

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

A Discourse Analysis of Social Activism and Social Movements on Social Media Networks: Towards an Understanding of the emergence of Virtual Public Spheres.

WAYLIN MARC JAFTA

3272810

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Artium in the Department of Sociology, University of the Western Cape.

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Lionel Thaver

December 2023

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	5
KEYWORDS	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
DECLARATION	8
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	9
1.1. Introduction: Research Rationale	9
1.2. Research Background	10
1.3. Research Problem	11
1.4. Research Aim	12
1.4.1. Research Objective	12
1.4.2. Sub – research objectives:	13
1.5. Primary Research Question	13
1.5.1. Sub – research questions	13
1.6. Research Design and Methodology	14
1.7. Research Limitations	14
1.8. Research Significance	14
1.9. Division of Chapters	15
1.10. Chapter Conclusion	15
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2. Introduction	16
2.1. Conceptual Framework	16
2.1.1. The Public Sphere: Dimensions	17
2.2. Establishing the Öffentlichkeit: Public Sphere	19
2.2.1. Representative Publicness (Repräsentative Öffentlichkeit)	20
2.2.2. The Literary public sphere (Literarische Öffentlichkeit)	22
2.2.3. The Bourgeois Public Sphere (Politische Öffentlichkeit)	24
2.3. The Internet: Virtual Public Spaces and Virtual Public Spheres	38
2.3.1. Social Media Networks: Dominant Debates	43
2.3.2. Social Media Networks: Dominant Critiques	47
2.4. Facebook: Overview	50
2.4.1. Facebook aka Meta: Technical Features and Sociability	50
2.5. Twitter: Overview	54
2.5.1. Twitter aka X: Technical Features and Sociability	54
2.6. #Jan25 – Egypt	58
2.7. #FeesMustFall – South Africa	60
2.8. Chapter Conclusion	62
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	64
3. Introduction	64

3.1.	Research Design	64
3.1.1.	Research Methodology	64
3.1.2.	Qualitative Research.....	65
3.2.	Facebook Data Collection.....	67
3.3.	Twitter Data Collection	69
3.4.	Ethical Considerations.....	74
3.5.	Research Limitations	74
3.6.	Evaluating Social Research	74
3.7.	Chapter Conclusion	77
CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS: DATA PRESENTATION.....		78
4.	Introduction.....	78
4.1.	Method of Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis	78
4.1.1.	THEME 1: CALLS AND REASONS TO PROTEST	81
4.1.2.	THEME 2: PROTEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES	87
4.1.3.	THEME 3: VIRTUAL SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY	92
4.1.4.	THEME 4: PROTEST OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNED.....	98
4.2.	Chapter Conclusion	103
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION.....		104
5.	Introduction.....	104
5.1.	THEME 1: Calls and Reasons to Protest.....	104
5.1.1.	Sub – theme: protest terms of reference	105
5.2.	THEME 2: Protest and Information and Updates.....	106
5.2.1.	Sub – theme: media freedom and censorship.....	107
5.3.	THEME 3: Virtual Support and Solidarity.....	108
5.3.1.	Sub-theme: social media technical features.....	110
5.4.	THEME 4: Protest Outcomes and Lessons Learned	110
5.4.1.	Sub – theme: revolution and protest aftermath	111
5.5.	Chapter Conclusion	112
CHAPTER 6 – MAIN CONCLUSION.....		113
6.	Introduction.....	113
6.1.	Study Aim	113
6.2.	Research Objective	116
6.3.	Primary Research Question	118
6.3.1.	Sub – Research Questions	119
6.4.	Limitations of the study.....	121
6.5.	Significance of the Study	121
6.6.	Conclusion	122
Bibliography		124
Appendix A – Facebook Data		134
Appendix B – Twitter Data		138

Appendix C - Ethical Clearance144
Appendix D – Plagiarism Report.....145



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

ABSTRACT

As Internet technologies, Facebook and Twitter are important sociopolitical tools in the context of revolutions and protest actions as evidenced in the cases of Egypt's 2011 political revolution #Jan25 and South Africa's 2015/2016 student-led protest #FMM. The objectives for #Jan25 was to democratize society and politics whilst for #FMM the aim was to democratize institutional culture of access to higher learning in South Africa. Drawing from the Habermasian public sphere theory's dimensions i.e., normative and empirical, this study investigates the different yet key role of the discursive use of Facebook and Twitter by social activist engaged in social movements, and the democratic project, to evaluate its bearing on the emergence of virtual public spheres, virtual public spaces or both.

The research design and methodology of this study is qualitative as it entails the collection, analysis, and interpretation of website data. The study population of this study is the Egyptian social activist and South African activist. The primary data is sourced from the Facebook "posts" and Twitter "tweets" of the social activists involved in Egypt's #Jan25 protest and activists of South Africa's #FeesMustFall. This study's sampling method is purposive as this allowed for an ideal sample size of 20-30 post/tweets. By means of thematic analysis of the data, the findings suggest that social activist of #Jan25 and activists of #FMM, focused on key public issues which was girded by emotive, and, at times, substantive rational protest discourse. Facebook and Twitter enabled virtual public spaces but their inherent technical features inhibit the emergence of democratized virtual public spheres. The Internet as a whole, therefore, must not be overtly praised as its capitalistic nature remains obvious.

KEYWORDS

Public Sphere

Facebook

Twitter

Social Activism

Social Movements

#JAN25

#FMF

Virtual Public Space(s)

Virtual Public Sphere(s)

Capitalism



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give all the glory and honor to God my heavenly Father for leading me throughout my master's journey. I give thanks to God for being my pillar of strength during times when doubt crept up on me to quit. I would also like to thank:

My Parents: I am thankful and grateful to you both who contributed in me becoming the man that I am today. Thank you for the love and support over the course of my entire life. I appreciate and love you both so much.

Family and friends: Thank you for all the support, love and encouragement over the years. Thank you for not giving up on me. I love you all.

Mentors and Life coach: Mr. Joubert and Mrs. Sandra – words cannot describe how much I love you two. Your astounding business acumen and profound life wisdom really inspires me. Thank you for all the support, I love you both so much.

Research Supervisor: Dr. Lionel Thaver Thank you so much. Words cannot describe the important role you played in the culmination of my master's thesis. Thank you for your honest and constructive feedback and involvement since my initial research idea, proposal, draft manuscript, and finally, my thesis. Your expertise is inspiring, thank you for believing in my potential and pushing me beyond that which cannot be left unchecked. This master's thesis was achieved due to the faith you have shown in me since our first encounter. Thank you Dr. Thaver.

Funders: I am honored and thankful to the National Research Foundation (NRF) for the bursary award which covered the full cost of my postgraduate studies at UWC. I am equally grateful to have been a bursary recipient of the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA). To both funders, thank you for aiding me financially as this enabled me to complete my master's degree.

DECLARATION

I declare that this study, *A Discourse Analysis of Social Activism and Social Movements on Social Media Networks: Towards an Understanding of the emergence of Virtual Public Spheres*, has not been submitted at any university for an examination or degree before. I declare that all the sources I have quoted or used in this study have been acknowledged and referenced both in-text and in the bibliography.



W.M. JAFTA

December 2023



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction: Research Rationale

The primary rationale of my thesis is to explore the ideals of the Habermasian public sphere and contrast it with the emotive, inflammatory and infodemic nature of Facebook and Twitter, particularly the latter network. On the one hand, the Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011 #Jan25 was significant in that the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic state, marked the start of a new beginning for millions of Egyptians. Under former dictator, Hosni Mubarak, Egyptians experienced high levels of social inequality i.e., poverty, unemployment, corruption, and the absence of democracy. The democratization of Egypt took shape in the virtual domains of society, that is, a revolution empowered by the Internet technologies i.e., Facebook and Twitter emerged and ousted the regime. On the other hand, South Africa's student-led movement is an equally important case as the protest actions resonated our country's deep-rooted social inequalities. Embedded by a painful colonial past, South Africa, however, still ranks as the most developed African nation. Yet, restrictions in terms of educational access for a large majority of South Africa's previously disadvantaged Black students, fueled a collective outcry of tertiary education injustice. The #FMF movement, as such, was not just about tertiary fees, but about restoring the societal imbalances. Both #Jan25 and #FMF relied on Internet technologies i.e., Facebook and Twitter. The former and latter networks are two of the world's leading communications organizations. Overestimations of these networks, however, tend to disregard the role capitalism plays in the creation, programming, functioning and distribution of the Internet and technology.

1.2. Research Background

The Arab Spring - Egypt #Jan25

The Arab Spring refers to the revolutions and uprising that occurred throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions (Souza & Lipietz, 2011). Drawing inspiration from protests in Tunisia in 2010, Egypt's revolution began on 25 January 2011 and led to the resignation of dictator Hosni Mubarak on 11 February 2011 (Souza & Lipietz, 2011). Egypt's underlying social, economic, political, and religious inequalities thus led to national protest for democratic and political change (Saidin, 2018). These conditions delegitimized the regime of political power and amplified collective feelings of frustration, injustice, and humiliation (Saidin, 2018). The role of the Internet specifically social media i.e., Facebook and Twitter, in the Arab Spring was important (Habeeb, 2012). However, from the onset of the Egyptian revolution, traditional media outlets such as TV, radio and newspapers reported little about the unrest as the regime took control of the media of public discourse. Citizens turned to social media, particularly Facebook (Habeeb, 2012). The successful usage of social media led to the promotion of public engagement, public mobilization, citizen journalism, gaining global solidarity, achieving mass social and political change (Shehata & Ismail, 2012).

South Africa – #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall

Prior to #FeesMustFall, the #RhodesMustFall protests occurred at the University of Cape Town in March 2015. Activist protested for the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue, as it was a cruel reminder of colonialism (Booyesen, 2016). Following #RhodesMustFall another protest #FeesMustFall emerged at the University of the Witwatersrand in October 2015. A proposed 10.5% tertiary fee increase for the 2016 academic year was under consideration by the management (Chawana, 2019). The protests should be considered within a broader background of a declining

government funding for higher education together with the widespread socio-economic inequalities and racial conflicts in South Africa (Chinguno et al., 2017). Like Egypt's #Jan25, South African activists planned and coordinated the protest using social media i.e., Facebook and Twitter. Students used #FeesMustFall to promote their demands and turn the movement into a national student movement (Ndlovu, 2017). #FMF protests was an extension of protests in the country (Langa, 2018).

1.3. Research Problem

By means of thematic analysis of website data, this study examines the relationship between social activism and social movements as it unfolds on social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter, to gauge its emergence as virtual public sphere, virtual public space or a combination of both. It considers whether the sociopolitical use of Facebook and Twitter, with their varied feature and functions, serve as means that can constitute as virtual public spheres and or virtual public spaces based on the range and scope of democratic discourses engaged in social activism and social movements towards the democratization of society.

The conceptual or theoretical reference point is Habermas' public sphere theory, and the various critical engagements thereof which provide the conceptual basis to distinguish between what constitutes a public sphere as distinct from a public space. The study devolves to evaluating the discourse on Facebook and Twitter based on whether the discourse approximates to the substantive elements of a Habermasian public sphere or whether it lapses into the amorphous void and hollowness of a

public space without much consequence. The final objective of this study is to present an understanding of the emergence of virtual public spheres and virtual public spaces as two domains in constant tension which pushes and pulls in different directions of democratic change towards the left and right as the case might be. This is brought to bear in a comparative analysis of social network sites in Egypt and South Africa in respect of the discourses respectively on democratizing politics and society and democratizing institutional culture and access to higher education and how these play in the Hashtag Social Movements evident in the two research settings.

1.4. Research Aim

The primary research aim of this study is to investigate the different yet key role of the discursive use of social media networks i.e., Facebook/Twitter by social activist engaged in social movements, and the democratic project, to evaluate its bearing on the emergence of virtual public spheres, virtual public spaces or both. To achieve the main aim, this study is guided by the following primary and sub-objectives as indicated below.

1.4.1. Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate the transformation potential of social activism on social media networks, such as Facebook & Twitter and how this facilitates and inhibits the emergence of a democratic virtual public sphere, virtual public space, or both as mixtures of rational and emotive discourses.

1.4.2. Sub – research objectives:

- ✓ To examine the technical features of Facebook and Twitter in terms of the type of public discourse which emerges across the former and latter, particularly of an oppositional and emancipatory nature of the # movements.
- ✓ To determine the primary differences and similarities between the real public and virtual public sphere/space including its intersections in the selected social movements.

1.5. Primary Research Question

Accordingly, the primary research question that this study seeks to answer is:

- ❖ How, if at all, does the sociopolitical use of Internet technologies, such as social media networks of Facebook and Twitter, by social activist, in social movements shape and contribute to the emergence of both virtual public spheres and virtual public spaces?

1.5.1. Sub – research questions

Alongside the primary research questions, the following sub-questions have been identified:

- ❖ What were the distinct discourses that were marshalled by the social activists of #Jan25 Egyptian, and the #FMF South African social movements to mobilize public protest action?
- ❖ How did the social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF use Facebook and Twitter to relay credible protest information and updates?
- ❖ How did Facebook and Twitter enable the social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF to gain global support and solidarity?
- ❖ What were the major discursive tendencies of said movements and what was its bearing for the emergence of virtual public spheres and spaces?

1.6. Research Design and Methodology

The research design for this study is exploratory, focusing on the description, meanings, and analysis of website data to make particular findings on the emergences and dynamics of virtual public spheres and spaces on social network websites. The research methodology for this study is qualitative in scope as it entails the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data by observing the discursive actions and conversations people part- take in. The primary data for this proposed study is sourced from the Facebook “posts” and Twitter “tweets” of the social activist involved in Egypt’s #Jan25 and activist of South Africa’s #FeesMustFall. The secondary data utilizes relevant academic research, literature, research reports, news texts, journal articles, and media texts. The data will be analyzed and interpreted using Thematic Analysis (TA).

1.7. Research Limitations

The primary limitation devolves to size as only two social movements are considered #Jan25 and #FMF. The period is limited to 2011 #Jan25 and 2015/16 #FMF. The number of social activist and student discourses are limited and not generalizable and applicable to other social movements in different contexts. At the qualitative level it tells us something about how the dynamic of spheres and spaces are technologically mediated and to what effect the balance between the rational and the inflammatory discourses enables and or inhibits an ideal virtual public sphere.

1.8. Research Significance

The significance of this study is of relevance to those interested in probing the social complexity that arises from multiple intersections of the virtual and the real and their reciprocating effects on each other in the context of social media networks.

1.9. Division of Chapters

Chapter 1 – Introduction: introduces the social background, research problematic, it outlines the primary research question(s), aim and objective(s), states the research limitations, significance, chapter division and chapter conclusion.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: examines the primary academic literature as well as secondary sources pertinent to this study. Regarding the theoretical framework, this study turns to the public sphere. The chapter thus looks at the internet/social media including social activism and movements i.e., #Jan25 and #FMF.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methodology: outlines the research design and methodology used to gather, analyze and explain the data so that the research question(s) is discussed in a coherent and organized fashion. This also includes the study population, sample method, size, criteria and evaluation of social research.

Chapter 4 - Results: Data Presentation - presents the primary research data findings and analysis. The data presentation precedes concise reflections of the meanings of the presented data.

Chapter 5 - Discussion: presents the findings as well as analysis of the data. This clarifies the main themes and sub-themes and how this bears relevance to primary and secondary research – question(s) of this study.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion: This chapter importantly summarizes the central analysis and arguments of this study.

1.10. Chapter Conclusion

A general outline of the research has been provided to indicate the main parts of this research study.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

This literature review's purpose is to establish the conceptual and theoretical grounding to clearly delineate and demarcate that which constitutes the key points of reference of this study. As such, to abate information overload, the review specifically focuses on studies of (i) the public sphere; (ii) the internet/social media networks (c) social activism and social movements. Firstly, the review outlines the researchers' conceptual framework. In the literature review's second part, it establishes the classical Habermasian public sphere, specifically the criteria, dominant debates, and the public sphere's dominant critique. Thirdly, the review considers the Internet's virtual public sphere/virtual public space potentials, a conceptual distinction of social media networks, followed by its dominant debates and critiques including the identified technical features of Facebook (Meta) and Twitter (X). The concluding section of the review considers social activism and social movements. More specifically, the section highlights the major online and offline events that occurred in both Egypt's 2011 national revolution #Jan25 and South Africa's 2015/2016 student – led protest #FeesMustFall. In its summation, the chapter reaffirms the key topics and shows its relevance for this study.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

For this study, the researcher opted to develop a conceptual framework. Figure 1 below illustrates the primary research topics informing this study.

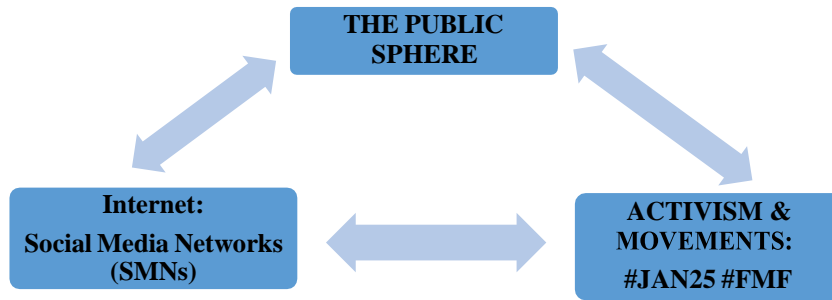


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

2.1.1. The Public Sphere: Dimensions

The theory of the public sphere first appeared in Jürgen Habermas' (1962) seminal book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Burger & Lawrence, 1991). It was later translated into English as, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Calhoun, 1992). Habermas provides a historical and sociological account of the rise, transformation and decline of the public sphere (Goode, 2005). However, for the purposes of this study's research problematic I will draw on Habermas (1989) for the two key dimensions that underpins the public sphere. First is the normative dimension, which necessitates that the public sphere:

“may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*)” (Habermas, 1989: 27).

The normative dimension underlines how mutual social, economic, political and cultural issues can galvanize ordinary citizens to unite and form ‘publics’ opposed to a government. The normative dimension stresses the critical reasoning skills which is essential for citizens’ participation in public discourse and debate. Thus, in this study I intend to show how this normative dimension was evident in the virtual public discourse of social activist involved in both #Jan25 and #FMF. On the other hand, the empirical dimension demonstrates how:

“The ‘town’ was the life centre of civil society not only economically; in cultural-political contrast to the court, it designated especially an early public sphere in the world of letters (*Literarische Öffentlichkeit*) whose institutions were the coffee houses, the salons, and the *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies). The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion, it put the state in touch with the needs of society” (Habermas, 1989:30-31).

The empirical dimension highlights the significance of civil society in terms of economic and social life in the private and public spheres. Formal institutions such as the coffee houses, salons, and table societies, all function as common public places for generating public discourse and debate whilst subsequently forming public opinion. The next section accordingly seeks to establish the three diverse types of public spheres as initially proposed by Habermas. The aim is to show the variation of the public sphere in terms of its emergence, transformation, and subsequent disintegration across various societal epochs.

2.2. Establishing the Öffentlichkeit: Public Sphere

The public sphere theory presupposes the notion of a democratic space where citizens engage in rational-critical public debate on issues of common public concern (Burger & Lawrence, 1991). Depending on the societal context, the word Öffentlichkeit initially denoted “the public, the public sphere or publicity” (Burger & Lawrence, 1991: xvi). In fact, Habermas (1989) identified three types of public spheres: (i) *Repräsentative Öffentlichkeit* - representative publicness i.e., a public display of power before an audience; (ii) *Literarische Öffentlichkeit* - the literary public sphere or the public sphere in the world of letters; and (iii) *Politische Öffentlichkeit* - the political public sphere or the public sphere in the political realm (Burger & Lawrence, 1991: xvi). Additionally, words such as ‘bürger’ and ‘Bürgerlich’ are equal to bourgeois or citizen, however, due to translational difficulties of “Bürgerlich Öffentlichkeit”, a better definition simply remains the bourgeois public sphere (Burger & Lawrence, 1991: xvi). Finally, there is the private sphere or intimate sphere i.e., *Intimsphäre* which by law, tact, and convention is shielded from intrusion (Burger & Lawrence, 1991: xvi).

For research purposes, this study is primarily interested in the *Politische Öffentlichkeit*. The justification for the political public sphere stems from the sociopolitical nature of events evidenced in #Jan25 - a national protest where social activists and citizens revolted for political change from authoritarianism to democracy in Egypt in 2011. Similarly, a political public sphere manifested itself in #FMF - a national student-led protest which opposed the monetization of higher education in South Africa in 2015/2016. Accordingly, the next section discusses *Repräsentative Öffentlichkeit* - representative publicness.

2.2.1. Representative Publicness (Repräsentative Öffentlichkeit)

The first type of public sphere is known as representative publicness. *Repräsentative Öffentlichkeit* simply means representative publicness (Burger & Lawrence, 1991). Under feudalism, “the publicness of representation was not constituted as a social realm, that is, as a public sphere; rather, it was something like a status attribute” (Habermas, 1989:7). Put differently, in feudal societies there was no distinction between a state and society nor public and private, which meant power was integrated into central authority and public discourse did not occur (Salvatore et al., 2013). Habermas thus accepts that a public sphere existed under feudalism though not as a sphere of interaction, but rather of representation girded by social status (Goode, 2005). This period marked the peak of “representative publicity” since kingship was represented “not for but ‘before’ the people” (Habermas, 1989:8). Apart from a king and his aristocratic society, the public of a country did not exist (Goode, 2005). The central authority, as such, displayed their status before an audience (Salvatore et al., 2013).

Social status thus inherently divides people. The public staging of this representative publicity was especially important. Precisely speaking, this representative publicity could be seen by the “insignia (badges and arms), dress (clothing and coiffure), demeanour (form of greeting and poise) and rhetoric (form of address and formal discourse in general) - in a word, to a strict code of noble” (Habermas, 1989:8). The public staging and features of representative publicity played a key role in the formation of the early bourgeois public (Goode, 2005). However, with the subsequent rise of early trade capitalism, “the aristocratic society that emerged from that Renaissance society no longer had to represent its own lordliness (i.e., its manorial authority)” (Habermas, 1989:10). Due to a new

economic system court societies began to dissolve and a new kind of sociability was developing across Europe i.e., Britain, France, and Germany (Calhoun, 1992). To be precise, “the feudal powers, the church, the prince, and the nobility, who were the carriers of the representative publicness, disintegrated in a process of polarization; in the end they split into private elements, on the one hand, and public ones, on the other” (Habermas, 1989:11). Simply put, an expanding union between a centralized state and trade capitalism marked the start of a “novel sense of publicness” (Goode, 2005:5). The publicness linked with court societies gradually disappeared and in effect “a society separating itself from the state” (Habermas, 1989:11) emerged from the late 17th to early 18th centuries (Calhoun, 1992).

This new civil society signalled a change for citizens to gain independence from the state. Civil society, thus, “established itself as the realm of commodity exchange and social labor governed by its own laws” (Habermas, 1989:11). However, civil society could only manifest once the state was constituted as a neutral site of authority (Calhoun, 1992). The idea of a society detached from the state began to take shape and civil society nonetheless served as “the genuine domain of private autonomy that stood opposed to the state” (Habermas, 1989:12). This space allowed citizens to not only engage with each other but also oppose state hegemony of the markets, since changes in the economy led to changes in all of society (Calhoun, 1992). The new public sphere of civil society thus signalled a political commitment of “itself (i.e., public opinion) as the only legitimate source of this law” (Habermas, 1989:54). It is thus necessary to consider the public sphere in the world of letters i.e., *Literarische Öffentlichkeit*, in the next section below.

2.2.2. The Literary public sphere (*Literrische ffentlichkeit*)

The second type of public sphere is also called the literary public sphere. *Literrische ffentlichkeit* thus means the public sphere in the world of letters (Burger & Lawrence, 1991). The end of feudalism in 17th century Europe was characterized by “new commercial relationships: the traffic in commodities and news manipulated by political power of members of the old ruling stratum” (Habermas, 1989:15). In other words, the changing economic and social landscape in Britain, France and Germany meant feudal powers dissolved, yet modern states monopolized the media such as the press, to serve and advance its own private interests (Goode, 2005). Precisely speaking, “institutions like the coffee houses, salons, and *Tischgesellschaften* was now held together through the medium of the press and its professional criticism” (Habermas, 1989:51). Simply put, these institutions not only served as public spaces for circulation of ideas and opinions, but with the press included these institutions themselves became centres of state critique (Salvatore et al., 2013).

The early half of the 17th century thus saw the rise of “political journals” (Habermas, 1989:20) which contained information on taxes, commodity prices, wars, foreign trade and so on (Goode, 2005). The media, specifically, “the press was systematically made to serve the interests of the state administration” (Habermas, 1989:22). The state saw the economic benefits of the press since producing news not only expanded readerships, but increased profits (Goode, 2005). Second, the press was seen as an effective means of conveying state decrees, proclamations, royal news, and other symbols of state authority (Goode, 2005). The press helped increase citizens’ awareness regarding the state’s political activities and issues of common public concern (Salvatore et al., 2013).

