter of which exists as their motivation for participating in collective action (Eder, 2015:36). This perspective is referred to as the new social movements theory. The new social movements theory places more emphasis on the existence of political grievances within the larger structure of a

society and its *culture* (Diani, 1998:5). Instead of analysing *how* social movements operate, like the resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective, new social movement theorists intend to investigate the systemic, political, and cultural reasons for *why* social movements emerge and why individuals mobilise against political and cultural structures of society (Chesters, 2015:352; Diani, 1998:5; Eder, 2015:34; Williams, 2019:92).

3.3.3 New social movements theory

With a strong influence of Marxist theory, traditional European social movements were mainly related to labour-socialist ideals and the conflicts between economic classes within society (Buechler, 2011:158; Williams, 2019:92). However, along with the emergence of the 'New Left' in post-industrial societies like that of Europe and North America (see section 2.5.1), came new struggles and aspirations for social change in social movements and, by extension, new avenues for theorising social movements (Almeida, 2019:59; Buechler, 2011:159; Chesters, 2015:352). Instead of focusing on the power struggle between capitalist elites and labour classes, like those with a Marxist perspective, theorists could turn their attention to movements that centred around postmaterialist values (Almeida, 2019:59; Buechler, 2011:159; Císař, 2019:54). Compared to the materialist, economically determined values of labour-socialist movements, postmaterialist values of new social movements centre around issues of identity, beliefs, social exclusion of certain groups or subcultures, and individuals' quality of life in society (Almeida, 2019:59; Buechler, 2011:160; Císař, 2015:54).

Two main ideas of the new social movements theory will be discussed in the sections that follow. First, social movements engage in processes of constructing a collective identity. The concept of collective identity is relevant to the context of online social movements, as numerous scholars point to the concept in their investigation of contemporary social movements that occur online (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015:865; Egner, 2022:349; Harlow, 2011:239; Huang, 2023:2692; Kavada, 2015:874; La Torre *et al.* 2022:4; Milan, 2015:888, Vrikki, 2020:85).

Second, social movement structures are noninstitutionalised, decentralised, and democratic in nature. New social movements theory's notions regarding the structural nature of new social movements have gained prevalence in scholars' accounts of online social movement organisation, due to, as indicated earlier in this study, the interactive nature of social media and the increased opportunity for members to participate in social movement activities and organising processes (see section 2.5.2 and 3.3.1.2). The ensuing sections provide an exploration of these ideas, together with an investigation of scholars' application thereof to the context of online social movements.

3.3.3.1 Construction of a collective identity within noninstitutional, decentralised democratic networks

New social movements theorists posited the role of a collective identity among a movement's members to explain why people become part of a collective and mobilise toward collective action (Almeida, 2019:59; Buechler, 2011:15; Melucci, 1995:43; Williams, 2019:92).

Melucci (1995:44), one of the most prominently referenced new social movements theory scholars in both online and offline social movement studies, defines collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and [a process] concerned with the orientation of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which action takes place” (Ayers, 2003:150; Fominaya, 2019:432; Huang, 2023:2691; Hunt & Benford, 2004:447; Kavada, 2015:874; Milan, 2015:892).

While the resource mobilisation and political process perspectives explore occurrences of collective action in relation to social movement participants' interaction with structures and systems in society, the collective identity perspective takes account of the *cultural* significance of collective action. Collective identity within a movement could explain social change related to cultural transformations in a society. These could include changes to social norms, how different groups view themselves and how others in society view them, how people express their identities publicly, and a society's recognition and acceptance of people's lifestyles and identities (Polletta & Jasper, 2005:283-286).

New social movements theorists argue that through their construction of collective identity amongst participants, contemporary movements aim to bring about collective behavioural change within a society (Almeida, 2019:72; Johnston *et al.*, 1994:15; Huesca, 2001:422). Therefore, new social movements theory regards social movements as “cultural laboratories” (Melucci, 1989:60). In other words, members of social movements produce a certain culture amongst themselves based on a collective identity that is conflictual with a society's dominant cultural identity (Diani, 1998:7; Melucci, 1989:60). Based on this view, for new social movements theorists, the process of creating a collective identity entails three elements, namely cognitive context formulation, relational networks creation, and emotional investment. To contextualise these elements to the current study, examples will be offered of how online social movement members embody them through their communication on social media.

First, social movement participants formulate a cognitive context for their movement's actions, how they should participate in them, and the environment or context in which they will take these

actions (Melucci, 1995:44; Vrikki, 2020:85). It is important to note that these formulations take place over time, and engaging in cognitive formulations facilitates a process of alignment between an individual's personal identity and the collective identity held in relation to an issue (Cammaerts, 2021:8; Hunt & Benford, 2004:445). Communication plays an important role in the cognitive element of creating a movement's identity. As Hunt and Benford (2004:445) state, collective identity is essentially "talked into existence". Similarly, Holland *et al.* (2008:99) argue that collective identity is constantly formed and reformed by movement participants' convergences. With communication's role in the production of cognitive definitions for a movement's goals, plans, and tactics, social media as communication channels act as a tool for cognitive definition within a movement.

An example of a movement that shows the use of social media for constructing a collective identity is the #ActuallyAutistic movement that occurred on Tumblr and later on X (Osorio, 2020:5). The movement is focused on self-representation and self-narration of people with autism to counteract dominant portrayals of autism that often stigmatise and represent autism as something that is bad or that those with autism are burdens to their families (Enger, 2022:352; Osorio, 2020:102). The #ActuallyAutistic movement reflected how social media enabled those with autism to express the collective identity they built in a world that rarely embraced the identity in dominant cultural narratives. When comparing the recognition and expression of the autistic identity between digital spaces and elsewhere, Egner (2022:350), a scholar with autism, noted: "With the development of social media, seemingly overnight, a vibrant and active community of autistic people was gaining ground in virtual spaces ... Yet away from social media it was as if autistics didn't exist. They didn't in other forms of media, outside of one-dimensional, medicalized portrayals and the occasional depiction of an autistic savant, and not visibly in our daily lives".

Members of the #ActuallyAutistic movement portrayed their participation in the movement's cognitive context formulations and their experience of a sense of belonging through posts made on social media. For example, one participant noted: "Navigating the #ActuallyAutistic community has taken me to my lowest ebb And it's also taken me to my highest. Because it's been a self-awareness & education my diagnosis didn't give & no amount of research can offer I can honestly say I'm thriving Thanks to meetin[g] all of you [sic]" (as quoted by Egner, 2022:357). Firstly, the participant's post illustrates the movement's formulation of a cognitive context in which it exists, namely a society that lacks a relatable representation of autism and available knowledge to help those with autism understand their diagnosis. Secondly, the post indicated the actions taken by the movement to address the context in which the movement exists, namely using social media to share knowledge and information regarding autism, its symptoms and what the lived

experiences of those with autism look like. The post also portrays the movement's cognitive orientation toward how action should be taken based on the context the movement exists in, namely, that those with autism should be the ones to do the educating and that engagement in the movement should entail a process of self-reflection on one's own experience of autism.

During the creation of a collective identity, networks of relationships or social relations emerge within a movement's social system and a new social reality emerges from the movement (Eder, 2015:37; Melucci, 1995:44). As argued in section 2.6.4, social media's interactive functions facilitate activist network and relationship building. These relationships foster a sense of belonging among members and serve as a basis or system for the continual construction and reconstruction of a group's identity and their cognitive definitions of a movement's actions. The relational focus of new social movements also brings about the notion that social movements are noninstitutionalised, decentralised, and democratically structured, which is often the case for online social movements (see section 2.6.2). Because new social movements emerge based on the collective identity that members share, they are more often perceived as small, decentralised, democratic and informal networks, rather than hierarchically structured organisations (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:26; Huesca, 2001:421). The decentralised nature of social movement networks manifests a *humanistic* approach towards social change, as participants preserve their movement through experiences of connectedness and loyalty toward the movement's identity and participation in collective action, and less through organisational ties or external organisational resources (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:26; Huesca, 2001:421; Johnston *et al.*, 1994:8). In other words, because new social movements emerge in an ungoverned context where the construction of a collective identity serves as a basis for and occurrence of collective action, they may not subscribe to traditional organisational structures to bring about social change, but rather organise within the social movement's relational network. As noted in section 2.2.1.3, the concept of collective identity preserving a movement ties in with the participatory approach's value of empowering participants of a process toward social change in the long run (see section 4.3.4).

The #ActuallyAutistic movement is a good example of how social media enables social movement members to create networks of relationships and how these networks exist as spaces for them to continuously participate in the movement in a decentralised manner. Firstly, when the participant pointed out above noted "I can honestly say I'm thriving Thanks to meetin[g] all of you" (as quoted by Egner, 2022:357), they illustrate the value of the #ActuallyAutistic relationships or identity network they are a part of. One could also argue that the movement's existence on social media, and social media's ability to facilitate interaction without face-to-face interaction (see section 2.3.2.1), provided a unique and valuable opportunity for those with autism to form relationships.

Participants would possibly not have been comfortable engaging with the movement if it was not accessible online since, as Osorio (2020:11) points out, more traditional offline movement activities like marches or sit-ins would have been inaccessible for autistic activists because many would struggle with the high sensory stimulation of such actions. The movement's existence on social media possibly allowed for higher degrees of participation than an offline movement would have.

Members of the #ActuallyAutistic movement used social media to form a community online in which they "collectively write new resistance narratives" (Egner, 2022:357). The #ActuallyAutistic hashtag enabled the movement's members to identify those who live with autism, and through this, they were able to form connections with one another and engage in conversations that helped build and represent their identity (Egner, 2022:357). These conversations weren't managed by a central actor or figure since the purpose of the movement was to allow those with autism to speak for themselves. Accordingly, the interactive nature of online communication and hashtag function on X allowed them to build their movement in a horizontal manner (see sections 2.6.2 & 2.6.2).

The last element of collective identity proposed by the new social movements theory is that of emotional investment. The new social movements theory proposes that participants' emotions play a part in their process towards creating meaning and therefore mobilising toward social change (Cammaerts, 2021:5; Hunt & Benford, 2004:446; Melucci, 1995:44; Vrikki, 2020:90). For participants to experience a sense of internal solidarity and commitment to a movement, they must convey their emotional investments towards the movement (Hunt & Benford, 2004:446). Milan (2015:891) points out that social media elements, such as the "like" and "share" functions (see section 2.3.2.5), allow social movement members to offer emotional support for claims made by other members, signifying solidarity with their emotional claims regarding an issue. Furthermore, due to the interactive nature of social media platforms (see sections 2.3.2.3 and 2.3.2.4), members can participate in shared instances of emotional expressions. For example, members of the #PeoplesVoteMarch social movement used X to share their feelings towards the Brexit referendum, and fellow members were able to express their support and solidarity by replying to and echoing these emotional statements. Emotionally charged expressions like "How Disgusting!" or "I'm Terrified" were met with responses like "I'm with you" or "Same" from those who follow the hashtag (Vrikki, 2020:91). These emotional convergences show that people's feelings about an issue play a role in a movement's discussions, how individuals connect with one another in online spaces and therefore also how they work towards creating a sense of

meaning and identity within their movement. More contextually relevant, social media enables a movement's members to participate in these emotional exchanges and conveyances.

Following the above exploration of collective identity, overall, it can be argued that collective identity entails that social movement members share the movement's belief in a cause, purpose, and definition of an issue; that they experience a sense of belonging and emotional and moral connection with those in the movement's social relational network; and that they express their identification with a movement through mobilisation towards bringing about social change (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:24; Diani, 1998:8; Eder, 2015:33; Fominaya, 2019:430-1431; Thomas, 2019:101; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002:466).

New social movements are often orientated toward bringing cultural changes to a society and its dominant assumptions of a group, like those living with autism. The interactive functions of social media and the public visibility of users' communication allow individuals from marginalised groups to gain access to new cognitive orientations regarding their identity in a specific societal context and also to form relationships with those that share the same definitions. The hashtag function on X offers social media users the opportunity to access conversations by those who identify with the movement, which then enables them to engage in processes of decentralised movement organisation. Rather than relying on actors like social movement organisations to help facilitate the movement, the hashtag, which belongs to the movement's members, becomes the centre of communication and exists as a virtual meeting space for anyone who identifies with it to participate in the movement.

Following an analysis of how assumptions of the new social movements theory are applied in online social movements, new social movements theory enables one to acknowledge the ways in which social movement participants use communication to come towards a shared understanding of their movement, circumstances, and feelings towards certain issues. New social movements theory also appreciates the value of specific social media functions, like hashtags, to help people meet up, form connections, and express their identification with a movement and functions such as "like" and "retweet" as tools to show and facilitate emotional investment in the movement, encourage one another to keep mobilising, and build a collective identity based on emotional definitions of issues.

The process of building a collective identity implies the creation of shared meaning among participants. Given that the new social movements theory attempts to understand *why* social movements emerge in a cultural context, the question then arises of *how* social movements create meaning in the cultural context they exist.

3.3.4 Framing theory

Resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective and new social movements theory clarifies and brings awareness to the *macro*-cultural, -structural, and -political contexts of movements. Notwithstanding, American theorists turned to framing theory to investigate the *micro*-level socio-psychological dynamics of social movements and understand how participants use cultural elements of society (i.e., discourse, identity, language, and symbols) to gain, retain, mobilise, and inspire members of a social movement (Buechler, 2011:142; Williams, 2019:93).

Framing theory argues that the meanings attached to events and experiences in society are produced through “interactively based interpretive processes” (Snow, 2019:384). Approaching social movements as a process of meaning construction between movement participants and other actors (i.e. possible allies, movement challengers, or the media), the theory acknowledges the power dynamics associated with a process of deconstructing and reframing dominant meanings in society (Buechler, 2011:142; Snow, 2019:384). Widely cited, Entman, (1993:52) defines the act of framing as emphasising certain aspects of reality in a manner that defines a problem, the causes thereof, how it should be judged or perceived, and which actions or solutions apply to the problem (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015:431; Brugman & Burgers, 2018:1; Ciurel, 2018:7; Güran & Özarslan, 2022:447; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013:142; Navarro & Coromina, 2020:95).

Framing theory closely relates to the agenda-setting approach used in media and journalism studies (Kostopoulos, 2020:36; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007:14). During agenda-setting, a journalist sets out to highlight certain issues or topics and present them to the audience as important (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007:14). The difference between framing and agenda-setting is that agenda-setting focusses on topic selection and what issues the audience should pay attention to, while framing focusses on topic interpretation and what meaning (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions) the audience should assign to an issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007:14). Accordingly, the intention of framing within social movements is to facilitate mobilisation among observers and supporters or to challenge movement opponents through the meanings a social movement assigns to certain aspects of society (Snow & Benford, 1998:198).

Several scholars have applied assumptions of framing theory to the context of online social movements (Bashir, 2012:17; Cammaerts & Jiménez-Martínez, 2014:50; Gamson, 2011:464; Moussa, 2013:4; Navarro & Coromina, 2020:95; Silva & Syed, 2019:4). The following two ideas of framing theory and the prevalence thereof in studies of online social movements will therefore be discussed. First, the concept of collective action frames; and second, the concept of frame alignment or frame resonance.

3.3.4.1 Collective action frames

Frames within social movements are referred to as collective action frames. Collective action frames are messages used to produce a lens through which the world can be interpreted and ultimately encourage mobilisation and movement support based on the worldview (Benford & Snow, 2000:614; Gamson, 1995:89). Social movements use framing to garner support and attraction to their cause through disseminating their ideologies (Abdul Rada *et al.*, 2021:6; Almeida, 2019:81). Put simply, framing theory provides insight into how social movement members articulate their grievances and interact with society through movement messages.

The theory introduces the following collective action frames, i.e., the frames that social movements use to interact with society, to explain the communication from social movement members: diagnostic frames, wherein a movement's members communicate to society the problem they think needs to be addressed as well as the possible causes for the problem; prognostic frames, wherein a movement proposes solutions and strategies to solve the problem and motivational frames, wherein social movement members appeal to the public to mobilise and take part in collective action towards bringing about social change (Almeida, 2019:85; Buechler, 2011:148; Güran & Özarslan, 2022:447; Rone, 2017:139; Snow & Benford, 1988:199).

Diagnostic frames, also called injustice frames, refer to the task of first identifying a problem and, second, the attributions thereof (Buechler, 2011:148; Gahan & Pekarek, 2013:763). During the task of problem or injustice identification, movement participants express a "political consciousness" as they experience a "moral indignation" (Gamson, 1995:90). Diagnostic frames imply an emotional motivation and sense of moral obligation for movement participants to point out that harm is being inflicted (Gamson, 1995:90).

The task of identifying an injustice or problem may be less complicated than attributing blame for its occurrence, which is a crucial part of the diagnostic process (Benford & Snow, 2000:616; Buechler, 2011:148; Ciurel, 2018:12). Determining concrete identifiable actors like specific individuals or groups to blame for injustice, i.e., a movement's targets, allows movements to direct their mobilisation efforts toward certain actors (Benford & Snow, 2000:616; Gamson, 1995:91). Ciurel (2018:12) posits that once the actors responsible for injustices are determined, their actions become a source of mobilisation motivation among social movement members. To come to an agreement on the sources of injustice or suffering, a movement's members engage in conversational and sometimes conflict processes wherein they determine who or what is to blame (Ciurel, 2018:12; Gamson, 1995:91). The importance of agreement among members regarding the attributions to a problem is also argued for when considering that varying diagnostics of a

problem leads to conflicting solution proposals, which may affect the movement's effectiveness in bringing about social change (Ciurel, 2018:8; Buechler, 2011:148).

A clear example of diagnostic framing is that of the Arab Spring movement's targeting of autocratic leaders. Given the prolonged state of the economic disaster that the countries found themselves in, diagnosing their circumstances as unjust would be easy. What is particularly relevant to the framing theory's proposed diagnostic process is the Arab Spring movement's clear diagnosis of their corrupt autocratic leaders as the cause of the problem. For example, protestors specifically referred to the Tunisian president's wife, Leila Trabelsi, and her spending of public funds on shoes and jewellery as a part of the cause of the country's economic struggles (Charrad *et al.*, 2021:22). Another example of an online social movement targeting specific actors who they believe to be part of the cause of an issue is the #ActuallyAutistic movement's targeting of a musician, Sia, for her use of a non-autistic actor in a movie project about autism (Egner, 2022:357). #ActuallyAutistic members used X to discuss why the movie's content was detrimental to people with Autism's self-perception (Egner, 2022:357). Some used the hashtag #SiaStop and others used the application's @-function (see section 2.3.2.2) to tag Sia in messages or its reply-function to interact with her posts (Egner, 2022:357; Oliver, 2020). Through their use of social media as a communication channel, online social movement members can publicly target those who contribute to the issues that affect them.

Following the diagnostic frames, members take on the task of prognostic framing, which involves proposing a solution or plan to solve a societal problem or perceived injustice (Benford & Snow, 2000:617). After highlighting the problems that Arab Spring countries experience and pointing to the countries' leaders and their corrupt practices as the causes thereof, Arab Spring members on social media proposed their solution to the problem – that the leaders should step down (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:206). Another solution proposed on social media was that of the elimination of state security (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:206). With a clear diagnosis of the problem's cause and the movement's targets, the Arab Spring movement was able to make clear demands to the targets. Members of the Arab Spring movement called for an acknowledgement of regimes' violence against citizens, demanding the release of those imprisoned on the grounds of *political* opposition, such as bloggers, the return of bodies of missing individuals and a definition of their loved ones as martyrs and activists of justice, rather than criminals (Charrad *et al.*, 2021:26). After having diagnosed an issue and its causes and proposing solutions, social movement members can go on to motivate each other and those outside the movement to mobilise towards change or make demands for changes in society. These messages are called motivational frames.

Motivational frames are calls to action used to motivate members to take agency, participate in collective action, and sustain such actions (Benford & Snow, 2000:618; Little, 2014:659). Motivational framing is the process whereby a movement attempts to liberate people cognitively and persuade them to believe that change is possible if they participate in mobilisation (Buechler, 2011:148). The process of motivational framing brings forth Gamson's (1995:90) argument of agency as part of collective action framing. The motivational frames within a movement's collective action framing process require movement participants to come to the conscious realisation of their ability to bring change to injustices through their collective action (Gamson, 1995:90). The purpose of a motivational frame and its element of agency should therefore be to bring about the empowering realisation among movement participants that they themselves can be agents of change through their participation in a movement (Buechler, 2011:148; Gamson, 1995:90).