By the 18th century, however, critical reasoning made its way into the press under the pretense of the “so-called learned article” (Habermas, 1989:25). Simply put, these were critical, open, and opinionated scholarly articles (Goode, 2005). The objective of these critical articles was to “inform the public of useful truths” (Habermas, 1989:25). The bourgeois public, despite the collapse of feudal powers, already “learned the art of critical-rational public debate through its contact with the elegant world” (Habermas, 1989:29). Simply put, the bourgeois literary public was influenced by the values of aristocratic dialogue (Goode, 2005). The public spaces such as “coffee houses, the salons, and the *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies)” (Habermas, 1989:29) all served as the social institutions of the public sphere (Salvatore et al., 2013). In fact, by the 18th century three thousand coffee houses already existed in London where discussions related to state affairs. French salons helped bridge the rising bourgeois political public sphere with a literary public sphere dominated by aristocrats. Table societies in Germany comprised of academics and professionals (Habermas, 1989:32-34).

In these public spaces “critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon extended to include economic and political disputes” (Habermas, 1989:33). Discourse of popular topics such as philosophy, art and literature now involved economic and political discourse, that is, state and public affairs (Smuts, 2010). Notable novels such as “Richardson’s *Pamela*, Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Goethe’s *Werthers Leiden*”, all promoted a literary culture that emphasized ‘subjectivity’ (Habermas, 1989:49-50). The subjectivity the family promoted was audience oriented as it was performed in front of other members of the family (Calhoun, 1992). In fact, “subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private was always already oriented to an audience (*Publikum*)” (Habermas, 1989:49).

Put differently, Habermas posits that the public sphere's precursor was the conjugal family since private citizens' subjectivity stems from the bourgeois family (Salvatore et al., 2013). Precise speaking, "the public's understanding of the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain (*Intimsphäre*)" (Habermas, 1989:28). In other words, this implies that the conjugal family, in principle, provided a good testing ground for critical public reflection (Salvatore et al., 2013). Early novels not only promoted a literary culture of subjectivity, but "the subjectivity originating in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created, so to speak, its own public" (Habermas, 1989:29). Simply put, the family promoted the value of humanness which no economic or social system could ever replace (Calhoun, 1992). Although the conjugal family was patriarchal, it offered individuals subjectivity and emotional training before taking their private interests and entering the public sphere (Salvatore et al., 2013). The eventual refeudalization of society, however, led to the literary public sphere's ultimate decline and "the public's rational-critical debate also became a victim of this refeudalization", resulting in a "culture-debating (*kulturräsonierend*) public" (Habermas, 1989:158-159) being replaced by a culture consuming public. As such, the bourgeois public sphere i.e., *Politische Öffentlichkeit*, will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.3. The Bourgeois Public Sphere (*Politische Öffentlichkeit*)

The third and final type of public sphere is called the bourgeoisie public sphere. *Politische Öffentlichkeit* also means the political public sphere (Burger & Lawrence, 1991). The political public sphere emerged out of the literary public sphere and replaced the representational governance of feudal societies (Salvatore et

al., 2013). The bourgeoisie public sphere thus denotes “a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion” (Habermas, 1989:25). In other words, the public sphere represents a social space where participants rationally debate about issues of common concern, where critique against the state is made and where public opinion is established to effect democracy (Salvatore et al., 2013). Importantly, Habermas’ account of the public sphere must not be compared with that of “‘the public’ i.e., individuals who assemble” (Lennox & Lennox, 1974:49). Rather, the concept of the public sphere is directed at the institution i.e., the state, which concretizes only by means of citizen participation. Thus, the public sphere cannot be defined merely as a crowd of people that assemble (Lennox & Lennox, 1974).

Moreover, Habermas does not imply that what made the public bourgeois was its social class structures, rather the society was characterized by bourgeois elements i.e., court society (Calhoun, 1992). While the bourgeois were private persons, “they did not rule: the claim to power presented in rational-critical public debate (*öffentliches Raisonement*) which *eo ipso* renounced the form of a claim to rule” (Habermas, 1989:28). This shows that citizens’ use of critical reasoning skills is essential for public discourse and debate against the state, but not to rule (Calhoun, 1992). Reason i.e., *raisonnement*, understood also as critical reasoning involves “public use of the rational faculty” (Habermas, 1989:35). Consequently, citizens’ use of their reason, as Calhoun (1992) contends, stems primarily from their private experiences in the “audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity of the conjugal family’s intimate domain (*Intimsphäre*)” (Habermas, 1989:28). The bourgeoisie public sphere, despite assuming political functions, remained embedded

in the literary public and its two main criteria for admission were “education and property ownership” (Habermas, 1989:85). This was not a restriction to the political public sphere (Calhoun, 1992), instead it was the “legal ratification of a status attained economically in the private sphere (Habermas, 1989:85). Simply put, these admissions defined a person, that is, as a fully qualified and independent person capable enough to participate in rational-critical public debate on matters of general interest (Calhoun, 1992).

Furthermore, “the state is the ‘public authority’. It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members” (Habermas, 1989:2). Put differently, while state authority assumes a facilitator role in the practice of rational-critical public debate, it does not form part of the political public sphere (Lennox & Lennox, 1974). There is, on the contrary, no overlapping between the state and the public sphere instead “they confront one another as opponents” (Lennox & Lennox, 1974:49). The bourgeois public viewed themselves as direct rivals to state authority (Calhoun, 1992). The sphere of public authority thus “assumed objective existence in a permanent administration and a standing army” (Habermas, 1989:18). Simply put, with the development of the state, governments as agents of administration, supported by standing armies, a new sphere of public authority was being established (Calhoun, 1992).

A key trait of the political public sphere is that of rational-critical public debate. The bourgeois public sphere established, not only a set of political interests and distinction between the state and society but upheld the practice of rational-critical debate (Calhoun, 1992). Subsequently, the constitutional functions of the bourgeois public sphere were legalized by “a set of basic rights concerned the sphere of the

public engaged in rational-critical debate (freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly and association, etc.) and the political function of private people in this public sphere (right of petition, equality of vote, etc.)” (Habermas, 1989:83). In other words, this shows that the bourgeois public sphere was institutionalized in constitutional order which guaranteed a wide range of political rights, which established a judicial system which was to mediate between claims between the citizens or group, or between them and the state (Kellner, 2014).

Habermas does not merely document the rise of opinion to public opinion but also noted the very meaning of the concept (Goode, 2005). Public opinion, in principle, “wanted to be neither a check on power, nor power itself, nor even the source of all powers” (Habermas, 1989:82). In other words, public opinion does not intend to control society, but simply regulate the state powers (Calhoun, 1992). In fact, “‘opinion’ of course, did not evolve straightforwardly into ‘public opinion’” (Habermas, 1989:90). Put differently, Habermas acknowledges the theoretical contestations of opinion to public opinion and subsequently turns to the works of advanced theorist i.e., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill and Tocqueville (Calhoun, 1992). The significance of each of these theoretical contributions is evidenced in their development and subsequent critique of public opinion as a legitimate means of reasoned truth (Calhoun, 1992). Accordingly, the next section considers the institutional criteria of the public sphere.

Institutional Criteria of the Public Sphere

A new public sphere comes into existence only when the three institutional criteria of: (i) disregard of status; (ii) domain of common concern; and (iii) inclusivity - are all met (Habermas, 1989). British coffee houses, French salons and German literary

societies, despite differences in size, participants and debates, all shared these institutional criteria (Calhoun, 1992). Accordingly, the first criteria necessitate “a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether” (Habermas, 1989:36). In other words, social intercourse denotes the communication between participants engaged in rational-critical public debate, should not be based on social status (Calhoun, 1992). This social status “usually combined the characteristic attributes ownership and education” (Habermas, 1989:56). Thus, if social status is disregarded, the better argument asserted through critical reason and debate, will uphold against the social hierarchies imposed by society (Calhoun, 1992).

Social hierarchies simply mean the social categorization of society which affords some, not all, people greater social status i.e., wealth, education, property etc., (Goode, 2005). In fact, the modern state’s social hierarchy at the top consist of “jurist, doctors, pastors, officers, professors and scholars” and the lower end of the hierarchy comprise of “the genuine ‘burghers’, the old occupational orders of craftsmen and shopkeepers” (Habermas, 1989:29). The political public sphere thus functions as an objective space only when social status is rejected, and rational argument made the sole authority of any issue (Calhoun, 1992). Hence, the fairness of “common humanity” (Habermas, 1989:36) which girds the shared ideals of love, freedom, and reproduction among humans, is maintained (Calhoun 1992). Common humanity is thus “institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim” (Habermas, 1989:36). Meaning that, as a constitutionalized element of truth, common humanity signalled the progress towards a perfectly just social order (Calhoun, 1992).

The second criterion identified is the domain of common concern. This criterion

specifically mandates that “discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned” (Habermas, 1989:36). In other words, all sorts of topics over which feudal powers i.e., the church had previously exercised a domination of interpretation over, were now opened to discussion since the public demarcated its discussions as focusing on all topics of common public concern (Calhoun, 1992). The subsequent rise of capitalism in effect required “a behaviour whose rational orientation required ever more information: philosophical and literary works and works of art in general were produced for the market and distributed through it, these culture products became similar to that type of information” (Habermas, 1989:36). As capitalism upheld its capitalist logic, the subsequent cultural products i.e., philosophical, literary and art became commercialized and accessible to private citizens (Calhoun, 1992). By using rational interaction with each other, private citizens established their own meaning to cultural products and in effect “stated the implicitness for so long as they could assert its authority” (Habermas, 1989:36). Put differently, by designating their ‘implicitness’ i.e., indirect nature, for private citizens, cultural products represented the common concern which enabled other issues of common concern to emerge for public discourse and debate (Calhoun, 1992).

The third and final institutional criteria relates to the idea of inclusivity. It comes as no surprise that “the same process that converted culture into a commodity (and in this fashion constituted it as a culture that could become an object of discussion to begin with) established the public as in principle inclusive” (Habermas, 1989:36). Simply put, capitalism’s commercialization of cultural products subsequently made the political public sphere more inclusive (Calhoun, 1992). Consequently, public discourse and “issues discussed became general not merely in their significance but

also in their accessibility” (Habermas, 1989:36). In other words, this meant that anyone outside the bourgeois public with access to cultural products e.g., novels, books, plays, journals etc., to some extent, now had the potential means of access to a culture-debating public (Calhoun, 1992). While the bourgeois public does not equate itself to the general public at large, they “act as its mouthpiece” of bourgeois representation and are simultaneously “conscious of being part of a larger public” (Habermas, 1989:36). The bourgeoisie public had distinct boundaries i.e., education and propertied, which excluded illiterate and non-propertied citizens, but the bourgeoisie public did not isolate itself from the rest of society (Calhoun, 1992). Thus, however exclusive, the bourgeois public could not completely establish itself as a clique since they were “immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people” (Habermas, 1989:36). In other words, despite its perceived elitism, the bourgeois public still represented everyone. Accordingly, the next section considers the dominant debates of the bourgeois public sphere.

Public Sphere: Dominant Debates

The public sphere is conceptualized in a variety of ways by scholars, but this section specifically draws from three major public sphere debates. Firstly, Calhoun (1992) shows how the early bourgeois public sphere consisted of confined sections of the European population, particularly educated and propertied men. In fact, this early bourgeois public sphere, as Calhoun (1992:2) argues, was “constituted around rational critical argument, in which the merits of arguments and not the identities of arguers were crucial”. In other words, the practice of rational-critical public debate to establish public opinion, was the key feature in a flawed, yet important ideological framework (Calhoun, 1992). Thus, from a sociological perspective “the importance of the public sphere lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration”

(Calhoun, 1992:6). Put differently, public discourse was considered as a means of coordination of society including state power and market economies (Calhoun, 1992). However, wealth and power are simply non-discursive means of coordination which offer no basic alternative to that of reason and will (Calhoun, 1992).

Secondly, while public opinion in the early bourgeois public sphere played a key role in regulating power, under capitalism, the dominant elites monopolized public opinion to advance their own private interests (Kellner, 2000:5). As such, due to modern technological societies the public sphere is now “a site of information, discussion, contestation, political struggle, and organization that includes the broadcasting media and new cyberspaces as well as the face-to-face interactions of everyday life” (Kellner, 2000:18). Put differently, the Internet expands as a means of democratic participation and debate whilst creating new public spaces for political intervention (Kellner, 2000). Since the Internet is a contested terrain of political battles used to promote certain agendas and interests, politics tends to be increasingly mediated by new media, computers, and information communication technologies (Kellner, 2000).

Lastly, Fuchs (2008) contends that modern society consists of distinct private and connected public spheres - the economy is the sphere of production and profit; politics is the sphere where collective decisions are taken; and culture is the sphere where social meanings and moral values are created. The modern public sphere thus connects all three spheres which creates a socio-political sphere, a socio-economic sphere, and a socio-cultural sphere (Fuchs, 2008). In modern society, the public sphere is not only visible in the social realms but also in the various social roles people assume as they organize around specific common interests as social groups

(Fuchs, 2014). Thus, as social groupings people take on different socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural roles (Fuchs, 2014). The refeudalization of the public sphere resulted in capitalist logic dominating politics, causing politics to become an apolitical market where people and ideology are marketed (Fuchs, 2023). Citizens are seen and treated as “political consumers” (Habermas, 1989:216) as the public sphere assumes “advertising functions” (Habermas, 1989:175). Hence, the public sphere theory provides key insight in examining how power relations restrict the possibilities of democratic communication in modern societies (Fuchs, 2023). Accordingly, while the public sphere theory is widely praised it is equally critiqued, as the next section considers the public sphere’s dominant critique.

Public Sphere: Dominant Critiques

Inasmuch as the public sphere theory is widely recognized as important, scholars also criticize the concept. In examining topics of the public sphere between 1979-2012, Lunt & Livingstone (2013:90) found that Habermas was frequently critiqued for “his apparent blindness to the many varieties of exclusion”. For Lunt & Livingstone (2013) there are three main strands of critique of the Habermasian public sphere i.e., the working-class critique; postmodern critique; and cultural imperialism critique. These critiques are concisely discussed in the sections below.

First, the working-class critique maintains that although liberal ideology advances individual freedoms e.g., of speech, opinion, association and assembly as universal rights, the unequal nature of societies, however, undermine these universal rights which deepens inequality and results in more unequal access to the public sphere (Fuchs, 2014). Second, the postmodern critique holds that the public sphere is dominated by educated and rich men in contrast to the private sphere designated for women and other poor groups (Fuchs, 2014). Finally, cultural imperialism asserts

that the public sphere is a Western enlightenment concept used to impose Western political, economic, and social systems on other countries (Fuchs, 2014). In fact, Sparks (1998) rejects the notion of a global public sphere and contends that public spheres and public spaces are not unique to Western culture. The cultural practice of public teahouses already occurred in other parts of the world i.e., China, Japan, Iran, Turkey (Sparks, 1988). Similarly, Di Wang (2008) compares the early 20th century Chinese teahouse to the British public houses. These were common spaces which various people attended for various reason, hence, these were not just cultural spaces but also political meeting points, where political debates occurred (Di Wang, 2008).

The public sphere is also criticized by different ideological approaches, particularly, the classical liberal and radical democratic approaches (Smuts, 2010). The public sphere, as the classical liberal approach advances, designates a space between state and society (Smuts, 2010). This approach holds that traditional media distribute required information for citizens to make informed choices, traditional media enables the formation of public opinion whilst empowering people to affect governance conduct by means of formal and informal power (Curran, 1991). Responsible for functioning as a monitoring system in society, traditional media is regarded as the fourth estate of the government (Curran, 1991).

However, Smuts (2010) notes that two major problems emerge. Firstly, the classical liberal approach fails to sufficiently account for the ways in power functions in different formal structures. This approach thus neglects demonstrating how traditional media relates to broader social inequalities (Smuts, 2010). Secondly, the classical liberal approach disregards the ways in which interests become organized and collectivized. This approach does not expand upon the ways in which traditional

media can revive the arrangements of progressive democracy (Smuts, 2010). Thus, the radical democratic approach was approximated to enhance to the limitations of the classical liberal approach (Smuts, 2010).

Traditional media, according to the radical democratic approach, function as the front line between competing social forces (Curran, 1991). Traditional media must enable participation, empower citizens to participate in public discourse and contribute to formulating public policies (Curran, 1991). Also, traditional media must facilitate the performance of symbolic organizations and reveal internal practices of public inquiry, including the function of public opinion (Curran, 1991). Issues of uncertainty arises in that the media must function as a demonstrative system within existing societal arrangements (Curran, 1991). In other words, traditional media must expose offences, solve injustices and reveal criminal behaviour to public inquiry, that is, media need must help in restoring societal imbalances (Curran, 1991). The classical liberal approach, on the one hand, sees traditional media as upright channels of communication between a state and its citizens (Smuts, 2010).

Feminists and Revisionist Critique

Nancy Fraser's (1990) famous text '*In Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*', criticized Habermas theory (Smuts, 2010). The bourgeois public sphere was based, according to Fraser (1990), on at least four questionable assumptions that lacked sufficient critical scrutiny (Smuts, 2010). The first assumption that Fraser (1990) rejects held that "it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate 'as if' they were social equals; the assumption, therefore, that societal equality is not a necessary condition for political democracy" (Fraser, 1990:62).

Women and subordinates were prohibited from entering the political public sphere based on characteristics of gender, education and social status (Fraser, 1990). Habermas' description of the public sphere "rested on significant exclusions" (Fraser, 1990:59). The bracketing of social status between citizens were not only bracketed, instead the "discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum: to marginalize women and members of the plebeian classes and to prevent them from participating as peers" (Fraser, 1990:63). Simply put, disparities were certainly not eradicated, instead just grouped and this grouping was administered by rules, quality and decorum initiated by a bourgeois state (Fraser, 1990). These protocols thus functioned to formally, and specifically, exclude females and people from lower social classes who could not participate and express their common concerns equally (Fraser, 1990).

The second assumption which Fraser (1990) criticized, held that "the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics" (Fraser, 1990:62). Under a singular public sphere, marginalized groups have no areas of debate and therefore unable to articulate and defend their own interests (Fraser, 1990). In contrast to a singular public sphere, alternative publics as evidenced provided "members of subordinated social groups-women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians-have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics: subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser, 1990:67). Prime examples are the famous U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublics of the late 20th century whereby "feminist women have invented new terms for describing social reality, including 'sexism', 'the double shift', 'sexual harassment' and 'marital, date, and acquaintance rape'"

(Fraser, 1990:67). Meaning that alternative publics provided excluded citizens a different space to express their views, opinions and interest (Smuts, 2010). Thus, within these subaltern counterpublics members “invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permits them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990:67). If several public spheres exist, vigorous public debate should ensue, while subjective debate might emerge under a singular public sphere (Fraser, 1990).

The third assumption that is opposed by Fraser (1990) held “that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of ‘private interests’ and ‘private issues’ is always undesirable” (Fraser, 1990:62). The problem with this assumption is that an issue of common concern for certain people can be considered along the line of private interests for others (Smuts, 2010). Accordingly, “that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so now” (Fraser, 1990:72). In other words, unlike in the past, the duty of determining whether or not matters are public or private, should be done by citizens themselves (Smuts, 2010). Concepts of public and private needs critical revision because “in political discourse, they are deployed to delegitimize some interests, views, and topics and to valorise others” (Fraser, 1990:73). In the political public sphere, notions of public and private continues to subdue common concerns of subordinate groups (Smuts, 2010). The terms public and private thus simply remain “vehicles through which gender and class disadvantages may continue to operate” (Fraser, 1990:73).

The final assumption “that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state” (Fraser, 1990:63), is also criticized.

Depending on how one interprets civil society, this assumption is vulnerable to two

explanations (Smuts, 2010). There first entails that a private sphere guided by capitalism, do not create equalities (Smuts, 2010). In fact, “laissez-faire capitalism does not foster socio-economic equalities” (Fraser, 1990:74). This implies that state activity is necessary to help in decreasing such inequalities (Smuts, 2010). In other words, “a sharp separation of (economic) civil society and the state is not a necessary condition for a well-functioning public sphere” (Fraser, 1990:74). Simply put, a clear distinction concerning civil society and the state cannot be a required condition for the existence of a public sphere (Smuts, 2010).

On the one hand, the second interpretation involves the public sphere and organizations (Smuts, 2010). On the other hand, the separation between civil society and the state creates “weak publics, publics whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion-formation and does not also encompass decision- making” (Fraser, 1990:75). Put differently, the public sphere can contest the state as a body of organizations though these organizations promote opinion-formation and not decision-making, subsequently resulting in weak publics (Smuts, 2010). Democratic parliaments, on the other hand, produce “strong publics, publics whose discourse encompasses both opinion-formation and decision-making” (Fraser, 1990:75). Strong publics thus emerge when public opinion is included in the process of decision-making (Smuts, 2010). In sum, this section has so far established the three types of Habermasian public spheres alongside its institutional criteria, its dominant debates and critique. Accordingly, the next section considers the nature of the Internet as virtual public spaces and or virtual public spheres. This is followed by a discussion of social media networks Facebook, nowadays called Meta, and Twitter, also known as X.

2.3. The Internet: Virtual Public Spaces and Virtual Public Spheres

The Internet and its related technologies play an integral part in all spheres of modern society. Utopian discourse tends to praise the democratizing potential of the Internet (e.g., Rheingold, 1993; Grossman, 1995; Castells, 2001), whilst dystopian rhetoric cautions against such overestimations (e.g., Pavlik, 1994; Melucci, 1994; Hill & Hughes, 1998). Unsurprisingly, Habermas (2006) himself questions the Internet, claiming that commercialization undermines the public sphere. However, the true nature of the Internet as a public sphere emerges out of the very utopian and dystopian claims (Papacharissi, 2002). Consequently, studies' examining the Internet as a virtual space and virtual sphere identify three common themes: (i) access to information; (ii) reciprocity of communication; and (iii) commercialization of online spaces (e.g., Malina, 1999; Sassi, 2000; Papacharissi, 2002).

Firstly, regarding access to information, studies stress the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet in terms of the digital divide between the haves and have-nots (e.g., Norris, 2001; Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Wilson, 2006). Such studies show that for people with access to computers, the Internet is a significant medium for online political discourse and participation (Papacharissi, 2002). Access to more information enabled by the Internet and its technologies, does not lead to increased online political discourse and participation as well as increased trust in political systems (e.g., Bimber, 2001; Kaid, 2002). This suggests that the advantages of the Internet as a virtual public space tends to benefit a few political elites, which in effect, renders the Internet as an illusion of an open public sphere for the have-nots (e.g. Pavlik, 1994; Sassi, 2005). Moving political discourse to a virtual public space simply excludes those with no access (Papacharissi, 2002).

While the Internet undeniably empowers social activist, groups and citizens to challenge state and public agenda (e.g., Grossman, 1995; Rash, 1997), as a virtual public space the Internet also connects a government to its citizens through various interactive technical features (Abramson et al., 1988). More access to information, thus, creates an illusion of “a sense of activity rather than genuine civic involvement” (Hart, 1994:109). Simply put, citizens do not simply become better informed and active with greater access to information (Papacharissi, 2002). Creating and processing information online is key in building personal and social identity since new social movements develop only insofar as activists fight for control and “the ceaseless flow of messages only acquires meaning through the code that orders the flux and allows its meanings to be read” (Melucci, 1994: 102). While increased online participation can broaden and democratize a virtual public sphere this can also weaken its unique content, by replacing it with virtual public discourse that is more typical and less innovative (Hill & Hughes, 1998). Such discourse, however, is not less significant (Papacharissi, 2002). Finally, access to information is not universal and equal to all, because those with access to computers and the Internet have a greater chance to become active citizens and participants in the public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Not everyone, however, ventures into online political discourse and debate thus, despite enabling virtual public spaces, the Internet is primarily inhibited by the failures of political systems in the real-world public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002).

Secondly, regarding reciprocity of communication, Internet technologies facilitate virtual public discourse that exceeds physical geographic boundaries and connects people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Papacharissi, 2002). While the Internet opens new channels of virtual public discourse, however, due to diverse cultural

backgrounds people are not always understanding towards one another (Hill & Hughes, 1998). Put differently, people may have similar motivations regarding online political discourse, but this can reproduce and magnify cultural disparities between citizens and countries (e.g., Mitra, 1997; Schmitz, 1997). Online anonymity on the Internet allows people to form uninhibited public opinions and political expressions (Akdeniz, 2002), but such expressions do not always have any significant political impact due to a lack of mutuality between people (e.g., Poster, 1995; Jones, 1997). Essentially, only when the Internet is girded by collective trust and reciprocity, can there be greater online political discourse and participation (Kobayashi et al., 2006). Social connections people form online, however, do not always promote mutual trust as evidence shows that virtual public spaces often bring together mistrusting people (Uslaner, 2004). Put differently, when users address certain public issues randomly with no consensus of the issues importance, the reciprocity of communication online becomes fragmented (Papacharissi, 2002). Meaning that, on the one hand, as virtual publics form smaller discussion groups, the ideals of a unified public sphere that connects all groups, eludes us. The establishment of special interest groups, on the other hand, fosters the development of several fragmented virtual publics (Papacharissi, 2002). Thus, the Internet and its technologies may exaggerate cultural differences and downplay or even restrict commonalities between people (Papacharissi, 2002).

Finally, the commercialization of online spaces shows that the Internet mainly serves the interest of capitalist forces (Papacharissi, 2002). The Internet is vulnerable to the same capitalist forces that changed the Habermasian public sphere (Carrey, 1995). In this sense, the Internet has become a virtual replication of the social and political world (Jones, 1997). Formed within a capitalist setting, the

Internet is inclined to capitalist logic of profit-making, and in effect, does not prioritize civic participation or even democratization (O' Loughlin, 2004). What is more, the "very architecture of the internet will work against the type of content control these folks [corporate monopolies] have over mass media" (Newhagen cited in McChesney, 1995). Put differently, the Internet provides a new avenue of a cultural and political renaissance, although capitalist conglomerates monopolize large fractions of the medium to serve their profit-making cyberventures (McChesney, 1995). Capitalism advances a culture based on commercial values and tends to "commercialize every nook and cranny of social life in way that renders the development or survival of nonmarket political and cultural organizations more difficult" (McChesney, 1995:10). Simply put, capitalism favours profit as opposed to debate and existing barriers to the Internet such as universal access and computer literacy (McChesney, 1995) including the issues of the digital divide (e.g., Norris, 2001; Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Wilson, 2006), which all makes the Internet seem like a distant possibility for many developing countries (Papacharissi, 2002). The Internet is unable to single-handedly "produce political culture when it does not exist in society at large" (McChesney, 1995:13). In other words, the Internet alone cannot change the nature of the political sphere, because capitalism commodifies new technologies, transforming them into commercially oriented media with no objective of promoting social welfare (Papacharissi, 2002).

Essentially, studies examining the potential of Internet as a virtual public sphere, all suggest that online digital technologies create a virtual public space but does not constitute a virtual public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Access to information, reciprocity of communication and the commercialization of online spaces, remain the primary conditions which prohibits the Internet's democratization and

subsequent transition from a public space to a public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Therefore, studies reviewing the conditions that extend and prohibits the potential of the Internet as a public sphere, all lead back to a main question, that is, “how do we recreate something online, when it never really existed offline? It is not impossible, but it is not an instantaneous process either” (Papacharissi, 2002:20). A new public space therefore is not equal to a new public sphere because as a public space, the Internet merely affords another way for political discourse and participation (Papacharissi, 2002). A virtual public space, as such, enhances discourse whilst a virtual public sphere enhances democracy (Papacharissi, 2002). The Internet is a key medium not only for the acquisition of information, but also for political action. The participating nature of the Internet has the ability to revive public discourse and present a new space for public opinion (Papacharissi, 2002). The next section first provides a conceptual distinction between social networking sites (SNSs) and social media networks. This is important because this study makes specific use of the latter concept.

Social Networking Sites

The concept of social networking sites (SNS) is at best understood as “web-based services that allow individuals to (i) construct a public or a semi-public profile within a bounded system, (ii) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (iii) view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:1-3). Simply put, people use the features offered on these sites to connect and create associations with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). To be precise, social networking sites already existed in 1995 e.g., Classmates, and in 1997 Six Degrees was launched, and by the late 1999s, Google was established (Fuchs, 2014). SNSs enable social networks to be sustained

and aid in the development of new associations between strangers who have similar opinions, ideas, activities and interests (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social Media Networks

The concepts of social media and web 2.0 have in the past years become popular for describing several types of World Wide Web (WWW) applications like blogs, microblogs like Twitter, networking sites like Facebook, or video/image/file sharing platforms like YouTube or wikis (Fuchs, 2014). In fact, O'Reilly (2005) is adamant that "web 2.0" denotes actual societal changes, because users, as a collective intelligence, co-create the value of major platforms like Google, Amazon, Wikipedia, or Craigslist in a "community of connected users" (O'Reilly, 2005). Social media networks, as such, present an image of a more strategically organized public sphere (Fuchs, 2014). The rise of the Internet, specifically blogs e.g., WordPress, Blogspot, Tumblr; social networking sites e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Diaspora*, VK; microblogs e.g., Twitter, Weibo; wikis e.g., Wikipedia and content sharing sites e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, has all led public discussions on the consequences of these media in the political realm (e.g., O'Reilly, 2005; Fuchs, 2014). This conceptual distinction of social networking sites and social media networks simply denotes the growth of the Internet and its technologies (Fuchs, 2014). This study thus makes use of social media networks as this resonates Facebook and Twitter as networks including the networks of social activism and social movements. Accordingly, the next section considers the dominant debates of social media networks.

2.3.1. Social Media Networks: Dominant Debates

One of the early scholars to promote social media networks as new tools for collective action, is Clay Shirky (2011), who authored an article titled "*The Political Powers of Social Media*". As society tends to evolve over time, the world's

communication system has gotten denser, more complex, and more participatory (Shirky, 2011). To be precise, “since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the world’s networked population has grown from the low millions to the low billions” (Shirky, 2011:1). These technological advances have produced more access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action (Shirky, 2011). In the main social media networks are key tools for promoting social and political change (Shirky, 2011). As social media networks have become “coordinating tools” for many global social movements, many authoritarian governments “are trying to limit access to it” (Shirky, 2011:2).

Public discourse, views and opinions is first broadcasted by traditional media, which is then echoed by friends, family members and colleagues across social media networks (Shirky, 2011). It is in this second social step that political opinions are formed, as with the printing press “the Internet spreads not just media consumption but media production as well: it allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views” (Shirky, 2011:34). Simply put, a public sphere is more likely to emerge in a society because of people’s dissatisfaction with matters of economics or day-to-day governance than from their embrace of abstract political ideals (Shirky, 2011). Social media networks increase shared awareness by propagating messages through social networks (Shirky, 2011). It is sensible to invest in social media networks as “general, rather than specifically political tools to promote self-governance” (Shirky, 2011:37). This is because two arguments of social media network’s role in global/national politics emerges (Shirky, 2011). First, it is seen as being “ineffective” as opposed to traditional media. Second, it causes “harm to democratization as good”. Also, social media networks only produce “slacktivism” (Shirky, 2011:38). Such critiques are not incorrect, instead

are central to questions of social media networks power (Shirky, 2011). Globally many social activist and social movements believe in the value of these networks, whilst many authoritarian states regard them as too powerful and, in some cases, harass, arrest, exile and in response even kill users (Shirky, 2011).

The Internet, notably the use of social media networks by social activist and social movements gave rise to networked social movements. In his book "*Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age*", Castells (2012:4) scrutinizes the "nature and perspectives of networked social movements". In other words, Castells focuses on the role of the Internet in modern social movements and politics (Fuchs, 2012). The notion of the network that Castells (2012) uses in the title of his book has a double meaning. The book engages with a) the social networks of activist, and b) the role of the Internet as global network of computer networks in social movements (Fuchs, 2012). Some key themes in the book suggest that, firstly, communication power is the central form of power today (Castells, 2012:5). Second, the Internet allows the construction of communicative autonomy (Castells, 2012:9), the Internet allows networked social movements to communicate the emotions of outrage and hope that are needed for switching from collective emotions to collective action (Castells, 2012:11-17). Finally, modern social movements are both online and offline networked movements in which social media networks play key roles (Castells, 2012).

When social movements in physical public spaces are repressed, the Internet affords the protection of connection and communication among people within these movements and with society (Fuchs, 2012). In fact, "the movement went from cyberspace to urban space" (Castells, 2012:45) which meant that "the original spaces of resistance were formed on the Internet" (Castells, 2012:56). Notably in

Egypt's #Jan25 revolution, social activist “planned the protests on Facebook, coordinated them through Twitter, spread them by SMSs and webcast them to the world on YouTube” (Castells, 2012: 58). Emotions of the need for protest and revolution thus spread on the Internet and then resulted in street protests (Fuchs, 2012).

The uprisings in 2011 across countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara and Yemen were all “conveyed by images and messages arriving from the Internet”(Castells, 2012:94), because “Internet networks provided a space of autonomy from where the movements emerged” (Castells, 2012:103) Simply put, Castells shows how the Internet, notably social media networks played a crucial role in the emergence of networked social movements across the Middle East and North African (MENA) regions (Fuchs, 2012). Many of these networked social movements “was born on the Internet, diffused by the Internet, and maintained its presence on the Internet” (Castells, 2012:168), and their “material form of existence was the occupation of public space” (Castells, 2012:168). Thus, 2011 was truly a year of major revolutions, protests, riots, and the emergence of networked social movements (Fuchs, 2012). Additionally, Badiou (2012) argues that 2011 was the year of the rebirth of history. Liberal ideology has for a long time tried to make people believe that we have reached a Fukayamian “end of history”, that capitalism is the bottom line of history, but modern social movements indicate no end of history and considering alternatives to existing regimes of domination and exploitation is possible and required (Badiou, 2012). Similarly, Žižek (2012) shares Badiou's (2012) analysis and asserts that 2011 was the year of dreaming dangerously. This

was the year in which people dared to try to make dreams of a different world reality since liberalism was disproved by history (Žižek, 2012). Accordingly, the next section considers the dominant critique of social media networks.

2.3.2. Social Media Networks: Dominant Critiques

Firstly, Fuchs' (2014) book "*Social Media: A Critical Introduction*" examines the Internet, specifically social media networks from a critical perspective. Critical in this sense refers explicitly to Marxism and neo-Marxism, with power and resource distribution the key points of focus (Fuchs, 2014). Conceptualizing social media networks require an understanding of sociality which can be understood as a threefold interconnected process of cognition, communication, and co-operation (Fuchs, 2014). To be sure, sociality "is a dialectical process where human social practices and social relations condition each other mutually" (Fuchs, 2023:208). Online networks often reflect these forms of sociality in several ways (Fuchs, 2014). Many corporate social media networks' capital accumulation models are to turn private, semi-public and public user data into a commodity that is sold to advertising clients that present targeted advertisements to users (Fuchs, 2014). Facebook and Twitter are not just communication companies, but also large-scale advertising agencies (Fuchs, 2014). They sell targeted advertisements and guarantee themselves the right to commodify users' private, semi-public, and public data for this purpose in their privacy policies (Fuchs, 2014). Users, privacy advocates and consumer protectionists tend to express concerns about corporate social media networks. They make profit out of data that users' online activities generate (Fuchs, 2014).

Secondly, regarded as a prominent sceptic of social media networks, Gladwell (2010) in his article titled "*SMALL CHANGE: Why the revolution will not be tweeted*", rejects social media networks' role in social and political events. Social

change, according to Gladwell (2010), is achieved through high-risk meaningful activism. In fact, Gladwell (2010) cites several famous examples such as the 1960s sit-ins by Black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina; the year-long Montgomery bus boycott organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1955 and 1956; and Australia's indigenous Freedom Ride and the Green Bans. All of these movements were characterized by strong group identity and cohesion with strong ties (Gladwell, 2010). Accordingly, "the kind of activism associated with social media networks is not like this at all. The platforms of social media networks are built around weak ties" (Gladwell, 2010:3). Twitter, for example, is a way of following or being followed by people you may never have met, whilst Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with (Gladwell, 2010).

Simply put, although there is strength in weak ties, weak ties rarely lead to high-risk activism (Gladwell, 2010). Although one can have thousands of Facebook friends and Twitter followers, however, in real life this is not possible (Gladwell, 2010). Thus, "liking" something on Facebook, or "retweeting" a story on Twitter requires little effort, yet those actions might quiet protagonists into thinking they are doing something meaningful (Gladwell, 2010). Consequently, this means that successful activism requires strategic hierarchies, with a careful and precise allocation of tasks (Gladwell, 2010). Hence, activist in revolutions and rebellions risk their lives and risk becoming victims of violence conducted by the police or the people their protest is directed at (Gladwell, 2010). Despite its transformative potentials, Gladwell (2010) is adamant that social media networks do truly little to produce tangible social and political change.

Finally, in *"The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom"*, Morozov

(2011) presents the concept of 'slacktivism', ironically, he only mentions 'slacktivism' on six pages of his 408-page book. Slacktivism is divided into five subcategories namely clicktivism, sympathy, political, charity (direct), and charity (by-product of consumption), and in all instances, the concept tends to be negative (Morozov, 2011). Christensen (2011) similarly argued that slacktivism is not a new phenomenon. The concept was developed by Fred Clark and Dwight Ozardin 1995. Slacktivism entails activities that are easily performed and considered effective in making the participants feel good about themselves (Christensen,2011). Additionally, Coleman & Blumler (2009:135-138) sum up the difficulties by noting three major problems that Internet campaigns face. First, online networks are disconnected from institutional politics, which means they may be unable to control the authorities. Second, online activities are sometimes elusive and ephemeral, meaning they never reach the agenda of the formal decision-making. Finally, the different activities tend to involve a destructive and nihilistic quality, which can make it hard for them to be taken seriously (Coleman & Blumler,2009). Morozov (2011) aligns himself not with the popular view of the Internet as a tool for the promotion of democracy, but something which has the potential to easily unravel it. Morozov (2011) posits that the Internet is heavily employed to strangle democracy and that we must shift ourselves from a cyber-utopian outlook to one of cyber-skepticism. Morozov (2011) exposes the dark side of new media, discussing how government crackdowns lead to many users being traced and arrested through their online accounts, blogs and message boards being erased, and protest groups being virtually infiltrated and blocked. Morozov (2011) thus shows that while the West made overexcited promotions of the likes of Facebook and Twitter, authoritarian regimes as in the cases of Iran 2009, Tunisia 2010, and Egypt 2011, were provoked

into shutting them down, further entrenching their own dictatorships. Accordingly, the next section provides an overview of social media networks Facebook i.e., Meta and Twitter i.e., X.

2.4. Facebook: Overview

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes, who were all students at Harvard University. According to Caers et al., (2013) formal e-mail or mobile number subscription allow users to create an account on Facebook's official website. Facebook design opts for a highly standardized layout of user accounts (Facebook, 2023). The profile page also often called 'the wall' is where users present themselves. A small profile picture adds to a large cover photo at the top of the page, below which, the name of the user is presented along with some basic information and a few buttons referring to friends' news feeds, photos, and likes (Caers et al., 2013). Once a profile is created, users can search for friends and send friend requests. When accepted, Facebook connects the two individuals by allowing them to see each other's profile page and by adding their activities to one another's news feed. Facebook functions as an online application to see and to be seen or to "prosume" - producing and consuming at the same time (Fuchs, 2021). Fast forward in October 2021, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg rebranded the network to 'Meta' (Facebook, 2023). Facebook's existing technical features were simply enhanced, and new ones added which consequently expanded the scope and potential of Facebook.

2.4.1. Facebook aka Meta: Technical Features and Sociability

This section indicates the Facebook technical features and their functions as used by activist to advance and or inhibit the #FMF social movements' goals. The identified

features can be viewed as traditional in that they existed prior to Facebook's relaunch to Meta. The three primary features and their functions discussed in this section involves the Groups, Pages, and Events, which all have direct bearing on the first sub-objective of this study. Collectively these features show that Facebook encourages sociability by representing existing social connections in a virtual space (Keenan & Shiri, 2009).

➤ **Groups**

Firstly, the Groups feature allow users to create and “join up to 6,000 groups” (Facebook, 2023). A key function of the Groups feature is that it becomes a virtual public space for users to unite on matters of common interest, share information, images/videos, foster robust discourse and debate. However, a major inhibiting function of the Groups feature is that it excludes users i.e., student protesters who were not subscribed as members, from contributing to protest discourse and online activities. While this limits the Groups to serve as a public sphere that is “open to all” (Habermas, 1989:1), as a virtual public space, however, the Groups feature produces subaltern counter-publics where members “invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permits them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990:67). The Groups feature and its functions were effective in the overall planning, mobilization, coordination, and protest actions taken by student activist and protesters involved in #FMF.

➤ **Pages**

To be sure, “your Page is where people go to learn more about you” (Facebook, 2023). Pages are modified and tailored spaces for public figures and civil society in general. For a Facebook Page to be created, the network needs to verify whether the individual user, organization or brand meets the desired level of public reputation (Facebook, 2023). An inhibiting function of the Page feature is that it merits social status which,

in the real public sphere, “usually combined the characteristic attributes ownership and education” (Habermas, 1989:56). However, since the protest discourse was based on common interest of all students, social status was rejected, and Pages served as objective spaces whereby rational argument was made the sole authority of issues (Calhoun, 1992). In terms of Pages sociability, Facebook’s foundation for building a social network is the public/private setting which allow users to have the option to make their profile page public or grant access to a wider audience (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). The Pages feature enabled South African public figures, organizations, and brands to distribute credible and exclusive #FMF information. The Pages feature thus played a key role in the coordination and mobilization of the #FMF protest as it enabled the circulation of credible protest information between protesters and the public at large.

➤ **Events**

Lastly, the Events feature allow users/groups to organize events and mobilize public support “Discover, plan and respond to events with your friends and communities” (Facebook, 2023). The Events feature enables the member(s) i.e., administrator(s) to supply a suitable title of the event, indicate the exact location of the event including the beginning and end time of the event (Facebook, 2023). The inhibiting function of the Events feature is, however, undermined by slacktivism, which is manifested in the form of clicktivism, sympathy, political, charity (direct), and charity (by-product of consumption), which in all instances, has negative meanings (Morozov, 2011). Slacktivism involves online activities that are easily performed to make the participants/users feel good about themselves (Christensen, 2011). The Internet, in this sense, is devoted to strangling democracy, we must therefore shift ourselves from a cyber-utopian outlook to one of cyber-skepticism (Morozov, 2011). The Events feature and its functioning was vital in the protest coordination as it enabled activist

in their roles as administrators to inform protesting students of key events relating to #FMF.

➤ **Supportive features**

Alongside the primary features identified, there are other supportive features namely the News Feed; Like; Comment; Share; Photo/Video; Messenger and Search. In using these features, student protesters contributed to the virtual public discourse and subsequently participated in the street protest. As members of the Groups, Pages, and Events, protesting students used the News Feed to access, view and organize their virtual community. Whilst the Like, Comment, Share, Photo/Video, Messenger, and Search features all enabled members to participate and contribute to the virtual public discourse of the social activist engaged in the #FMF movement. Table 1 below presents the identified Facebook technical features and functions as used by activist in South Africa's 2015/16 #FMF.

Features	Main Function
News Feed	Users can view feeds from friends, groups/pages/events users can also like posts and comment.
Groups	Communities of common interest, that share info, fosters debates etc.,
Like	Enables users to click on/interact with post, photos/videos.
Comment	Users can comment on post, pictures and videos.
Share	Users can share post, pictures/ videos etc in groups or friends.
Search	Allows users to search for friends, family, groups, pages etc.
Pages	Public figures, organizations etc., share exclusive information.
Events	Users/groups can organize events and mobilize support.
Messenger	Allows instant communication via webchat or a mobile app.
Photo/Video	Enables users to upload images, videos and live streaming.
Like	Enables users to click on/interact with post, photos/videos.

Table 1: Facebook features (Facebook, 2023).

In sum, the identified primary features i.e., Groups, Pages and Events and their functions alongside the supportive features, were all instrumental in the planning, mobilization, coordination and actions taken by activist and protesters involved in #FMF. Inasmuch as Facebook produces new forms of sociability (Keenan & Shiri,

2009), the activist use of the identified technical features implies that a new public space is not equal to a new public sphere because as a public space, the Internet merely affords another way for political discourse and participation (Papacharissi, 2002). The next section looks at Twitter's rise and subsequent technical features.

2.5. Twitter: Overview

Founded by Jack Dorsey and launched in 2006, Twitter established itself as another major social media network, most effective in social movements. Twitter's technical features allow users to target their messages to different layers of a platform audience (Bruns & Moe, 2014). The structural design of Twitter also links otherwise isolated individuals via the @-mention button. Retweets and default posts allow users to share with their personal publics, while #hashtags allow them to join wider national and international conversations (Halavais, 2014). In addition, activists use Twitter's @-mention feature to directly reach out to political elites (Bruns & Moe, 2014). When elite actors such as political leaders, bureaucrats, human rights activists, and journalists themselves join the movement by tweeting or retweeting, it creates immediate widespread responses as they have a substantial number of followers on Twitter (Tremayne, 2014). Like Facebook, Twitter have also made ample advances since its inception. In October 2022, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, purchased Twitter for a record \$44 billion from previous owner Jack Dorsey (NBC News, 2022). Musk saw the potential of Twitter and relaunched the network to X, revamped its technical features and committed the network to free speech (Twitter, 2023).

2.5.1. Twitter aka X: Technical Features and Sociability

This section indicates the Twitter technical features and their functions as used by both Egyptian social activists of #Jan25 and South African student activist of #FMF

to advance and or inhibit the social movements' goals. Importantly, the identified features can be viewed as traditional in that they existed prior to Twitter's relaunch to X. The identified primary features include the @username; #Hashtags; Tweet/RT. The supportive features were namely Like; Comment; Search; Share; Direct Message and Media. Collectively these features show that Twitter encourages sociability through simplicity by focusing on niche technology. Unlike Facebook's nice communities, nice technology is more inclusive as there is no alienating cultural element afforded by niche technology (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). Twitter's creation represented a revolution in simplicity (Weller et al., 2014).

➤ **@Username**

According to Weller et al., (2014), Twitter is used for a range of communicative purposes such as characterizing tweet types (Java et al., 2007) and determining the meaning of tweets (Kelly, 2009). The function of the @username feature enables direct interaction and replies between users regardless of whether they follow each other (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). By including the @username feature of another user/organization, it becomes possible to highlight and interact with specific users/organizations and their tweets (Bruns & Moe, 2014). The function of the @username feature enables users subscribe to other user's tweet feeds to receive their updates and friends are added either by email or invite (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). Social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF used the function of the @username feature to directly interact not only with state officials, politicians, but also with protesters and civil society at large. The @username feature thus enabled activist to strategically coordinate and mobilize local and global protest support by direct virtual interaction.

➤ **#Hashtags**

Twitter affords the formation of relations between users and texts using hashtags,

which consist of the “#” symbol followed by a word or phrase (Schmidt, 2014). #Hashtags are made searchable by the networks interface; they connect tweets from users who have no pre-existing follower-followee relationship. #Hashtags are unmoderated, so any user can introduce and use them, giving rise to a wide and uncontrolled variety of hashtags (Schmidt, 2014). The function of #hashtags is thus used to mark a tweet(s) as being relevant to specific public discourse, making it easily discoverable to other users (Bruns & Moe, 2014). The inhibiting function the #hashtag feature is that when users address certain public issues randomly with no consensus of the issue’s importance, the reciprocity of communication online becomes fragmented (Papacharissi, 2002). Including a #hashtag in one’s tweets signals a desire to partake in a wider communicative process, potentially with anyone interested in the same topic(s) (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Inasmuch as the #hashtag feature inhibits unmoderated discourse between users, the social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF still made use of the #hashtag feature as this enabled them to increase their planning, coordination, and mobilization efforts.

➤ **Tweet/Retweet**

When logging into Twitter, all users are met with a Tweet text box containing “*What is happening?!*” on their homepage i.e., the timeline (Twitter, 2023). This Tweet text box enables users to compose tweets, which since its inception in 2006, had been limited to 140-characters (Bruns & Moe, 2014). However, as the network changed in scope and potential, in November 2017, Twitter increased the maximum tweet length from 140 to 280 characters (Weller et al., 2014). Social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF made use of the Tweet feature and while its function was restricted by 140 characters at the time of the protest, social activist and activist still managed to plan, mobilize, and coordinate protest actions in their different

societies. Retweets, according to Bruns & Moe (2014), enhances tweet(s) visibility across different boundaries i.e., users use this feature to bring messages from the hashtag level to the attention of their own followers. When tweet(s) were made and posted by activist, the retweet function enabled followers to increase the tweet(s) online presence to reach wider online publics. Hence, inasmuch as the Internet is a key medium for online political discourse and participation (Papacharissi, 2002), and while digital features empower activist to challenge state and public agenda (e.g., Grossman, 1995; Rash, 1997), as a virtual public space the Internet also connects a government to its citizens through more advanced technical features (Abramson et al., 1988). In the main, however, social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF used the tweet and retweet features to not only communicate, but plan, mobilize and coordinate the different social movements.

➤ **Supportive features**

Alongside the primary features identified, there are other supportive features namely Like; Comment; Share; Search; Direct Message and Media. In using these features, social activist of #Jan25 and student protesters of #FMF contributed to the virtual public discourse and subsequently participated in the street protest. The Like feature functions as a means for users to show that they agree with a certain tweet i.e., opinion and they can Comment on tweets which increases their participation. Additionally, the Search feature enables users to locate certain tweets, hashtags and or user accounts. Direct Messaging enables users to instantly communicate, whilst the function of the Media feature allows users to upload information and or content. The function of the Share feature means users can share their tweet, media and other sources with them other users and network such as Facebook. Table 2 below presents the identified Twitter technical features used by the activists.