In the case of the Arab Spring movement, social media channels were used to motivate people to join in protests that target those to blame for their circumstances. The fact that members were able to use social media to frame their movement may have played a crucial role in the movement's success, because of the tight grip that dictators often hold on traditional media's news publication. The framing in traditional news coverage in Egypt was clearly demotivating. For example, Hamdy and Gomaa (2012:199) pointed out how semi-official newspapers in Egypt often framed protests as events that could have negative impacts on the economy, pointing to possible loss of tourism and investment due to the uprisings. However, when the movement's members framed the protests, they never focussed on the economic consequences of the movement (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:199). Members used social media to frame protesters' experiences of police brutality and their continued participation in the movement as martyrdom, with one post reading "a new page of Egyptian history is being written with the blood of the martyrs and the hissing of anger from demonstrations that we should all join" (as quoted by Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:199).

Members of the Arab Spring were able to actively counter-frame participation in their movement as an empowerment of the people. This act of counter-framing to motivate members to mobilise portrays the power dynamics at play during the framing process of a movement and its actions. Social media's facilitation of mass personal communication (see section 2.3.2.2) enables online social movement members to reclaim their movement's framing process beyond the gatekeepers of traditional media (see section 2.6.2). Furthermore, because of social media users' ability to spread information and UGC rapidly, social movement members can jump on a story and frame

it according to the movement's goals before traditional news outlet journalists do (see section 2.3.2.1).

By using the different collective action frames proposed by framing theory to analyse the communication in online social movements, one gains an understanding of the possible reasons why a social movement can move toward mobilisation and the importance of clear and concise messaging in the process toward mobilisation. When social movements use social media for framing a movement, they enable researchers to gather information regarding the ways in which they view issues, targets, and solutions. Their online communication provides a rich pool of data for researchers to understand the workings of a social movement outside of other public representations thereof, like that of traditional news media. Take, for example, Hamdy and Gomaa's (2012) study of the different ways in which the Arab Spring movement was framed by newspapers versus social media posts by the movement's members. Compared to traditional newspapers, social media frames showed considerably more interest in the human experiences of protesters and the suffering of Arabic people and, as pointed out above, highlighted stories of those who experienced police brutality at protest events (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:201). The accessibility of accounts from actual members of a movement regarding protest activities and participants' views of the movement enables a researcher to explore the meanings created by movements rather than by traditional news sources.

Another issue to consider regarding the expression of human experiences by social movements is the increased resonance of frames with members of the public and the movement's mobilisation targets. This brings forth the framing theory's notion of frame alignment.

3.3.4.2 Frame resonance and alignment

Framing theorists argue that it is not just resources or political opportunities that play a role in the process of mobilisation but also the extent to which a movement's frames resonate with those it attempts to mobilise toward social change (Ciurel, 2018:10; Gahan & Pekarek, 2013:760; Katelaars, 2016:6; Snow & Benford, 1988:213). The theory posits the notion of frame resonance to explain the variations in the effectiveness of frames in bringing about collective action. Frame resonance or frame alignment is the process in which collective action frames are aligned with the values, beliefs, culture, and experiences of potential allies (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013:763, 766; Katelaars, 2016:6). For messages of a social movement to resonate with its mobilisation targets, they should feel that the movement's collective action frames have credibility and salience (Benford & Snow, 2000:619; Gahan & Pekarek, 2013:765). The subsequent text explores the proposed qualities of collective action frames that have credibility and salience. For collective

action frames to have credibility, framing theory proposes the consideration of three frame qualities, namely, consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of articulators (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013:765).

The consistency of a frame refers to the message's congruence with a social movement's beliefs, claims, and actions (Benford & Snow, 2000:620; Ciurel, 2018:10). For example, if a movement expresses the belief in non-violent protests, but its members go on to be violent at protest actions, it may impact the extent to which the movement is regarded as consistent and therefore credible. Members of the #ActuallyAutistic movement showed consistency in their beliefs and mission surrounding the accurate representation of people with autism by people who are #ActuallyAutistic. Their critique of musician Sia's movie project that used a non-autistic actor to portray the disability (Egner, 2022:357) reaffirmed their stance on the need to reclaim autism as theirs to define and portray to the public. The public visibility of a movement's actions, such as that of the #ActuallyAutistic movement's targeting of Sia, enables online social movements to portray consistency between their actions and claims. Fittingly, X's hashtag function (see section 2.6.1) enables mobilisation targets to perceive the movement's consistency more easily. For example, since the #ActuallyAutistic movement's communicative claims and actions are both labelled with the hashtag, mobilisation targets can search the hashtag to easily determine whether the movement shows consistency in its claims (i.e., there is a need for reclamation of representations of autism) and actions (i.e., calling actors like Sia out on their problematic portrayals of autism).

The empirical credibility of a frame refers to its perceived congruence with reality (Benford & Snow, 2000:620; Ciurel, 2018:10). The perceived congruency does not necessarily refer to a frame's factuality or validity, but rather the extent to which a frame offers *culturally* believable evidence of a problem, its cause, or solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000:620). The social movement should consider the mobilisation target's cultural perspective (i.e., values, beliefs, and norms) when offering evidential indicators of a problem's cause or solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000:620). For example, the #MeToo movement was specifically formed around the idea that victims disclose their experiences of sexual abuse or assault online (Alaggia & Wang, 2020:2). With survivors publicly disclosing the sexual abuse they experienced at the hands of Harvey Weinstein, posts with the #Metoo hashtag paired with accounts of sexual assault in the entertainment industry and other workplaces escalated. Within seven months, more than four million victims had shared their stories of sexual assault online (Alaggia & Wang, 2020:2). These increased disclosures of sexual assault helped to provide empirical credibility to the #MeToo movement, showcasing the

empowering value of disclosing stories and the importance of creating a space for victims to share their experiences without being blamed, shamed, or met with disbelief.

One could argue that the accessibility of social media as a communication channel to make public disclosures and access to these disclosures beyond space and time (see section 2.3.2.1) increased the #MeToo movement's ability to create a sense of empirical credibility. Mobilisation targets would not necessarily have come into contact with people's experiences and beliefs regarding the problematic sexual culture in workplaces if it were not for the public visibility of information provided by the #MeToo movement. Therefore, while social media would have enabled the #MeToo movement's members to share messages that resonate with people who share in their experiences of problematic workplace cultures, their social media disclosures may have also played a role in increasing the extent to which those who have not had those workplace experiences find the movement's frames to be culturally believable.

The last quality of a frame's credibility, the credibility of a frame source or articulator, emphasises the knowledge and status of a movement's articulators or representatives (Benford & Snow, 2000:620, 621). The more credible the frame articulator in terms of their knowledge, expertise, and trustworthiness regarding an issue, the more likely mobilisation targets will be willing to align themselves with the movement and therefore take collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000:621; Ciurel, 2018:10). The credibility of a frame source or articulator resonates with resource mobilisation theory, as it reiterates the value of activists' knowledge and figures associated with a movement as a resource that may bring about mobilisation (see section 3.3.1.1). In the case of the #ActuallyAutistic movement, which aligns itself with the idea that those with autism should be articulators of the autism identity, Osorio (2020:13) found that the social movement's members often referred to the idea of "expertise" in their posts.

Framing themselves as experts in their disability, members of the #ActuallyAutistic movement were able to counteract or counter-frame the medicalised and oversimplified claims of dominant articulators that would be considered medical "experts" in the disability (Egner, 2022:350, 360). For example, Egner (2022:360) points out that numerous members of the movement participated in comment threads narrating their experiences of autistic meltdowns, stating that "experts" who do not have autism do not have the ability to share what a meltdown actually feels like, and that narratives by dominant articulators do not offer recognisable meltdown stories. Similarly, Osorio (2020:18) highlights the following post of a #ActuallyAutistic participant wherein the user posits their own experience with autism as knowledge that is more valuable than that of "experts": "hi im #actuallyautistic and i can tell you most of the facts on ur school's autism poster [sic] are either bullshit or unhelpful" (as quoted by Osorio, 2020:18). Furthermore, the use of the word "actually"

in the hashtag implies the position of a person with autism as more knowledgeable than those who make claims about the disability while not being “actually autistic”. The hashtag serves as a means to define the articulator of the post as credible, since they have autism. By using the hashtag function while pointing out problematic messages regarding autism, members of the #ActuallyAutistic movement were able to discredit dominant articulators of the disability and establish or counter-frame themselves as credible sources of narratives regarding what it is like to have autism.

In addition to the credibility of frames, framing theory also points to the importance or relevance of a frame to the message receivers. It argues that if a movement’s beliefs, meanings, and values correlate to the central beliefs, meanings, and values of those it attempts to mobilise, the probability of participation in collective action is greater. In other words, the extent to which a movement’s targets resonate with frames is also dependent on its salience to the targets. The theory therefore also proposes that a frame should have salience. For collective action frames to have salience, framing theory proposes three frame qualities: centrality, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity (Buechler, 2011:149; Gahan & Pekarek, 2012:12; Katelaars, 2019:7). As in the discussion above frame credibility qualities, arguments will be made for how online social movements facilitate salience of a movement’s collective action frames to bring about mobilisation.

The centrality of a frame refers to the extent to which a movement’s beliefs, claims and values are essential or important to a mobilisation target’s life (Benford & Snow, 2000:621). The importance of the #ActuallyAutistic movement to members’ everyday lives is shown in posts that articulate and reinforce the need to reclaim their diagnosis. For example, one participant posted: “I’m aware the phrase ‘I am autism’ has been used to cast a negative shadow our way. I’m reclaiming this phrase. It does not belong to them. I used the phrase ‘I am autism, autism is me’ when I made my diagnosis public. This is me reclaiming those words. #ActuallyAutistic” (as quoted by Osorio, 2020:3). Although the participant already made their diagnosis public in the past, the relevance of the #ActuallyAutistic social movement to their own beliefs and life encouraged them to, once again, reclaim the autism identity as something to be celebrated, rather than shunned or oppressed. The centrality of the movement’s cause brought about this individual’s mobilisation and online participation in the movement.

The experiential commensurability of a frame calls on one to consider the extent to which a movement’s messages resonate with the mobilisation targets’ everyday lives or experiences (Benford & Snow, 2000:621; Ciurel, 2018:10; Katelaars, 2016:8). This quality is especially important in the diagnostic or prognostic framing tasks of a movement, as the framing theory

recommends that a movement's diagnosis of and solutions to an issue should not be too distant or abstract for it to relate the everyday lives and personal experiences of mobilisation targets (Ciurel, 2018:10; Katelaars, 2016:8). The experimental commensurability of the #ActuallyAutistic movement was shown in a participant's post highlighted earlier, wherein they noted a poster at their school misrepresenting their experience of autism (see section 2.3.4.2). The participant was able to resonate their experience of the unhelpful poster with the movement's message that those who have autism should be regarded as the experts in their disability.

In the case of the Arab Spring movement, Egyptian members were able to resonate with the struggles and messages of the Tunisian members. With both countries facing the injustice of dictatorship, and given the geographical proximity of the two countries (also pointed out in section 3.3.2.1), the stories and calls to action that Tunisian protestors shared would have had considerable experimental commensurability for the Egyptian population. As Eltantawy and Wiest (2011:1211) point out, Egyptian protesters of the movement were encouraged by the events of the Tunisian protests. There was a cross-national shared experience between different countries of the Arab Spring. Hence the movement's ability to hold experimental commensurability across borders. Tunisian members' use of social media to organise their protests and make claims about their circumstances publicly meant that Egyptian members could access these experimental commensurable frames despite being in a different country. Social media's characteristics that enable masspersonal communication beyond space and time (see sections 2.3.2.1 & 2.3.2.2) are thus at play when it comes to Egyptian members' ability to encounter frames articulated by Tunisian members.

The last quality a frame could have to ensure its salience to mobilisation targets is narrative fidelity. While a frame's experimental commensurability refers to resonance with an individual's experiences, narrative fidelity, or cultural resonance, refers to the extent to which a frame relates to the cultural stories or assumptions of the society in which a mobilisation target exists (Ciurel, 2018:11; Snow & Benford, 1988:210). An example of narrative fidelity in the framing of the Arab Spring movement is shown in one post that read: "In response to a peaceful, civilized protest, the police forced them out of the square and treated them as though they were Zionist enemies" (as quoted by Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012:201). The post shows how Egyptian members of the movement used the historical anti-Zionist efforts of the Egyptian government to reinforce the narration and assumption that the Egyptian government treats its citizens as enemies, and is doing so again during Arab Spring protests. Egyptian Arab Spring members related their experiences of violence with the historical treatment of Jews in their country, allowing mobilisation targets to recall the stories of the government's anti-Zionist acts and regard the movement as having narrative fidelity.

Other contemporary social movement theories like the resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective and new social movements theory enable the acknowledgement of resources, political opportunity, and collective identity as influencers of mobilisation. However, as Buechler (2011:149) notes, without the right approaches to framing, conditions like sufficient resources, political opportunity or collective identity might not bring about collective action. Mobilisation also depends “on the way these variables are framed and the degree to which they resonate with the targets of mobilisation” (Snow & Benford 1988: 213).

Framing theory provides insight into the process of meaning-making and communication or framing tasks within a movement that facilitates mobilisation. The theory points out the ways in which social movement messages should be formulated to bring about mobilisation and social change. These messages may be diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. Social movement members may use social media to disseminate these messages and to determine what exactly the meaning of these messages should be. It is worthwhile to point out that social media’s affordance of public accessibility to a movement’s messages provides valuable opportunities for researchers to access the collective action frames whereby social movements target audiences to generate collective action as well as the audience’s reaction or lack of reaction towards collective action frames.

For diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational messages to bring about mobilisation, they must embody qualities of credibility and salience. Framing theory’s consideration of the credibility and salience of a movement’s messages calls for an investigation of how social movement members use social media to frame a movement to mobilisation targets as consistent, believable, trustworthy, truthful, necessary, or relevant to their lives and culture. With its micro-level focus on social movement mobilisation, framing theory provides insight into the smaller socio-psychological dynamics at play when members engage in processes that other contemporary social movement theories propose, such as resource mobilisation, power negotiations, or creating a collective identity.

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to understand the emergence of contemporary social movement theories, to determine their assumptions, and to investigate how these assumptions can be applied to the context of online social movements (see section 1.6.2.2).

To first understand the context in which contemporary social movement assumptions emerged, arguments from one of the main theories that preceded the contemporary paradigm, the collective behaviour perspective, and the critiques against it were explored (see section 3.2). It was determined that contemporary social movement theories emerged as scholars began to study the phenomena of social movements as rational, legitimate actions of marginalised or oppressed members of a society that aim to bring about social change (see section 3.3). It was argued that social movements participate in collective action due to citizens' recognition of societal inequality, but that these inequalities may not be the only factor at play in the emergence of social movements. With this notion as a point of departure, a paradigm shift occurred, and social movement scholars turned their focus to understanding how and why social movements emerge (see section 3.3). As a result, contemporary social movement theories like the resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective, new social movements theory and framing theory arose with the following may theoretical arguments that are still applied today to the context of online social movements (see sections 3.3.1 & 3.3.2).

3.4.1 Resource mobilisation theory

- Social movement members participate in organisational processes to obtain social movement resources (see section 3.3.1). Online social movements use social media as a resource to obtain and share other resources, disseminate movement messages, and participate in movement organisation processes (see section 3.3.1.1 3.3.1.2). With this theory's perspective, communication is *organisational* and focussed on mobilising resources to challenge structures of unequal resource distribution within society.

3.4.2 Political process perspective

- Social movement members use political opportunities to take part in political processes that bring about social change (see section 3.3.2). These political opportunities may include triggering events that cause rapid reactions online. During political opportunity mobilisation, members participate in negotiations of power by displaying their discontent with powerholders and their unity against them, and by making demands for change (see section 3.3.2.2). With a political process perspective communication becomes *political* and focussed on challenging political powerholders in society.

3.4.3 New social movements theory

- Social movements mobilise due to the collective identity that they create among themselves in a decentralised manner through relational networks wherein they collectively formulate

definitions for the movement and the context it exists in and experience a sense of belonging and emotional investment toward the movement's cause (see section 3.3.3.1). This theory highlights the *cultural* function of communication in online social movements and is focussed on challenging the cultural beliefs held by a society regarding a movement's identity.

3.4.4 Framing theory

- Social movements participate in acts of meaning creation and gain, retain, mobilise, and inspire members through employing credible and salient collective action frames that diagnose an issue, offer solutions for it, and motivate people to join mobilisations to bring about social change (see section 3.3.4.1 – 3.3.4.2). Framing theory points to the function of communication in a process of *meaning-making* and focusses on how social movements challenge the dominantly held perceptions in a society.

Contemporary social movement theories have enabled social movement scholars to analyse why and how online social movements organise and mobilise to take part in collective action. However, mobilisation actions like resource and political mobilisation, collective identity formulation, and collective action framing require that members *communicatively* participate in the movement. With their focus on mobilisation and collective action, these theories do not provide prescriptions for how members should participate in the communication processes that surround mobilisations. Rather, they offer different points of departure for determining how and why online social movement members communicate in a process toward mobilisation and social change.

The assumptions of a communication-based approach such as that of the participatory approach, will provide deeper and valuable insight into how communication surrounding mobilisation practices ought to be practised to bring about sustainable social change. The next chapter of this study will investigate the emergence of the participatory approach to communication for social change and explain how the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories can be used to recontextualise the approach to be applicable to the context of online social movements.

CHAPTER 4 A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: EMERGENCE AND APPLICATION IN AN ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENT CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 of this study explored the emergence of contemporary social movement theories, their assumptions, and how these assumptions apply to the context of online social movements (see section 3.3). It was noted that by applying the respective theories' assumptions to online social movements, one gains different points of entry into exploring online communication processes in social movements and the role of social media in enabling social movement members to participate in these communication processes (see section 3.5). Based on the role and functionality of a contemporary social movements theory application in facilitating the previous chapter's identification of the different ways in which online communication for social change occurs within social movements (see section 3.5), this study proposes the use of these theories' assumptions to help guide an application of principles from the participatory approach to communication for social change in online social movements.

The participatory approach has become the normative approach to understanding processes toward change from a communication perspective (De Souza & Begeer, 2020:258; Dutta, 2015:127; Muturi & Mwangi, 2009:75; Reed, 2008:2418;). The approach involves an examination of the extent to which a project empowers people to collaborate toward sustainable social change, as well as the ways in which citizens participate in communication for social change to empower themselves to bring about change (Cooke & Kothari, 2001:5; Tufte, 2017:75). As argued in section 1.1, the participatory approach values *sustainable* social change and posits participatory communication to embody and produce sustainable social change. Fittingly, Tufte (2020:110) notes that mobilisations, like "social uprising, protest or performance is rarely a stand-alone occurrence". Most notably, a participatory approach to true sustainable social, cultural, political, and economic change takes time (Tufte, 2017:22). Mobilisations that social movements produce, however, are often temporary occurrences or actions toward change, and do not imply the long-term empowerment of members and sustainable social change that a participatory approach values.

Oyedemi (2020:620), for example, argues that protest mobilisations are “not [a] long-lasting or consistent tool of social change”. Mobilisations or collective actions are the implementation of a social movement’s solutions or tools to bring about change. The implementation of collective actions or mobilisation tactics is only one part or stage of a bigger process of sustainable social change. From a participatory perspective, the process toward sustainable social change also encompasses elements like planning, decision-making, power distribution and critical reflection (see sections 4.3.1 – 4.3.4). Accordingly, the long-term, true empowerment of a movement’s members and their ability to bring about sustainable social change relates to more than just successful mobilisation, but also *sustained* mobilisation and participation in communicative elements that surround it.

Although contemporary social movement theories point to some characteristics of a social movement that could sustain mobilisation, such as resource mobilisation, motivational framing or a collective identity, the theories do not account for the role of participatory communication between members in strengthening these characteristics in a movement (see section 3.4). The participatory approach, however, would enable an investigation of the valuable communicative activities that social movements engage in to ensure that sustainable empowerment and social change emerge from a movement. Notwithstanding, as noted in section 1.2, the approach has not yet been contextualised to the contemporary context of online social movements. Synthesising assumptions from the already contextualised contemporary social movement theories with principles of the participatory approach seems appropriate.

The current chapter aims to answer the research question: *What are the principles of the participatory approach and how can they be applied to the context of online social movements?* (see section 1.5.2.3). This chapter will first explore the theoretical paradigms that preceded the participatory approach. Section 4.2.1 will detail assumptions from the dominant paradigm of modernisation, followed by that of the dependency paradigm in section 4.2.2. These first two sections will facilitate an understanding of the context in which principles of the normative participatory paradigm emerged and illustrate the similarities between paradigm shifts within the field of social movement theorisation and that of communication for social change. Section 4.2.3 will offer an in-depth analysis of assumptions made by a participatory approach to social change. During this analysis, arguments will also be made for the relevance of assumptions from contemporary social movement theories, which were determined in the previous chapter (see section 3.5), to guide an application of the participatory approach’s principles to communication within online social movements.