Feature	Function
@username	Used for mentioning or replying to other users directly.
Tweet/RT	Users can tweet and retweet in agreement.
#Hashtag	Users can group tweets according to topic/ type.
Like	Allows users to like tweets, retweets, videos etc.
Comment	Users can respond/reply to tweets and hashtags.
Share	Users can circulate tweets via the DM, SMS/email.
Search	Users can trace specific tweets, accounts or #hashtags.
Direct Message	Users can have private conversations with others.
Media	Users can upload photos and videos.

Table 2: Twitter aka X new features (Twitter, 2023)

In sum, the identified primary features i.e., '@' user, #Hashtags, Tweet/RT and their functions alongside the supportive features, were all instrumental in the planning, mobilization, coordination and actions taken by social activist and activist involved in both #Jan25 and #FMF. Although Twitter encourages sociability through its niche technology (Keenan & Shiri, 2009), the Internet alone cannot change the nature of the political sphere, because capitalism commodifies modern technologies, transforming them into commercially oriented media with no objective of promoting social welfare (Papacharissi, 2002).

2.6. #Jan25 – Egypt

According to Fay (2012), the Egyptian revolution is best understood through Fisks' four stage political crisis theory: Prodrome, Outbreak, Chronic, and Resolution (Han, 2009). These stages make it easier to detail how Egyptian activist and the movements went about their online tactics and offline actions (Fay, 2012).

➤ **Prodrome**

Four key events encapsulate the first stage. This stage consists of a series of events that underpinned a political crisis in Egypt (Fay, 2012). The first even occurred in April 2008 when Internet activist in Egypt created the 'April 6 Youth Movement':

a Facebook group that served as a place for complaints and revolutionary ideas (Fay, 2012). Frequently the leaders of this group were arrested or brutally attacked by Mubarak's security forces (Fay, 2012). The second event relates to the murder of blogger and activist Khaled Said in 2010, which led to public outrage and protests police brutality, corruption and unemployment in particular (Fay, 2012). The third event relates to the destabilizing Alexandria church bombing (Fay, 2012).

➤ **Outbreak**

The outbreak of the Egyptian crisis began on January 25, the country's national police holiday, as thousands of protesters gathered in various locations around Egypt, marching toward Tahir Square (Fay, 2012). Many prominent opposition groups had announced their intentions to participate in the protests (Fay, 2012). In Cairo, small protests converged in Tahir Square, which became the epicentre of the revolution. Despite the early political aspirations of the protesters, there was no widely accepted set of demands and goals (Fay, 2012). On January 26 and 27, the protests persisted and access to the Internet, particularly, social media networks Facebook and Twitter, was limited to isolate activist and protesters (Fay, 2012). In a further attempt to disperse demonstrators, police used tear gas and rubber bullets on them (Fay, 2012). Tahir Square became a popular destination for protests, foreign journalists were intimidated and beaten to prevent the international community from accessing accurate and unbiased information related to the protests (Fay, 2012).

➤ **Chronic**

The chronic stage began in the first minutes of January 28, when each of Egypt's five major Internet Service Providers (ISP) had shut off their services entirely within half an hour (Fay, 2012). Only one ISP namely Noor, maintained services for another two days due to its vital role in the Egyptian economy (Fay, 2012). As

fragments of information escaped, Internet activist groups like Anonymous published and distributed lists of strategies to circumvent the Internet block (Fay, 2012). On February 1, the “March of a Million” saw protesters spilled into Tahrir Square, only to hear Mubarak announce his intention to step down after overseeing a transition of power (Fay, 2012). A final momentum shift occurred with the February 7 release of Wael Ghonim, who had been detained during the first days of the revolution (The Guardian, 2011). On February 10, rumours spread that Mubarak would step down after U.S. President Barack Obama’s call for an immediate transfer of power to a democratic regime (Fay, 2012). With the momentum on the side of the movement, the final stage of ‘resolution’ was approaching (Fay, 2012).

➤ **Resolution**

On February 11, just one day later, Vice President Suleiman appeared on state television, announcing Mubarak’s resignation (The Guardian, 2011). The demonstrators in Tahrir Square and around the country celebrated as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took power from Mubarak. Human Rights Watch reported that over 300 Egyptians were killed throughout the country since the beginning of the revolution (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Though Mubarak fled to Saudi Arabia, the military has maintained the preeminent role in decision-making. The institution’s reluctance to relinquish power has led to protests that continued long after the resolution of this crisis (Fay, 2012). The next section looks at the student – led protest in South Africa #FeesMustFall.

2.7. #FeesMustFall – South Africa

➤ **From Rhodes Must Fall to #FeesMustFall**

According to Mavunga (2019), South Africa’s public tertiary education institutions faced a series of student-led protest actions in late first in early March and late October 2015 in light of increased tertiary cost for the academic year of 2016. As a

harsh reminder of colonialism, protesting students united around #RhodesMustFall in March 2015 at UCT, and they demanded the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue (Mavunga, 2019). Alongside a range of issues, students wanted a decolonized curriculum and the dissolution of outsourcing support staff (Booyesen, 2016). These demands were amplified across all South African universities, leading to a national mobilization of student and public support (Booyesen, 2016). Different names were assigned to movement but what continued was the unity in determination to achieve their goals (Chawana, 2019). In its expansion, the #FMF movement transformed by taking on various names such i.e., #OpenStellies, #DataMustFall, #ZumaMustFall (e.g., Booyesen, 2016; Langa, 2017; Mavunga, 2019). The protests at some institutions were too destructive resulting in the postponement of classes, rescheduling of examinations, damage to property, injuries and the arrest of students (Mavunga, 2019).

➤ **#FeesMustFall**

Following the revelation of a 10.5% tertiary increment at South African universities, a series of protest broke out first at Wits University in mid - October 2015 (Langa, 2017). Owing to underlying tensions between the university management and student leaders, #FeesMustFall quickly made news headlines alongside #RhodesMustFall. By coordinating blockades at the entrances of the universities and enforcing sit-ins in key university spaces, #FMF was gradually taking shape (Mavunga, 2019). A remarkable moment was the moment when members of management spent the entire night in dialogue with the student leaders in the Solmon Mahlangu House (Chawana, 2019). Accordingly, “the events of that day marked the shift of power dynamics both at the University and nationally, from the University management to students and workers and from the state to the masses” (Ndlovu, 2017:30). Never before did this occur at any of South Africa’s

universities, which showed that students wanted their demands to be taken seriously (Ndlovu, 2017). Students used Facebook and Twitter to publicize #FMM what they wanted, and in so doing, transformed the movement into a nationwide protest (Ndlovu, 2017). #FMM generated over “1.3 million tweets during the last 2 weeks of October” (Maggs, 2015). Activist planned and coordinated the protest via Facebook and Twitter and used these networks to organize discussions, which in effect, united student protesters in all provinces (Maggs, 2015). The student protesters identified the movement as an anti-capital project aimed at decolonizing the neo-liberal project within the University of the Witwatersrand (Motimele, 2019). #FMM is associated with several academic debate, yet there is a consensus that the #FMM student protest must be understood in terms of South Africa’s wider socioeconomic issues such as poverty, unemployment, high-crime, corruption and racial conflicts to name a few (e.g., Booysen, 2016; Langa, 2018). Ultimately considering the major topics discussed in this literature review, the next section ends with the chapter conclusion.

2.8. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of the literature relevant to this study. The chapter discussed the public sphere theory, its dominant debates and subsequent dominant critiques. Consideration was made to the Internet, notably social media networks’ dominant debates, dominant critiques, the technical features and functions of Facebook and Twitter as well sociability on the former and latter networks. The chapter concluded with highlighting the major events of Egypt’s #Jan25 revolution and South Africa’s student-led protest #FeesMustFall. Essentially, the rationale for the extensive literature review highlights not only key aspects, but also indicates certain research gaps. In terms of

the public sphere theory, scholars rightfully critique the theory, yet they fail to provide a comprehensive analysis that addresses the full impact of digital and social media on the public sphere. There is also an insufficient exploration of how different digital platforms contribute uniquely to public discourse. Additionally, there is not enough analysis of structural and systemic barriers that prevent equal participation, including digital divides and socio-economic factors. The literature also fails to show us how power relations shape discourse within the public sphere, including the role of elites, corporate interests, gender dynamics and intersectional issues within public discourse. The literature does not show detailed empirical case studies that provide insights into how the public sphere operates in specific contexts. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the public sphere, especially in the context of contemporary societal changes. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology of this study, as informed by the literature review chapter.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized classical building with columns and a pediment.

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and research methodology undertaken for this study. It outlines the sampling method, size, criteria, and study population. This includes the data collection tools and data collection process. In conclusion, the chapter notes the ethical considerations of this study, including the research limitations, evaluation of social research and the research reflexivity of this study.

3.1. Research Design

A research design refers to the steps that researchers take to complete their studies from start to finish (Marvasti, 2004). The research design refers to approaches to qualitative research that encompass formulating research questions and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting findings (Cresswell et al., 2007). To be precise, “a research design relates to the criteria that are employed when evaluating social research” (Bryman, 2012:45). Simplified, the research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data (Cresswell et al., 2007). A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process (Bryman, 2012). The research design for this study is thus exploratory, focusing on the meanings and descriptions of findings.

3.1.1. Research Methodology

A research methodology can be defined as a theory of how an inquiry should proceed (Schwardt, 2007:195). The research methodology involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry (Schwardt, 2007). Research methodologies explicate and define the kinds of problems that are worth investigating e.g., what constitutes a researchable problem

or conceptualizing a problem in such a way that it can be investigated using designs and procedures (Schwardt, 2007). This also includes how to select and develop appropriate means of collecting data (Creswell & Cresswell, 2014). Thus, this study adopts a qualitative research approach because this approach reinforces meaning as well as the intentions underlying human interaction and behaviour.

3.1.2. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research refers to any kind of research “that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:17). Qualitative research is thus “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:479). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people “make sense of their world and the experiences they have” (Merriam, 2009:13). The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, based on the reasons above, this study accepts the significance of qualitative research.

❖ Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

There are significant differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The former is text-oriented while the latter concerns itself with numerical analysis (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative and quantitative methods do not represent disciplinary absolutes, let alone moral ones (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative and quantitative research methods differ primarily in their - analytical objectives; research designs; data collection and instruments; data produced; flexibility built into study design (Bryman, 2012).

❖ **Sampling Method**

In quantitative research, the discussion of sampling revolves around probability sampling (Bryman, 2012). Discussions of sampling in qualitative research tend to revolve around the notion of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012). This study made use of purposive sampling.

❖ **Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling strategies with pre-selected criteria relevant to the research design question (Bryman, 2012). The criteria that will be relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of units of analysis must be made clear (Bryman, 2012). For this study, the key posts and tweets including citizens and public organizations are the main units of analysis.

❖ **Sample Size**

The study's research objectives and characteristics of the study population e.g., size and diversity, determine which and how many people/units to select (Bryman, 2012). This study used a sample size of 20 – 30 post/tweets because not all post/tweets could be considered.

❖ **Sampling Criteria**

The sampling criteria created for this study was guided by the research questions. It made the inclusion and exclusion of units of analysis more specific and relevant.

See Table 1 below.

Reputable Facebook Groups
Verified Twitter accounts/Influential
Be native i.e., Egyptian/South African (male/female)
Have institutional/organizational credibility
Played a key/decisive role during protest

Table 3: Sampling Criteria

❖ **Study Population**

According to Bryman & Bell (2015), a population in research consists of all the units which are fitting for the research project. Hence, the research population of this study is the Egyptian and South African male and female activist, notably those who were regarded as key actors including traditional media platforms civil society organizations. See Table 2 below.

Nationality	Gender	Age	Organization	Networks
Egyptian	Male/Female	18 - 60	Local/Global	Facebook/Twitter
South African	Male/Female	18 - 60	Local/Global	Facebook/Twitter

Table 4: Study Population

3.2. Facebook Data Collection

The data collection tools and instruments were the social media networks themselves. Meaning that, the technical features of Facebook and Twitter was used to extract and download the raw data i.e., 'post' and 'tweets'. The section below outlines the steps taken to collect the data. Facebook data is freely accessible to the public and poses no ethical problems. Accessing this data is not, however, easy. The researcher had to perform a series of online steps to access the raw website data via the Facebook Group feature. The steps taken by the researcher is outlined and evidenced below.

- **Step 1**

To gain full and credible access to the Facebook group page, the researcher used his own personal Facebook account. The login was achieved by means of email and password. See Figure 1 below.

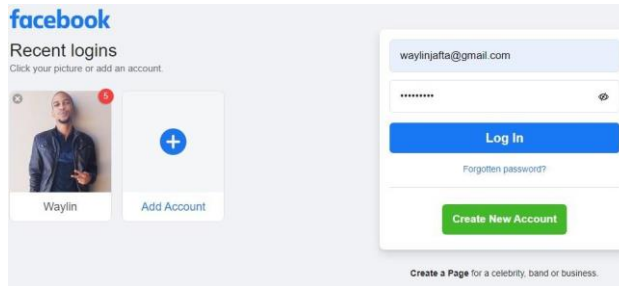


Figure 1: Facebook Login page

- **Step 2**

The second step related to #FeesMustFall, but as there were multiple #FMF groups it was difficult to determine their credibility. As such, the search was refined, and this led to the discovery of “Wits Fees Must Fall”. This group was more credible as it was the only one with a massive following +- 1400 ‘Likes’. See Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: With Fees Must Fall FB Group

- **Step 3**

In this step, the researcher had to click the “Like” button as this allowed me full access to the group/pages. See Figures 3 below.



Figure 3: Wits Fees Must Fall group.

- **Step 4**

This step involved Facebook’s online save feature. For #FMF the dates of key post save ranged from 12 October 2015 – 23 October 2015. See Figure 4 below.

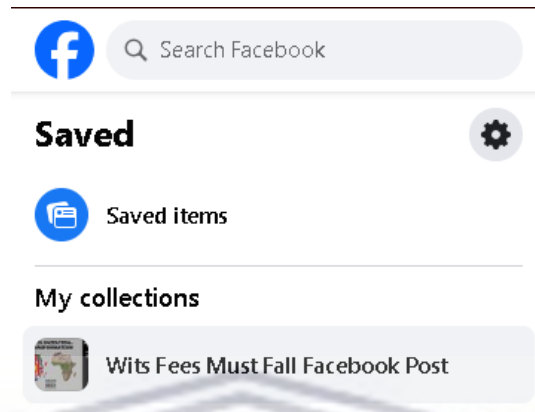


Figure 4: Facebook Online Save Feature

- **Step 5**

The next step involved manually copying and pasting the post onto MS Word documents. The documents had to be renamed, organized, and then printed out.

- **Step 6**

The last step involved protection of the data. The data was stored on my personal Google One Drive cloud storage accounts and hard copies kept safe.

3.3. Twitter Data Collection

- ❖ **Twitter Tweets (Tweetdeck)**

Prior to its rebranding, the technical features of Twitter also included and afforded users’ free access to and use of a third-party app called Tweetdeck. On their website Twitter (2021) described Tweetdeck as “a more advanced yet simplistic Twitter experience by letting the user view multiple timelines in a centralized interface”. In other words, Tweetdeck allowed users to manage multiple Twitter accounts, do tweet collections, track analytics etc. However, today Tweetdeck is called X Pro and requires a substantial fee to gain access. Regardless, the changes from Tweetdeck to X Pro has in no way affected the raw collected data i.e., tweets of this

study. The next section thus outlines the steps taken by the researcher to perform the data collection via Tweetdeck.

❖ **Twitter “tweets” - #Jan25 and #EMF**

Like Facebook data, Twitter data is freely accessible to the public and poses no ethical problems depending on the nature of the study being undertaken. Various online tools are available for collecting data on Twitter e.g., NVivo, NodeXL (Hansen et al., 2010), YourTwrapperKeeper (Bruns & Liang, 2012) and many others. These tools are useful, however, very costly. Hence, the researcher opted to use Tweetdeck.

• **Step 1**

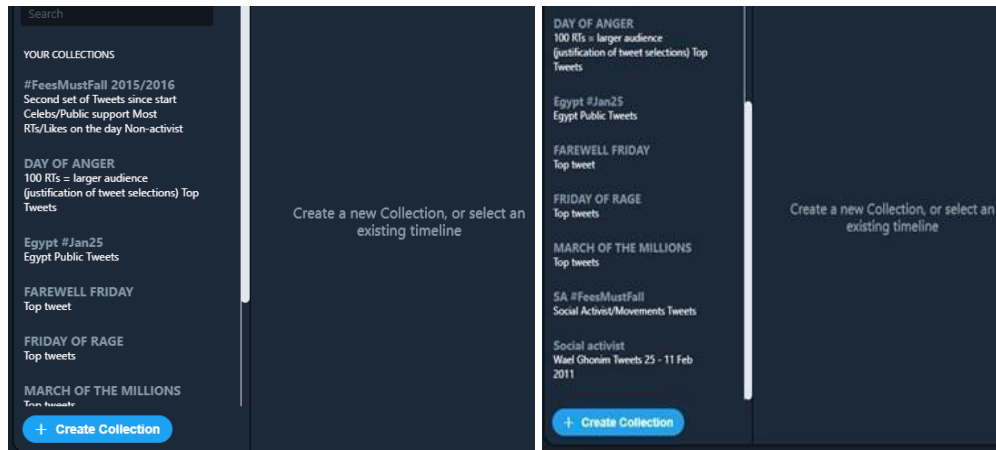
In this step, the author used his own personal username/email and password to login to Twitter. The login process legitimized my online activity and reduced the risk of being seen as a ‘hacker’ or ‘bot’ by Twitter. See Figure 5 below.



Figure 5: Use Home Page Screen

• **Step 2**

The next step led to the creation of collection columns which focused entirely on the events related to both #Jan25 and #FMF. Tweetdecks’ collection columns allow users to group and save enormous amounts of contents. Each collection column contained general and specific tweets. See Figure 6 below.



• Figure 6: Tweetdeck's Collection Columns

• **Step 3**

On the user home page these columns are easily visible. However, the width of the columns cannot be reduced, limiting the full display of all columns. See Figure 7 below.



Figure 7: User Home Screen Tweet Collections

• **Step 4**

With the aim of identifying specific tweets, the researcher used Tweetdecks 'edit collection' feature for both #Jan25 and #FMF. See Figure 8 below.

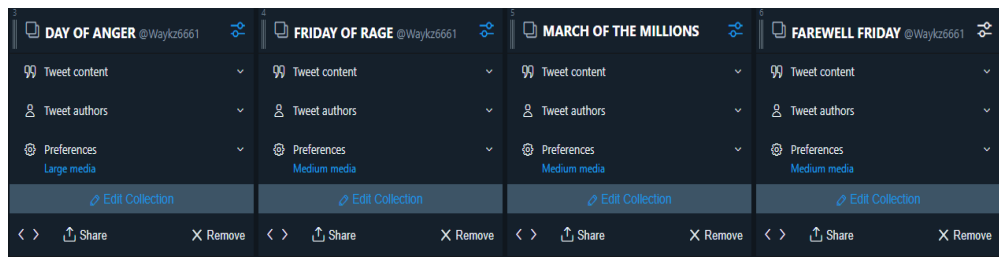


Figure 8: Tweetdeck's Edit Collection feature.

- **Step 5**

To understand the contents of each collection column. See Table 4 below.

Major Event	Column Description
Day of Anger	Tweets relating to the start of the protest.
Friday of Rage	Tweets tracking the progress of protest.
March of One Million	Tweets relating to public participation/action.
Farewell Friday	Tweets relating to the peak of the movement.
#Jan25	General public generated tweets of the protest.
#FeesMustFall	Specific tweets of the protest.

Table 4: Descriptions of column contents

- **Step 6**

After the collection columns were created, the data was organized including the criteria for selecting key tweets, were all made in this step. See Table 5 below.

Egypt #Jan25	South Africa #FeesMustFall
Key words/phrases: #Jan25 #Egypt.	Key words/phrases: #FMF
Tweets of verified users (activist, public figures, organizations etc.).	Tweets of non-verified users (students, public figures, organizations etc.).
Tweets of public users e.g., citizens.	Tweets of public users e.g., citizens.
High tweet analytics i.e., +100 RTs.	High tweet analytics i.e., +100 RTs.

Table 5: Collection column tweet criteria

- **Step 7**

The next step involved downloading and copying the tweets onto Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. See Figure 9 (#Jan25) and Figure 10 (#FMF) below.

B	C	D	E	F	G
USER	TWEET	RT	LIKES		
Mona Eltahawy	In past 8 days at least 12 #Egyptians set themselves on fire out of desperation: unemployment, poverty, corruption. #Jan25 #Egypt protest	581	34		
Wedaddy	URGENT: REQUEST to ALL EUROPE & US tweeps on #Jan25 PLEASE ASK YOUR MEDIA TO COVER #EGYPT NOW	492	12		
Alshaheed	Police in Alexandria Egypt open fire on protesters. Live ammunition. Our correspondant has been hit with a bullet in his head. #Jan25 #Egypt	373	5		
ircpresident	TWITTER IS BLOCKED IN EGYPT #Jan25	287	5		
@HuffPost	Twitter is BLOCKED in Egypt http://huff.to/eQxoGI get more updates here http://huff.to/g7rQKs #jan25	120	11		
@amarsalama	Egypt protests: 30k in Alexandria, 50k in Cairo, 6k in Mansoura, more in Aswan, Quina,	158	6		
JAN25 Day of Anger		JAN 28 Friday of Rage	FEB 1 March of the Million	FEB 11 Farewell Friday	

Figure 9: Excel spreadsheet data #JAN25

B	C	D	E
USER	TWEET	RT	LIKES
@SASCO_Jikelele	Education should not be a debt sentence for the poor. We demand quality free education. The time for implementations is now. #FeesMustFall	35	11
@vuyanipambo	If there was ever a time for free quality education, that time is now. #FeesMustFall #HabibMustFall	44	15
@bakerlikeanita	"If they want to call us thugs, they must call us thugs who stole education" Vuyani Phambo #FeesMustFall 🙄🙄🙄	86	32
@khayadlanga	People who say that race has nothing to do with #FeesMustFall haven't applied their mind to the history that haunts the present.	277	82
@eNCA	BREAKING NEWS: President Zuma says there will a 0% increment for varsity fees. #FeesMustFall pic.twitter.com/3WKz1VeYOK	544	125
@chestermissing	ANC is celebrating the #feesmustfall victory. Next they'll be celebrating the public protector's Nkandla report and release of the spy tapes	273	117
@khayadlanga	When you have no money, and when you see it drying up, you are so aware, it even affects how you perform. #FeesMustFall	115	14
FEB 1 March of the Million		FEB 11 Farewell Friday	#FMF 2015

Figure 10: Excel spreadsheet data #FMF

3.4. Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, the University of the Western Cape's Ethics Committee approved this study. Data on Facebook and Twitter is freely accessible only to members of the public who are registered on these social media networks. To that end, it posed no ethical risks although committed efforts was made to ensure the anonymity of the study's research population/units of analysis. In other words, the personal information of the selected activist/social media networks users will not be publicized. Instead, the researcher is only interested in the actual post and tweets across the selected dates. This is to demonstrate their relation to the research question, aims and objectives.

3.5. Research Limitations

Studies examining, investigating, or evaluating the Internet i.e., social media networks' potential to function as and or facilitate a critical-oriented virtual public sphere, will be hindered by issues of access to information, the reciprocity of communication and the commercialization of online spaces (Papacharissi, 2002). On the one hand, studies can promote Facebook and Twitters' transformative potentials in terms of their role and functions before, during and after sociopolitical events. On the other hand, studies who overlook Facebook and Twitter's capitalistic agendas during social revolutions and protest actions will not yield effective results as these networks are designed, regulated, and distributed by capitalist.

3.6. Evaluating Social Research

In quantitative studies concepts such as reliability, replication, and validity remain important. Bryman (2012:389) claims that many qualitative researchers point out concerns regarding, "their relevance for qualitative research". Mason (1996:21)

stated that, “reliability, validity, and generalizability are different kinds of measures of the quality, rigor and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles”. Lincoln & Guba (1985) identified “two primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study: trustworthiness and authenticity” (Bryman, 2012:390). The next section considers these criteria.

❖ **Trustworthiness**

In Qualitative research, “trustworthiness is made up of four criteria each of which has an equivalent criterion in Quantitative research” (Bryman, 2012:390). See Table 6 below.

Credibility	Multiple accounts of social reality which is especially evident in the trustworthiness criterion of credibility.
Transferability	Qualitative findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world.
Dependability	All records are kept in an accessible manner i.e., research process, problem formulation, research participants, data analysis etc.
Confirmability	The researcher has not overtly allowed his/her personal values to sway the conduct of the research and the findings.

Table 6: Trustworthiness Criteria (Bryman, 2012)

❖ **Authenticity**

In addition to the four criteria of trustworthiness, Lincoln & Guba (1985) posits the criteria of authenticity. Together “these criteria raise a wider set of issues concerning the wider political impact of research” (Bryman, 2012:393). Table 7 below represents the considerations made towards the authenticity of the data for this study.

Fairness	Does the research fairly represent different viewpoints among members of the social setting?
Ontological authenticity	Does the research help members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu?
Educative authenticity	Does the research help members to appreciate better the perspectives of other members of their social setting?
Catalytic authenticity	Has the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances?
Tactical authenticity	Has the research empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action?

Table 7: Authenticity Main Criteria (Bryman, 2012)

❖ **Reflexivity – Role of the Researcher**

Reflexivity has several meanings in the social sciences. Put differently, reflexivity also refers to how social researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate (Bryman, 2012). The researcher is viewed as implicated in the construction of knowledge through the stance that he/she assumes in relation to the observed and through the ways in which an account is transmitted in the form of a text (Bryman, 2012). The researcher acknowledges that undertaking this study was filled with temptations of bias towards some of the issues identified. Yet, the researcher ensured that this study remained objective during its investigation and analysis. Thanks to having a large digital footprint on both Facebook and Twitter, the researcher used this to profound effect by identifying and analyzing key types of website data i.e., post and tweets. Importantly, while some of the posts and tweets were crucial, a significant amount of these post and tweets could, however, not be included.

3.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research design and methodology that was used in this study. An explanation and justification of the research design and research methodology was provided. Consideration was made towards distinguishing qualitative research from quantitative research and a justification was provided for using the former approach for this study. The chapter also indicated the sampling method, sample size, sample criteria and study population of this study. The data collection tools used, and the data collection steps taken by the researcher, were also outlined and justified. The chapter finally indicated the ethical consideration of this study, the research limitations, evaluating social research and research reflexivity.

In essence, the importance of this chapter demonstrated the relevance of qualitative research. This specific research design and methodology was identified to ensure the accomplishment of the study's research aims, objectives and questions. Additionally, the chapter showcased the significance of ethics in social research including the credibility of data as well as the role of the researcher. Against this backdrop, the next chapter presents the results and data presentation.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS: DATA PRESENTATION

4. Introduction

This chapter introduces the results presentation and discussion. First, the chapter considers the method of data analysis of this study, followed by a concise illustration of the thematic analysis process deployed in this study. Thereafter, the chapter presents the identified main themes which emerged from the data analysis. The data was collected directly from the social media networks themselves i.e., Meta and X, better known as Facebook and Twitter. The type of data collected is website data i.e., post and tweets of the social activist, social movements, local/international organizations, public figures and members of the general Egyptian and South African public. The data is presented in relation to the primary and sub – research questions of this study.

4.1. Method of Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the major methods of Qualitative data analysis. To be precise, thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). A key feature of thematic analysis is its applicability in various epistemological frameworks (Bryman, 2012). Positivists use thematic analysis to examine individual meaning and experiences, which give insights into external reality (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Critical realists use thematic analysis to investigate social meanings and implications behind topics of interest (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Constructivist considers how the social, cultural, and structural contexts influence individual experiences to reveal meanings that are socially constructed (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This study adopts a constructivist

approach because “meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, rather than inhering within individuals” (Burr, 1995 cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006:14). The justification for a constructivist approach is that thematic analysis is a suitable and powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes encapsulate a “patterned response or meaning” in data which informs the research question(s) (Braun & Clarke 2006:82). Themes tend to describe the different facets of a singular idea in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whilst sub – themes have a particular focus relevant for the research question(s) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through naming and analyzing a specific sub-theme, that aspect of the theme becomes particularly salient (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The development of the main themes and sub – themes for this study were achieved by using Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic process as its blueprint. See Table 8 below.

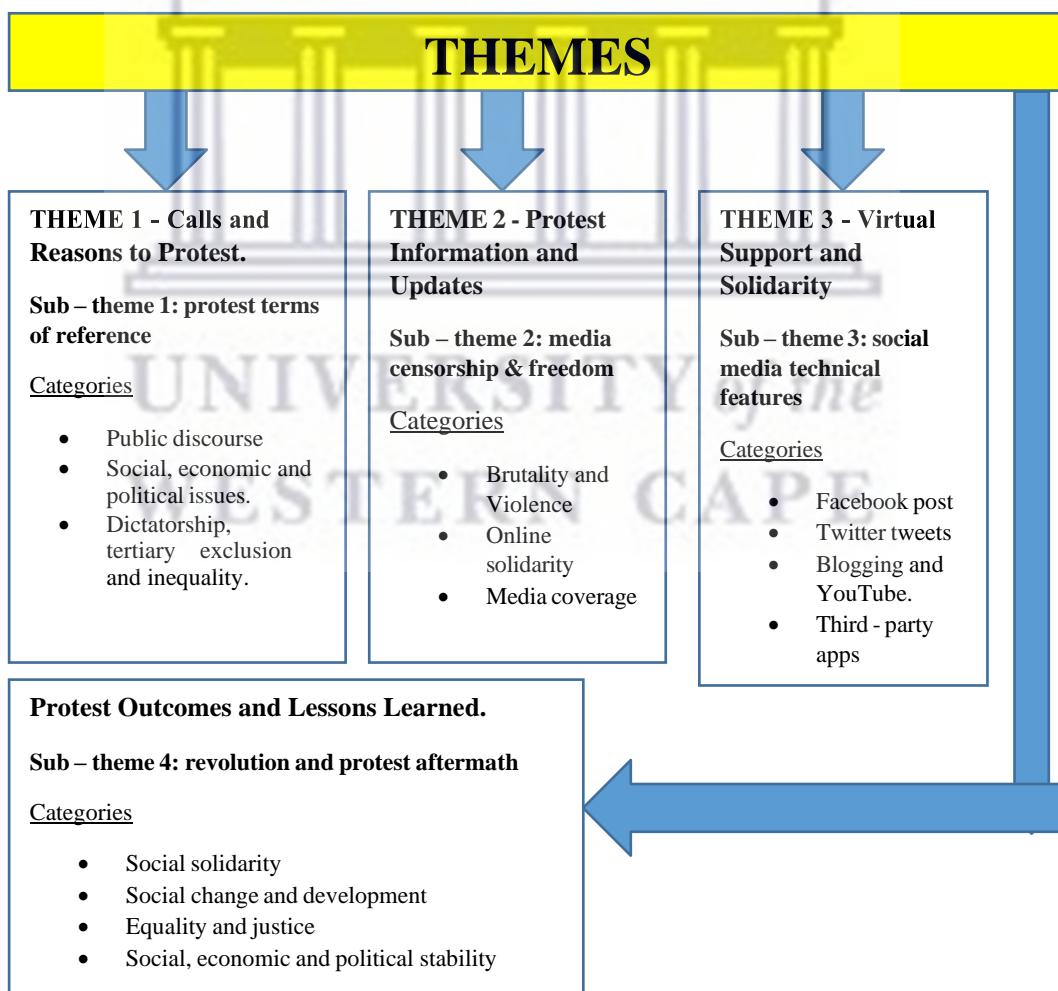
PHASE 1	<u>FAMILIARIZATION</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This phase mainly included reading and re-reading the data.
PHASE 2	<u>GENERATING INITIAL CODES</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This phase required generating initial (open) codes.
PHASE 3	<u>SEARCHING FOR THEMES</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searching for themes was an iterative process during this phase.
PHASE 4	<u>REVIEWING THEMES</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical revision of the codes to see if they support, contradict and overlap.
PHASE 5	<u>DEFINING AND NAMING THEMES</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The naming and descriptions of themes occurred in this phase.
PHASE 6	<u>PRODUCING THE REPORT</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key information about the study, how the findings link up with the research questions, aims and objectives.

Table 8: Thematic Analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Main Themes and sub - themes

Four (4) main themes and sub – themes emerged from the Facebook post and Twitter tweets website data. The researcher tabulated the themes and then described them accordingly. It was not always possible to separate out the themes. Meaning that sometimes the description of one theme has similarities of another theme. The diagram below provides an outline of the main themes and sub – themes.

- **Calls and reasons to protest.**
- **Protest information and updates.**
- **Virtual support and solidarity.**
- **Protest outcomes and lessons learned.**



4.1.1. THEME 1: CALLS AND REASONS TO PROTEST

Now, it is worth pointing out that prior to Facebook's relaunch to Meta in late 2021, the researcher had already collected and analyzed the data i.e., post from the Egyptian Facebook Group 'We Are All Khaled Said' between 2019-2021. However, as of 2023 and without any reasons given, Facebook removed the We Are All Khaled Said Group from its network. Thus, the researcher accepted that the Facebook dataset of Egypt would be ineffective because examiners, researchers and readers of this study would not be able to validate the data i.e., post on Facebook. Nevertheless, the discussion is still of relevance for the data collected on the #FMF Facebook Group aka 'Wits Fees Must Fall'.

The tabulated first main theme i.e., **calls and reasons to protest**, presents the key Facebook post and Twitter tweets that have been identified in relation to the first sub – research question. A total of six data extracts was chosen for this process. There are three key posts and six key tweets. This means that 1 (a), 2 (b), 3 (c) denotes the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25. On the other hand, the key Facebook post of #FMF is denoted as 4 (a), 5 (a), 6 (a) and the key Twitter tweets of #FMF labelled as 4 (b), 5 (b), 6 (b). Following from the tabulated data will be sub-tables containing the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25, followed by the Facebook and Twitter tweets of #FMF. The aim is to indicate the technical features and their functions that were most useful for social activist and activist in their respective calls and reasons to protest in the contexts of both Egypt and South Africa. Accordingly, Table 10 below presents the primary data collected i.e., key post and tweets from both Facebook and Twitter.

CALLS AND REASONS TO PROTEST				
EGYPT #JAN25		SOUTH AFRICA - #FeesMustFall		
TWEETS		POST		TWEETS
1 (a)	Pray for #Egypt. Very worried as it seems that government is planning a war crime tomorrow against people. We are all ready to die #Jan25	4 (a/b)	Join us tomorrow. Towards #FreeQualityEducation #EndOutsourcing We made a pact with the workers, and we intend to see this moment out with an immediate victory for both parties.	#WitsFeesMustFall is not only for Wits Students but all unprivileged students who just want to be EDUCATED #FEESMUSTFALL
Source	@Ghonim		Wits Fees Must Fall	@Eassy
2 (b)	Mubarak is the third longest ruler in the 5000-year history of #Egypt behind Mohamad Ali Basha and the Pharoah Ramseis II #Jan25	5 (a/b)	As a non-partisan, student led and worker aligned movement, we are in full support of this. Let's show up.	The whole country is coming together #WitsFeesMustFall and all #FeesMustFall! We'll no longer be marginalised! Education is not a commodity
Source	@YousefMunayyer		Wits Fees Must Fall	@ANCYL_Wits
3 (c)	In past 8 days at least 12 #Egyptians set themselves on fire out of desperation: unemployment, poverty, corruption. #Jan25 #Egypt protest	6 (a/b)	No #freeeducation, no registration! #ASIJIKI #wesaidfeesmustfall	This is not a battle over the colour of your skin. It's time for everyone to stand together to address a bigger cause #FeesMustFall #UPrising
Source	@Monaeltahawy		Wits Fees Must Fall	@SimphiwePetros

Table 10: THEME 1 - Calls and Reasons to Protest.

The main identified technical features of Twitter i.e., @username, #Hashtags and Tweets/RTs all played decisive roles for social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF. Firstly, when the social activist made the calls to protests, they composed highly emotive tweets, which to be sure, represented a boisterous way of mobilizing public protest support. Additionally, the use of supportive features such as Media and Share increased social activist calls to protest. In effect, protesting citizens and students alike responded to the calls to protest by using the Like, Comment, Search, Media, DM and Share features. When social activist stated the reasons to protest, they made use of the Tweet/RT and #Hashtags features including the Media and Share features. From the data presented, the type of virtual public discourse, however, is girded by highly emotive characteristics, which contrasts with Habermas' (1989) public sphere ideals of rational-critical public debate. Table 11 below shows the key tweets of #Jan25.

Twitter tweets - #JAN25

1 (a)	"Pray for #Egypt. Very worried as it seems that government is planning a war crime tomorrow against people. We are all ready to die #Jan25".
2 (b)	"Mubarak is the third longest ruler in the 5000-year history of #Egypt behind Mohamad Ali Basha and the Pharoah Ramseis II #Jan25".
3 (c)	"In past 8 days at least 12 #Egyptians set themselves on fire out of desperation: unemployment, poverty, corruption. #Jan25 #Egypt protest".

Table 11: Key Twitter tweets #JAN25

- **Tweet 1 (a):** "Pray for #Egypt. Very worried as it seems that government is planning a war crime tomorrow against people. We are all ready to die #Jan25" - @Ghonim.

This tweet is a plea for help from the international community. The tweet signals a call to protest as citizens had been subjected to years of harsh living conditions

under Mubarak. The tweet emphasizes that citizens were not afraid of death at this point due undemocratic state actions.

- **Tweet 2 (b):** “Mubarak is the third longest ruler in the 5000-year history of #Egypt behind Mohamad Ali Basha and the Pharoah Ramseis II #Jan25”- @YousefMunayyer.

This tweet shows how the political hegemony by Mubarak stifled the Egyptian society for years. The tweet provides a key historical scene of uncontested state and public power by Mubarak.

- **Tweet 3 (c):** “In past 8 days at least 12 #Egyptians set themselves on fire out of desperation: unemployment, poverty, corruption. #Jan25 #Egypt protest” - @Monaeltahawy.

The tweet points out three recurring issues that led to citizens’ acts of self-immolation within the space of a week. These were public issues affecting the masses at large. The next section looks at the key Facebook post of #FMF.

Facebook post - #FeesMustFall

4 (a)	“Join us tomorrow. Towards #FreeQualityEducation #EndOutsourcing We made a pact with the workers, and we intend to see this moment out with an immediate victory for both parties”.
5 (a)	“As a non-partisan, student led and worker aligned movement, we are in full support of this. Let's show up”.
6 (a)	“No #freeeducation, no registration! #ASIJIKI #wesaidfeesmustfall”.

Table 12: Key Facebook post #FeesMustFall

- **Post 4 (a):** “Join us tomorrow. Towards #FreeQualityEducation #EndOutsourcing We made a pact with the workers, and we intend to see

this moment out with an immediate victory for both parties” – Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post reflects a call made to students and university support staff i.e., cleaners to unite and protest. The post cites the inequality at various universities across the country.

- **Post 5 (a):** “As a non-partisan, student led and worker aligned movement, we are in full support of this. Let's show up” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post highlights a powerful sense of solidarity and unity between students and workers to achieve the objectives for all those involved.

- **Post 6 (a):** “No #freeeducation, no registration! #ASIJIKI #wesaidfeesmustfall”- Wits FMF Facebook Group.

The post simply shows that without free education, the yearly registration process on campuses would be thwarted. Table 13 below looks at the key tweets of #FMF.

Twitter tweets - #FeesMustFall

4 (b)	“#WitsFeesMustFall is not only for Wits Students but all unprivileged students who just want to be EDUCATED #FEESMUSTFALL”.
5 (b)	“The whole country is coming together #WitsFeesMustFall and all #FeesMustFall! We'll no longer be marginalised! Education is not a commodity”.
6 (b)	“This is not a battle over the colour of your skin. It's time for everyone to stand together to address a bigger cause #FeesMustFall #UPrising”.

Table 13: Key Twitter tweets #FeesMustFall

- **Tweet 4 (b):** “#WitsFeesMustFall is not only for Wits Students but all unprivileged students who just want to be EDUCATED #FEESMUSTFALL” - @Eassy.

The tweet shows that the movement was not limited to one university, but rather represents all disadvantaged Black students at other universities.

- **Tweet 5 (b):** “The whole country is coming together #WitsFeesMustFall and all #FeesMustFall! We'll no longer be marginalised! Education is not a commodity” - @ANCYL_Wits.

This tweet was a call to the South African public at large to unite and protest in social solidarity and unity.

- **Tweet 6 (b):** “This is not a battle over the colour of your skin. It’s time for everyone to stand together to address a bigger cause #FeesMustFall #UPrising” - @SimpfiwePetros.

The movement was not based on race as the tweet shows that the movement has a clear focus towards a common goal.

In sum, in the case of the Facebook post of #FMF, the main technical features of Facebook i.e., Groups, Pages and Events were effective for activists in their calls and reasons to protest. First, with the Groups feature, activist stated the calls to protest to members. Second, group members circulated these calls to their personal networks i.e., friends via the Share feature. The main and supportive features i.e., News Feed; Like; Comment; Share; Photo/Video; Messenger and Search, were all useful in students’ calls and reason to protest. The next section looks at the second main theme – **protest information and updates.**

4.1.2. THEME 2: PROTEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES

The tabulated second main theme i.e., **protest information and updates** displays the key post and tweets that have been identified in relation to the second sub – research question. A total of six data extracts was chosen for this process. There are three key posts and six key tweets. This means that 1 (a), 2 (b), 3 (c) denotes the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25. On the other hand, the key Facebook post of #FMF is denoted as 4 (a), 5 (a), 6 (a) and the key Twitter tweets of #FMF labelled as 4 (b), 5 (b), 6 (b). Following from the tabulated data will be sub-tables containing the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25, followed by the Facebook and Twitter tweets of #FMF. The aim is to indicate the technical features and their functions that were most useful for social activist, activist and organizations/civil society (in SA), to ensure credible protest information and updates in both contexts of Egypt and South Africa. Table 14 below presents the primary data collected i.e., key post and tweets for both Facebook and Twitter.

PROTEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES			
EGYPT #JAN25		SOUTH AFRICA - #FeesMustFall	
TWEETS		FACEBOOK POST	TWEETS
1 (a)	Al Jazeera continues to bring you uncensored coverage of the events in #Egypt as they unfold. Watch LIVE here: http://aje.me/ajelive #jan25	4 (a/b) Statement from WitsFMF Wits Fees Must Fall (FMF) student movement and the ongoing occupation at Solomon Mahlangu House	What You Need To Know About The #FeesMustFall Protests buzzfeed.com/hayesbrown/w ha... pic.twitter.com/Wpdr1YdfzU
Source	@AJEnglish	Wits Fees Must Fall	@Lisatozzi

2 (b)	SOS: Internet & Landlines cut. They will massacre us. Please spread this video & RT http://apne.ws/eEC1I5 #Egypt #Jan25 talk to ur Reps	5 (a/b)	Official Statement: Student Demands 11 January 2016: We have embarked on the no registration fee campaign	South Africa #FeesMustFall: Stories behind the protests bbc.in/1jEHdSp
Source	@Alshaheed		Wits Fees Must Fall	@BBCAfrica
3 (c)	BREAKING: Many governmental buildings are being captured by protesters in #Suez. Al Arabiya #Egypt #Jan25	6 (a/b)	#FeesMustFall calls on academic's workers and students to join a Protest action	Student leaders at the forefront of #Feesmustfall protest ebx.sh/1RSsLZ6 pic.twitter.com/8Y2VxV4hkS
Source	@ArabRevolution		Wits Fees Must Fall	@eNCA

Table 14: THEME 2 - Protest information and updates

The identified man and supportive technical features of Twitter i.e., @username, #Hashtags and Tweets/RTs all played decisive roles for social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF. Additionally, social activist and activist also made use of Twitter's supportive features i.e., Like, Comment, Search, Media, DM, and Share to help in circulating protest information and updates to protesters in both #Jan25 and #FMF. As the Internet was shut down and #Jan25 social activist repressed by Mubarak's security forces, credible media outlets joined in by broadcasting the protest actions without any censorship. In South Africa, media organizations contributed by circulating objective and opinionated discourse. Table 12 below shows the key tweets of #Jan25.

Twitter tweets - #JAN25

1 (a)	“Al Jazeera continues to bring you uncensored coverage of the events in #Egypt as they unfold. Watch LIVE here: http://aje.me/ajelive #jan25”.
2 (b)	“SOS: Internet & Landlines cut. They will massacre us. Please spread this video & RT http://apne.ws/eEC1I5 #Egypt #Jan25 talk to ur Reps”.
3 (c)	“BREAKING: Many governmental buildings are being captured by protesters in #Suez. Al Arabiya #Egypt #Jan25”.

Table 15: Key Twitter tweets #JAN25

- **Tweet 1 (b):** “Al Jazeera continues to bring you uncensored coverage of the events in #Egypt as they unfold. Watch LIVE here: <http://aje.me/ajelive> #jan25” - @AJEnglish.

This tweet importantly shows how a major traditional media organization committed itself on reporting the protest events without any form of censorship or editing.

- **Tweet 2 (b):** “SOS: Internet & Landlines cut. They will massacre us. Please spread this video & RT <http://apne.ws/eEC1I5> #Egypt #Jan25 talk to ur Reps”- @Alshaheed.

This tweet shows how the regime restricted Internet and communication connections to the rest of the world. The tweet highlights a fear of mass killings of citizens by Mubarak’s security forces to online and offline protest activities.

- **Tweet 3 (b):** “BREAKING: Many governmental buildings are being captured by protesters in #Suez. Al Arabiya #Egypt #Jan25”- @ArabRevolution.

This tweet illustrates how citizens not only participated online, but how this was translated into offline actions of occupying key state domains in the real public sphere. Table 16 below looks at the key Facebook post of #FMF.

Facebook post - #FeesMustFall

4 (a)	“Statement from WitsFMF Wits Fees Must Fall (FMF) student movement and the ongoing occupation at Solomon Mahlangu House (formerly known as Senate House)”.
5 (a)	“Wits Fees Must Fall Official Statement: Student Demands 11 January 2016”.
6 (a)	“#FeesMustFall calls on academics workers and students to join a Protest action on Wednesday 27 January to contest the securitization of South African campuses and to reassert the demands for decolonization and decommodification of education in South Africa”.

Table 16: Key Facebook post #FMF

- **Post 4 (a):** “Statement from WitsFMF: Wits Fees Must Fall (FMF) student movement and the ongoing occupation at Solomon Mahlangu House (formerly known as Senate House)” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post show that protestors were occupying one of the key buildings on the university. The post informs protesting students that they have moved into a position of power and that they will continue to occupy the space.

- **Post 5 (a):** “Wits Fees Must Fall Official Statement: Student Demands 11 January 2016” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post had to be reduced as it had over two pages of content, the full post is listed in Appendices B of this study. The post is an official statement made by activist leaders in which they outlined a range of demands.

- **Post 6 (a):** “#FeesMustFall calls on academics workers and students to join a Protest action on Wednesday 27 January to contest the securitization of South African campuses and to reassert the demands for decolonization and decommodification of education in South Africa” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

The final post is just as significant due to its explicit statements. The post informed student protestors to resist the policing across campuses. Table 17 below looks at the key tweets of #FMF.

Twitter Tweets - #FeesMustFall

4 (b)	“What You Need To Know About The #FeesMustFall Protests buzzfeed.com/hayesbrown/wha... pic.twitter.com/Wpdr1YdfzU ”.
5 (b)	“South Africa #FeesMustFall: Stories behind the protests bbc.in/1jEHdsp ”.
6 (b)	“Student leaders at the forefront of #Feesmustfall protest ebx.sh/1RSsLZ6 pic.twitter.com/8Y2VxV4hkS ”.

Table 17: Key Twitter tweets #FMF

- **Tweet 4 (b):** “What You Need To Know About The #FeesMustFall Protests buzzfeed.com/hayesbrown/wha... pic.twitter.com/Wpdr1YdfzU”- @Lisatozzi.

This tweet informs and updates both local and international citizens of what was happening in South Africa and provides a link to an article with more protest information.

- **Tweet 5 (b):** “South Africa #FeesMustFall: Stories behind the protests bbc.in/1jEHdsp” - @BBCAfrica.

The tweet provides more key information to the international community regarding the chain of events involving the student protest action in South Africa.

- **Tweet 6 (b):** “Student leaders at the forefront of #Feesmustfall protest ebx.sh/1RSsLZ6 pic.twitter.com/8Y2VxV4hkS” - @eNCA.

The tweet shows that the activist leaders were physically involved by protesting the ground and across the country in conditions that proved to be challenging.

In terms of the Facebook post of #FMF, all the main technical features i.e., Groups, Pages and Events were key for activist in ensuring protest information and updates. Though some media outlets were narrating #FMF as inherently violent, activist stated used the functions of the Group to counter-narrate factual protest information to its members and broader student and public at large. Alongside the supportive features i.e., News Feed; Like; Comment; Share; Photo/Video; Messenger and Search, students were thus able to facilitate and coordinate protest information and updates. Conversely, in terms of the Twitter tweets of #FMF, the main technical features i.e., Tweet/RT and #Hashtags were instrumental for public figures and civil society in ensuring reliable and credible protest information and updates were relayed to the broader public. Additionally, Twitter's supportive features i.e., Like, Comment, Search, Media, DM, and Share were all effective in increasing the protest information and updates across various communities in both the virtual public space and real-world public sphere. The next section presents the third major theme i.e., **virtual support and solidarity**.