4.2 Approaches to communication for social change: from modernisation to participation

Approaching communication for social change from a historical perspective, most scholars place theories of communication for social change into two categories: theories of the dominant paradigm of modernisation or diffusion models and theories of an alternative paradigm, also called participatory or multiplicity models (Melkote, 2003:132; Morris, 2003:225; Servaes & Lie, 2020:30; Thomas, 2014:8, Waisbord, 2001:30). The theoretical framework through which scholars view the phenomena of communication for social change or development has implications for the definition thereof. Offering a clear definition of the term at this stage of the discussion would therefore be hasty. Accordingly, the historical exploration of the emergence of different theoretical frameworks in the field of communication for social change encompassed in the ensuing sections will provide an understanding of how the phenomenon has been approached and defined.

McAnany's (2012:87) account of the history of development or social change communication theorisation outlines the field's development by referring to (1) modernisation-diffusion as the dominant approach from the 1960s until the 1970s; (2) the ascendance of the dependency or critical paradigm from 1970 until the mid-1980s, and (3) the formation and dominance of the participatory approach in the 1980s with its continued normative discourse in the field today. This outline will be used as a point of departure to a historical exploration of the theorisation of communication for social change that has led to the shift from a modernisation approach to development to the normative participatory approach to communication for social change.

4.2.1 The dominant paradigm of modernisation

The modernisation approach emerged after World War II in the Cold War period (Barranquero, 2011:161; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:386; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:1). During the time of the Cold War between the East and the West, the "Three Worlds of Development" concept – i.e., the "First World", the "Second World", and the "Third World" – was used to divide and label countries according to their perceived states of development (Agunga, 1999:29). The so-called "First World" mainly consisted of Western countries from Western Europe and North America and were part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Conditions of the First World were considered the ideal state of development, with the United States noted as a prime example of a modern, economically flourishing, and technologically progressive first-world country (Louw, 2020:176). The First World operated from a *capitalist* economic system (Barranquero, 2011:161). They valued systems and practices of democracy and capitalist industrialisation (Agunga, 1999:30-32; Dutta, 2020:103). The "Second World" comprised of the Soviet Union or Russia and its allies in

the Warsaw Pact, operated from a *socialist* economic system (Barranquero, 2011:161). They valued communism and state-controlled production and industrialisation (Agunga, 1999:32-35). The so-called “Third World”, consisting of countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, was characterised as “underdeveloped” and poor, compared to the superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – from the first and second worlds (Agunga, 1999:35-43; Barranquero, 2011:161).

Third-world countries found themselves in the middle of a power struggle between capitalist and socialist nations (Louw, 2020:163). These countries were targeted by first-world nations like the United States who wanted to serve their own interests for development based on their economic political ideologies (Agunga, 1999:2; Dutta, 2020:103; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:2, Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:386). During their quest to rebuild countries after the destruction of WWII and to *modernise* the rest of the world, first-world countries defined “development” as the process of replicating a political-economic system similar to that of the first world and bringing about economic growth in third-world countries (Dutta, 2020:103; Kiely, 1995:75; Shi, 2020:930). Developed countries saw development as a means to establish an international corporate structure for capitalist economic development, as opposed to the socialist economic system the Russians argued for at that time (Louw, 2020:163; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:2). Theories within the modernisation paradigm are based on Western economies’ neo-classical economic model for development and aimed to promote capitalistic economic development (Dutta, 2020:103; Melkote, 2003:130; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:187; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:386; Shi, 2020:930).

Modernisation theorists proposed that the third world’s ideas about a modern society should be changed so that these countries could change their behaviour in favour of capitalistic growth and democratic political systems to ultimately overcome their conditions of poverty and underdevelopment (Dutta, 2020:103; Waisbord, 2001:3). The modernisation approach argued for the use of information technology to instil modern values and innovations from developed Western countries in individuals from underdeveloped countries. Modernisation directs the development of the third world through information and behavioural manipulation (Barranquero, 2011:155; Waisbord, 2001:4). Failing to consider the possible socio-psychological effects an individual experiences in a developing country, the theory proposes that lack of development is due to an individual’s ideas, behaviour, and culture (Dutta, 2020:120; Shi, 2020:931). It attempts to propagate capitalistic-favoured behaviour in an individual in a developing country, hoping that this behaviour would lead to the economic growth and industrialisation of the Third World and, subsequently, the global state of development.

In addition to its emergence from economic theories, social evolutionary ideas also influenced the modernisation paradigm (Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:386; Servaes, 2020:2; Shi, 2020:931). Theories based on the notion of social evolution reduced the development of societies to “ideal-typical extremes”, for example, traditional versus modern societies (Dutta, 2015:123; Melkote, 2003:331). Developing countries in Asia and Africa were seen as “traditional” or “primitive” and contrasting to “advanced” industrialised societies in Western Europe and North America (Dados & Connell, 2012:12; Louw, 2020:178; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:386). With this perspective, modernisation thinkers argued that the concept of modern society was defined not only based on Western industrialisation and capitalism but also all other building blocks of Western society, such as their cultural norms, political and economic institutions, and actions, as well as their attitudes towards science, knowledge, and technology (Barranquero, 2011:161; Fjes, 1976, as cited by Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:386; Louw, 2020:178; Shi, 2020:931). Therefore, while modernisation’s influence from economic theory led to its classification of development as economic growth and industrialisation, the paradigm’s influence from social evolutionary theory led to the assumption that underdeveloped, “traditional societies” could only be modernised and achieve economic growth if they reach the same socio-political state as that of a “modern society”, i.e., the societal and political institutions, culture, norms, attitudes, and behaviours of the “first world” (see Melkote & Steeves 2015b:386; Servaes, 1995:40; Servaes, 2020:18; Shi, 2020:931).

Proposing that individuals in developing countries could enter a process of development by imitating and resembling characteristics of individuals from developed countries, modernisation theorists argued for the removal of barriers or obstacles, i.e., religious and cultural values, that they believed kept traditional societies from becoming modern (Dutta, 2015:142; Louw, 2020:178; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:387; Servaes, 1995:40; Shi, 2020:931; Waisbord, 2001:3). Servaes (1995:40) points out five modernisation mechanisms to remove barriers to development: (1) demonstrating Western society’s more advanced methods of development; (2) integrating different modern methods for development; (3) compressing the time of development to a period that is shorter than the time it took for developed countries; (4) preventing development errors by learning from the mistakes of developed countries; and (5) adapting advanced modern practices to the traditional society’s environment and culture.

The modernisation paradigm of development correlates with the collective behaviour perspective of social movement theory, as it values the existing structure that society functions in and the institutionalised behaviour such structure facilitates in society (see section 3.2). However, the valued structure is based on Western ideals. By implication, should members of a society reject the ideals that modernisation theorists ascribe to a developed society, collective behaviour

theorists would regard their behaviour as “irrational” and “non-functional” in an otherwise functional societal structure (see section 3.2).

Modernisation theorists believed the lack of development in third-world countries to be an effect of their “traditional” cultures and their lack of knowledge. Freire (2005:154) described modernisation as “cultural invasion” whereby the worldview of the invaders is forced upon developing countries to “mould” them into modernised societies. To ensure that members of “traditional” society subscribe to modernisation’s notion of development or institutionalised behaviour, theorists emphasised the role of mass media messages and communication to accelerate and facilitate modernisation in society members (Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:388; Waisbord, 2001:1, 3).

Works of modernisation theorists, such as Lerner’s (1958) *The passing of traditional society* and Schramm’s (1964) *Mass media and national development*, helped solidify the role of communication (especially through mass media) as an essential part of the development process (McAnany, 2012:10; Waisbord 2020:96). A modernisation communication process is based on one-way communication models. It proposes that persuasive information should be diffused by a sender through mass media channels, promoting not only modernisation but also the adoption of channels of modernisation, i.e., mass media and other mass communication channels (Shi, 2020:931; Waisbord, 2001:3). This top-down approach to communication also correlates with the collective behaviour perspective of social movement theorisation, as it appreciates institutionalised development (see section 3.2). In other words, the institutions within a societal structure determine the development needs of said society.

In addition to using economic analysis to measure the extent to which an underdeveloped society can integrate into a capitalist development model, modernisation theorists also measured individuals’ modernisation in terms of their adoption of mass media (Awodiya, 2012:2; Shi, 2020:930). This measure of modernisation was based on studies that showed that increased media exposure led to an increase in favourable attitudes toward the adoption of a modern development process. It would later be pointed out that individuals from a higher socioeconomic status adopted modernised behaviours, rather than those in rural and poor populations (Waisbord, 2001:109). Underdeveloped communities were unable to adopt modern behaviours because the ideological framework of modernisation and persuasion placed the task of development on the individual rather than on the larger system they found themselves in (Huesca; 2001:181).

While some modernisation theorists proposed mass media as a means of facilitating modernisation, Rogers's diffusion of innovations theory emphasised the importance of the communicative role of the local members of a society to introduce new ideas within their social system (Melkote, 2003:135; Rogers, 2003:26-27,36). This theory was developed to serve as a "local-level framework" to facilitate communication regarding the planning of modernisation (Melkote, 2003:134). Rogers's model still showed a strong influence from a modernisation approach to development. Although it, to some extent, included some members of a developing community as message senders in the communication process, it entailed modernisation's persuasive and top-down communication approach to development. Local members were still expected to formulate development messages based on innovations, i.e., agricultural ideas from the US, prescribed by a Western model for development. The diffusion of innovations theory is named one of the most influential theories for development, as it served as the "blueprint" for development communication activities for decades (Waisbord, 2001:4). It received criticism for its strong focus on media exposure rather than the content of messages, and bias that assumed positive attitudes toward or effects of technology, sources, persuasion, one-way communication processes, and progressive farmers (Chin, 2020:1156; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:389).

4.2.1.1 Critiques against the modernisation approach

The strongest critique against the modernisation paradigm is its assumption that development can be achieved through a one-size-fits-all approach. By prescribing only the standard Western modernisation model as a blueprint for development, theories of modernisation placed the societies and nations of the third world in one homogenous group. This approach stripped them of their distinct histories and cultures and prohibited them from developing through their own localised ideas (Awodiya, 2012:12; Dutta, 2015:125; Freire, 2005:138; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:184; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:387; Shi, 2020:931). Modernisation has also been criticised for its deterministic focus on economic growth and democratic politics, as some theorists believed that the achievement of the latter did not lead to the improvement of living conditions for those who live in poverty and rather produced economic dependency (Mattelart, 1978:15; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:187; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:5; Shi, 2020:931). Instead, it led to increased inequality among developed and developing countries and even among rich and poor communities within developing countries (Agunga, 1999:146; Frank, 1996:5; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:187).

Some argued that the modernisation paradigm showcased how a development process that is led and assisted by Western developed countries leads to developing countries' dependence on Western countries for industrialisation, training, and technological advancement (Agunga,

1999:146; Kiely, 1995:75). Furthermore, the modernisation approach did not allow for development styles other than those that fit into a Western economic model for development (Agunga, 1999:146; Barranquero, 2011:155; Mattelart, 1978:21). Modernisation critics argued that the Western model for social change and modernisation paradigm should be regarded as a *description* of development in Western, developed countries, rather than an *approach* to bringing about social change in developing countries (Melkote, 2003:130,132, Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:236).

While the dominant paradigm of modernisation was still in full swing with numerous planned projects and government initiatives, social movements for structural change and critiques of the modernisation approach called for a shift in thinking (Barranquero, 2011:154; McAnany, 2012:66; Servaes, 2020:18). By the late 1960s, the field began to show a split in its approaches to development. On the one hand was the dominant approach to development with theories of modernisation and diffusion. On the other hand, a participatory view of communication that provided a contrasting approach to that of modernisation started to emerge (Frank, 1969:5, 9; Waisbord, 2020:108). Similar to the collective behaviour perspective in the field of social movements research (see sections 3.2 & 3.3), the field of communication for social change shows a shift wherein the individual is not to blame for the issues within a society, but rather, the structures that control that society are to blame.

4.2.1.2 Similarities in paradigm shifts: modernisation and collective behaviour

In the previous chapter (see sections 3.2 & 3.3), it was noted that the field of social movement theorisation underwent a paradigm shift from a functionalist perspective to a conflict paradigm that allowed for the recognition of the inequalities within society. The modernisation approach to development held similar notions as that of the collective behaviour perspective, i.e., that the structures or systems in a society should guide an individual's behaviour, and that individuals cannot develop or act rationally toward assimilating within a society without the input from a societal system (see section 3.2).

With a communication focus, the modernisation perspective proposed the dissemination of information on what classical social movement scholars would refer to as the norms by which a society should behave (see section 3.2). Both approaches were problematic in that they assumed the competence of an agent *outside* of a group in need of development to inform and govern the development process. Therefore, from a modernisation or collective behaviour perspective, development occurs on the terms of the institutions or powerholders in a society (Shi, 2020:391) (see sections 3.2 & 4.2.1.1). These approaches' assumptions, however, fail to consider the role

of the institutions or powerholders in perpetuating inequalities within society (Dutta, 2020:120; Shi, 2020:931). Both approaches pose the risk that if employed or practised, institutions or powerholders could maintain oppressive conditions in a society, since development would be dictated by those that already benefit from the system. The collective behaviour paradigm enforced societal norms by arguing that collective behaviour from oppressed groups to bring about social change is “irrational” or “illegitimate” (see section 3.2). Similarly, in the context of theorising development, during the modernisation paradigm’s dominance, non-Western contributions to the field were regarded as non-scientific and of lesser value than their dominant counterparts (Barranquero, 2011:155). In its practice, the communication processes proposed by the modernisation approach helped to maintain the economic and political structures that caused inequalities in society (Dutta, 2019:317; Mattelart, 1978:23-24; Shi, 2020:932).

Both approaches failed to recognise the importance of the economic, political, social, and cultural circumstances and contexts in which individuals from either developing countries or social movements found themselves in. The approaches placed little focus on the development or mobilisation participants’ ability to determine changes that need to be brought about in a society. For scholars to gain an understanding of individuals’ actions that bring about social change outside of the proposed institutionalised channels of the modernisation or collective behaviour perspective, both the social movements and development communication fields underwent paradigm shifts.

These paradigm shifts emerged to recognise marginalised or oppressed groups as actors who have the ability to claim agency in a process toward social change (Freire, 2005:45; Servaes, 2020:18; Shi, 2020:932; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:751) (see sections 3.2 & 3.3). The social movement field produced contemporary social movement theories to understand how and why people mobilise towards social change (see section 3.3). The field of communication for social change, however, produced the dependency paradigm and the now normative participatory approach to communication for social change. The strongest critique against modernisation and the first theories that centred around participation emerged from the dependency paradigm (Beltrán, 1979:25; Barranquero, 2011:155; Huesca, 2001:180; Servaes, 2020:18; Shi, 2020:931).

4.3 The dependency paradigm

The dependency paradigm is based on the view that development through modernisation entails an interdependent relationship between countries at the centre of development (the “First World”)

and countries at the periphery (the “Third World”), and that development aid from the First World is precisely what facilitates underdevelopment in the Third World (Agunga, 1999:6; Awodiya, 2012:11; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:228; Shi, 2020:932). Originally developed in Latin America, the dependency paradigm took form as social scientists of the region started to challenge Eurocentric perspectives of development from the modernisation approach and introduced a structuralist, neo-Marxist orientation to the discipline (Huesca, 2001:180; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:228; Servaes, 2020:18; Shi, 2020:931). Key theorists of the dependency paradigm include Andre Gunder Frank (1969), Armand Mattelart (1978), Juan Díaz Bordenave (1976), Paulo Freire (1970), and Luis Ració Beltrán (1979).

Dependency theorists argued that underdevelopment was not – like modernisation theorists argued – due to *internal* factors such as people’s culture, their religion, or lack of capital, information, and access to Western ideas of development. Instead, problems of underdevelopment at the *periphery* were seen as a *consequence* of development at the *centre* (Frank, 1969:9; Servaes, 2020:18). Processes of development and underdevelopment were seen to be interrelated and continuous (Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:228). That is to say, one cannot have one without the other, and one should examine development and underdevelopment in a way that accounts for the *world system* in which those circumstances exist (Frank, 1969:3). For some dependency theorists, elements of the post-colonial economic world system, such as unequal capital, labour, and trade relations, meant that developed countries at the centre of the system existed as such at the expense of underdeveloped countries at the periphery (Dos Santos, 1970:231; Frank, 1996:3; Servaes, 1996:32; Servaes & Malikha, 2002:7; Waisbord, 2020:109). As Latin American scholars began to deconstruct and examine the modernisation approach, they argued that early development efforts were based on neo-colonial control and expanding capitalism in an ideological and material sense (Huesca, 2001:181).

Similar to scholars who argued for a conflict paradigm emergence in the field of social movement studies to recognise inequalities in societies (see sections 3.2 and 3.3), dependency theorists held a neo-Marxist perspective. The dependency theory argues that one should consider the historical and continued effect of relations between developed and developing countries – proposing underdevelopment as a result of these relations (Frank, 1996:3; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:229; Servaes, 2020:18). The dependency paradigm proposed that underdevelopment resulted from the unequal distribution of resources and international division of labour between developed and underdeveloped countries amidst Western capitalism’s expansion into the rest of the world (Waisbord, 2020:108). It was argued that countries at the periphery stayed underdeveloped because the global expansion of capitalism forced them into political and cultural

dependency on countries at the centre, which held dominant, imperialist positions in the global order (Dos Santos, 1970:231; Freire, 2005:161-162). Dominant countries' economic power and political decisions – particularly that of the United States – were regarded as perpetrators of underdevelopment in non-western countries, especially in the Global South (i.e. regions of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania), which modernisation theorists previously referred to as third-world countries (Dodos & Connell, 2012:12). Countries in a position of dependence could only develop as a reflection of the development of countries at the centre (Freire, 2005:161; Waisbord, 2020:108-109).

Dependency thinkers wanted to shift the focus from the *individual's* behaviour to the global economic *structures* that perpetuated the conditions of underdevelopment, marginalisation, and poverty and essentially kept people from developing (Dutta, 2015:127). Theorists with a dependency perspective argued that modern development goals contrasted with the social, political, and economic circumstances underdeveloped communities found themselves in (Bordenave, 1976:138 & 141; Chin, 2020:1157; Huesca, 2001:181; Mattelart, 1978:15). Because underdevelopment was seen as the result of *structures of inequality* within a society, it was argued that development should be *political*, rather than *informational* (Servaes & Malikhaio, 2002:9, Waisbord, 2020:108). Factors that are *external* to the individual, i.e., those factors they do not have control over, such as unequal land distribution and poor healthcare services, were seen as limitations for development in the periphery (Waisbord, 2020:109). This view contrasted with modernisation theorists' assumption that internal factors, such as the religious and cultural values of traditional societies, limited their development. With a dependency view, development was not measured according to the individual's adoption of certain behaviours or technology, but rather in terms of the social, political, and economic circumstances that surround certain behaviours (Huesca, 2001:181). The dependency phase's influence from the critical theory perspective still holds a strong position in normative theorisations of communication for social change today. The notion of power and reorganising structures of power that are perceived to be oppressive, whether political or social, has become part of the dominant discourse in academia and development practice surrounding social change.

Because the modernisation approach placed so much emphasis on the media for its part in development, dependency theorists' notion of redistribution of power also called for the transformation of media structures (Beltrán, 1979:ii; Dutta, 2020:105; Waisbord, 2020:109). Dependency thinkers argued that a modernist view ignored that the media was controlled by those who had economic interests and instead used it to make profits for their businesses (Dutta, 2020:105; Huesca, 2008:182; Mattelart, 1978:16-17; McAnany, 2012:80, Waisbord, 2020:109).

Key authors in dependency thinking, like Armand Mattelart (1978:15) and Paulo Freire (2005:140), described mass media as tools for cultural imperialism and the creation of societal false consciousness, rather than the duplicators of social change resembling Western “utopia”, as modernisation theorists had championed them to be (McAnany, 2012:71, 73; Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:388). For dependency theorists, the media should serve the people rather than capitalist elites and businesses’ commercial and entertainment needs (Waisbord, 2020:109).

The dependency paradigm led to a movement for independence and political, cultural, and economic self-determination among countries in Africa and Asia. As dependency thinkers argued that countries of the Third World should cut ties with the First World, the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) was created and the Non-Aligned Nations, which consisted of countries from the Third World, were formed to redefine development as a *political struggle* (Beltrán, 1979:i; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:6). As noted earlier (see section 3.2.1.2), the shift within the field of development communication shows similarity to that of the social movement field. Both fields started to argue for social change to be self-determined, justified political action that is affected or brought on by systemic factors (see section 3.3). Although the dependency perspective allows consideration on the effects of global capitalism on processes of development within developing countries, its strong focus on the economic factors related to underdevelopment leaves room for a wider acknowledgement of other factors that may be crucial to communication for social change, such as an individual’s or a community’s empowerment beyond economic measures. Therefore, by the 1980s, participatory approaches to development communication began to gain momentum.