4.1.3. THEME 3: VIRTUAL SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

The tabulated third main theme i.e., **virtual support and solidarity** displays the key post and tweets that have been identified in relation to the second sub-research question. A total of six data extracts was chosen for this process. There are three key posts and six key tweets. This means that 1 (a), 2 (b), 3 (c) denotes the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25. On the other hand, the key Facebook post of #FMF is denoted as 4 (a), 5 (a), 6 (a) and the key Twitter tweets of #FMF labelled as 4 (b), 5 (b), 6 (b). Following from the tabulated data will be sub-tables containing the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25, followed by the Facebook and Twitter tweets of #FMF.

The aim is to indicate the technical features and their functions that were most useful in mobilizing virtual support and solidarity in both contexts of Egypt and South Africa. Table 18 below presents the primary data collected i.e., key post and tweets for both Facebook and Twitter

VIRTUAL SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY				
EGYPT #JAN25		SOUTH AFRICA - #FEESMUSTFALL		
TWEETS		POST		TWEETS
1 (a)	In solidarity with all #Egypt protesters exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly #Jan	4 (a/b)	Statement on negotiations with WITS management. #EndOutsourcing #FreeEducation	South Africans abroad pledge their support for #FeesMustFall dlvr.it/CWhzx7 pic.twitter.com/LWFidOJdpw
Source	@Amnestyusa		Wits Fees Must Fall	@ewnreporter
2 (b)	There are now leaders from 3 countries in the world officially asking Mubarak to step down: Turkey, Maldives, Denmark #jan25 #egypt	5 (a/b)	University of the Witwatersrand management confirmed today that they will neither pursue a permanent interdict, nor will they apply to extend the existing interim interdict against protesters.	We have gained international support. From Germany, China, Cameroon students show solidarity. #FeesMustFall pic.twitter.com/sNeuBwFAfR
Source	@Dima_Khatib		Wits Fees Must Fall	@yamalisa
3 (c)	I march with you. *Pls RT to join the virtual March of a Million on Twitter* #jan25 #Egypt #MillionMarch	6 (a/b)	What do we mean when we say a decolonised, African University?	We are told that about 500 people are protesting in Trafalgar Square, London
Source	@Jamesmb		Wits Fees Must Fall	@GroundUp_News

Table 18: THEME 3 - Virtual Support and Solidarity

The identified main and supportive technical features of Twitter i.e., #Hashtags and Tweets/RTs were instrumental for both social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF. In the case of #Jan25, social activist alongside civil society tweeted and retweeted protest discourses relating to emancipation and political liberation. These tweets were circulated not only to the followers of the main user(s), but also to followers across the Twitter network. On the other hand, in #FMF, activist alongside civil society also used functions of the #Hashtags and Tweets/RTs to mobilize and virtual support and gain solidarity locally and internationally. In both instances of #Jan25 and #FMF Twitter’s supportive features i.e., Like, Comment, Search, Media, DM, and Share were all effective in facilitating virtual support and solidarity. Table 19 below looks at the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25.

Twitter Tweets - #JAN25

1 (a)	“In solidarity with all #Egypt protesters exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly #Jan”.
2 (b)	“There are now leaders from 3 countries in the world officially asking Mubarak to step down: Turkey, Maldives, Denmark #jan25 #egypt”.
3 (c)	“I march with you. *Pls RT to join the virtual March of a Million on Twitter* #jan25 #Egypt #MillionMarch”.

Table 19: Key Tweets #JAN25

- **Tweet 1 (a):** “In solidarity with all #Egypt protesters exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly #Jan” - @Amnestyusa.

This tweet demonstrates the support and solidarity from a prominent international non-profit organization that monitors and promotes human rights for all people.

- **Tweet 2 (b):** “There are now leaders from 3 countries in the world officially asking Mubarak to step down: Turkey, Maldives, Denmark #jan25 #egypt”- @Dima_Khatib.

International pressure increased as leaders from different countries supported and stood in solidarity with the movement. These leaders formally requested Mubarak to relinquish his political powers.

- **Tweet 3 (c):** “I march with you. *Pls RT to join the virtual March of a Million on Twitter* #jan25 #Egypt #MillionMarch”- @Jamesmb.

The final tweet shows that people, as Twitter users, across the globe supported and stood in solidarity with Egyptians by participating in virtual protest. Table 20 below looks at the key Facebook post of #FMF.

Facebook post - #FeesMustFall

4 (a)	“Statement on negotiations with WITS management. #EndOutsourcing #FreeEducation”.
5 (a)	“University of the Witwatersrand management confirmed today that they will neither pursue a permanent interdict, nor will they apply to extend the existing interim interdict against protesters”.
6 (a)	“What do we mean when we say a decolonised, African University? And why is transformation not Decolonisation. A discussion will be had at Solomon Mahlangu House today at 16:00 to 18:00 on Decolonisation vs Transformation”.

Table 20: Key Facebook post #FeesMustFall

- **Post 4 (a):** “Statement on negotiations with WITS management. #EndOutsourcing #FreeEducation” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

The post is a statement regarding the discussions that took place between the activist leaders and university management. It underpins salient elements of support towards the broader social movement.

- **Post 5 (a):** “University of the Witwatersrand management confirmed today that they will neither pursue a permanent interdict, nor will they apply to extend the existing interim interdict against protesters” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post shows that the university management had shown signs of support and solidarity as they allowed protesting students to carry out their right of assembly and freedom of speech.

- **Post 6 (a):** “What do we mean when we say a decolonised, African University? And why is transformation not Decolonisation. A discussion will be had at Solomon Mahlangu House today at 16:00 to 18:00 on Decolonisation vs Transformation” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post emphasizes students’ commitment towards a more African-based syllabus in all South African tertiary education institutions. Table 21 below looks at the key tweets relating to #FMF.

Twitter Tweets - #FeesMustFall

4 (b)	“South Africans abroad pledge their support for #FeesMustFall dlvr.it/CWhzx7pic.twitter.com/LWFidOJdpw”.
5 (b)	“We have gained international support. From Germany, China, Cameroon students show solidarity. #FeesMustFall 🇳🇮 pic.twitter.com/sNeuBwFAfR”.
6 (b)	“We are told that about 500 people are protesting in Trafalgar Square, London in support of #FeesMustFall. pic.twitter.com/DExjf5P0sg”.

Table 21: Key Tweets #FeesMustFall

- **Tweet 4 (b):** “South Africans abroad pledge their support for #FeesMustFall dlvr.it/CWhzx7 pic.twitter.com/LWFidOJdpw” - @ewnreporter.

The tweet indicates how the student movement received international support and solidarity across the globe. The tweet shows the virtual community was aware of #FMF occurring across South African universities.

- **Tweet 5 (b)** – “We have gained international support. From Germany, China, Cameroon students show solidarity. #FeesMustFall 🇺🇸 pic.twitter.com/sNeuBwFAfR”- @yamalisa.

South Africans did not only support the student movement from abroad, but also citizens from other countries as this tweet shows. The tweet reflects global solidarity with the student movement.

- **Tweet 6 (b)** – “We are told that about 500 people are protesting in Trafalgar Square, London in support of #FeesMustFall. pic.twitter.com/DExjf5P0sg” - @GroundUp_News.

This tweet further demonstrates the level of international support and solidarity that #FeesMustFall received in the United Kingdom. The student movement had reached international recognition.

In #FMF, activist relied on Facebook’s main technical features i.e., Groups and Pages features to further increase virtual support and solidarity. Additionally, the supportive features i.e., News Feed; Like; Comment; Share; Photo/Video; Messenger and Search, were all used to further gain virtual support and solidarity. The next section presents the final major theme i.e., **protest outcomes and lessons learned.**

4.1.4. THEME 4: PROTEST OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNED

The final theme i.e., **protest outcomes and lessons learned** displays the key post and tweets that have been identified in relation to the third sub-research question. A total of six data extracts was chosen for this process. There are three key posts and six key tweets. This means that 1 (a), 2 (b), 3 (c) denotes the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25. On the other hand, the key Facebook post of #FMF is denoted as 4 (a), 5 (a), 6 (a) and the key Twitter tweets of #FMF labelled as 4 (b), 5 (b), 6 (b). Following from the tabulated data will be sub-tables containing the key Twitter tweets of #Jan25, followed by the Facebook and Twitter tweets of #FMF. The aim is to indicate the technical features and their functions that were most useful in evaluating the protest outcomes and lessons learned in both contexts of Egypt and South Africa. Table 22 below presents the primary data collected i.e., key post and tweets for both Facebook and Twitter.

PROTEST OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED				
EGYPT #JAN25		SOUTH AFRICA - #FeesMustFall		
TWEETS		FACEBOOK POST		TWEETS
1 (a)	Yes, social media played a role in #jan25. But don't call this the Twitter or FB revolution. Real people protested and died. It's theirs.	4 (a/b)	No #freeeducation, no registration! #ASIJIKI #wesaidfeesmustfall	BREAKING NEWS: President Zuma says there will a 0% increment for varsity fees. #FeesMustFall pic.twitter.com/3WKz1VeYOK
Source	@Acarvin		Wits Fees Must Fall	@eNCA

	The Mubarak regime miscalculated the people of #Egypt from		Official Statement: Student Demands	#RhodesMustFall was not just about a statue.
2 (b)	day one (#Jan25). No matter what regime did, the people always won. #Egypt.	5 (a/b)	(continued)	#FeesMustFall is not just about fees. Fighting structural injustice takes revolutions.
Source	@Bencnn		Wits Fees Must Fall	@Mlaurahuss
3 (c)	Today witnessed the fall of one man from power and the empowerment of 80 million egyptians #onelove #tahrir #jan25 #jan28	6 (a/b)	Always remember this university belongs to us (image)	We must continue to support our #FeesMustFall family, as they continue their decolonization project towards free higher education.
Source	@AymanM		Wits Fees Must Fall	@Zelleimani

Table 22: THEME 4: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The identified man and supportive technical features of Twitter i.e., @username, #Hashtags and Tweets/RTs were all instrumental for both social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF. Social activist and activist used these features and their functions to articulate the protest outcomes and lessons learned. The subsequent use of the Tweet/RT and #Hashtags features allowed activist to interact with protesters and civil society at large. In both instances of #Jan25 and #FMF Twitter's supportive features i.e., Like, Comment, Search, Media, DM, and Share were all effective in evaluating the protest outcomes and lessons learned. Table 23 below shows the key tweets relating to #Jan25.

Twitter Tweets - #JAN25

1 (a)	“Yes, social media played a role in #jan25. But don't call this the Twitter or FB revolution. Real people protested and died. It's theirs”.
2 (b)	“The Mubarak regime miscalculated the people of #Egypt from day one (#Jan25). No matter what regime did, the people always won. #Egypt”.
3 (c)	“Today witnessed the fall of one man from power and the empowerment of 80 million egyptians #onelove #tahrir #jan25 #jan28”.

Table 23: Key Tweets #JAN25

- **Tweet 1 (a):** “Yes, social media played a role in #jan25. But don't call this the Twitter or FB revolution. Real people protested and died. It's theirs”- @Acarvin.

This tweet acknowledges the role of social media in the success of the movement but the shows that the real heroes were those who lost their lives in the protest.

- **Tweet 2 (b):** “The Mubarak regime miscalculated the people of #Egypt from day one (#Jan25). No matter what regime did, the people always won. #Egypt”- @SultanAlQassemi.

This tweet highlights the tenacity and determination showed by Egyptian citizens in their quest for national social change, despite the brutal protest conditions.

- **Tweet 3 (c):** “Today witnessed the fall of one man from power and the empowerment of 80 million egyptians #onelove #tahrir #jan25 #jan28” - @AymanM.

The tweet reflects the millions of Egyptians who celebrated the removal a dictator. The ousting of a dictator gave a new sense of freedom and hope to million Egyptians. Table 24 below looks at the key Facebook post of #FMF.

Facebook post - #FeesMustFall

4 (a)	“No #freeeducation, no registration! #ASIJIKI #wesaidfeesmustfall”.
5 (a)	“Wits Fees Must Fall Official Statement: Student Demands 11 January 2016: We have embarked on the no registration fee campaign to ensure that the gates of the university are open to all black people. This movement is geared towards the attainment of free education and the immediate implementation of free education in South Africa”.
6 (a)	“Always remember this university belongs to us” (image).

Table 24: Key Facebook post #FeesMustFall

- **Post 4 (a):** “No #freeeducation, no registration! #ASIJIKI #wesaidfeesmustfall” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

This post shows that students wanted to halt the registration process until their demands were fully met.

- **Post 5 (a):** “Wits Fees Must Fall Official Statement: Student Demands 11 January 2016: We have embarked on the no registration fee campaign to ensure that the gates of the university are open to all Black people. This movement is geared towards the attainment of free education and the immediate implementation of free education in South Africa”.

This post overlaps with theme two as it extends how students’ demands was achieved. Students opposed the registration process which served to exclude poor black students despite meeting the academic requirements.

- **Post 6 (a):** “Always remember this university belongs to us” (see full image in appendices A and B).

This post was in the form an image posted as a cover photo on the groups page. The image and its meaning urged students not to forget that they hold the power as universities cannot exist with them. Table 25 below show the key #FMF tweets.

Twitter Tweets - #FeesMustFall

4 (b)	“BREAKING NEWS: President Zuma says there will a 0% increment for varsity fees. #FeesMustFall pic.twitter.com/3WKz1VeYOK”
5 (b)	“#RhodesMustFall was not just about a statue. #FeesMustFall is not just about fees. Fighting structural injustice takes revolutions”.
6 (b)	“We must continue to support our #FeesMustFall family, as they continue their decolonization project towards free higher education”.

Table 25: Key Tweets #FeesMustFall

- **Tweet 4 (b):** “BREAKING NEWS: President Zuma says there will a 0% increment for varsity fees. #FeesMustFall pic.twitter.com/3WKz1VeYOK” - @eNCA.

This tweet shows that one of the key objectives of the protest was achieved whereby former president Jacob Zuma in 2015 announced a no-fee increments for the 2016 academic year.

- **Tweet 5 (b):** “#RhodesMustFall was not just about a statue. #FeesMustFall is not just about fees. Fighting structural injustice takes revolutions” - @Mlaurahuss.

The tweet show that the success of the student protest was more than just people demonstrating, but that their struggles continues wherever injustice occurs.

- **Tweet 6 (b):** “We must continue to support our #FeesMustFall family, as they continue their decolonization project towards free higher education”- @Zelleimani.

The final tweet simply points out that the events of the student movement should not be forgotten, instead students must unite against the inequalities in academia.

In terms of the Facebook post of #FMF, the main technical features i.e., Groups and Pages, contributed to activist achieving successful protest outcomes and lessons learned. The functions of the Groups served as a common space for members to assemble and reflect on the overall protest outcomes and lessons learned. The Pages of public figures/organization similarly broadcasted the success of the protest outcomes and lessons learned. Additionally, the supportive features i.e., News Feed; Like; Comment; Share; Photo/Video; Messenger and Search and their functions all contributed to the successful protest outcomes and lessons learned.

4.2. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the results and data presentation. It provided an outline of the thematic analysis process this study undertook in the identification and presentation of the key Facebook post and Twitter tweets of social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF. The main themes were presented in the form of main and sub-tables. The identified posts and tweets under each main theme were then supported by brief discussions as to what the data shows. The data had to be organized in a strategic manner which reflected the significant issues relating to Egypt's #Jan25 and South Africa's #FeesMustFall.

Essentially, the significance of the results and data presentation showcases the measures which social activists undertook in the quest for social change. By using thematic analysis, the patterns of the data collectively demonstrated that ordinary people took up arms and united as a collective. Each main theme including the sub-themes thus highlights the specificity of the nature of events as they unfolded in Egypt's #Jan25 revolution and South Africa's #FMF social movement. Accordingly, in the next chapter, a discussion of the results will take place.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

5. Introduction

The previous chapter provided the results and data presentation. The purpose of this chapter is primarily to provide a discussion of the findings of the data. The chapter is structured in accordance with the identified primary themes - (i) calls and reasons to protest; (ii) protest information and updates; (iii) virtual support and solidarity; and (iv) protest outcomes and lessons learned. Each theme is further discussed alongside the sub-themes. Relevant literature from Chapters 1 and 2 is drawn upon to substantiate the main findings of this study. The discussion of the main themes alongside the sub – themes, all have relevance to each sub–research question of this study. The next section thus considers theme one, calls and reasons to protest.

5.1. THEME 1: Calls and Reasons to Protest

The main theme underpins discourse of democratizing politics and society in Egypt and democratizing institutional culture and access to higher education in South Africa. During social and political struggles, Gladwell (2010:3) deems social media networks like Facebook and Twitter ineffective because they “are built around weak ties”. In other words, while there is strength in weak ties, weak ties rarely lead to high-risk activism (Gladwell, 2010). However, in the main the data of the theme suggests that in both contexts of #Jan25 and #FMF, Facebook and Twitter were key tools for promoting social and political change (Shirky, 2011). Despite the former and latter networks’ transformative potentials, social media sceptic Gladwell (2010) is adamant that high-risk social activism means that social activist in revolutions risks their lives to achieve real social change as such movements are characterized by strong group identity and cohesion with strong ties. Contrastingly, the data of the

theme is indicative that Facebook and Twitter as sociopolitical tools have produced more access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and led to an enhanced ability to undertake collective public protest action (Shirky, 2011).

5.1.1. Sub – theme: protest terms of reference

The sub - theme suggests that the underlying public social issues in both contexts of #Jan25 and FMF gave rise to networked social movements (Castells, 2012). These networked social movements, as the data shows “was born on the Internet, diffused by the Internet, and maintained its presence on the Internet” (Castells, 2012:168). Importantly, the sub-theme shows that social activist relied on Facebook and Twitter to communicate the emotions of outrage and hope that were needed for switching from collective emotions to collective action (Castells, 2012). The sub-theme is suggestive that in both #Jan25 and #FMF, emotions of the need for protest and revolution spread on the Internet and subsequently resulted in street protest (Fuchs, 2012).

To put this into context, the data implies that Egypt’s underlying social, economic, and political inequalities were all social conditions that led to the mobilization of public support and national protest action (Habeeb, 2012). These conditions delegitimized the regime of political power of the authoritarian state which further amplified collective feelings of frustration, injustice, and humiliation amongst protesting citizens (Saidin, 2018). The data thus implies that the authoritarian state led by Mubarak, had deprived millions of Egyptians of their basic human rights, particularly a lack of freedom and the absence of democracy stagnated Egypt. The tweet below shows this:

- **Tweet 2 (b):** “Mubarak is the third longest ruler in the 5000-year history of #Egypt behind Mohamad Ali Basha and the Pharoah Ramseis II #Jan25”- @YousefMunayyer.

Conversely in the context of South Africa’s #FMF, the data suggest that protesting students regarded the movement important in their objectives of decolonizing South African universities (Motimele, 2019). Hence, despite the protests being labelled by different names such as #RhodesMustFall, #OutsourcingMustFall, #OpenStellies, #DataMustFall, #ZumaMustFall etc., what continued was the unity in determination to achieve their goals (Chawana, 2019). The extracted post below demonstrates this:

- **Post 4 (a):** “Join us tomorrow. Towards #FreeQualityEducation #EndOutsourcing We made a pact with the workers, and we intend to see this moment out with an immediate victory for both parties” – Wits FMF Facebook Group.

5.2. THEME 2: Protest and Information and Updates

The main theme suggests that as both #Jan25 and #FMF expanded in their scope and objectives, the role of Facebook and Twitter became even more vital as alternative local and global communication channels. The theme is indicative that social activist in both #Jan25 and #FMF “planned the protests on Facebook” and subsequently “coordinated them through Twitter” (Castells, 2012:58). The theme also shows that when the social activist and social movements were repressed in public spaces, Facebook and Twitter enabled the protection of connection and communication amongst protesters and the global society (Fuchs, 2012). A more critical view of the theme, however, cautions that Facebook and Twitter are not just

communication companies, but also large-scale advertising agencies that commodify users' private, semi-public, and public data in order to profit out of users' online activities (Fuchs, 2014). The theme is thus indicative that despite serving as virtual public spaces, the Internet technologies such as Facebook and Twitter remain afflicted by the failures of political systems in the real-world public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Importantly, the theme shows that while social activist and social movements prioritize the value of Facebook and Twitter, authoritarian states such as the Mubarak regime in Egypt, regard them as simply too powerful and subsequently arrest, harass, exile, and even kill users in response (Shirky, 2011).

5.2.1. Sub – theme: media freedom and censorship

Traditional media must enable participation, empower citizens to participate in public discourse and contribute to formulating public policies (Curran, 1991). In other words, traditional media must expose offences, solve injustices and reveal criminal behavior to public inquiry, that is, media need must help in restoring societal imbalances (Curran, 1991). However, the data suggests that in Egypt's #Jan25 this was not the case at all since the use of the Internet and all forms of traditional media communication was prohibited by the Mubarak regime. From the onset of the Egyptian revolution, traditional media outlets such as TV, radio and newspapers reported little about the unrest (Habeeb, 2012). Internet activist groups like Anonymous published and distributed lists of strategies to circumvent the Internet block (Fay, 2012). The data shows that access to the Internet, particularly, Facebook and Twitter, was limited to isolating social activists and protesters (Fay, 2012). The extracted tweet below illustrates this:

- **Tweet 2 (b):** “SOS: Internet & Landlines cut. They will massacre us. Please spread this video & RT <http://apne.ws/eEC1I5> #Egypt #Jan25 talk to ur Reps”- @Alshaheed.

Internet usage and communication restrictions in the context of South Africa was applicable to due to Constitutional rights, however, state-owned and funded traditional media outlets narrated #FMF in terms of its violent nature. Like Egypt’s #Jan25, the data shows that South African activists planned and coordinated the protest using Facebook and Twitter i.e., #FMF to publicize what they demanded and in so doing, transformed the movement into a nationwide protest (Ndlovu, 2017). The data indicates that activist leaders relayed key protest information and updates via its Facebook Group as means to counter false narratives distributed by state-owned ad funded traditional media outlets. The post below shows how students were kept informed of factual protest events:

- **Post 6 (a):** “#FeesMustFall calls on academics workers and students to join a Protest action on Wednesday 27 January to contest the securitization of South African campuses and to reassert the demands for decolonization and decommodification of education in South Africa” - Wits FMF Facebook Group.

5.3. THEME 3: Virtual Support and Solidarity

This theme encapsulates the online and offline support shown towards the Egyptian revolution #Jan25 and the South African student-led protest #FMF, particularly by the global virtual community. The theme thus indicates that both #Jan25 and #FMF “went from cyberspace to urban space” (Castells, 2012:45) mainly because “the original spaces of resistance were formed on the Internet” (Castells, 2012:56).

While the Internet opens new channels of virtual public discourse, however, due to diverse cultural backgrounds people are not always understanding towards one another (Hill & Hughes, 1998). The data, however, suggests that this was not the case, as people from diverse nationalities and backgrounds across the globe united behind the unique social causes of both Egypt's #Jan25 and South Africa's #FMF. Although Uslaner (2004) argued that social connections people form online do not always promote mutual trust as virtual public spaces often bring together mistrusting people, the data however, indicates that the social connections formed online regarding #Jan25 and #FMF, brought trusting people and organizations together. Whilst Morozov (2011) argued that slacktivism involves online activities that are easily performed to make participants feel good about themselves, however, the theme suggest that this was not the case as people participated virtually and physically in the protest actions in both #Jan25 and #FMF.


Importantly, the theme is indicative that Facebook encourages sociability by representing existing social connections in a virtual space and Twitter encourages sociability through simplicity (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). Through hashtags, images, videos, tweets and posts, the theme shows how individuals within and outside of both Egypt and South Africa were able to show solidarity with both #Jan25 and #FMF. While the virtual support and solidarity functioned as a catalyst by amplifying the voices of those on the ground and around the globe, the theme shows that moving political discourse to virtual public spaces such as Facebook and Twitter simply exclude those with no access (Papacharissi, 2002). The main theme shows that modern social movements are both online and offline networked movements in which social media networks play key roles (Castells, 2012).

5.3.1. Sub-theme: social media technical features

Social media networks like Facebook and Twitter also known as social networking sites (SNS), both have unique technical features that allow users to communicate, share information and build relationships with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The data suggests that this was the case in Egypt's #Jan25, as the technical features enabled external support from the global community to be seen and heard across the globe. The extracted tweet below illustrates this:

- **Tweet 1 (b):** “In solidarity with all #Egypt protesters exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly #Jan” - @Amnestyusa.

Similarly, in the case of South Africa's #FMF, the data suggest that activists planned and coordinated the protest via Facebook and Twitter and used these networks to organize discussions, which in effect, united student protesters in all provinces (Maggs, 2015). The data shows that activists and protesters not only gained local public support but also international support. The extracted tweet below illustrates this:

- **Tweet 5 (b) –** “We have gained international support. From Germany, China, Cameroon students show solidarity. #FeesMustFall  pic.twitter.com/sNeuBwFAfR”- @yamalisa.

5.4. THEME 4: Protest Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The final main theme specifically denotes the significance of the events that transpired in both #Jan25 and #FMF. Inasmuch as these were two different social movements in two different developing African societies, the data shows that the objectives of both #Jan25 and #FMF were similar in that the end goal was always

social change and justice in the political sense of achieving freedom and democracy in Egypt, and financial inclusion and curriculum reform in terms of access to tertiary institutions in South Africa. The theme underlines Fay's (2012) claim that Fisks' four stage political crisis theory is useful to better understand the implicit and explicit nature of the Egyptian revolution. Whilst in South Africa, the theme suggests that the #FMF student protest must be understood in terms of wider socioeconomic issues such as poverty, unemployment, high-crime, corruption and racial conflicts to name a few (e.g., Booysen, 2016; Langa, 2018).

5.4.1. Sub – theme: revolution and protest aftermath

The data shows that 2011 was truly a year of major revolutions, protests, riots, and the emergence of networked social movements (Fuchs, 2012). The year 2011 was the year of dreaming dangerously, as the data indicates that this was the year in which people dared to try to make dreams of a different world reality since liberalism was disproved by history (Žižek, 2012). In the context of Egypt's #Jan25, the data suggest that the protest outcomes and lessons learned includes the power of social media networks, collective public action, the importance of sustained efforts towards meaningful social change including challenges of transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy. The data shows how #Jan25 exposed the complexities of such transitions, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to address social, economic, and political reforms. The extracted tweet below illustrates this:

- **Tweet 1 (b):** “Yes, social media played a role in #jan25. But don't call this the Twitter or FB revolution. Real people protested and died. It's theirs”- @Acarvin.

On the other hand, in the context of South Africa, the protest outcomes and lessons learned, the theme suggests that #FMM had a significant impact on the South African society by increasing awareness about the challenges, students face in accessing higher education and intensifying discussions about broader socio-economic issues. The tweet below illustrates this:

- **Tweet 5 (b):** “#RhodesMustFall was not just about a statue. #FeesMustFall is not just about fees. Fighting structural injustice takes revolutions” - @Mlaurahuss.

5.5. Chapter Conclusion

The chapter set out to provide a discussion of the findings of the results. The identified main themes and sub-themes are indicative that social activist and social movements’ utilized Internet technologies such social media networks like Facebook and Twitter to great effect in their respective social causes namely #Jan25 and #FMM. Although the chapter shows that, to some extent, Internet technologies such Facebook and Twitter have the potentials to constitute virtual public spaces, they do not as yet, however, form robust virtual public spheres. Nevertheless, Facebook and Twitter did function as effective tools for the planning, coordination, mobilization and protest actions. This shows that inasmuch as the Internet empowers citizens to virtually assemble and strategize against the state, Facebook and Twitter are primarily meant to advance capitalist profit-logic agendas. Thus, a critical view of social media networks’ broader modus operandi reveals how these networks are nothing more than vehicles of capitalism. All in all, the next chapter will thus focus on the primary conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 6 – MAIN CONCLUSION

6. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conclusion of the study. The writing of the conclusion was guided by the research aim and objectives including the primary and sub-research questions. The limitations and significance of this study is also considered, followed by this study's main conclusion.

6.1. Study Aim

The primary research aim of this study is to investigate the different yet significant role of the discursive use of social media networks i.e., Facebook/Twitter by social activist engaged in social movements, and the democratic project to evaluate its bearing on the emergence of virtual public spheres, virtual public spaces, or both. The findings suggest that in both the contexts of Egypt's #Jan25 and South Africa's #FMF, social activist and activist relied primarily on Facebook and Twitter to not only communicate, but to plan, coordinate, mobilize protest support and action. Both #Jan25 social activist and #FMF activist generated and circulated a wide – range of public issues, which was girded by highly emotive and, at times, substantive rational protest discourse. This means that both #Jan25 socialactivist and #FMF activist were explicit in their discursive use of social media networks. The next section shows how this study's primary research aim was achieved in the context of Egypt's #Jan25 political revolution and South Africa's #FMF student social movement.

❖ Facebook – #FMF: A South African Virtual Public Space

A new public sphere comes into existence only when the three institutional criteria of: (i) *disregard of status*; (ii) *domain of common concern*; and (iii) *inclusivity* - are all met (Habermas, 1989). Yet, the findings suggest that the main technical features

of Facebooks' i.e., Groups, Pages, and Events, in the case of #FMF merely constituted virtual public spaces and not virtual public spheres. These features are inclusive, but a more critical view shows that their functionalities all share a major limitation – they prohibit non-Group members, non-Page followers' and non-Event recipients' access to, participation in, and contribution to protest discourse and online activities. This opposes the core ideal of an “open to all” public sphere (Habermas, 1989:1).

Firstly, although Facebook's Groups render domains of common concern, moving political discourse to a virtual public space simply excludes those with no access (Papacharissi, 2002). The function of the Groups feature created distinct virtual subaltern counterpublics where members “invent and circulate counterdiscourses: oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990:67). Second, Pages feature was based on user social status which is “something like a status attribute” (Habermas, 1989:7), and this inhibiting function of the Pages i.e., social status, prevent members of the lower social classes to participate and express their common concerns as true equals (Fraser, 1990). Finally, the Events feature does not enable the ideals of inclusivity as non-Group members and non-Page followers were simply denied basic access of viewing protest events in Groups and Pages. Thus, as virtual public spaces, activists and their social movement formed part of networked social movements (Castells, 2012). However, it is best that we shift ourselves from a cyber-utopian outlook to one of cyber-skepticism (Morozov, 2011), because the Internet alone cannot change the nature of the political public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002).

❖ **Twitter - emotive/rational virtual public space and sphere**

As the research findings show, the main technical features of Twitter i.e., @username, Tweet/RT and #Hashtags in both cases of #Jan25 and #FMF, gave rise to both virtual public spaces and virtual public spheres. Firstly, in both contexts, social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF, relied on the main and supportive features i.e., Like; Comment; Search; Share; Direct Message and Media to plan, coordinate, mobilize protest support and action. These functions were girded by highly emotive discourse especially in the case of Egypt where the calls and reasons to protest resonated with millions: “In past 8 days at least 12 #Egyptians set themselves on fire out of desperation: unemployment, poverty, corruption. #Jan25 #Egypt protest” (Theme 1: tweet 3 c). However, in terms of the protest information and updates, prominent media organizations relied on rational discourse: “Al Jazeera continues to bring you uncensored coverage of the events in #Egypt as they unfold” (See Theme 2: tweet 1 a). In other words, the technical features all enable virtual public spaces that enhance emotive discourse but become virtual public spheres insofar as the discourse is rational.

The same holds for #FMF, where the discourse fluctuated between emotive and rational. In terms of virtual support and solidarity, the activist protest discourse was rational: “We have gained international support. From Germany, China, Cameroon students show solidarity #FeesMustFall” (Theme 3: tweet 5 b). However, activist turned to emotive discourse in their reflection of the protest outcomes and lessons learned: “We must continue to support our #FeesMustFall family, as they continue their decolonization project towards free higher education” (Theme 4: tweet 6 b). The functionalities of these features enabled both virtual public spaces and spheres as indicated by the emotive and rational discourses made by social activists of

#Jan25 and activists of #FMF. Simply put, while rational discourse invokes elements of a virtual public sphere, the highly emotive discourse renders the functions simply as virtual public spaces. In achieving the main aim, this study was guided by one primary and two sub-research objectives which is discussed next.

6.2. Research Objective

The primary objective of this study was to demonstrate the transformative potential of social activism on social media networks, such as Facebook & Twitter and how this facilitates and inhibits the emergence of a democratic virtual public sphere, virtual public space, or both. The findings suggest that social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter have sociopolitical significance for modern day social activism and social movements. Inasmuch as there are valid skepticisms and issues of the Internet and its technologies i.e., Facebook and Twitter, the Internet as a medium still presents people, groups and civil society to participate and contribute to sociopolitical change especially in the context of social revolutions and protest actions. Yet, we must take caution in overestimations of the transformative potentials of the Internet i.e., Facebook and Twitter, as they primarily function to serve the interest of capitalists without real concern for democratization, let alone social welfare. In support of the primary research objective, the study had two sub-research objectives:

➤ Sub – research objectives 1

To examine the technical features of Facebook and Twitter in terms of the type of public discourse which emerges across the former and latter, particularly of an oppositional and emancipatory nature. The findings suggest that since Facebook and Twitter are global and popular communication and networking tools, each have

unique and distinctive technical features. The findings show that both Facebook and Twitter's main and supportive technical features as used by social activists and activists of #Jan25 and #FMF enabled them to successfully plan, coordinate, mobilize protest support and action. However, the main and supportive technical features of Facebook and Twitter prevented both #Jan25 and #FMF as social movements to constitute virtual public spheres due to inherent limitations in the features' functions. The second sub-research objective has also been considered and this is indicated in the section below.

➤ **Sub – research objective 2:**

To determine the primary differences and similarities between the real public and virtual public sphere/space including its intersections in social movements. The findings suggest that the Internet and its related technologies i.e., Facebook/Twitter, do have the potential to enable virtual public spaces, whilst also inhibiting the emergence of a true virtual public sphere. On the one hand, the real public sphere entails people assembling in a designated space that is free from state and market influence and requires a practice of rational-critical public debate whereby social status is equally rejected. On the other hand, the virtual public spaces on both Facebook and Twitter do not comply with these conditions, as their inherent functionalities promote and prohibit a more inclusive, rational, and equal virtual public sphere. Yet, these differences all point back to the one common theme - that is, the Internet is a capitalist medium oriented towards commercial objectives, whilst ignoring the democratization of society and politics. This is the same system that disintegrated the ideals of the Habermasian public sphere in favor of capitalist logic of profit-making.

6.3. Primary Research Question

This study's primary research question asked:

- ❖ How, if at all, does the sociopolitical use of Internet technologies such as social media networks i.e., Facebook and Twitter, by social activist in social movements shape and contribute to a critical, social and political discourse and thus the emergence of a virtual public sphere and virtual public spaces?

The findings of this study indicate that the sociopolitical use of Internet technologies such as Facebook and Twitter, in the contexts of #Jan25 and #FMF, did produce more access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action (Shirky, 2011). While social activists of #Jan25 and activists of #FMF made discursive use of Facebook and Twitter's technical features, to effect political and educational changes in domains of virtual public spaces, the functions of these features undermined the emergence of a more inclusive and rational virtual public sphere. Thus, when examining the potentials of the Internet as a virtual public sphere, Facebook and Twitter in terms of the functionalities of their features, creates virtual public spaces but does not constitute virtual public spheres (Papacharissi, 2002). Despite their transformative potentials, sceptics maintain that Facebook and Twitter do very little to produce tangible social and political change (Gladwell, 2010). However, what the findings indicate is that the Internet enabled networked social movements such as #Jan25 and #FMF to communicate the emotions of outrage and hope that was needed for switching from collective emotions to collective action (Castells, 2012:11-17). However, skeptical claims maintain that the sociopolitical use of Facebook and Twitter only promotes slacktivism (Morozov, 2011). Facebook

and Twitter are therefore not just communication companies, but also large-scale advertising agencies that make profit out of data that users' online activities generate (Fuchs, 2023).

6.3.1. Sub – Research Questions

Alongside the primary research questions, the following sub-questions have been identified:

- ❖ What were the distinct calls the social activist of #Jan25, Egypt and the activist of #FMF, South Africa used to mobilize public protest action in Egypt and South Africa?

THEME 1: Calls and Reasons to Protest - The main theme underpins discourse of democratizing politics and society in Egypt and democratizing institutional culture and access to higher education in South Africa. The theme suggests that in the case of #Jan25, social activist focused mostly on Egypt's underlying social, economic and political inequalities were factors that increased the calls and reasons to protest (Habeeb, 2012). The theme suggests that a lack of freedom and the absence of democracy stagnated Egypt. In the case of #FMF, the theme suggests that student protesters focused on issues of financial exclusion and institutional racism and decolonizing South African universities (Motimele, 2019). In both contexts of #Jan25 and #FMF, the theme shows that Facebook and Twitter were key tools for promoting social and political change (Shirky, 2011).

- ❖ How did the social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF use Facebook and Twitter to relay credible protest information and updates?

THEME 2: Protest and Information and Updates - The theme suggests that as both #Jan25 and #FMF expanded in their scope and objectives, the role of Facebook and Twitter became even more vital as alternative local and global communication channels. The theme is indicative that social activist in both #Jan25 and #FMF “planned the protests on Facebook” and subsequently “coordinated them through Twitter” (Castells, 2012:58). A more critical view of the theme, however, cautions that Facebook and Twitter are not just communication companies, but also large-scale advertising agencies that commodify users’ private, semi-public, and public data in order to profit out of users’ online activities (Fuchs, 2014).

- ❖ How did Facebook and Twitter enable the social activist of #Jan25 and activist of #FMF to gain global support and solidarity?

THEME 3: Virtual Support and Solidarity - This theme encapsulates the online and offline support shown towards the Egyptian revolution #Jan25 and the South African student-led protest #FMF, particularly by the global virtual community. The theme thus indicates that both #Jan25 and #FMF “went from cyberspace to urban space” (Castells, 2012:45) mainly because “the original spaces of resistance were formed on the Internet” (Castells, 2012:56). The theme shows that moving political discourse to virtual public spaces such as Facebook and Twitter simply exclude those with no access (Papacharissi, 2002). Regardless, the main theme shows that modern social movements are both online and offline networked movements in which social media networks play key roles (Castells, 2012).

- ❖ What are the major lessons that can be drawn from these hashtag movements?

THEME 4: Protest Outcomes and Lessons Learned - theme specifically denotes the significance of the events that transpired in both #Jan25 and #FMF. Inasmuch as these were two different social movements in two different developing African societies, the data shows that the objectives of both #Jan25 and #FMF were similar in that the end goal was always social change and justice in the political sense of achieving freedom and democracy in Egypt, and financial inclusion and curriculum reform in terms of access to tertiary institutions in South Africa. In the context of Egypt's #Jan25, the complexities of societal transitions, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to address social, economic, and political reforms (Fay, 2012). Whilst in the South Africa context, the theme is indicative that the #FMF student protest must be understood within the broader background of underlying socio-economic disparities (e.g., Booysen, 2016; Langa, 2018).

6.4. Limitations of the study

The primary limitations devolve to size as only two social movements are considered #Jan25 and #FMF. The period is limited to 2011 #Jan25 and 2015/16 #FMF. The number of social activist and student discourses are limited and not generalizable and applicable to other social movements in different contexts. At the qualitative level it tells us something about how the dynamic of virtual public spheres and virtual public spaces are technologically mediated, and to what effect the balance between the rational and the inflammatory discourses enables and or inhibits an ideal virtual public sphere.

6.5. Significance of the Study

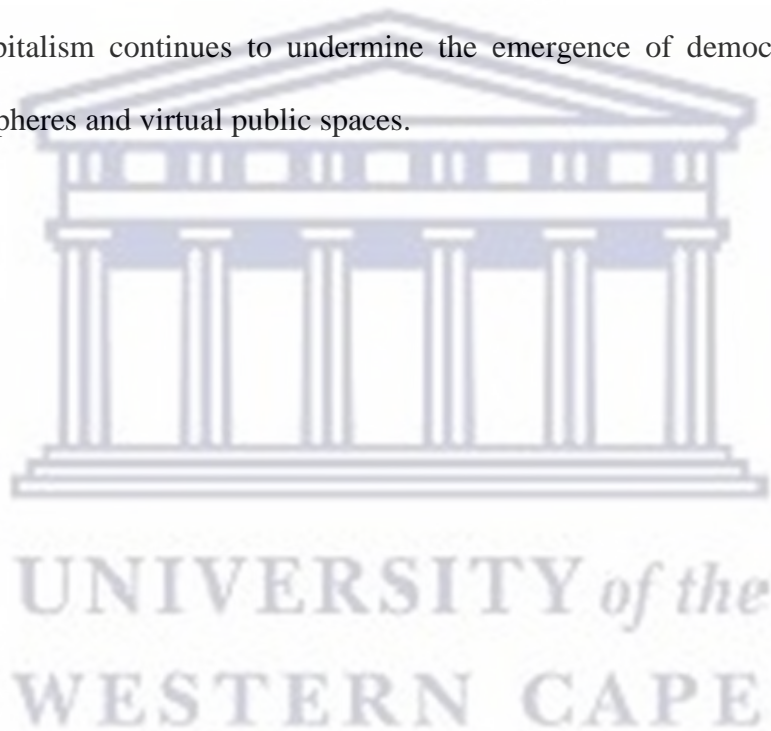
The significance of this study is of relevance to those interested in probing the social complexity that arises from multiple intersections of the virtual and the real and

their reciprocating effects on each other in the context of social media networks. Through a critical understanding of the public sphere theory i.e., institutional conditions, dominant debates and critiques, this study shows that the framework is incredibly important for modern society, particularly in terms of politics, freedom and more importantly, rational-critical public opinion that can affect real social change and democracy. The study is equally important for understanding how offline i.e., traditional forms of high - risk social activism and online i.e., networked social movements co-exists in the Information age.

6.6. Conclusion

Inasmuch as the public sphere theory is critiqued for its exclusionary characteristics, this study, however, posits that the theory remains sociologically significant in that it advances a critical understanding of key themes i.e., society, politics, economics, and culture. This study finds that the practice of rational- critical public debate to affect public opinion, makes the public sphere a remarkable theoretical framework. Alongside the practice of rational-critical public debate, a new public sphere only emerges when all three institutional criteria of: (i) disregard of status; (ii) domain of common concern; and (iii) inclusivity - are met (Habermas, 1989). These normative and empirical dimensions of the public sphere thus enabled this study to critically investigate the Internet i.e., Facebook and Twitter's potentials to firm up into virtual public spheres and or virtual public spaces, under specific conditions involving the former and latter's technical features and functionalities. While Facebook and Twitter possess important sociopolitical potentials in the context of protest revolutions and protest actions i.e., Egypt #Jan25 and South Africa #FMF, the findings reveal a much darker side of the Internet in terms of its ostensible relationship with capitalism. Capitalism commodifies Facebook and Twitter as

profit-making networks with no real intention of advancing the Habermasian public sphere principles and ideals. The initial disintegration of the public sphere was due to capitalism thus making the Internet not very unique. This study, in effect, finds that a more critical outlook of the data reveals that despite advancing the successes in both #Jan25 and #FMF, Facebook and Twitter made profit out of all those users' data in the online activities they produced. Thus, in closing, the researcher argues that we need to reject cyber-optimistic ideologies about the Internet i.e., Facebook and Twitter, in particular, in favor of more cyber- pessimistic views which exposes how capitalism continues to undermine the emergence of democratized virtual public spheres and virtual public spaces.



Bibliography

- Abramson, J.B., Arterton, F.C., and Orren, G.R. (1988). *The electronic commonwealth: The impact of new media technologies on democratic politics*. New York: Basic Books.
- Africa News Agency. (2016). FeesMustFall is newsmaker of the year. *The Star*, 10 March, p. 3. [Online] Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/feesmustfall-newsmaker-of-the-year-1995717> [Accessed on 5 August 2023].
- Akdeniz, Y. (2002). "Anonymity, Democracy, and Cyberspace", *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 69 (1), pp. 223-237. DOI: 10.1353/sor.2002.0010.
- Badiou, A. (2012). *In praise of love*. Serpents Tail: London.
- Bimber, B. (2001). "Information and Political Engagement in America: The Search for Effects of Information Technology at the Individual Level", *Political Research Quarterly*, 54 (1), pp. 53-67. DOI: 10.2307/449207.
- Booyesen, S. (2016). *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*. In: Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Boyd, D & Ellison, N.B. (2007). "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13 (1), pp. 210-230. DOI: 10.1111/j.1083 6101.2007.00393.
- Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2006). "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume 3, pp. 77-101. DOI:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Bruns, A. & Hallvard, M. (2014). Structural layers of communication on Twitter. In: Weller et al., (ed). *Twitter and Society*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. pp. 15 - 28.
- Bruns, A. & Burgess, J. (2011). *The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics*. Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research conference. Available: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/46515/> [Accessed 17 February 2023].
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bryman, A & Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods 5th edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burger, T & Lawrence, F. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*: MIT Press: Cambridge.
- Caers, R., De Feyter, T., De Couck, M., Stough, T., Vigna, C., and Du Bois, C. (2013). "Facebook: A literature review", *New Media & Society*, 15 (6), pp. 982-1002. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813488061>
- Calhoun, C. (1992). *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Carey, J. (1995). The press, public Opinion, and public discourse. In: T. S. Glasser.,(ed) *Public opinion and the communication of consent*. New York: Guilford, pp. 373-402.
- Castells, M. (2001). *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the internet, business and society*. Oxford University Press: London.
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chawana, F. (2019). *An analysis of the ideological interventions during #FeesMustFall: A Case study of the University of the Witwatersrand*, Johannesburg: (unpublished master's thesis).
- Christensen, R. (2011). *Plane Answers to Complex Questions. The Theory of Linear Models*. 4 ed. New York: Springer.
- Coleman, S & Blumler, J. (2009). *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory Practice and Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corbin, S. & Strauss, A. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2 ed. Sage Publications, Inc.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Curran, J. (1991). Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere. In: P, Dahlgren, ed. *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*. New York: Routledge, pp. 27-57.
- Eltantawy, N., & Wiest, J. B. (2011). The Arab Spring Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, pp. 18.
- Eley, G. (1992). Nations, publics, and political cultures: Placing Habermas in the nineteenth century. In: Calhoun, C (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 289-339.
- Facebook, (2023). *Facebook Events*. [Online] Available at: [Accessed 25 August 2023].
- Facebook, (2023). *Facebook Groups*. [Online] Available at: [Accessed 15 August 2023].
- Facebook, (2023). *Facebook Pages*. [Online] Available at: [Accessed 20 August 2023].
- Facebook, (2023). *Introducing Meta: A Social Technology Company*. [Online] Available at: [Accessed 15 May 2022].
- Fay, B. (2012). The Egyptian Revolution Goes Viral: Reading Categories of Tweets in the Twitter-created Networked Public Sphere. *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone*, Volume 175, p. 69.
- Fraser, N. (1990), Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, *Social Text*, 25/26, pp. 56-80.
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. In: C. Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 109-142.
- Fuchs, C. (2008). *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. New York:

Routledge.

Fuchs, C. (2011). *Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies*. London: Routledge.

Fuchs, C. (2012). Social media, riots, and revolutions. *Capital & Class*, 36(3), pp.383-391.

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*. New York: Routledge.

Fuchs, C. (2021). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. Third edition ed. London: Sage.

Fuchs, C. (2023). *Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere*. New York: Routledge.

Gladwell, M. (2010). Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted. *The New Yorker*, pp. 42-49.

Goode, L. (2005). *Jürgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*. London: Pluto.

Grossman, L. K. (1995). *The electronic republic*. New York: Viking.

Habeeb, W. (2012). *The Middle East in Turmoil: Conflict, Revolution, and Change*. Greenwood.

Habermas, J. (2006). "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research", *Communication Theory*, 16 (4), pp. 411- 426.

Habermas, J. (1964/1974). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article. *New German Critique*, Volume 3, pp. 49-55.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Halavais, A. (2014). Structure of Twitter: Social and Technical. In: Weller et al., ed. *Twitter and Society*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., pp. 29-42.

Han, J. (2009). Korea's beef crisis: the Internet and democracy. *Australian Journal of*

International Affairs, 63(4), pp. 505-528.

Hart, R. (1994). Easy citizenship: Television's curious legacy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Volume 546, pp. 109-120.

Hill, K.A. & Hughes, J.E. (1998). *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Honeycutt, C. & Herring, S. C. (2009). Beyond microblogging: Conversation and collaboration via Twitter. *Proceedings of the 42nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-42)*, 5(8), p. 1–10.

Java, A., Finin, T., Song, X. & Tseng, B. (2007). *Why we twitter: Understanding microblogging usage and communities*, *Why we twitter: Understanding microblogging*. San Jose, CA.

Jones, S. (1997). The Internet and its Social Landscape. In: *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. CA: Thousand Oaks, pp. 7-35.

Kaid, L. (2002). Political advertising and information seeking: Comparing exposure via traditional and Internet channels. *Journal of Advertising*, Volume 31, pp. 27-35.

Keenan, A. & Shiri, A. (2009). Sociability and social interaction on social networking websites. *Library Review*, 58(6), pp. 438-450.

Kelly, R. (2009). *Twitter study (White paper)*. San Antonio, TX: Pear Analytics [Online] Available at: <http://www.pearanalytics.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Twitter-Study-August-2009.pdf> [Accessed 13 June 2023].

Kiger, M.E. & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide. *Medical Teacher*, 42 (131), pp. 846-854.

Kobayashi, T., Ken'ichi, I., & Kakuko, M. (2006). Social Capital Online: Collective Use of the Internet and Reciprocity as Lubricants of Democracy. *Information. Communication & Society*, (5) 582-611. DOI: 10.1080/13691180600965575.