4.4 The normative participatory paradigm

The participatory approach that emerged suggests that the process of bringing about social change should belong to the people – i.e., those who find themselves within circumstances that they deem change-worthy (Cooke & Kothari, 2001:5; Freire, 2005:45; De Souza & Begeer, 2020:259; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:747). While a person should have control over their own process toward change, they themselves, their beliefs, ideas, or culture are not considered the cause for a lack of change. Instead, these aspects and concerns are seen as crucial components of a participatory process towards social change.

Similar to the dependency perspective, the participatory approach takes a structural approach to understanding causes for underdevelopment, calling scholars to consider the structures in which

marginalised, oppressed, or disadvantaged individuals find themselves and how these structures and systems put individuals in circumstances that require change (Tufte, 2017:12; Waisbord, 2020:110). Unlike the dependency perspective, it does not only deem social change to be the *economic* self-determination and empowerment of nations. Rather, the participatory approach proposes participation in communication for social change itself as part of empowerment. The approach emphasises an individual's autonomy in a process of change; the importance of their cultural identity; and their dialogical participation at all levels and phases of a process toward social change, empowering them to influence society and take control of their circumstances and actions toward change (Chin, 2020:1172; De Souza & Begeer, 2020:259; Dutta, 2019:317; Dutta, 2020:102; Muturi & Mwangi, 2009:75; Servaes, 2020:7; Servaes & Malikhao, 2002:20; Shi, 2020:932).

Below follows a critical discussion of the principles of the participatory approach to communication for social change to elaborate on the statements made above. These assumptions relate to individuals' participation in the social change communication process; the practice of dialogical communication for social change; the consideration of cultural diversity within change initiatives; and the long-term empowerment of participants in social change. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, to contextualise the discussion, arguments will be made for using assumptions of contemporary social movement theories to apply participatory principles to the phenomena of communication for social change in online social movements.

4.4.1 Individuals' participation in the communicative process toward social change

Participatory communication within a participatory process towards social change is defined by Singhal (2001:12) as "a dynamic, interactional, and transformative process of dialogue between people, groups, and institutions that enables people, both individually and collectively, to realise their full potential and be engaged in their own welfare". In contrast to the modernisation approach, which regards development goals as determined by Western "developed" societies, the participatory approach argues that those who benefit from a social change initiative or project need to actively participate in determining what issues they want development initiative to address, and how these concerns can be approached from their point of view (Dutta, 2020:102; Morris, 2003:226 Muturi & Mwangi, 2009:75). They should partake in the establishment of a project's goals based on their own unique understanding and experience of the issues they face, and actively participate in the implementation of the project as well as its evaluation about the extent to which they have been empowered (Altamirano, 2020:324; Chin, 2020:1157; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005:96; Waisbord, 2001:20).

It is important to note that some participatory approaches take what scholars refer to as a “project or program-based approach” to bringing about social change (Burger, 2015:23; Otto & Fourie, 2016:22; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:12). This approach refers to participants as stakeholders or beneficiaries of social change, implying the involvement of an external party in the change process (Chin, 2020: 1160; Muturi & Mwangi, 2009:79; Otto & Fourie, 2016:22). Unlike a modernisation approach, which would imply that a project is facilitated, informed, and to an extent managed by an external actor, the participatory approach places all community or citizen stakeholders in the process toward change as equals to those who are external actors (Burger, 2015:22; De Souza & Begeer, 2020:267; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:748). A participatory approach therefore places a strong emphasis on ensuring that community stakeholders actively take part in communication processes regarding social change, since it is this participation that is said to bring about change (De Souza & Begeer, 2020:259; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005:94). Empowerment stems from the ability of participants to control decisions that affect them and the issues they aim to solve (Chin, 2020:1163; Morris, 2003:226; White, 1996:143).

Participation is not a neutral activity and implies a reclamation of power and autonomy by the people (Chin, 2020:1163; De Souza & Begeer, 2020:259). The participatory approach emphasises the notion of power redistribution between those who facilitate social change and those who benefit from social change. As White (1996:155) notes: “If participation means that the voiceless gain a voice, we should expect this to bring some conflict. It will challenge power relations, both within any individual project and in wider society. The absence of conflicts in many supposedly “participatory” programs is something that should raise our suspicions. Change hurts.” For the redistribution of power and the reclamation of control over change, citizens create spaces for participation, engaging in communication for social change as a political act.

4.4.1.1 Creating spaces for participation

Cornwall (2002:2) notes different spaces for citizens to participate in a process towards social change, both physically, like occupying a constrained area, and metaphorically, where power is redistributed to citizens to enable their engagement in social change processes. Isin (2009:368) refers to these spaces for participation as “sites of action”. Sites of action are areas of dispute or discourse surrounding certain issues, interests, and themes like identity, human rights, or politics (Isin, 2009:370). By creating their own spaces or sites for participation in social change, citizens are able to engage with political systems in a manner that is less determined and controlled by external agencies or institutions, like that of elections (Isin, 2009:371). Rather, they can create and facilitate their own opportunities for communication toward social change by engaging on their own terms and in their own space for participation, like in a social movement (Cornwall,

2002:2; Dutta, 2015:137). Since citizen-created spaces for participation, like social movements, are formed by those who *want* to take part in them, and not by governments or institutions, they offer space for participation to groups who would otherwise be marginalised within a political system (Cornwall, 2002:22; Freire, 2005:149; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:739; White, 1996:146). With this viewpoint, social movements exist as struggles for social and political inclusion (Tufte, 2020:111), and their creation spaces or sites for participation in social change can be understood as members' means to insert themselves into the political and societal systems that exclude them.

The notion of creating spaces for participation evokes the concept of citizen participation, which Arnstein (2012:12) defines as the political and economic empowerment of marginalised groups in society to enable their participation in change strategies like resource allocation, information dissemination, goals and policy determination, and development project operation. Central to the idea of citizen participation and participation spaces is the notion of power. As Arnstein (2012:12) notes, "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless". Oftentimes, the spaces for participation offered or initiated by powerholders, like the state, presupposing that those in power determine the nature of the change process – which was clearly the case during the modernisation era (Cornwall, 2002:8; Tufte, 2017:16). Participants within a space of communication for social change often need to engage in a struggle for power or deconstructing of power relations to define their own boundaries for participation (Cornwall, 2002:8; De Souza & Begeer, 2020:264). For Tufte (2017:62), the politicisation of participation and framing it as a power struggle between the elite and the oppressed emerged as a result of social movements that engaged in processes of challenging power structures.

To approach the notion of spaces for participation in the context of online social movements, the contemporary political process perspective from the sociology discipline would call for an investigation of the political contexts within a society that would provide the opportunity for mobilisation (see section 3.3.2). As stated by the participatory approach and the political process perspective, there may be institutionalised spaces for participation in a process towards change, such as election times or going to court when legislation opposes a movement's goals (see section 3.3.2.1). As the participatory approach suggests, these spaces may not allow for true participation, as they require little actual, active involvement of individuals in the process of social change. Therefore, the political contexts that could allow for the creation of participation spaces would be instances such as economic struggle, diminution of citizen's rights or state repression. An example of this would be that of the Arab Spring movement, as discussed in the previous chapter's section on political opportunity and negations of power (see section 3.3.2.2). Members of the Arab Spring movement used their oppressive circumstances as an opportunity to start

demanding change. Moreover, they participated in social change beyond the power structures of their autocratic governments, which did not offer institutionalised spaces for participation, and used social media to gain the power to participate. The political process perspective allows one to consider the political opportunities that arise for a movement's members to use social media to create a space for participation. As stated in section 3.5.2, the political process perspective points to the political function of participation. Should social movement members engage in a social movement in times of political opportunity, they employ participation as a political act of reclaiming power and autonomy in the development process.

Another perspective that contemporary social movement theory, the resource mobilisation theory (see section 3.3.1), offers a different understanding of online social movement's creation of a space for participation (see section 3.3.1). While the political process perspective would suggest that political opportunity may serve as a basis for a space of participation, resource mobilisation theory would propose the organisation and mobilisation of resources as central to such a space. From this perspective, redistribution of power to obtain a space for participation would entail an acquisition of social movement resources, since resources are what enable collective action toward social change. Based on the previous chapter's argument of social media as both a social movement resource and a tool to organise other social movement resources (see section 3.3.1.2), one may then, as with the application of a political process perspective to online social movements, argue for the role of social media in enabling the creation of a space for participation. Furthermore, the resource mobilisation theory would suggest that resources such as ties between fellow activists and coalitions like in the case of the BLM movement, which were all at least in part facilitated by social media (see section 3.3.1.2), may also serve to create spaces for activists to participate towards social change. From a resource mobilisation perspective, participation requires organisation, and communication therefore serves an organisational function that enables people to claim the power needed to take collective action toward social change.

From a new social movement theory perspective, social movement members create spaces for participation by means of creating a collective identity. This approach specifically proposes that participation occurs through decentralised, democratic movement formation between members, as they create relational networks within the movement that are based on a collective identity (see section 3.5.3). The collective identity is regarded as a conflictual actor within society's culture, as it offers an alternative way of interpreting reality and constructing meaning (see section 3.5.3). The new social movement theory enables one to consider the cultural function of communication in a social movement's process toward creating a space for participation. The participation in the movement centres around the collective identity. The collective identity

becomes the basis for participation, serving as a means for social movement members to reclaim the cultural power of self-expression – as with the case of the #ActuallyAutistic movement pointed out in section 3.3.3.1. In that section, it was also argued that online social movements use social media's hashtag function to help facilitate and organise participation in the movement. If participation is based on members' association with a collective identity, the hashtag, which is an expression of the movement's identity, acts as a virtual meeting space for participation and reflects social media's role in online social movement's creation of spaces for participation.

Framing theory would propose using collective action frames to create a space for participation. By diagnosing issues, the causes thereof and the possible solutions for issues (see section 3.3.4.1), social movements engage in a process toward reclaiming power in the process of meaning-making within society. The motivational frames in a movement serve as a means for members to invite others into the space for participation in meaning-making (see section 3.3.4.1). Social media serves as a masspersonal communication channel that allows social movement members to invite others to participate (see section 2.3.1.2), empowering them to mobilise against those who have been determined to be to blame for issues. Framing theory also allows one to consider the importance of a movement's credibility and salience, i.e., its frame resonance, in order for mobilisation targets to consider the movement as a space in which they would want to participate (see section 3.3.4.2). Because frame resonance or alignment is said to increase the extent to which mobilisation targets would be willing to participate in a movement (see section 3.3.4.2), one can also argue that for social movements to create an online space for participation that brings about the reclamation of power and control, as the participatory approach would suggest, social movements should communicate in a manner that qualifies them as credible, consistent and having empirical credibility, while also ensuring that the movement is framed as central to a mobilisation target's everyday life, having experimental commensurability, and narrative fidelity (see section 3.3.4.2).

The different lenses of contemporary social movement theories allow one to acknowledge the different communication processes at play when a social movement's members create space for participation in a process toward social change – specifically ones that are not institutional in nature, since online social movements often emerge in noninstitutional, informal structures. The informal networks that online social movements create to manifest a space for participation are in part due to their use of social media to give voice to their concerns and obtain a sense of power in order to take collective action. Based on the application above, spaces of participation in online social movements are created by (1) mobilising political opportunities, (2) creating collective action frames, (3) mobilising resources and (4) creating a collective identity (see figure 5-1). Aside

from noting the need for creating a space for participation, however, the participatory approach also proposes notions regarding what true participation in communication for social change entails to ensure that participants truly acquire power in a process toward social change.

4.4.1.2 True participation in social change

Considering the context in which the participatory approach views communication for social change, i.e., development projects or programs, the approach's assumptions regarding true participation within a development process place emphasis on the power dynamics between the different actors involved in a development process, i.e., 'the people' or beneficiaries, and the external agents or powerholders, like the state (Chin, 2020:1155; White, 1996:143). Cited by numerous participatory approach scholars (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019:2; Carpentier, 2020:195;198; Hurlbert & Gupta, 2015:101; Lennie & Tacchi, 2014:10; Manyozo, 2012:10; Oliver, *et al.*, 2015:4; Reed, 2008:2419), Arnstein (2019:25) proposes eight levels of participation to make sense of citizens' power within a participation space and determine the level to which they are actually participating in a project toward social change.

The first two levels, manipulation and therapy, are regarded as non-participatory, as it entails that those in power educate, cure, or steer participants in a direction of change, with no intention of involving them with the process of planning or conducting the process toward change (Arnstein, 2019:25; Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019:5; Freire, 2005:147). Mefalopulos and Tufte (2009:15) refer to this level of participation as passive participation, while White (1996:144-145) refers to it as nominal participation. Citizens are only informed about what the project or initiative would entail, and there is little to no opportunity for them to provide feedback or participate in its implementation (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:15; White, 1996:144-145).

Levels three to five, namely informing, consultation, and placation are regarded as tokenism (Arnstein, 2019:25). While information regarding opportunities and rights are important during a process of civil engagement toward social change, a one-way process of information dissemination, like prescribed by a modernisation approach, does not provide opportunity for participation in crucial parts of a development process, like at the planning stage (Arnstein, 2019:27-28). Consultation, which involves asking citizen's opinions on issues, can prove helpful in moving towards a process of participation. If a development initiative only involves consultation, without other channels for participation towards social change, there is little to no assurance that citizens' opinions will be considered concerning the planning, execution, and evaluation of a development plan (Arnstein, 2019:28; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:15). Citizens' participation in the planning, execution, and evaluation of a development project or initiative toward social change is

crucial since the participatory approach suggests that a lack thereof leads to a weaker sense of ownership and commitment among citizens, lowering the chances of bringing about sustainable social change (Mefalopoulos & Tufte 2009:28).

The fifth level of participation, placation, allows some participation for citizens, as it entails that a selection of individuals is placed onto boards like community action agencies or that of public bodies. In this instance, powerholders who may hold the majority vote on a board still have the power to judge the validity of participant's inputs – essentially allowing them to participate” but not profit “beyond the extent the powerholders decide to placate them” (Arnstein, 2019:29). This level of participation is problematic since it does not allow for participants' control over the decision-making processes that influence them. There is no occurrence of power redistribution when the powerholders still hold the ability to dictate the direction of social change processes. The lack of “participants” opportunities to engage in conflict with those in power and truly have an impact on the development process indicates that, as implied by White (1996:155), true social change may not actually be occurring.

A process of social change can only be regarded as truly participatory if citizens take part in decision-making and management of the process. True participation is not only participation in the implementation of solutions, but also in the communication and decision processes that precede the implementation stage (Manyozo, 2012:121; White, 1996:143). Partnership, delegated control, and citizen control are regarded as the highest level of participation within a participation space (Arnstein, 2019:25).

During a partnership or what White (1996:145) would refer to as representative participation, citizens and powerholders negotiate power through shared planning and decision-making, and citizens share authority within the process toward social change (Arnstein, 2019:31). Arnstein (2019:31) notes that partnership methods are most effective when a group of citizens has the resources necessary to fund the time and efforts of leaders, lawyers, or organisers to influence the outcomes of their initiatives toward change. Mefalopoulos and Tufte (2009:15) refer to this level of participation as participation by collaboration, noting that it requires stakeholders in projects to engage in horizontal communication and capacity building. Participation by collaboration may at first be dependent on inputs and facilitation from actors outside a community of citizens, however, this form of participation may with time evolve to be more independent in nature (Mefalopoulos & Tufte, 2009:15). De Souza and Begeer (2020:262) use the term co-creation of co-creative leadership to describe the collaborative efforts of communities and organisations toward social change. During co-creation, the goals and actions of change are informed by diverse viewpoints and perspectives from *all* participants (De Souza & Begeer, 2020:262). Similar to Mefalopoulos

and Tufte's argument that collaboration may lead to more independence, De Souza and Begeer (2020:263) posit that co-creative leadership environments facilitate a sense of purpose and agency in participants, which then inspires self-leadership and personal resourcefulness among individuals.

From a political process perspective, in the context of online social movements, which is inherently a form of political resistance, negotiations of power entail public demands for the redistribution of power (see section 3.3.2.2). In the Arab Spring example of the previous chapter (see section 3.3.2.2), power negotiations with autocratic governments (that would likely not step into partnership with its citizens) required Arab Spring members to weaken the credibility of their governments. They used social media to organise their mobilisations that call for changes to the regime – essentially stepping into a negotiation of power through public demands for change which later led to leaders stepping out of governance (see section 3.3.2.1). The role of online communication for social change in this case would not be, as the participatory approach suggests, to hold some position of authority in a system. The notion of a social movement claiming a position of authority in a political process would be too idealistic in the context of communication for social change in online social movements. The *lack* of such power is after all precisely the reason for members' participation in the movement.

Rather, guided by a political process perspective, online social movement members engage in negotiations for power by making public demands for change toward powerholders on social media. Participation in mobilisations becomes a way for social movement members to demand the consideration of citizens' perspectives in the decision-making processes regarding social change. Their participation in making public demands is what inserts them into a position of possibly influencing decisions toward social change. As pointed out in section 3.5.2, the political process perspective enables one to consider the political function of communication for social change. With this consideration, one can appreciate online mobilisations in times of political struggle and the role of social media in enabling marginalised or oppressed groups to reclaim their right to voice their concerns regarding the political processes and decisions that influence them – especially if social media and protest are the only means for participants to do so.

Similar to the political process perspective, the framing theory points out how online social movements may engage with powerholders in society in a more public manner and online. The framing theory widens the scope of a political process perspective, as it does not limit social movement mobilisations to a political context. Rather, it considers the cultural role and power of public meaning-making through collective action frames (see section 3.3.4.1). Social media allows online social movement members to access a communication channel to diagnose issues,

offer solutions and hold those in power accountable to bring about social change. The ability social media provides to online social movement members to influence cultural processes of meaning-making is valuable in a participatory sense, since it redistributes the power of meaning-making at least partially into the hands of citizens, enabling them to participate in communication that influences the dominant meanings held by a society and its powerholders.

For example, applying the framing theory to the #ActuallyAutistic movement showed how the movement engaged with a “powerholder” in the public sphere, Sia, placing blame on the celebrity for enforcing stigmas about autism and proposing that those who are #ActuallyAutistic should be the ones to represent the community (see section 3.3.4.1). The members claimed a position of authority in autism representation and publicly participated in a process of meaning-making that facilitated new perceptions of how autism should be represented and depicted. They were able to communicate that change is needed in society while implementing these changes at the same. Online social movements can gain the power to initiate and manage processes toward social change when they participate in collective action framing that aims to bring about perception changes in society. Adding the participatory approach’s value of *partnership* between the powerholder and the social movement, one can argue for the added consideration of the extent to which diagnostic frames (that engage with powerholders) enable social movements to collaborate with powerholders to bring about social and perception changes in society. If the #ActuallyAutistic movement engaged in communication that is based on mutual capacity building between Sia and members, they would possibly have been able to achieve even more social change through *partnership* with the singer. Section 4.3.2 of this chapter deals with the importance of dialogical communication that would be needed in such a partnership.

The resource mobilisation approach would agree with the participatory approach’s notion that financial resources are necessary to fund other resources, such as experienced leaders and organisers, to engage in the partnership level of participation. Resource mobilisation theory focuses on the ways in which the members of a movement participate in the process of gaining access to these resources (see 3.3.1.2). The theory highlights the communication processes that would *precede* participation partnerships. A resource mobilisation perspective widens the scope of an analysis of participation to include the necessary processes of resource acquisition that enable online social movements to place knowledgeable representatives in spaces of authority. As pointed out in section 3.3.1.1, members of the BLM movement used social media to call for resources like funds. Additionally, they noted the value of portraying the movement’s successful mobilisations to gain funds and support from outsiders (see section 3.3.1.1). A movement’s participation in different mobilisations, which may include political opportunity mobilisation or

engaging in collective action framing, becomes part of a process of resource mobilisation and their ability to enter a participation partnership. The movement's reclamation of the power to voice their concerns and to influence public processes of meaning-making becomes the building blocks for mobilising resources and to claim positions of authority.

Once a movement enters a participation partnership, the participatory approach's added prescriptions of true participation will ensure that they are truly empowered and able to influence decisions regarding social change. Together, the two theories provide a means for online social movements to work towards obtaining shared authority in a social change process, i.e., by acquiring resources to place knowledgeable representatives in such roles, and to truly claim power in the decision-making and planning process toward change.

In the seventh level of participation, power is delegated to the citizens. This means that citizens have the majority vote over public officials or powerholders in a society as to what extent an initiative or program is accountable to them (Arnstein, 2019:31). Citizens take on the primary decision-making role within the process toward development (Arnstein, 2019:31). Mefalopulos and Tufte (2009:15) refer to this as empowerment participation. They note that there are still outsiders who partner with the community during the project, however, the project is initiated by the citizens as primary stakeholders. The outsiders and stakeholders use dialogue to identify problems and exchange knowledge and information to come to a solution, but the project belongs to the citizens (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:15).

The highest level of participation, *citizen control* entails that participants govern and manage their own process toward social change and control the extent to which those on the outside can participate in this process (Arnstein, 2019:32; Servaes & Malikhao, 2005:96 & 2002:25). This entails community-level participation wherein participants take part in identifying their needs, the constraints of fulfilling these needs, and solutions to solve their issues and constraints (see Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:397). As noted earlier, De Souza and Begeer (2020:263) refer to this level of participation as self-leadership or self-management, arguing that self-management stems from participation in the development process. By participating in critically evaluating and reflecting on the development issues they experience, citizens are empowered to act as agents of change (Melkote & Steeves, 2015b:396). The participatory approach emphasises participants' agency in the development process and values the ability of citizens to make decisions regarding social change and to enact those decisions by interacting with and navigating through structures that may influence them in acquiring resources needed for change (Chin, 2020:1163; Basu & Dutta, 2008:108, De Souza & Begeer, 2020:263; Dutta, 2011:9, 13, 40). If participants have agency during the development process, they can direct the process toward change to the point

that it serves the needs of the community, rather than meet the goals of outsiders who may want to manage the process.

The last two levels of participation in the context of online social movements are particularly relevant to that of new social movements on social media, i.e., movements that focus on the creation of a collective identity and relationships as a form of social change (see section 3.3.1.1). These movements, like the #ActuallyAutistic movement, use social media to not only forge the collective identity that empowers them to take collective action or to experience a sense of belonging (which is already a part of the change they strive for within society), but also to determine who gets to be a part of their movement, based on the identity (see section 3.3.1.1).

The new social movement theory posits the importance of negotiation within a social movement between participants to determine their definitions of their movement's goals, actions, and context, as well as who is part of their movement. Furthermore, its recognition of the informality and less hierarchical nature of a movement's structures speaks to the participatory approach's argument for citizens as agents of change, without powerholders needing to determine their process toward change. This was illustrated by the #Actually Autistic movement's ability to situate the movement and its articulators as valuable actors in the public representation, discussion, and management of the autistic identity (see section 3.3.1.1). Therefore, the new social movement theory recognises the ability of citizens to "govern" themselves as a collective. Another assumption of the new social movement theory that relates to the participatory approach's concept of self-governance, is that participants' relationships and their shared feelings and identity around an issue allow them to sustain their movement. Even when they do not mobilise, their creation of and participation in sustaining a new permanent reality in which they feel accepted, safe, and understood allows them to, as the participatory approach would appreciate, continually hold their movement accountable to serve their needs.

It is noteworthy that the participatory approach, as discussed above, mostly describes participation in the context of development projects or programmes and posits the notion that social change in a project-based approach requires citizens to step into roles of authority to truly and fully participate in communication processes toward social change. Online social movements, as illustrated in some of the examples above, do not necessarily exhibit the same processes of participation in communication for social change as participants in development initiatives and projects. Online social movements are not necessarily facilitated by agents who facilitate their planning processes and execution or evaluation of their movement. As pointed out in section 4.3.1.1, social movements often create spaces for participation that exist outside of institutional or formal organisational structures. Furthermore, their occurrence on social media increases their

unstructured and informal occurrence, since members can participate in mobilisation and organisation processes in a more decentralised manner without the need for organisational involvement (see section 2.6.2). In cases where mobilisation against powerholders in society occurs online, outside of the institutional channels or participatory levels that a project-based approach to participation would favour, the assumptions of the political process perspective, framing theory, and resource mobilisation theory offer points of departure for analysing such instances of communication for social change.

To bring about social change beyond just mobilisation and challenging powerholders through social media, social movements aimed at bringing change to aspects like policies, resource distribution, or the dominant meanings held in society, would at *some* point require interaction with the institutions, organisational structures, or powerholders. That is not to say that these mobilisations are unrelated to the participatory approach's project-based appraisal of certain levels of participation. Rather, these mobilisations may occur as instances of participation in communication for social change that could later lead to the movement's engagement in higher levels of participation, like participation by collaboration.

Assumptions from contemporary social movement theories regarding resource mobilisation, political negotiations of power through political opportunity mobilisation and collective action framing can facilitate one's investigation of how social movements can specifically use social media to engage in communication that may *precede* higher levels of participation in a development process. These theories conceptualise the notion of participation in a process of communication toward social change as (1) the negotiations of power through online or public displays of discontentment and demands for change (political process perspective); (2) the mobilisation of resources through online communication in order to put social movement leaders in positions of power that enable them to either act in partnerships with the state or to make votes in delegated positions of power regarding steps toward social change (resource mobilisation theory) or; (3) the use of social media to diagnose issues, offer solutions, and hold those in power accountable to bring about change (framing theory). A synthesis of the contemporary social movement theories and the participatory approach would argue that online social movements engage in valuable mobilisation and communication processes that may affect the extent to which social movements are able to enter higher levels of participation at an institutional or organisational level. Combining assumptions from contemporary social movement theories and the participatory approach would enable one to consider both the mobilisation efforts that may precede "institutional" access to participation, as well as the ideal levels of "institutional" participation that a social movement should aim for during their mobilisations.

In instances where the purpose of the movement is to create a collective identity to bring about social change, social movements members may engage in “citizen control” participation. This participation is highly valued by the participatory approach, as it enables citizens to participate in processes toward social change beyond the collaborative levels of participation that would involve partnership with or involvement from outsiders or institutions. Both the new social movement theory and the participatory approach would be useful in analysing the communication process at play in citizen-controlled participation in the formation of an online collective identity. Adding the new social movement theory’s assumptions in addition to a participatory approach in analysing communication in online social movements enables one to approach participation from a collective identity perspective that requires participation in negotiation processes among members of a social movement in order to come to mutual definitions of issues, actions, goals, membership boundaries, and, ultimately, a permanent reality of empowerment.

Earlier in this section, it was noted that when online social movements participate in mobilisation processes toward social change, their consideration of assumptions of the participatory approach may be helpful in enabling them to enter higher levels of participation toward social change, i.e., participation beyond protests or online communication. The participatory approach’s assumptions regarding dialogue, culture, and empowerment are applicable to such an endeavour.

4.4.2 The practice of dialogical communication for social change

For participatory thinkers, a social change initiative empowers its participants when communication aimed towards social change is, contrasting to modernisation theory’s top-down approach, practised within a horizontal, two-way process of problem-solving rather than mere dissemination of solutions (Chin, 2020:1157; Dutta, 2020:101; Morris, 2003:226; Shi, 2020:932; Tacchi, 2020:101; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:740). Instead of participants existing as passive receivers of information about change solutions, they are regarded as active participants, capable of crafting solutions to problems based on their understanding of the world (Dutta, 2020:102). Because the participatory approach to communication emphasises the exchange of information rather than persuasion through disseminating information, participants should engage in *dialogical* communication in a process toward change (Freire, 2005:164; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:16; Servaes, 1995:46; Shi, 2020:932; Tacchi, 2020:101). Participatory scholars regularly refer to Paolo Freire’s dialogical approach to education in their approach to communication for social change, as it proposes that people should be treated humanely in the communication process, underlining the value of all participants’ contribution to a process toward change (Altamirano, 2020:309; Amoyan & Custodio, 2019:70; Dutta, 2020:101; Mefalopulos & Grenna, 2004:29; Manyozo, 2012:112; Servaes, 1995:46).

Freire (1983:67) states that individuals have the right to name their circumstances and speak their truth. His theory assumes language to be the root of human experience, emphasising the practice of dialogic communication as a means of critically reflecting and acting upon reality (Freire, 1970:32; Morrow & Torres, 2002:37). Freire (1970:14-15) believes that this critical dialogical reflection upon the perception of social and personal reality empowers an individual to “win back the right to say his or her word and name the world”. Therefore, according to this approach, participants should be empowered to participate in the discussions regarding their development. Essentially, a participatory approach values dialogue because it serves as a process through which the beneficiaries of a development project or initiative come to first, consciousness and understanding of their desire for social change based on critical reflection upon their circumstances, and second, a solution to problems in their circumstances.

Freire’s dialogical pedagogy calls on one to consider the strategic communication objectives of a development process that would allow stakeholders to articulate and reflect on their participation in bringing about change (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:16). In a dialogical, two-way communication process towards social change, the beneficiaries of a project are no longer in a dynamic of teacher-student and subject-object with those who help to facilitate a development process (Altamirano, 2020:312; Freire, 2005:167; Otto & Fourie, 2016:26). Rather, they find themselves in an environment of subject-subject communication, where communication is used to create a mutual understanding of issues, actors learn from one another, and propose problems and solutions to problems (Freire, 2005:167; Otto & Fourie, 2016:26; Shi, 2020:932). Dialogical communication is a collaboration between actors and participants, based on mutual respect, trust and understanding, to exchange information regarding development issues in such a way that they are beneficiaries are empowered to change their circumstances (Mefalopulos & Grenna, 2004:29; Moemeka, 2000:7; Servaes, 1995:46; Servaes & Malikhaio, 2002:2;). For participatory theorists, the effective facilitation of dialogue within development initiatives enables participants to create a process of development that inherently empowers current as well as possible participants to actively participate in communication and actions that leads to social change (see Moemeka, 2000:7).

The nature of online social movements based on their occurrence on social media, as determined in section 2.6, serves as a starting point for arguing that the participatory approach’s principle of dialogue is relevant to the context of online social movements. Members of online social movements can engage in dialogue regarding movement organising and mobilisation. They can do so from any place or time since social media enables persistent, asynchronous and synchronous communication and interaction with posts made by other users (see section 2.7).

Furthermore, in accordance with the participatory approach's emphasis on communication that is horizontal in nature instead of one-way, like with a modernisation approach, social media enables masspersonal communication, transforming a one-way mass communication model into one that is multidirectional and allows everyone with access to the web to participate in horizontal movement organising (see section 2.7). Social media also enables social movement members to express themselves and give voice to their experiences through UGC, allowing them to, as the participatory approach would value, name their circumstances, and speak their truth (see section 2.7). The interactive functions of social media may enable online social movement members to practice dialogical communication on social media in order to bring about communication for social change.

Given the purposes and natures of online new social movements, and likely due to the shared roots within critical, neo-Marxist theory (see sections 3.3.3 & 4.2.2), the new social movements theory is perhaps the most relevant contemporary social movement theory when it comes to dialogue within social movements. The participatory approach and new social movements theory show similar interest in the communicative and relational empowerment of individuals to work towards change. The new social movements theory specifically places the value of dialogue in the process of creating a *collective identity*. It offers guidelines for instances in which dialogue can be applied in an online process of communication for social change when social movement members create collective identities.

These include instances where social movement members formulate a cognitive context of definitions for their actions, create networks or relationships, or express their emotional investment in the movement (see section 3.3.3.1). By using these instances of collective identity formation as points of departure for determining the dialogical nature of online communication for social change, one can, for instance, investigate how the #ActuallyAutistic movement's members engaged in dialogue that enabled them to come to a cognitive formulation of the context in which their movement exists, namely a society that lacks a relatable representation of autism and diagnosis support (see section 3.3.3.1). One can also, for example, investigate the role of dialogical communication in the #ActuallyAutistic members' creation of relational networks and examine how they used social media's interactivity functions to dialogically empower themselves to communicate horizontally in the movement (see section see section 3.3.3.1).

Lastly, new social movement theorists' application of the theory's notion of the importance of portraying and communicating one's emotional investment in a movement allows one to consider the functions of social media in a dialogical communication process. For example, it was argued that the like and share functions of X and Facebook can be valuable in showing support for

emotional claims made by social movement members online (see section 3.3.3.1). The new social movements theory posits this public portrayal of support between members as a crucial element to individuals experiencing a shared sense of meaning and internal solidarity within the movement (see section 3.3.3.1). For participants to feel empowered to change their circumstances via dialogue, they must collectively cognitively define their movement's context, form relationships with one another based on their shared cognitive formulations and use social media's interactivity functions to show their emotional support and commitment to a movement.

While the participatory approach places emphasis on the use of dialogue to empower participants to take part in social change, the resource mobilisation theory suggests the consideration of resource mobilisation in a process towards empowerment (see section 3.5.1). Therefore, from a resource mobilisation theory perspective, dialogue within an online social movement would be centred around the mobilisation of resources toward social change. This perspective does acknowledge that social movement members need to come to a shared understanding of problems that they face. The focus is less on the critical reflexive nature of dialogical communication, as the participatory approach would suggest, and more on the organisational function of communication in a process toward mobilising resources (see section 3.5.1). For example, applying the resource mobilisation theory to the case of the #BLM movement enabled Mundt *et al.*, (2018:8) to determine how BLM activists used social media to organise groups with the same goals under the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, allowing them to find each other and get into contact with one another to gain access to resources, other activists and to share valuable knowledge with one another. Therefore, dialogical communication should be applied in processes of resource mobilisation, where members share their skills, knowledge and experiences with one another through critical reflection but as resource mobilisation.

The participatory approach's added focus on dialogical communication as a means to empower individuals to voice their concerns regarding a lack of resources (naming circumstances) and come to the realisation of their existing resources that could be used for collective action (realising solutions), can ensure that the activists engage in participatory processes of self-reflection during instances of resource mobilisation and therefore be empowered to take ownership of organising resources. A combination of the two approaches would propose the organisational function of communication, i.e., to mobilise resources, as well as the dialogical nature of such organisational communication, in order to ensure the process of resource mobilisation brings about the empowerment of a movement.

Even though social movement members may engage in dialogical communication focused on mutual understanding, consensus, trust, and creating a sense of belonging when they

communicate with one another, social movements also often exist as conflictual actors in a society (see section 3.5.3). Communication in social movements may also be used to challenge actors or powerholders outside of the movement through external communication (see sections 3.5.2 & 3.5.4). Given that these demands would occur on social media and in the streets during protests, they would not necessarily occur in a dialogical manner. The political process theory and framing theory present how social movements engage in conflictual communicative actions directed toward certain targets to demand social change.

For example, using the political process perspective's acknowledgement of negotiations for power, one can identify instances of communication from members of the Arab-Spring movement against powerholders. Section 3.3.2.2 highlighted the Arab-Spring members' advocacy messages directed at decision-makers and the members of the public to weaken the government or system's credibility and expose the system's injustices and issues. Similarly, in section 3.3.4.1, framing theory presented instances of diagnostic framing aimed toward certain targets, like when Arab-Spring protestors specifically referred to the Tunisian president's wife, Leila Trabelsi's spending of public funds (see section 3.3.4.1). These conflictual communicative actions are considered crucial in the process of mobilisation (see sections 3.5.2 & 3.5.4).

When online social movement members engage in public outbursts of mobilisation due to triggering events or what the political process perspective would refer to as political opportunities (see section 3.3.2.1), they do, as the participatory approach would favour, name their circumstances and issues. Conversely, they do not necessarily need to engage in dialogical communication in order to come to a point of diagnosing issues on social media. Online social movements can participate in a shared process of self-reflection toward action *without* dialogue since they can witness other members' outcries on social media and, through this exposure to other members' UGC regarding an issue, become empowered to participate. The masspersonal nature of social media (see section 2.3.1, b) allows social movement members to, on the one hand, communicate with specific targets and demand change, and on the other, communicate with members of their community and inform them of the space they have created for participation in mobilisation toward change (see section 4.3.1.1).

The political process perspective calls for reflection on how the collective statements from social movement members on social media regarding a triggering event serve as a means for the movement to signal to others that it is time to participate in mobilisation. Without such an event that enables a movement's members to easily diagnose an issue online, the participatory approach's assumptions regarding the use of dialogue for participants to name their circumstances and causes thereof would be helpful. Furthermore, for social movement members

to be able to come up with solutions to an issue other than just protesting, the participatory approach's principle of dialogical collaboration towards informing solutions towards social change would be applicable. Synthesising the political process perspective with the participatory approach, one appreciates the ability of online social movements to rapidly mobilise with the use of social media (see section 2.6.1), based on the political opportunity of triggering events (see section 3.3.2.1). Additionally, one acknowledges the dialogical communication processes that need to occur for online social movements to produce valuable and empowering solutions toward social change and take collective action beyond rapid protest mobilisations.

In the case of framing theory, the concept of diagnostic framing addressed instances in which social movement members engage in communication that is conflictual and often non-dialogical like members of the Arab Spring movement did to challenge autocratic leaders (see section 3.3.4.1). Still, the framing theory does not provide insight into the processes of communication that occur when powerholders reply to diagnostic frames. The theory has, after all, received critique for its one-way approach to communication (Steinberg, 1999:739; Tarlau, 2014:376). As pointed out earlier in section 4.3.1.2., the participatory approach's principles regarding dialogical communication are applicable in instances where social media's interactive functions (see section 2.3.1.3) facilitate communication between powerholders and a movement's members. If members of the #ActuallyAutistic movement had engaged in dialogical communication to come to a mutual understanding with Sia, the communication of the movement would have been more participatory in nature and therefore also more empowering in the long run.

Furthermore, framing theory points out the importance of consensus between a movement's members to come to a shared understanding of the causes of an issue, since variations of such understandings have implications for the extent to which the movement can effectively conceptualise relevant solutions to a problem (see section 3.3.4.1). The theory, however, does not offer insight into how members should engage in dialogue during these conversations. The participatory approach's assumptions regarding the practice of dialogical communication between members when it comes to the diagnostic and prognostic framing phases of a movement are therefore applicable. Should social movement participants engage in dialogical communication internally and externally, to come to a shared understanding of an issue and solution, they may be able to communicate toward social change more effectively both with their mobilisation targets and with those that they frame as actors to blame for an issue.

The framing theory proposes assumptions regarding frame resonance to understand how messages like motivational frames could bring about successful mobilisation (see section 3.3.4.2). The notion of frame resonance or cultural resonance fits in well with the participatory

approach's appreciation of the cultural knowledge and traditions that participants or beneficiaries of a project bring to the table during the proposed dialogical communication and critical reflection upon their needs. The participatory approach argues that through dialogical communication members should exchange information regarding their culture, social context, and background (Mefalopulos & Grenna, 2004:29; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:742). Dialogue should therefore also be used as a means to facilitate a process in which oppressed groups are empowered to express their cultural identities and the parties involved come to intercultural awareness, understanding and acceptance (Servaes, 2020:11; Wheeler *et al.*, 2020:738). The next principle of the participatory approach, which proposes the consideration of cultural diversity within an initiative, arises.

4.4.3 The consideration of cultural diversity within a communicative process toward change

For participatory thinkers, the nature of communication and actions within an initiative should relate to the cultural context in which the participants find themselves (Servaes & Malikhao, 2003:98). Essentially, a process toward development should contextually fit the needs of a community, and solutions to developmental issues should include the ideas from traditional systems – not just that of the modern (Manyozo, 2012:104; Melkote & Steeves, 2015a:371; Mosse, 2001:17;). Taking into account its emergence as part of a paradigm shift towards communication for social change that values the cultures and identities of developing nations, it makes sense that the participatory approach calls for the promotion of mutual understanding between participants of different cultures, “with full respect for the dignity and equality of peoples living in different conditions and acting in different ways” (McBride *et al.*, 1980:254).

A culture-centred approach to communication for social change proposes that participants' dialogical engagement, as presented in section 4.4.2, enables them to articulate the cultural meanings and contexts relevant to the change they want to bring about (Basu & Dutta, 2008:108). The participatory approach's focus on cultural contexts allows one to gain insight into participant's knowledge, beliefs, meanings, behaviours and actions (Dutta, 2011:11). With a culture-centred approach to social change, the participatory approach emphasises the role and importance of these cultural contexts and a participant's experiences in how social change should be strategised (De Souza & Begeer, 2020:259; Dutta, 2015:131; Manyozo, 2012:104; Tufte, 2017:43). Through exploring social change as something that can be centred around their culture, participants are able to set agendas for change based on their own perspectives, and therefore take agency in the process toward social change (De Souza & Begeer, 2020:259; Dutta, 2011:170; Freire, 2005:181). The participatory approach therefore argues that through beneficiaries' collective

critical reflection upon their shared issues and their culture-specific knowledge relevant to the issue and its solutions, an initiative may foster a higher level of participation among participants (Waisbord, 2001:19).

How people communicate and create meaning is based on their culture (Servaes, 2020:7). Therefore, in valuing the role of culture as an informant of how social change should take place, the participatory approach proposes that during a process of communication for social change, participants should overcome cultural differences by attempting to communicate in a manner that is focused on creating mutually understood meaning while at the same time respecting the social and cultural differences they experience (Freire, 2005:181; Servaes, 2020:11). The participatory approach acknowledges the structures within society as a product of culture (Freire, 2005:181; Servaes, 2020:8). Contrary to a modernisation approach of *cultural invasion*, the participatory approach suggests a *cultural synthesis* whereby actors from different cultures become integrated into a shared process toward change (Freire, 2005:180). In giving marginalised voices an opportunity to articulate their culture and inform a process of social change based on their culture, a society's structure may become more representative of cultures or identities that have been marginalised or oppressed (Freire, 2005:181). Marginalised groups may liberate themselves by stimulating critical reflection on their conditions and how they may take action to transcend these oppressive conditions (Ango, 2018; Freire, 1970:30). This critical reflection can only be manifested in initiatives by valuing the humanity and worth of participants from all cultural and societal backgrounds or statuses. Decisions within the initiative should therefore be made with sensitivity to all cultures, and the participants' liberation must be localised according to their circumstances (Hancock *et al.*, 1997:236).

The participatory approach's assumption regarding the importance of a participant's culture is relevant to the context of online communication for social change since online social movements often comprise members from diverse audiences to form a network of activists who share a collective identity around a social issue (see section 2.7). As mentioned in section 4.3.2, the concept of frame resonance may help determine how members of online social movements use cultural cues to increase the extent to which people are willing to participate in the movement's mobilisation efforts. The use of the framing theory's concept of frame resonance may therefore help contextualise the participatory approach's principle of consideration of cultural diversity to the phenomenon of online communication for social change. Consequently, framing theory assumptions should be considered when analysing the extent to which an online social movement values the cultural realities and experiences of its members and its mobilisation targets.

Firstly, a social movement's evidence for a problem, cause or its solutions should be culturally believable by mobilisation targets, and therefore have empirical credibility (see section 3.3.4.2). This speaks to the participatory approach's notion that the planning of development should be informed by the perspectives and experiences of participants. Secondly, the articulators of a social movement should be regarded as credible and knowledgeable (see section 3.3.4.2). The #ActuallyAutistic movement showed how online social movement members are able to discredit articulators that they do not deem to be knowledgeable on an issue (see section 3.3.4.1). This speaks to the participatory approach's notion that the articulation of a marginalised culture or identity, like that of the #ActuallyAutistic group, and the employment of their knowledge in the development process, has value in recreating structures in society. The #ActuallyAutistic group was able to recreate the knowledge structure surrounding autism and redistribute the articulation power of such knowledge to those who have autism.

Thirdly, the mobilisation target should be able to regard the movement's beliefs, claims and values as central and applicable to their own life and everyday experiences (see section 3.3.4.2). This speaks to the participatory approach's argument that the development project should employ the knowledge and experiences of participants when defining the issues it aims to address and the solutions that should be implemented to solve the issues. Fourth, mobilisation targets should be able to resonate with the cultural stories and assumptions that the movement's messages are based on (see section 3.3.4.2). This assumption speaks to the participatory approach's appreciation for the cultural contexts in which participants find themselves and the importance of their critical reflection on these contexts to name the circumstances that need to change. Members of the Arab Spring movement were able to recall the historical treatment of Jews in their critical reflection on the need for regime changes in Egypt (see section 3.3.4.2).

The above recontextualization of the participatory approach's assumptions regarding culture still shows the relevance of the approach to the context of online social movements. By employing the assumptions of the framing theory regarding frame resonance, one gains the constructs needed to explore how online social movements deal with the concept of culture in the contemporary context of communication for social change on social media. It is important to note that the framing theory does not provide insight into the communication processes in which social movement members engage to determine the messages of their frames. While the framing theory adds the value of determining cultural aspects that should be taken into account when communicating with mobilisation targets, the participatory approach argues for the necessity of the cultivation of dialogical communication to acquire the cultural knowledge that one might need to formulate culturally resonant collective action frames. A synthesis of the framing theory

and the participatory approach entails that, on the one hand, one uses assumptions from framing theory to explore how social movements frame their movement in relation to the culture that its *mobilisation targets* exist in. On the other hand, it also entails employing principles of the participatory approach to determine if a participatory, dialogical process was followed to empower *members* of the movement to inform those frames culturally. This two-fold approach would ensure that a movement gives voice to or amplifies the member's cultural experiences and perspectives, and that if a mobilisation target resonates with the movement's external collective action frames, the internal dialogical communication processes that occur continue to empower them in a culturally relevant way. One may argue that the cultural resonance of both external and internal messages of a movement during a process whereby a mobilisation target becomes a movement member corresponds with the new social movement's notion of collective identity.

The new social movements theory argues that the collective identities within new social movements act as conflictual actors in a dominant culture to produce a new cultural reality that represents the identity and culture of a marginalised group. Therefore, the goal of a movement should not be to just target potential mobilisers with the hope or presumption of frame alignment. Rather, the goal should be to use internal dialogical communication to inform frame alignment with the cultural identities and experiences of a movement's members, and if the mobilisation targets or user on social media resonates with the frames, they would not only be empowered to mobilise, but also to align themselves with the movement's collective identity that continues to exist even after mobilisations (see section 2.2.1.3). The new social movement theory's assumptions regarding collective identity also provide assumptions that speak to the participatory approach's arguments regarding culture.

According to the new social movements theory, members of a movement engage in the collective cognitive formulation and definition of an issue and its context, to align themselves with a collective identity that guides the movement's actions (see section 3.3.3.1). This notion of collective cognitive formulation among members speaks to the participatory approach's acknowledgement of the importance of an individual's participation in diagnosing issues and coming up with solutions based on their experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, since the new social movements theory proposes that a process of cognitive formulation takes time and deliberation, and that members should be able to align their personal identities with the collective identity of the movement, the cognitive formulation concept speaks to the participatory approach's argument that participants should be considerate of the cultural differences between them, and communicate in a way that enables them to come to a mutual understanding of an issue and the possible solutions for it. The new social movements theory's assumptions regarding the process

of creating a collective identity that influences the culture in society may allow one to explore how online social movement members use communication to give voice to the identity of a culturally marginalised group in society.

The assumptions of the participatory approach regarding culture contrast with the modernisation approach to development, which did not consider the cultural context of development recipients. The modernisation approach valued development from a capitalist perspective, arguing for the implementation of Western cultural values to bring about development (see 3.2.1). The hope of bringing about development through the implementation of one set of Western cultural values within a society that does not subscribe to said culture is, arguably, unsustainable. Participants cannot take ownership of a development initiative that does not adhere to their own values and belief systems. Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that the concept of sustainable development has become part of the normative approach to communication for social change (see 2.1). The participatory approach aims to promote sustainable development by empowering participants to take ownership of their own development.

4.4.4 The long-term empowerment of participants

For those that hold a participatory perspective, the purpose of an initiative aimed towards social change must be to empower its participants in the long term (Melkote & Singhal, 2021:3; Waisbord, 2001:21). This perspective allows one to consider a community or individual's barriers toward achieving social change, i.e., becoming empowered (Melkote & Singhal, 2021:3). Empowerment entails that an individual becomes aware that they are without power in relation to an issue, that they recognise the causes of the issue, that they become aware that change is possible, and that they acquire the ability and capacity to bring about social change.

The process by which an individual becomes aware of their powerlessness, the causes thereof and the possibility of becoming empowered is what Freire (2005:35) refers to as critical consciousness, and describes as participants learning "to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality". Acquiring critical consciousness entails that individuals reflect upon the world in which they, the oppressed, and the oppressor find themselves. In other words, diagnosing an issue. In itself, the act of naming the problem is empowering, since participants reclaim their right to give voice to their experiences (Freire, 2005:88; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:20). Critical consciousness also entails that participants become aware of their capacity to bring change to the problem they have named (Altamirano, 2020:317; Dutta, 2020:102; Watts *et al.*, 2011:46). Zimmerman *et al.* (1992:708) refers to the way people think about their capacity to bring about social change as the

intrapersonal component of empowerment. Once a participant has become aware of their ability to change their circumstances, i.e., empowered at an intrapersonal level, they can be empowered to take action. Action toward social change cannot occur without critical reflection upon issues and the causes thereof and the awareness of the possibility for change to occur (Svensson, 2020:227). As Chin (2020:1165) notes, the goal of participatory communication is to enable participants to come to the realisation that they have the capability to take action to improve their circumstances. Communication for social change is used to promote participants' independence, in other words, to facilitate their agency in the development process (Petersone, 2007:10). Therefore, empowerment at an intrapersonal level deals with the participant's perception of themselves as competent to bring about social change, and capacity to change the social and political systems they find themselves in (Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992:708).

A participatory approach to communication for social change proposes that the process of acquiring critical consciousness and empowerment at an intrapersonal level occurs through the practice of dialogical communication wherein marginalised voices are amplified and listened to (Amoyan & Custodio, 2019:70). Through dialogue, participants can be made aware of the value of their innate knowledge and experience to resolve issues (Altamirano, 2020:316; Moemeka, 2000:11; Petersone, 2007:11). This is referred to as an acquisition of "critical consciousness", whereby the participant becomes aware of their circumstances and their ability to take actions toward bringing change to these circumstances (Freire, 1970:47-49, 68-74, 85). Participants may be empowered and liberated by participating in dialogue that entails their critical reflection upon their shared issues and how they may take action to solve these issues (Ango, 2018; Freire, 1970:30; Waisbord, 2001:19). Empowerment can be both non-physical, like acquiring respect, recognition, self-worth and identity, through dialogue and critical reflection, but also on a physical level, like participants acquiring infrastructure, resources or community to bring about social change (Burger, 2015:22).

Therefore, apart from being empowered to name their circumstances and to become aware of their ability to change them, participants should also be empowered by acquiring the ability to bring about change. The ability to bring about social change can occur through what Zimmerman *et al.* (1992:708) refer to as interactional empowerment, which entails a participant's interaction with people and environments that enable them to successfully bring about social change. Interactional empowerment may bring about empowerment that is non-physical, such as obtaining problem-solving and decision-making skills, knowledge regarding development issues and solutions, the ability to critically analyse issues and experiences and speak to others about them, and the sense of community, trust, and reliance cultivated between participants the

development process through dialogical communication (Dickson, 2000:207; Purdey *et al.*, 1994:334; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992:708). Interactional empowerment may also bring about physical empowerment, in a material sense, such as funding or access to resources (Burger, 2015:22). The participatory approach more so values the empowerment of individuals in a project in a psychological sense, enabling them to take control of their development process without the help of outsiders (Burger, 2015:22). The notion of control as empowerment brings forth another component of participants acquiring the ability to bring about social change – their behavioural empowerment (Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992:708).

Behavioural empowerment refers to the participant's ability to take action and influence environments or political and social structures through participation in development (Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992:708). Referring back to Freire's concept of critical consciousness, which Mefalopulos and Tufte (2009:20) also describe as "action-orientated awareness raising", the participatory approach argues that a crucial component of empowerment is the action taken based on critical reflection (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:20; Svensson, 2020:10). Critical consciousness is not only reflection, but action upon reflection. As Dutta (2020:102) notes, a person's reflection upon and understanding of their circumstances becomes "the basis for creating trajectories of social change that are anchored in people's participation". When participants take action toward social change, i.e., participate in a social change process, they "reclaim power to shape their own lives" (Chin, 2020:1163). From a participatory perspective, development can be regarded as participants resisting and challenging power relations in society (Svensson, 2020:10). By taking control of their own development process, participants resist and challenge the power structures in society that sustain inequality or oppression. Fittingly, Servaes and Malikhaio (2016:174) define empowerment as "the ability of people to influence the wider system and take control of their lives".

The participatory approach proposes that participants should have control over the decision-making processes in a development process (Manyozo, 2012:121; Morris, 2003:226; White, 1996:143). The more control that the participants have, the more they will take ownership of their development and feel commitment toward the process of development (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:28). A participatory approach to communication for social change implies that participants should also have control in deciding what issues should be addressed, what the causes of the issues are, and what the solutions to the issues should be (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995:1670; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:16). The approach's principles regarding dialogue and culture arise here, as the participant's diagnosis of an issue, and their strategy towards solving it should be based on their communicative participation in determining solutions that are culturally relevant to them and their experiences (Freire, 2005:181; Morris, 2003:242; Waisbord, 2001:19; Dutta,

2011:170). Based on the Freirean principle of action-reflection or reflective participation (Freire, 2005:51), the participatory approach argues that participants should continually engage in a process of critical reflection and taking actions based on these reflections (Amoyan & Custadio, 2019:70; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009:20; Svensson, 2020:227). In other words, the continued participation in critical reflection leads to the continued participation in action toward social change. The continued intrapersonal (reflective) and interactional (facilitated or shared) empowerment of participants leads to the continued behavioural (actions) empowerment of participants, and these components all share mutual causality in a participatory process towards social change. This participatory process embodies a sustainable approach to social change.

As it was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, social movement mobilisation often entails temporary actions toward social change, such as protests (see section 4.1). Therefore, members of online social movements may find it difficult to sustain collective action toward social change. Contemporary social movement theories like the resource mobilisation approach, political process perspective, the new social movement theory and framing theory provide arguments for how online social movement can use social media to either prompt or sustain a movement's mobilisation (see sections 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.5.3 and 3.5.4). In the sections that follow, arguments will be made for the application of the participatory approach's principles regarding sustainable empowerment, based on the points of departure the above-mentioned contemporary social movements provide in relation to mobilisation within online social movements.

The resource mobilisation theory proposes that individuals are willing to participate in mobilisation if they perceive it as having the resources necessary to bring successful social change. Furthermore, to sustain mobilisation, members engage in organisational processes to obtain social movement resources (see section 3.5.1). While the resource mobilisation approach enables the consideration of the interactional empowerment that an individual acquires through mobilising resources, building connections with other activists and gaining knowledge from them, the approach does not allow one to explore the intrapersonal empowerment that occurs when an individual is empowered to take action. The critical consciousness or intrapersonal empowerment of a participant in a process toward social change is crucial to ensure that they take ownership of their development and continue to feel motivated to mobilise. Therefore, when taking a resource mobilisation approach, the added assumptions of the participatory approach regarding critical reflection would entail that a movement's member should engage in self-reflection and dialogue with other members to name their circumstances, to realise their ability to bring change to these circumstances and to determine what valuable resources their community has, like cultural specific knowledge, that could be part of the solution. This process of reflection may ensure that

a movement's members do not just mobilise because of the movement's resources, but that they are committed to the movement's cause and the community they have built during the process of dialogical reflection. Their participation in the process of resource mobilisation would also be crucial since it would give them agency in their process toward development.

The political process perspective argues that members mobilise based on the political opportunities in the system that they find themselves in (see section 3.5.2). While this would entail that members go through a process of critical reflection to name their circumstances and to change them through mobilisation, the perspective does not offer insight into the dialogical processes and interactive empowerment that would be crucial for movement commitment and solidarity. From a political process perspective, behavioural empowerment occurs in that online social movement members mobilise and demand social change from powerholders. Since demanding social change from powerholders do not necessarily allow for members to experience a sense of control over their lives and development, these mobilisations may not persist if the members are not empowered on an intrapersonal level, through critical reflection, or interactively, by learning skills and building connections. The intrapersonal and interactional empowerment of a member would feed into ongoing behavioural empowerment, therefore ensuring that members mobilise even if there are not triggering events or political opportunities to do so. Mobilisation and empowerment may only persist and be sustainable if the movement uses the added assumptions of the participatory approach to empower members beyond just political opportunities in society.

The framing theory argues that mobilisation is obtained and sustained by a movement by producing culturally resonant collective action frames regarding an issue, its causes, solutions and actions toward social change (see section 3.5.3). As stated in section 4.3.3, this process of collective action framing will only be truly empowering to members if they participate in the formulation of these frames and the dialogical processes to inform them. If members do so, they may experience intrapersonal empowerment through obtaining critical consciousness, interactive empowerment through building connections with other members and the skills needed to successfully frame the movement, and behavioural empowerment through taking agency in producing the frames and taking part in targeting others for mobilisation. Furthermore, if mobilisation targets resonate with the frames that members have created, they may be prompted to engage in a process of critical reflection and the participatory nature of communication between members of the movement would then allow them to also be interactively and behaviourally empowered. Due to its occurrence on social media and the movement's goal to amplify the voices of those with autism, the #ActuallyAutistic movement showed the agency that members obtain through framing themselves as experts in the disability (see section 3.3.4.2). Their agency implies

that they applied participatory principles of critical reflection and ownership of solutions to problems. Therefore, the combination of the framing theory's processes toward stimulating mobilisation and the participatory approach's assumptions regarding the true empowerment and participation of members may ensure an ongoing process of mobilisation and empowerment among members and mobilisation targets.

The new social movements theory proposes that social movement members are mobilised by engaging in a process of creating a collective identity, building connections with one another, organising in a horizontal manner through these connections and showing emotional commitment to the movement and other members (see section 3.5.3). The process of building a collective identity, which entails cognitive formulations and self-reflection, aligns with the participatory approach's assumption of critical consciousness to empower an individual intrapersonal level. The connections that members form with one another and the space a collective identity offers them to express their identity align with the notion of interactional empowerment. Furthermore, given that new social movements are organised in a decentralised manner, members are given a sense of agency in their process of defining and creating a collective identity. The interactive functions of social media that allow members to express their commitment to the movement and to support one another (see section 3.3.3.1) speak to the participatory approach's appreciation for empowering participants to take action toward change. In the case of an online new social movement, members would be able to use functions like UGC, comments, likes and retweets (see section 3.3.3.1) to uphold the collective identity they have created and facilitate societal cultural change as they represent and articulate a non-dominant identity within society.

One may argue that the new social movement theory's seamless integration with the participatory approach's principles regarding empowerment is due to the fact that the theory is not focused on bringing about mobilisation, but on ensuring that members are empowered beyond mobilisation efforts. Therefore, while the resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective and framing theory provide valuable insights into the mobilisation aspect of a social movement, collective action is not sustainable if it is not, as the participatory approach would prescribe, based on the Freirean principle of reflective participation (i.e., members' actions based on critical reflections upon their circumstances and ability to change these circumstances). Mobilisation, collective action, and empowerment of a movement can only be sustained in the long term if the members are empowered interpersonally through critical reflection, and interactionally through dialogue and collectively participating in the organisation and planning of the movement, to ensure the continued behavioural empowerment of participants whereby they take control of their development and acquire the power that they have been denied.

4.5 Conclusion

The research question this chapter aimed to answer is: *What are the principles of the participatory approach and how can they be applied to the context of online social movements?* (see section 1.5.2.3). The normative participatory approach emerged as scholars emphasised the role of the community in determining the needs, direction, and implementation of development through their active participation in communication processes towards social change. It was proposed in section 4.1 of this chapter that the already contextualised contemporary social movement theories, and their assumptions as outlined in the previous chapter's section 3.5, could be useful in gaining points of departure for the application of participatory principles to the context of online social movements.

With this in mind, Chapter 4 set out to apply the principles of the participatory approach to online social movements and make arguments regarding the following two enquiries: (1) how the contemporary social movement theory perspectives can guide the application of the participatory approach to fill in its contextual gaps regarding an online social movement context, and (2) how the application of the participatory approach's principles can ensure that assumptions for the contemporary social movement are applied in a manner that ensures the sustainable empowerment of a movement's members beyond just instances of mobilisation.

The chapter used assumptions of contemporary social movement theories as points of departure to evaluate the application of the participatory approach's arguments that:

- Participants obtain spaces for participation to gain the communicative power to bring change to a society, its structures or culture (see section 4.4.1.1).
- True participation and empowerment toward social change requires higher levels of authority in decision-making processes toward change (see section 4.4.1.2).
- Participants are empowered through engaging in dialogical communication for social change, whereby they critically reflect upon their circumstances and come to the realisation that they can bring about social change (see section 4.4.2).
- Social change and solutions should be informed by the cultural knowledge, experiences, and resources of participants for them to take ownership of the process (see section 4.4.3).
- Participants are empowered sustainably if they are empowered interpersonally, through acquiring critical consciousness; interactionally, through shared participation in change; and behaviourally, through agency in actions toward social change (see section 4.4.4).

Consequently, the following synthesised arguments emerge regarding online social movement members' participation, dialogue, consideration of cultural diversity and empowerment.

4.5.1 Online social movement member's participation

- Online social movement members should claim power in the process of social change by creating spaces for participation in communication for social change. They may do so by using social media to seize political opportunities, mobilise resources, create a collective identity or employ culturally resonant collective action frames.
- When online social movement members lack access to spaces of participation that enable them to step into positions of authority over decision-making processes, which is often the case for an online social movement, they may acquire power by using social media to publicly challenge and criticise those in political power or by using collective action frames to publicly participate in a process of meaning-making toward change in society. The process of online resource mobilisation enables online social movement members to acquire the resources needed to place their representatives in positions of authority, and therefore to engage in higher levels of participation. Should an online social movement manage to form a collective identity online, the collective identity would serve as a permanent space for the highest level of participation a movement can have.

4.5.2 Dialogue in online social movements

- For online social movement members to experience a sense of empowerment to change their circumstances and to take agency in the process toward social change, they should use the interactive functions of social media to build a collective identity, reflect on the resources they need and the resources they already have to bring about change, come to a shared understanding of the issues or challenges they face, the causes thereof and the solutions therefor, form relationships with one another and express their emotional support and commitment to the movement. Should members engage with powerholders on social media that they challenge, they should do so in a way that enables the powerholder can learn from them and that enables them to come to a shared understanding of the issue.

4.5.3 Consideration of cultural diversity in online social movements

- For online social movement members to take ownership of the movement, its actions, and its identity, they should engage in dialogical communication to enable members to give voice to their cultural experiences, beliefs, and identity. Members' identity, cultural beliefs,

understandings of the world and themselves, and their experiences should inform the process by which they bring about social change. To communicate in a manner that is representative of the movement's members' culture and identities, members should determine evidence for a problem, its cause or solutions; who they believe to have the knowledge, expertise and trustworthiness to represent them; how an issue affects their everyday lives what solutions would be applicable to their everyday lives; and what individual experiences and cultural stories of beliefs they hold in relation to the issue.

4.5.4 Long-term empowerment of an online social movement's members

- Online social movement members can only be empowered in a sustainable manner if they are empowered intrapersonally, interactionally, and behaviourally. While a movement's mobilisation actions may offer members temporary behavioural empowerment, it does not imply that members are empowered in the long run. For empowerment to occur beyond just mobilisations, a movement's members should engage in dialogical communication and a process of collective cognitive formulation to acquire a critical consciousness of an issue and their ability to take action to change it. Obtaining critical consciousness and a shared cognitive formulation empowers members intrapersonally and enables them to form a collective identity whereby they can continue to engage in critical reflection and dialogue. Through dialogue, expression of their identity, and forming relational connections with one another, members are empowered interactionally, gaining a sense of belonging and valuable insight into the resources and knowledge or skills they have and can share with one another to bring about social change. The behavioural empowerment of a movement's members can only be sustained and truly empowering if members take ownership of their actions. Continually engaging in critical reflection and interaction enables actions to be informed by members, therefore allowing them to take ownership thereof. The purpose of communication should therefore not just be to bring about behavioural empowerment, i.e., mobilisation or collective action, but also intrapersonal and interactional empowerment to inform the nature of members' actions toward social change.

This chapter shows how the participatory approach can be applied to online social movements. Resource mobilisation, political process perspective, and framing scholars can use its principles to consider how social movement members can be empowered sustainably. Participatory scholars can use these three contemporary social movement theories to identify instances of communication for social change within social movements. Their focus on mobilisation rather than empowerment is problematic. A social movement's goals should go beyond mobilisation to ensure

member's sustained empowerment. Mobilisation should be based on members' intrapersonal and interpersonal empowerment. The assumptions of a participatory approach to communication in online social movements help explain communication processes that empower people beyond mobilization. In the next chapter, the synthesised arguments made above will be used to present a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication in online social movements.

CHAPTER 5 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, the argument was made that online social movements should engage in participatory communication for social change to bring about the sustainable empowerment of a movement's members beyond occurrences of collective mobilisation. However, it was also argued that the participatory approach was conceptualised before the use of social media for communication for social change and developed for a more traditional project-based setting that differs from a contemporary social media setting (see section 1.1). Chapter 1 proposed a synthesised approach to developing a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication in online social movements, comprising principles from the participatory approach and assumptions from contemporary social movement theories that have already been applied to the context of online social movements.

To determine what a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication for social change within online social movements would entail, this study set out to reach the following research objectives (see section 1.6.2): to examine the emergence of online social movements; to determine the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories and how they can be applied to the context of online social movements; and to determine the assumptions of the participatory approach and how they can be applied to the context of online social movements. The ensuing sections will detail the findings of these sections and finally present an answer to the main research question of this study: *What should a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication in online social movements entail?* (see section 1.5.1).

5.2 Characteristics of social media and online social movements

Chapter 2 was aimed at answering the first specific research question determined in section 1.5.2.1: *How did online social movements emerge?* The purpose of this question was to enable the researcher to first come to a conceptual understanding of online social movements and gain contextual insight into the contemporary setting of the phenomena. Following a literature study examining the emergence of online social movements, it was determined that the phenomena

emerged as part of society's embrace of the interactional functions of Web 2.0's social media, with movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #AmINext, #Occupy and the Arab Spring movement engaging in Cyberactivism 2.0 (see section 2.5.3). Not surprisingly, it was found that online social movement members' use of social media has an impact on the nature of online social movements, as well as the ways in which they participate in communication for social change. Based on the literature study conducted in Chapter 2, the following arguments can be made for the nature or characteristics of online social movements that emerged in the twenty-first century and illustrate the value of social media in an online social movement context:

- Social media allows for continuous, asynchronous, and synchronous communication. As a result, communication and protest actions within online social movements are without the constraints of place, time, resources, or costs and allow for rapid, sometimes global mobilisation (see section 2.6.1).
- Communication on social media is masspersonal in nature. Consequently, social movements can be organised horizontally without the need for leadership or permission from an authoritarian figure or a social movement organisation to participate in movement organising (see section 2.6.2). Additionally, movement members can communicate to mass audiences beyond the gatekeepers of traditional media and use the masspersonal communication channels of social media as an alternative means to either fulfil their own needs for coverage or to correct reports made by mass media that the movement deems as distortive (see section 2.6.2).
- Because social media facilitates interactivity and engagement through UGC and is sustained by the UGC that users share and interact with online, social movement members acquire platforms for free expression and a sense of communicative empowerment (see section 2.6.3).
- Since social media enables the creation of online social and information networks, the sites also allow online social movement members from diverse audiences to form a network of activists who share a collective identity around a social issue. The collective identity that online social movements construct on social media may lead to the offline mobilisation of a movement's protest actions and allow its members to sustain and expand their advocacy efforts in the long run (see section 2.6.4).

With a broader understanding of online social movements, their characteristics, and the relation between the nature of online social movements and the characteristics of social media, as presented in Table 5-1, the researcher set out to determine how contemporary social movement

scholars explain and examine the nature of online social movements and the role of social media in online social movement mobilisations.

Table 5-1 Characteristics of social media and online social movements

Characteristics of social media	Characteristics of online social movements
Social media communication channels are desentrained and persistent because of their continued availability even if the communicators are not present in real-time to take part in the communication process.	The persistence of social media communication channels enables communication and protest actions without the constraints of place, time, resources, or costs, therefore allowing global mobilisation.
Communication on social media is masspersonal in nature – it embodies characteristics of both mass and interpersonal communication.	Access to masspersonal communication channels enable horizontal movement organising and communication beyond the gatekeepers of traditional media
Social media sites are sustained by the UGC that users share and interact with.	UGC serves as a means for free expression and a sense of communicative empowerment of a movement's members.
The interactions generated by the UGC on social media often lead to the construction of online social and information networks.	The interactivity of social media sites allows individuals from diverse audiences to form a network of activists that share a collective identity around a social issue.

5.3 Contemporary social movement theories in the context of online social movements

Chapter 3 was aimed at answering the second specific research question determined in section 1.6.2.2: *What are the assumptions of contemporary social movement theories and how can they be applied in the context of online social movements?* These contemporary social movement theories are the resource mobilisation theory, political process perspective, new social movements theory, and framing theory. It was found that contemporary social movement theories emerged as a critique of theories from the collective behaviour perspective and a means for scholars to investigate social movements as rational occurrences of collective action and mobilisation to challenge inequalities and injustices in society (see sections 3.2 and 3.3).

Chapter 3's exploration of resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective applications to the context of online social movements provided an understanding of how social movements mobilise and consequently how they communicatively engage in mobilisations (see sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2). Based on the chapter's account of these applications, the subsequent arguments arise.

5.3.1 Resource mobilisation theory

- People use rational reasoning to decide whether to participate in social movement mobilisation. During this process of reasoning, people may decide to mobilise within a movement if they believe adequate resources are available for mobilisation to be successful (see section 3.3.1).
- Social movement members participate in organisational processes to obtain social movement resources, such as finances and material resources; human resources; information and knowledge; able and strategic social movement leaders and teams; alliances with other social movements and professionals; and sympathetic support and solidarity from the public and public figures (see section 3.3.1).
- There are communication processes or actions at play when a social movement displays these resource mobilisation theory assumptions, and social media plays a role in enabling these processes. Social media exists as a social movement resource, since members may use it to obtain and share other resources and disseminate movement messages (see section 3.3.1.1). Therefore, social movement members' use of social media already portrays a sense of a movement's resource mobilisation toward collective action. Social media can also be used to participate in movement organisation processes, as it allows members to create activist networks and resource alliances, arrange protest events, and disseminate information regarding these events (see section 3.3.1.2).
- The resource mobilisation theory highlights occurrences of online social movement communication that relate to resource mobilisation and organisation. However, because the theory's focus is to determine how social movements emerge and organise themselves, its assumptions are not so much relevant to the *nature* of communication, but more so the *function* of communication in organising resources and the movement. This notion of the organisational function of communication for social change within a social movement was carried to Chapter 4's exploration of the applicability of the participatory approach to communication for social change in online social movements (see section 4.3.1.1).

5.3.2 Political process perspective

- Social movement members use political opportunities to take part in political processes that bring about social change (see section 3.3.2). Political opportunities include institutional access to change, conflict between elites in a political system, changes in political alignments from political parties, election times, relief of governmental repression, the existence of multiple channels for challenging power, times of economic struggle, threats to environmental and public health, diminution of rights for citizens, and state repression (see section 3.3.2.1).
- When social movement members take part in political processes through mobilisation, they participate in negotiations of power to bring about social change. They do so by displaying their discontent with powerholders and their unity against them, and by making demands for change (see section 3.3.2.2).
- In an online social movement context, once political opportunity arises, social movement members may use social media to communicate their discontent with the circumstances they find themselves in to support their demands for change. Moreover, given the nature of social media as channels for expeditious information dissemination, these platforms allow for the rapid spread of social reaction and discontent, increasing members' ability to take part in a political process toward social change. Since a political process toward social change involves negotiations of power, social movement members may use social media as platforms to participate in these negotiations, communicating their dissatisfaction toward leaders, their grievances, and their demands for social change (see section 3.3.2.2).
- While the resource mobilisation theory enables a focus on the *organisational* function of communication within online social movements, like mobilising resources, the political process perspective turns one's attention to the *political* function of online communication because it values how social movement members communicate to mobilise political opportunity. The political process perspective's notion of the political function of participation within online social movement communication was used in Chapter 4's exploration of the applicability of the participatory approach towards communication for social change (see section 4.3.1.1).

While the resource mobilisation theory and political process perspective provides insight into *how* social movements mobilise, Chapter 3's investigation of the emergence of contemporary social movement theories also noted that the paradigm shift toward contemporary perspectives entailed new ideas regarding *why* social movements mobilise (see section 3.3.3). The researcher set out to investigate the new social movements theory. The following arguments emerge from section

3.3.3's exploration of new social movements theory applications to the phenomena of online social movements.

5.3.3 New social movements theory

- Social movements mobilise due to the collective identity that they create among themselves. This collective identity does not fit into the dominant culture of an existing society, and the creation and existence thereof serve as an act of mobilisation and social change (see section 3.3.3.1). The collective identity of a movement exists as a conflictual actor within society's culture, as it offers an alternative way of interpreting reality and constructing meaning. These collective identities are often organised in a decentralised manner (see section 3.3.3.1).
- When creating a collective identity, members engage in communication and self-reflexive emotional processes to define their experiences and their movement's actions. Through these processes, members form relational networks in which they experience a sense of solidarity and belonging. They articulate their emotional investment in the movement by articulating their support for each other and the movement's cause (see section 3.3.3.1).
- There are communication processes at play when a movement's members create a collective identity in a cultural context that does not offer space for their existence or expressions. Members use social media to articulate their experiences of society or the current culture, while their participation in the public articulation of their experiences and supportive messages for others who do so serves as a means for them to create a context in which they feel a sense of belonging. Social media also allows members to connect with one another and build relationships with those who share in the movement's collective identity. The interactive nature and accessibility of social media enable a movement's members to organise themselves in a decentralised manner.
- The new social movements theory's assumptions highlight the communication processes that a movement's members engage in to come to a shared understanding of themselves and their collective identity. It points to the cultural function of communication in online social movements. Assumptions from the new social movements theory can be used to examine how social movement members communicate to create relationship networks based on a collective identity that brings cultural change to a society. The new social movements theory's notion of the cultural function of participation within online social movement communication and collective identity formation were used in Chapter 4's exploration of the applicability of the participatory approach towards communication for social change (see section 4.3.1.1).

After an investigation of the three contemporary social movement theories above, it was argued that although they are valuable in understanding and bringing awareness to the macro-structural, -political, and -cultural contexts of movements, framing theory calls for a consideration of the micro-level socio-psychological dynamics of social movements (see section 3.3.4). The following main arguments emerge from an exploration of this theory's application to the context of online social movements.

5.3.4 Framing theory

- Social movements participate in acts of meaning creation and gain, retain, mobilise, and inspire members through employing cultural elements of society in their messages. These messages are called collective action frames (see section 3.3.4.1).
- Social movements use collective action frames to produce a lens through which the world can be interpreted and ultimately encourage mobilisation and movement support based on the worldview. Collective action frames can be diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational. These frames are used to define a problem, the causes, or attributes thereof, the actions or solutions to apply to the problem, and motivations for taking part in mobilisations to demand the implementation of actions or solutions to the problem (see section 3.3.4.1).
- Social movements create frame alignment by ensuring that collective action frames resonate with a movement's mobilisation targets. Should a frame have credibility and salience, mobilisation targets may resonate with it and a movement's messages may therefore lead to social movement mobilisation and social change (see section 3.3.4.2).
- Online social movement members use social media to not only frame their movement through collective action frames but also to offer counter-frames to messages that may demobilise the movement's mobilisation targets. Additionally, social media enables social movement members to increase the credibility and salience of their frames by allowing them to publicly share information about an issue and to highlight experiences of those who suffer because of the issue (see sections 3.3.4.1 & 3.3.4.2).
- Framing theory offers valuable insight into the ways in which communication for social change messages should be formulated to bring about mobilisation and perception changes in society. The theory acknowledges the different meanings and purposes of messages that facilitate social movement mobilisations. These considerations regarding the mobilisation capacity of communication for social change messages and processes of meaning-making

were used in Chapter 4's exploration of the applicability of the participatory approach towards communication for social change in online social movements (see sections 3.3.3 & 4.3.4).

Based on sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.4's arguments regarding how and why online social movements mobilise, the value and applicability of contemporary social movement theories to the context of online social movements and communication within these movements are apparent. Each of these theories and their assumptions showcase different ways in which online social movements engage in communication for social change to mobilise members or organise a movement. They also point to the different functions of mobilisation and thus communication to bring about different changes in society. The subsequent types of changes emerge from the different functions of communication that contemporary social movement theories showcase. They are also included in this study's framework for analysing participatory communication in online social movements (see figure 5-1).

- Structural change, through organisational communication to mobilise resources and place members in a position to take action and bring about change.
- Political change, through mobilising political opportunity and making demands for change.
- Cultural change, through communicatively engaging in the creation of a collective identity to bring about change.
- Perceptual change, through collective action frames that assign new meaning to issues and inspire people to mobilise toward change.

The unique and contextualised occurrences and functions of communication for social change in online social movements, as determined with contemporary social movement theory assumptions, were applied in Chapter 4 of this study to explore how one can use principles of the participatory approach to analyse participatory communication in online social movements.

5.4 Participatory principles in the context of online social movements

Chapter 4 was aimed at answering the third specific research question determined in section 1.5.2.3: *What are the principles of the participatory approach and how can they be applied to the context of online social movements?* It was argued that because contemporary social movement theories do not provide prescriptions for how members should participate in the communication processes that surround mobilisations, the assumptions of a communication-based perspective such as that of the participatory approach will provide deeper and valuable insight into how

communication surrounding mobilisation practices ought to be practised to bring about sustainable social change (see section 3.4 & 4.1).

The literature study indicated that the participatory approach emerged as part of the critique of the dominant paradigm of modernisation. The participatory approach's emergence showcased scholars' acknowledgement of the role of developed countries in perpetuating inequalities in society and the importance of developing countries' participation in a social change process (see sections 4.2.1.1, 4.3 & 4.4). Based on Chapter's 4 study of participatory literature, the principles of the approach can be summarised as follows:

- Participants obtain a space for participation to gain the communicative power to bring change to a society, its structures or culture. Obtaining a space for participation entails a redistribution of power in a society wherein powerholders and citizens both participate in social change and exist as equals in the space for participating in social change (see section 4.4.1.1).
- Participation occurs at different levels, and the highest levels with true participation only occur if (1) citizens and powerholders are in a partnership or in a shared state of authority and engage in a process of shared planning and decision-making; (2) power is delegated to the citizens and they take on the primary decision-making role in social change, or (3) citizens govern and manage the social change and control the extent to which powerholders can participate in this process (see section 4.4.1.2).
- Participants are empowered when they engage in communication for social change dialogically. Dialogical communication entails shared critical reflection between participants upon their circumstances, their realisation of their ability to bring about change, their exchange of knowledge and experience regarding their circumstances and how they can be changed, and their empowerment to take actions based on these reflections and exchanges (see section 4.4.2).
- Participants are empowered to take ownership of social change if the process and solutions are informed by their cultural knowledge and experiences. The change that occurs should be a reflection of the cultures, beliefs, identities, and everyday lives of the participants (see section 4.4.3).
- Social change should be sustained by the long-term empowerment of participants. Long-term empowerment requires that participants are continually empowered on an intrapersonal level, through dialogue and self-reflection and acquiring critical consciousness; on an interactional

level, through the exchange of knowledge, skills, ideas, and resources; and on a behavioural level, through participating in the implementation or actions toward social change (see section 4.4.4).

The traditional participatory approach as outlined above is designed to ensure that beneficiaries and powerholders become equal participants in participatory communication toward social change. However, this approach implies that the powerholder has acknowledged the need for change and that they are willing to bring about change through a participatory process. Social movements are the result of circumstances wherein the powerholders of a society are causing inequalities or deprivation, but are not yet willing to engage in a process toward changing these circumstances through projects that a participatory approach is traditionally designed to inform. Without the power, means, or opportunity to engage in projects or initiatives toward change, social movements target powerholders through mobilisation or conflictual actions like protesting, collective identity formation, or collective action framing to communicate to the powerholders that change is necessary. These mobilisations are a social movement's way to influence the decisions that powerholders make that affect them and to influence the larger political systems or structures they find themselves in.

Mobilisations place social movements in an *external* communicative process with powerholders, demanding change through protests or online communication. Thus, the relationships between the powerholders and social movements are considerably different compared to the relationships between a development project's actors, and they occur in different spaces of participation in social change. Contemporary social movement theories as outlined in section 5.3 provide insight into the interactions between powerholders and social movements. The theories were valuable in determining how online social movement members create spaces for participating in social change and how they gain power through the different mobilisation actions that contemporary social movement theories propose (see sections 4.4.1.1 & 4.4.1.2). Consequently, this study proposes that the first two themes of a framework for analysing participatory communication in online social movements should relate to online social movements' creation of spaces for participation and their reclamation power through communicative participation in these spaces.

While these two themes relate to social movement members' *external* communication with powerholders and positions them in relation to other actors in society, mobilisation or collective action also requires *internal* communication between a movement's members. It is in these internal communication processes between members that the participatory approach's principles become especially valuable and provide insight into how mobilisations can be sustained and a movement's members can be empowered beyond mobilisation or interaction with powerholders

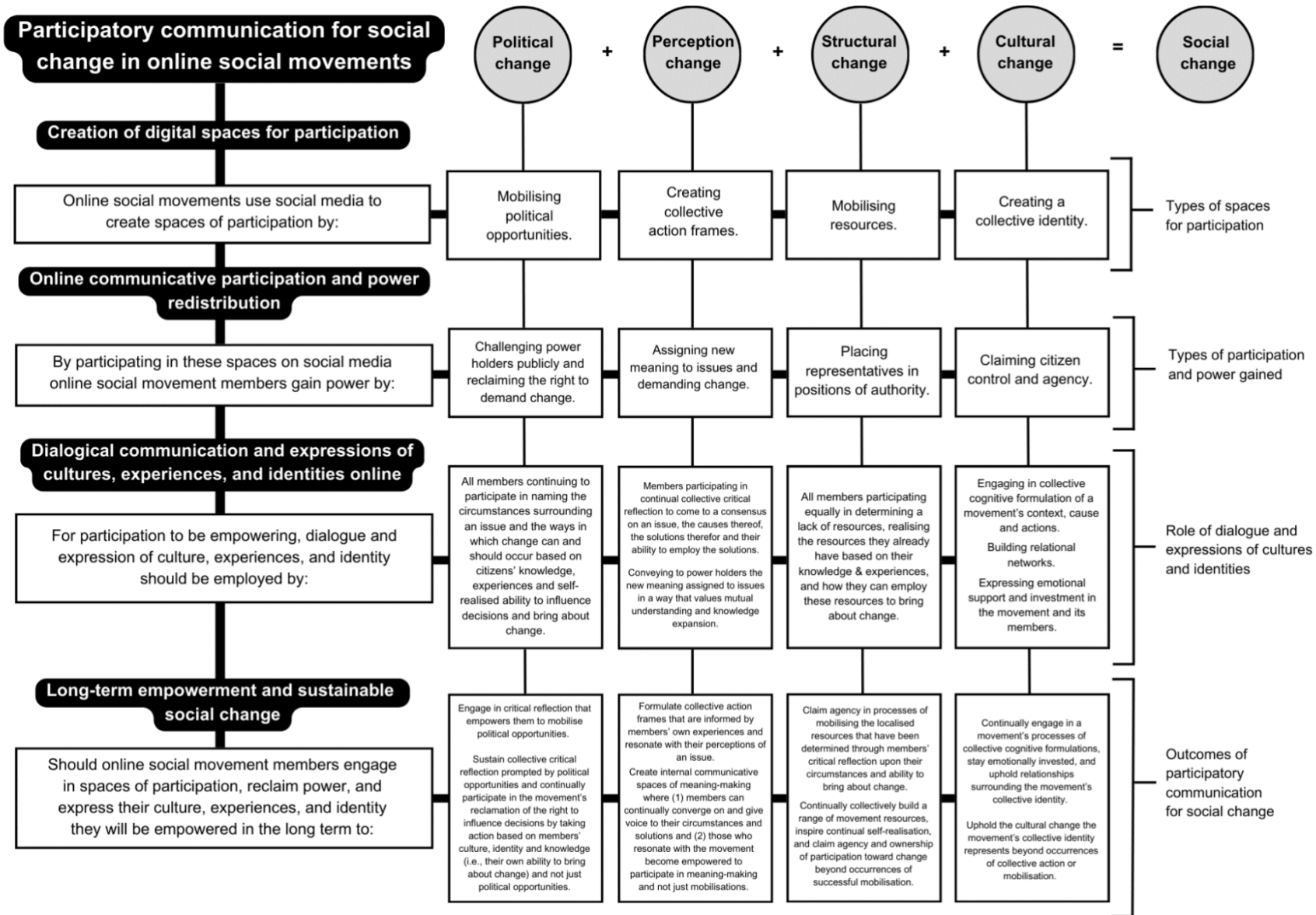
though *participatory* internal movement communication. As a result, this study proposes the themes of online dialogical communication and expressions of cultures, experiences, and identities as well as the long-term empowerment of a movement's members to bring about sustainable social change to develop a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication for social change in online social movements. The four themes that Chapter 4 produced to guide a participatory approach to communication for social change in online social movements are thus:

- Online social movements' creation of spaces for participation.
- Online social movement's communicative participation and reclamation of power in these spaces for participation.
- Online social movement's dialogical communication and expressions of culture experiences and identities.
- The long-term empowerment of online social movement members and sustainable social change.

5.5 A conceptual framework for analysing communication for social change in online social movements

Guided by the answers of specific research questions that emerged from Chapters 2 through 4, i.e., Chapter 2's insights on the nature and characteristics of online social movements (see section 5.2); Chapter 3's outline of contextualised assumptions from contemporary social movement theories (see section 5.3); and Chapter 4's four themes of participatory communication that can be applied to an online social movement context (see section 5.4), Figure 5-1 and the subsequent sections present and elaborate on the main arguments of Chapter 4 (see section 4.5) to answer the general research question of this study determined in section 1.5.1: *What should a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication within online social movements entail?*

Figure 5-1 Participatory communication for social change in online social movements



5.5.1 Creation of digital spaces for online communicative participation and power redistribution

As mentioned in section 5.4, the participatory approach argues that participants obtain a space for participation to bring change to a society, its structures, or culture; and obtaining a space for participation entails a redistribution of communicative power in society (see section 4.3.1.1). The traditional spaces of a participatory context would entail that the powerholders or external agents and the community participate in the process toward change together, and share power in decision-making processes (see section 5.4). However, the spaces in which social movements participate in communication for social change are created around the mobilisations or collective identities that challenge powerholders or structures in society. As a result, online social movements present new contemporary online spaces for participation in social change and a new dimension of the nature of participation, whereby the members reclaim their right to bring about social change by organising themselves and participating communicatively without the involvement of external powerholders or agents.

As argued in section 5.4, social movements' spaces of participation entail *external* communication to powerholders and *internal* communication between members to organise mobilisations, formulate collective action frames, and create collective identities. Social media plays an integral role in enabling online social movement members to create these spaces for participation in both external and internal communication for social change. Social media exists as the channels through which online social movement members participate in communication for social change. The true value of social media's enablement of interactive, masspersonal communication beyond the confines of space, time, and gatekeeping of powerholders in society comes to light here (see sections 2.3.1.1 – 2.3.1.1). Social media enables online social movement members to reclaim the power of participation in social change.

Also mentioned in section 5.4, the participatory approach mostly describes participation in the context of development projects or programmes, and requires citizens to step into roles of authority to truly and fully participate in communication processes toward social change (see section 4.4.1.2). However, because online social movement members participate in communication for social change online or through mobilisations, their spaces of participation do not necessarily allow for the levels of participation that the participatory approach would appreciate. Although true participation, like partnership, power delegation, or even citizen control (see sections 4.4.1.2 & 5.4) might be the goal of members of a social movement, they set out to claim power in ways that differ from the traditional means of entering positions of authority (i.e. through projects or initiatives). A revised approach to understanding the level of participation in

online social movements is therefore needed. This study's framework for analysing participatory communication for social change in online social movements posits that online social movements create spaces for participation in social change and reclaim or redistribute communicative power in the following ways (see Figure 5-1):

- They mobilise political opportunities like extreme states of repression, police brutality, or conflicts between elites by reacting upon these opportunities or triggering events on social media and making public demands for change from powerholders. Political opportunity mobilisation becomes their space for participating in communication for social change. Members can share UGC to social media portraying an issue or event, create a hashtag relating to the political opportunity, and subsequently produce an online space for communicative participation wherein they discuss the issue, demands for change, and mobilisations. They may use social media to make demands directly to a powerholder and support these demands through mobilisations, like protests. The power they claim through political opportunity mobilisation is the right to make demands for change and the right to challenge and hold powerholders accountable to bring about change.
- They post collective action frames on social media wherein they diagnose an issue and its causes, target powerholders they deem part of the causes, propose solutions for the issue, and motivate others to join in on their mobilisations, based on their diagnosis and prognosis of an issue. Online collective action framing becomes their space for participating in communication for social change. Through social media's desentrained, persistent, and masspersonal communication channels, they may collectively engage in collective action framing without the need for in-person collaboration to formulate frames. The masspersonal nature of social media also enables them to publish their frames without the constraints of traditional media gatekeepers. With social media's @-function, members target powerholders, publicly framing them as causes of issues. Hashtags may be particularly valuable in creating spaces wherein members participate in framing the movement, as members may collectively engage in assigning the hashtag as the meaning of the movements' cause or motivation. Through collective action framing, online social movements gain the power of assigning new meaning to issues and powerholders in society and claim their right to participate in demanding change and defining the perceptions that society holds about an issue and its causes.
- They use portrayals of successful mobilisations and social media to acquire and mobilise resources for social change. Members can mobilise and acquire social movement resources

through interactive functions of social media, like direct messaging, between organisers or donors, or through masspersonal communication beyond the constraints of space and time, like making online calls for resources or support from members and allies. They can create UGC surrounding successful mobilisations like protests to communicate to others that the movement is worth joining or donating resources towards. These resources may include knowledgeable organisers and representatives and the funds needed to place these representatives in positions of authority, should a movement's internal mobilisation activities and external communication for social change foster a traditional space for participation in social change, like partnership between the movement and powerholders or external agents. Online resource mobilisation becomes a space for members to participate in bringing structural change by distributing resources between marginalised groups to enable them to enter higher levels of participation in the structures of society and place representatives in positions of authority.

- They form a collective identity based on their shared experience and definition of an issue and express this collective identity on social media. The hashtag function of social media helps members to identify themselves publicly as part of the movement and to represent the movement's identity. Employing the interactive functions of social media, members build a social and informational network wherein they engage in the creation and sustentation of the movement's collective identity. The collective identity of a movement exists as a space where they can participate fully and truly in social change, as it represents their agency in controlling and managing their movement without the involvement of external actors.

5.5.2 Dialogical communication and expressions of cultures, experiences and identities online

Mobilisation is valuable because it empowers citizens to create spaces for participating in social change and represents their willingness to challenge the systems, perceptions, cultures, and structures that influence them negatively. However, effective mobilisation or collective action, external communication with powerholders, and participation in the spaces outlined above also requires sufficient internal communication between a movement's members. As mentioned in section 5.4, the participatory approach's principles become valuable for proposing how members engage in internal participatory communication in these spaces of participating in social change.

The participatory approach argues that participants are empowered when they partake in dialogical communication for social change, as it entails that participants engage in critical reflection upon their circumstances and the realisation that they can bring about social change.

Participants engage in critical reflection by naming their struggles and working together to find solutions. In the case of online social movements, members are able to use the applications' interactive functions (see section 2.3.1.3) to engage with one another. Social media enables online social movement members to practice dialogical communication, empowering them to take collective action toward social change.

The participatory approach also argues that participants are empowered to take ownership of social change processes when they are able to inform the process, its goals, and its actions with their cultural experiences and knowledge. The approach suggests a culture-centred approach, enabling participants to articulate their cultural identity so that the society they bring change to becomes more representative of that culture (see section 4.3.3). Due to their occurrences on social media, online social movements often comprise members from diverse audiences that take part in movement mobilisation (see section 2.7). The participatory approach's suggestions about cultural diversity would ensure that an online movement engages in communication for social change that is considerate of members' different experiences and knowledge they bring to the table that could provide culturally relevant solutions to problems.

This study's framework for analysing participatory communication in online social movements proposes that for mobilisations to be sustained, and for a movement's members to be empowered beyond mobilisation or their interaction with powerholders, they engage in dialogical communication and express their culture, identities, and experiences in the following ways (see Figure 5-1).

- Through interactive functions like comments, likes, and retweets on UGC that represent triggering events, they continually engage in processes of dialogue to name and reflect on the circumstances they find themselves in, like states of repression or police brutality. Through these reflections, they acquire consciousness of their ability and the solutions to change these circumstances, like making public demands for change, pressuring powerholders, and naming the political opportunities that would allow them to mobilise more efficiently. They use functions like pages or hashtags to collectively plan and enact their mobilisations based on their localised knowledge and experiences of the world around them.
- They use social media to dialogically reflect upon their circumstances and come to a consensus and shared understanding of an issue, its causes, and solutions by exchanging information and ideas on how the issue relates to their everyday lives, experiences, and cultural narratives – and the beliefs, values, and meanings that they hold. These exchanges can happen through UGC shared on social media, accompanied by a movement's hashtag,

so members can see how other members diagnose an issue and engage with these posts to refine how meaning should be assigned to an issue, based on the stories and information they share. Social media's allowance of communication beyond the constraints of place and time can be utilised to gain perspectives and input from diverse groups of people, widening the movement's scope of inclusion and cultural resonance in meaning-making processes. When social media's masspersonal communication channels allow members to engage with powerholders through collective action frames, members convey new meanings of issues in a way that enables powerholders to understand their experiences with an issue and facilitate a belief or perception among powerholders that change should occur with solutions that are based on the knowledge shared by members online.

- They use social media to dialogically reflect upon the issues they face, the resources they need to address these issues, and the resources they already have to mobilise toward bringing about change, like their own knowledge and lived experiences of an issue. Through dialogue on comment sections or direct messages, they define the knowledge, skills, and insights stemming from their culture, identity, or experiences, and use social media's masspersonal publication function to distribute or mobilise these as resources toward social change.
- They engage in dialogue on social media where they collectively cognitively define the context the movement exists in, its cause, and the actions they should take; form relationships with one another based on their shared cognitive formulations; and employ social media's interactivity functions to show their emotional support and commitment to a movement and its identity. These interactions are accompanied by the movement's hashtag and are employed to create a collective identity that represents the member's personal experiences relating to an issue and their experiences thereof. They use UGC to express their collective identity, giving voice to their experiences and beliefs and employ functions such as likes, comments, and retweets to show emotional support for other members' expressions.

5.5.3 Long-term empowerment of an online social movement's members

The participatory approach favours *sustainable* communication for social change (see section 1.1). Therefore, participants should be empowered to participate in a process of change in the long run. To ensure long-term participation and empowerment, participants should acquire critical consciousness, which involves self-reflection and shared reflection to name their circumstances, acknowledge their ability to change them, and be empowered to change them (see section 4.3.2). The first step toward sustainable empowerment occurs on an intrapersonal level but is facilitated

through dialogue. Because social change cannot occur in isolation, participants should also be empowered interactionally. Through their interaction with other individuals and their environment, they are empowered both materially, like by acquiring resources, and non-materially, like gaining knowledge and skills to support them toward bringing about social change. The intrapersonal and interactional empowerment of an individual enables them to take action toward change. This behavioural empowerment is only sustainable in nature if participants have agency in their actions toward change, and control in decision-making processes that influence them. The intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural empowerment of participants share mutual causality, and participants should therefore continually engage in processes of reflection and action upon their reflections (see section 4.3.2).

It was noted at the beginning of this study (see section 1.1) that mobilisation may not equal the sustainable empowerment of a movement's members. The added value of a participatory perspective to the context of communication for social change in online social movements, is that it ensures that the members are empowered in the long run, and that the movement brings about *sustained* social change. This study's framework for analysing participatory communication for social change in online social movements posits that online social movements bring about sustainable social change and empowerment in the following ways (see Figure 5-1):

- They engage in critical reflection on social media that empowers them to mobilise political opportunities. These critical reflections are UGC created to represent triggering events like a marginalised individual's suicide or murder. They sustain collective critical reflection prompted by political opportunities by participating in a continued process of dialogue toward critical consciousness. These dialogical reflections toward critical consciousness entail that they become aware of their ability to bring change to circumstances that caused the triggering event, share ideas for how to bring change and implement these ideas. Members use social media to, based on their acquired and continued creation of critical consciousness, participate in the movement's reclamation of the right to influence decisions. They take action toward reclaiming their right to influence political decisions that affect them by making demands for change based on their experiences, identity, and knowledge and not just based on political opportunities that arise in times of crisis.
- They present their claims, beliefs, and movement to the public and their mobilisation targets through collective action frames. These frames are informed by internal processes of collective critical reflection through online dialogue and interaction that value members' cultural identities, experiences, and beliefs. The frames resonate with the members,

facilitating their continued participation and commitment to the movement. Through public, online dissemination of the movement's diagnosis and prognosis of an issue, coupled with a hashtag that identifies the movement's perception of an issue, the frames are made available to mobilisation targets that may face the same issues and hold the same beliefs as members of the movement. Online participatory formulation and public dissemination of credible and culturally resonant frames through the desentrained, persistent, masspersonal communication channels of social media facilitates an ongoing process of internal participatory meaning-making between members and critical consciousness raising of both members and mobilisation targets of the movement. The credible and culturally resonant nature of collective action frames that are informed by members' experiences and cultures enables the movement to bring about mobilisation as well as active participation in the meaning-making process to bring about perception changes in society.

- They engage in resource mobilisation processes to gain interactional empowerment through resource mobilisation processes. To ensure that members are also empowered intrapersonally and acquire a critical consciousness regarding their circumstances (like a lack of resources) and their ability to take action toward change (like mobilising the resources they have), they engage in online dialogical communication. Through dialogue, members acquire and share resources that are based on their experiences, knowledge, identity, culture, or everyday lives and build a range of localised resources toward change that belong to the movement and reflect their localised solutions to issues. Continued reflection upon their ability to mobilise resources to bring change facilitates ongoing self-realisation among members and enables them to take ownership of the process toward change. This agency and active participation in organising the movement and its resources may bring about the sustained participation of members beyond initial successful resource mobilisation.
- They engage in a process of creating a collective identity. The process entails that they come to shared cognitive formulations of an issue, the context of the issue, and their movement and the actions their movement should take. This brings about a collective critical consciousness and empowers them on an intrapersonal level. Furthermore, they use social media to build a relational network among one another wherein they continue to engage in critical reflection to form cognitive formulations, but also to offer emotional support to one another and showcase their investment in the movement. Collective cognitive formulations through sharing UGC and reacting to each other's posts facilitate the interactional empowerment of the members. Their continued participation in the movement's creation and recreation of its collective identity

becomes a means for them to take ownership of their actions toward social change. Therefore, the collective identity becomes the source of sustainable empowerment.

With these arguments combined, this study presents a conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication for social change in online social movements (see Figure 5-1). Guided by the themes proposed in section 5.4, the framework synthesises principles of the participatory approach and contemporary social movement theories to offer insight into the different types of spaces for participation in online social movements; the power social movement members gain by participating in social change and mobilisation in these online spaces; the role of dialogue and expressions of cultures and identities during participation in mobilisation activities; and the outcomes of participatory communication for social change in online social movements. The framework also presents how, through participatory communication in different online spaces, a social movement can bring about political change through political opportunity mobilisation, perception change through collective action framing, structural change through resource mobilisation, and cultural change through collective identity creation – as part of a larger process toward sustainable social change.

5.6 Conclusion

This study answered its specific research questions presented in section 1.5.2 to produce the framework presented in section 5.5 and Figure 5-1. The framework offers a reconceptualisation of the participatory approach's principles, while acknowledging the unique characteristics of social media and online social movement mobilisation. Through employing assumptions from contemporary social movement theory, the researcher was able to integrate social movement scholars' insights of online social movements into a participatory communication-based approach to analysing the phenomena. The contemporary social movement theories were particularly valuable in understanding how online social movements participate in online communication when they mobilise toward social change. A synthesis of these understandings with the participatory approach's principles produced a framework that:

- Acknowledges the value of online social movement mobilisation and communication for social change in spaces for participation that differ from traditional offline social movements or project-based approaches to social change.

- Accounts for the value of levels of participation that, through external communication with powerholders and the public, enables unique ways for reclaiming power to bring about political, perceptual, structural, and cultural change.
- Presents contextually and conceptually relevant ways for an online social movement to facilitate dialogical communication and expression of members' identities, experiences, and cultures, ensuring that the participatory communication for social change brings about sustained mobilisation, long-term empowerment of members, and sustainable social change.

Future research that applies this framework to an online social movement's communication will be helpful in affirming its validity and value and determining its possible shortcomings.

5.7 Limitations of the study and future research

This study did not include the empirical research needed to qualitatively apply and empirically verify the proposed theoretical framework of the study. The strong focus on literature and existing relevant empirical studies did, however, allow this study, which is limited in size and researchers, to still offer an in-depth exploration of the studies which have already been done in the setting of online social movements. Future research that applies this framework to an online social movement's communication will be helpful in affirming its validity and value and determining its possible shortcomings. The researcher proposes that future studies employ a mixed research methodology in empirical application of the framework to different local and international online social movements. The framework can be utilised by participatory communication scholars but will also be of use for scholars from other disciplines like sociology who wish to gain a better understanding of participation in online social movements.

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ANNEXURE A ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za

12 May 2021

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE LETTER OF DECISION: NO RISK

Based on the review by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)** on 12/05/2021, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby clears your study as a **no risk** study. This implies that the NWU-SCRE grants its permission that, provided the general conditions specified below are met, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: A conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication within online social movements.

Principal Investigator/Study Supervisor/Researcher: Mx Hannelie Otto

Co-supervisor: Prof Lynnette Fourie

Student: A. de Wet (27138615)

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	0	6	4	4	-	2	1	-	A	7
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Institution Study Number Year Status
Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single Study

Commencement date: 12/05/2021

Risk:

No Risk

Expiry date: 12/05/2022

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation

General conditions:

The following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The commencement date indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, BaSSREC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research;
 - withdraw or postpone clearance if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and/or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- BaSSREC can be contacted for further information via 21081719@nwu.ac.za / 13128388@nwu.ac.za.

BaSSREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study.

Please do not hesitate to contact BaSSREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Rothmann', written in a cursive style.

Prof Jacques Rothmann
Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

ANNEXURE B LANGUAGE EDITING CONFIRMATION

RUAN FOURIE

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

A conceptual framework for analysing participatory communication within online social movements

by Amy de Wet

This document certifies that
the above-mentioned
dissertation has been edited for
proper English language usage.



ruanfourie23@gmail.com

082 068 6077

ANNEXURE C ORIGINALITY REPORT

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