- Langa, M., Ndelu, S., Edwin, Y., Vilakazi, M. (2017). *Hashtag: An analysis of the #FeesMustFall movement at South African Universities*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. Johannesburg: South Africa.
- Lennox, S & Lennox, F. (1974). The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article. *New German Critique*, Volume 3, pp. 49-55.
- Lincoln & Guba, (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Lunt, P & Livingstone, S. (2013). Media studies' fascination with the concept of the public sphere: critical reflections and emerging debates, *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(1), pp. 87-96.
- Maggs, J. (2015). *Social media: #FeesMustFall tweets rule*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.financialmail.co.za/mediaadvertising/2015/11/05/socialmediafeesmustfalltweets-rule> [Accessed 15 June 2022].
- Malina, A. (1999). Perspectives on citizen democratization and alienation in the virtual public sphere. In: Hague & Loader, eds. *Digital Democracy: Discourse and decision making in the Information Age*. New York: Routledge, pp. 23-38.
- Marvasti, A. (2004). *Qualitative Research in Sociology: An Introduction..* Sage Publications Inc., Thousand Oaks.
- Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Mavunga, G. (2019). #FeesMustFall Protests in South Africa: A Critical Realist Analysis of Selected, *Newspaper Articles*, 7(1), p. 81-99.
- McChesney, R.W. (1995). The Internet and US Communication Policy-Making in Historical and Critical Perspective, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 1(4).
- McMillan, J.H & Schumacher, S. S. (1993). *Research in education: A conceptual understanding*. New York: Harper Collins.
- McMillan, J. H. & Schumacher, S. S., (1997). *Research in Education: A Conceptual*

Introduction. New York: Longman.

Melucci, A. (1994). 'A Strange Kind of Newness: What's "New" in New Social In Movements?'. In: Larana, Johnston & Gusfield, eds. *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, p. 101–30.

Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA.

Mitra, A. (1997). Virtual community: Looking for India on the Internet. In: S. Jones, ed. *Virtual culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. CA: Thousand Oaks, pp. 55-79.

Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.

Mutsvairo, B. (2016). *Digital Activism in the Social Media Era: Critical Reflections on Emerging Trend in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Newcastle: Palgrave Macmillan.

NBC News, (2022). *A timeline of Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter*. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/25/business/elon-musk-twitter>[Accessed 19/7/22].

Ndlovu, H. (2017). The journey through Wits #FeesMustFall 2015/16. In: *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of the Wits Fallists*. Johannesburg: SWOP and the University of Witwatersrand, pp. 30-38.

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide*. New York: Cambridge Press.

O'Reilly, T. (2005). *What Is Web 2.0 Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*. [Online] Available at:

<http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> [Accessed 15 May

2021].

O'Loughlin, J. (2004). Democratic Values in a Globalizing World: A Multilevel Analysis of Geographic Contexts, *GeoJournal*, Volume 60, p. 3–17.

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere, *New Media & Society*, 4(9), pp. 9-27.

Pavlik, J. V. (1994). Citizen access, involvement, and freedom of expression in an electronic environment. In: W. & Pavlik, ed. *The people's right to know: Media democracy, and the information highway*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 139-162.

Poster, M. (1995). 'The Internet as a Public Sphere? *Wired*, 3(1), p. 209.

Rash, W. (1997). *Politics on the nets: wiring the political process*. New York: HW Freeman & Co.

Rheingold, H. (1993). *The Virtual Community*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Rheingold, H. (2000). *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Revised edition. MA: MIT Press.

Saidin, M. (2018). Rethinking the 'Arab Spring': The Root Causes of the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution and Egyptian January 25 Revolution, *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, Volume 13, pp. 1-12.

Salvatore, A., Schmidtke, O. & Trenz, H. (2013). Introduction: Rethinking the Public Sphere Through Transnationalizing Processes: Europe and Beyond. In: A. Salvatore, O.

Sassi, S. (2000). The controversies of the Internet and the revitalizations of political life. In: Hacker & van Dijk, eds. *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*.

Sassi, S. (2005). Cultural differentiation or social segregation? Four approaches to the digital divide, *New Media Society*, 7(5), pp. 684-700.

Schmidt, J. (2014). Twitter and the Rise of Personal Publics. In: Weller et al., ed. *Twitter and society*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., p. 488.

- Schmitz, J. (1997). Structural Relations, Electronic Media, and Social Change: The Public Electronic Network and the Homeless. In: Jones, ed. *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. CA: Sage, p. 80–101.
- Schwardt, T. (2007). *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*. 3 ed. University of Illinois: Urbana-Champaign.
- Shehata, N & Ismail, T. (2012). Disclosure practices in Egypt: what are factors beyond the low level? *International Journal of Economics and Accounting*, 3(3/4), pp. 264- 275.
- Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody*. London: Penguin.
- Shirky, C. (2011). The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change, *Foreign Affairs*, 90(1), pp. 28-41.
- Smuts, L. M. (2010). *Social networking sites as a new public Sphere: Facebook and its Potential to Facilitate Public Opinion as the Function of Public Discourse – A Case Study of the 2008 Obama Campaign*, Stellenbosch University: (unpublished master’s thesis).
- Souza, M & Lipietz, B. (2011). The ‘Arab Spring’ and the city. *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 15(6), pp. 618-624.
- Strauss, A. L. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tremayne, M. (2014). Anatomy of protest in the digital era: A network analysis of Twitter and occupy Wall Street, *Social Movement Studies*, Volume 13, p. 110–126.
- Twitter, 2023. *TwitterHomepage*. [Online]Available at: <https://twitter.com/home> [Accessed 12 August 2023].
- Uslaner, E. M. (2004). Trust, civic engagement, and the Internet. *Political Communication*, 21 (2), pp. 223-242.
- Van Dijk & Hacker. (2003). The Digital Divide as a Complex and Dynamic

Phenomenon. *The Information Society*, Volume 19, pp. 315-326.

Wang, D. (2008). The Idle and the Busy. Teahouses and Public Life in Early Twentieth-Century Chengdu. *Journal of Urban History*, 26(4), pp. 411-437.

Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J. & Maht, M. (2014). In: *Twitter and Society*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., p. 488.

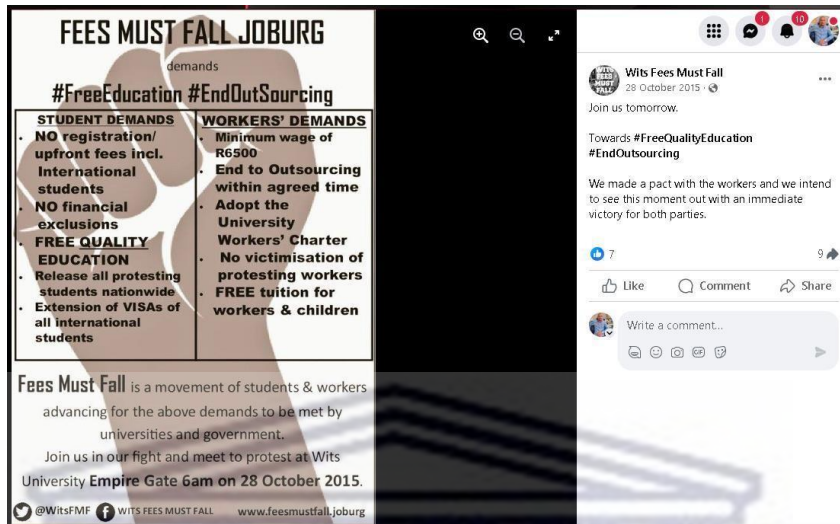
Žižek, S. (2012). *Less than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso.



Appendix A – Facebook Data

This appendix contains the evidence of the Facebook dataset of #FMF.

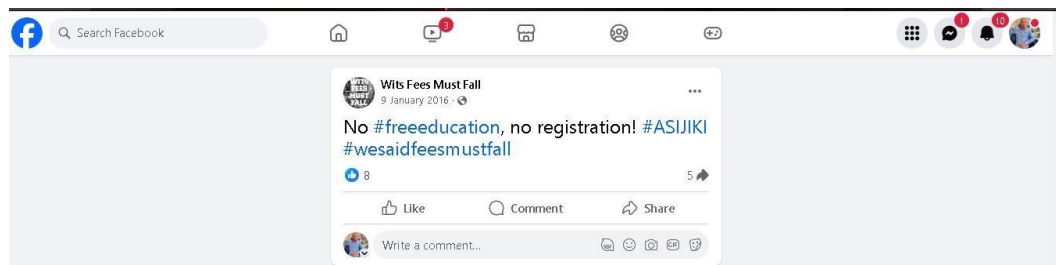
THEME 1: CALLS AND REASONS TO PROTEST



Post 4 (a)



Post 5 (a)



Post 6 (a)

THEME 2: PROTEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES

Wits Fees Must Fall
11 January 2016

Statement from WitsFMF

Wits Fees Must Fall (FMF) student movement and the ongoing occupation at Solomon Mahlangu House (formerly known as Senate House).

In accordance with the ongoing struggle for free quality education; Wits Fees Must Fall (WitsFMF) recognizes that registration fee and/ or upfront fee payment contributes to the increasing number of students who are denied access to education due to their economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Wits FMF is dedicated to ensuring that historically thus economically disadvantaged students enjoy the same right at equilibrium with the historically privileged. The fact of our impossible reality is that we cannot afford the payment of registration together so with tuition and residence fees. Symbolically so we protest against registrations continuing as normal in accordance with the greater goal that ought to be

education for commitment for the greater as not having an academic year at all until our demands are fully met.

This movement seeks to fight against anti-black practices of the institution in all its forms. We seek to rectify the structural and epistemic violence which has led to the academic and financial exclusion of black students, the exploitation of black workers and the generalized intellectual dishonor of black academics and also bridge the gap between whites and blacks which have been acquired by over 500 years of land dispossession and oppression throughout the world. We also do acknowledge that our struggles, even though geographically separated with our brothers and sisters beyond the shore of our beloved Africa, our struggles against anti-blackness doesn't exist in isolation and we therefore seek for global solidarity from similar movements around the world like Black Lives Matter and Rhodes must fall Oxford. This leads us to the desire and agency to end life of the University of the Witwatersrand as we know it!

@WitsFMF
FROM FREE EDUCATION TO LAND APPROPRIATION! ALUTA CONTINUA!

Post 4 (a)

Wits Fees Must Fall
11 January 2016

Wits Fees Must Fall Official Statement: Student Demands
11 January 2016

We have embarked on the no registration fee campaign to ensure that the gates of the university are open to all black people. This movement is geared towards the attainment of free education and the immediate implementation of free education in South Africa.

Education in this country is reflective of our socio-economic conditions that perpetuate black poverty and exclusion. Black students across universities in South Africa are perpetually financially excluded and locked into debt.

For this reason we are calling for the end of commodifying education. We want the doors of higher learning to be open to every student in South Africa. Access to education must not be based on one's ability to pay; it must be open to all! We do not want 'payment plans' and 'student loans'. We want #FreeEducationForAll. We are fighting for the decommodification of education.

We are committed to this project and we are not alone! Students from all over the country are calling for #FreeEducationNow. We are saying #AsinaMali. It must also be recognised that this year being the

We demand #FreeEducationNow

No registration fee (even where there is outstanding debt)

Historic debt repayment for students who are graduating this year to scrapped in total.

Access to academic record whether you are in debt or not.

Left-over food from all dining halls must be given to poor students and day scholars on campus (inclusive of weekends)

Suspensions and disciplinary action due to the protest that took place in 2015 should be revoked.

No Police presence on campus

African Students (International students) within the border of Africa should not pay an upfront fee payment of 75 percent but rather it should be pushed down to 20 percent.

Removal of upfront accommodation fee and students should be allowed to move upon registration.

We are also stating that the negotiation processes towards the insourcing of university workers must continue in good faith. The task team which was set up in 2015 must not be disrupted and meetings towards the achievement of the insourcing of workers must continue as per plan.

We have also communicated the above demands to University

Post 5 (a)

**DEMILITARISE
DECOLONISE
DEMOCRATISE**

The presence of private security guards on our campus means that:

- Violence and sexual assault experienced by the students are being dismissed.
- We are presented with a false choice, between private security and police, leaving violence as the only option.
- Discussion and debate is closed down, presenting the only option as violence.
- Institutional violence committed by the university is erased.
- Students are prohibited to enact their constitutional rights to protest on campus.
- We are presented with the image of violence, which can only lead to more violence.
- The administration contradicts their commitment to insourcing through hiring private security companies.
- Black academics have been singled out in being 'separated' to their offices, this is clearly reminiscent of the policing of Black bodies that our country's history is steeped in.
- Students have been excluded from and shut out of Solomon (previously Santos) House, a key space for organising and study on campus.
- People with disabilities are further excluded because wheelchair access has been blocked at other entrances to Solomon House and Central Block.
- Students and workers' demands and actions are perceived to be irrational and thus their protests unjustified.
- Management implies that they had no 'reasonable' choice but to revert to violent containment.

So today we retaliate by demonstrating the seriousness of having riot police on our campuses. Join us in solidarity for those who have been affected by riot police in South Africa's past and present and join us in our struggle towards attaining free quality education.

We have not fallen!

Wits Fees Must Fall
26 January 2016

#FeesMustFall calls on academics workers and students to join a Protest action on Wednesday 27 January to contest the securitization of South African campuses and to reassert the demands for decolonization and decommodification of education in South Africa.

The protest action will take place from 1p - 2pm on the plaza in front of the Wits Great Hall stairs. The protest action will include performative and acoustics elements as well as a handing over of a memorandum to the u... See more

19 Likes, 14 Comments, 8 Shares

Write a comment...

Post 6 (a)

THEME 3: VIRTUAL SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

Wits Fees Must Fall
11 January 2016 · 🌐

Statement from WitsFMF

Wits Fees Must Fall (FMF) student movement and the ongoing occupation at Solomon Mahlangu House (formerly known as Senate House).

In accordance with the ongoing struggle for free quality education; Wits Fees Must Fall (WitsFMF) recognizes that registration fee and/ or upfront fee payment contributes to the increasing number of students who are denied access to education due to their economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Wits FMF is dedicated to ensuring that historically thus economically disadvantaged students enjoy the same right at equilibrium with the historically privileged. The fact of our impossible reality is that we cannot afford the payment of registration together so with tuition and residence fees. Symbolically so we protest against registrations continuing as normal in accordance with the greater goal that ought to be

education. Our commitment will take us as far as not having an academic year at all until our demands are fully met.

This movement seeks to fight against anti-black practices of the institution in all its forms. We seek to rectify the structural and epistemic violence which has led to the academic and financial exclusion of black students, the exploitation of black workers and the generalized intellectual dishonor of black academics and also bridge the gap between whites and blacks which have been acquired by over 500 years of land dispossession and oppression throughout the world. We also do acknowledge that our struggles, even though geographically separated with our brothers and sisters beyond the shore of our beloved Africa, our struggles against anti-blackness doesn't exist in isolation and we therefore seek for global solidarity from similar movements around the world like Black Lives Matter and Rhodes must fall Oxford. This leads us to the desire and agency to end life of the University of the Witwatersrand as we know it!

@WitsFMF
FROM FREE EDUCATION TO LAND APPROPRIATION! ALUTA CONTINUA!

Post 4 (a)

Wits Fees Must Fall
3 November 2015 · 🌐

Following lengthily negotiations on Sunday, wherein Wits workers and students of the #WitsFMF Movement learned that institution agrees in principle to insource it non-academic staff, management motioned slightly to the right side of history. University of the Witwatersrand management confirmed today that they will neither pursue a permanent interdict, nor will they apply to extend the existing interim interdict against protesters. As such, no legal representation will be needed to stand at the High Court tomorrow (4 November 2015). In effect, the interdict will lapse

👍 4

Post 5 (a)

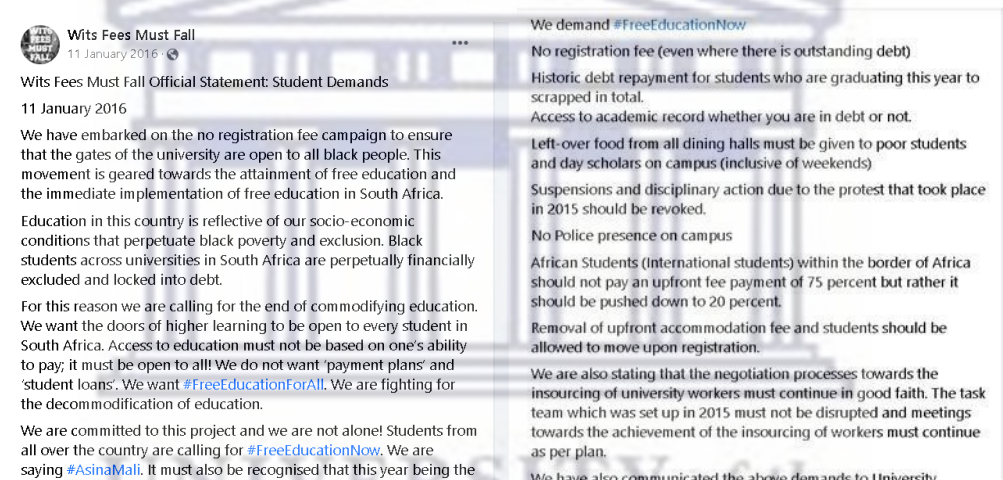
The image shows a Facebook post from the 'Wits Fees Must Fall' group, dated 3 December 2015. The post features a promotional graphic for a discussion titled 'DECOLONIZATION vs TRANSFORMATION'. The graphic includes a map of Africa with various national flags overlaid, and a smaller map of the African continent. Text on the graphic includes '#FEESMUSTFALL', 'PRESENTS DISCUSSION ON: DECOLONIZATION vs TRANSFORMATION', and 'SPEAKER: PRISHANI NAIDOO'. The event is scheduled for '16:00-18:00 THURSDAY 3 DEC SOLOMON HOUSE'. The Facebook post interface shows 6 likes and 1 comment, with options to Like, Comment, and Share. The post text asks: 'What do we mean when we say a decolonised, African University? And why is transformation not Decolonisation. A discussion will be had at Solomon Mahlangu House today at 16:00 to 18:00 on Decolonisation vs Transformation.'

Post 6 (a)

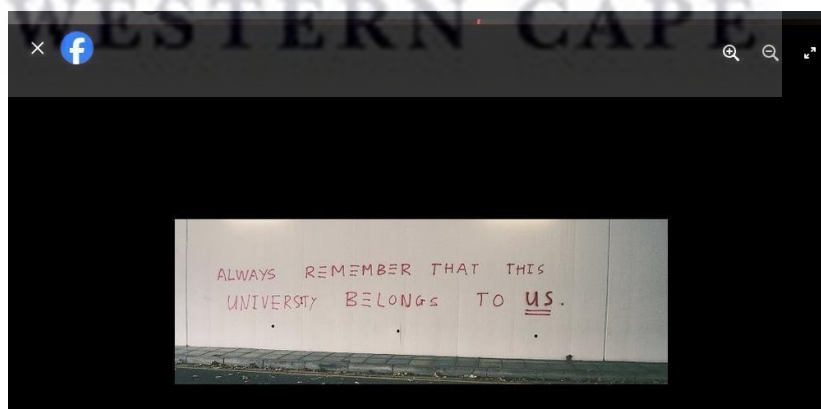
THEME 4: PROTEST OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED



Post 4 (a)



Post 5 (a)



Post 6 (a)

Appendix B – Twitter Data

This appendix contains the evidence of the Twitter datasets of #Jan25 and #FMF.

THEME 1: CALLS AND REASONS TO PROTEST

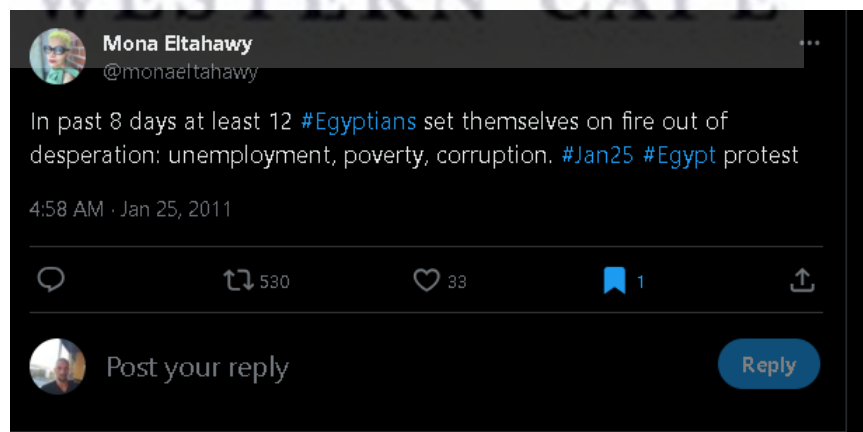
➤ #Jan25 – key tweets



Tweet 1 (a)



Tweet 2 (a)



Post 3 (a)

➤ **#EMF – key tweets**



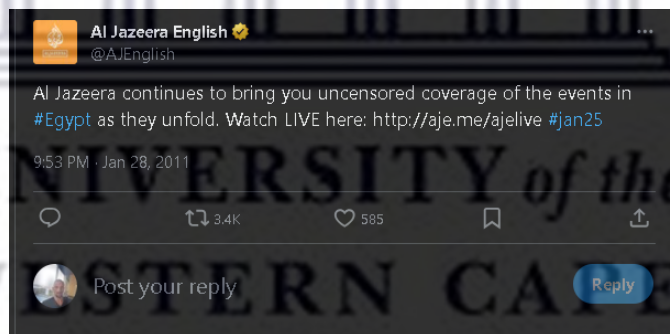
Tweet 5 (b)



Tweet 6 (b)

THEME 2: PROTEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES

➤ **#Jan25 – key tweets**



Tweet 1 (a)



Tweet 2 (a)

➤ **#EMF – key tweets**



Tweet 4 (b)



Tweet 5 (b)



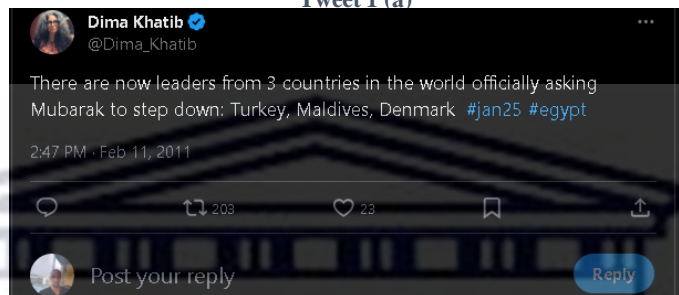
Tweet 6 (b)

THEME 3: VIRTUAL SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

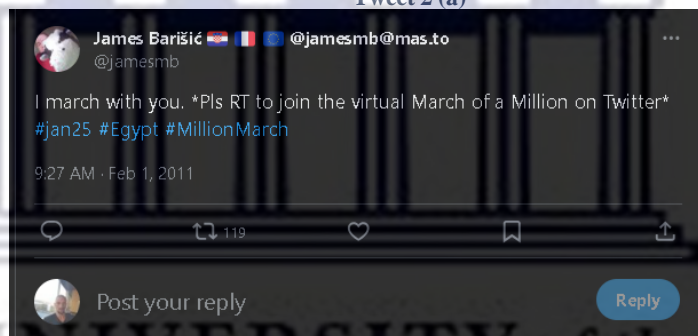
➤ **#Jan25 – key tweets**



Tweet 1 (a)

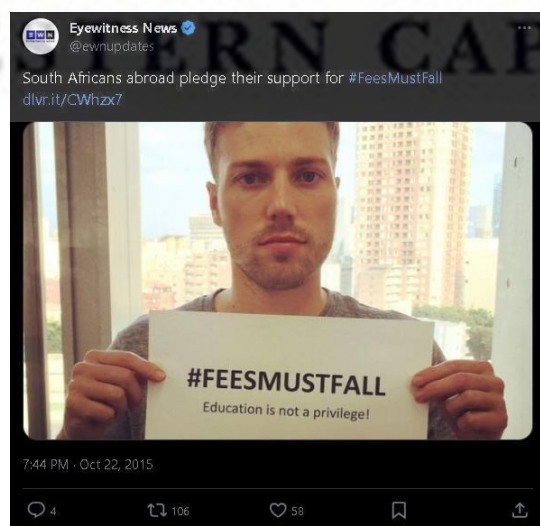


Tweet 2 (a)



Tweet 3 (a)

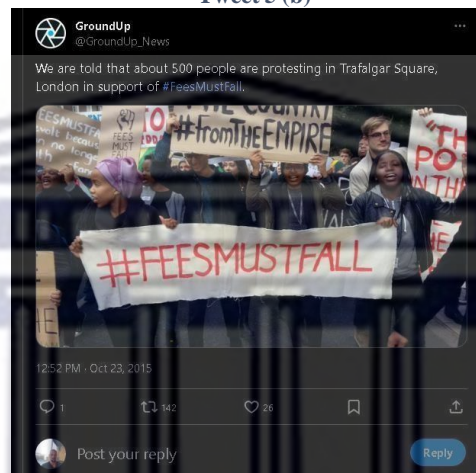
➤ **#EMF – key tweets**



Tweet 4 (b)



Tweet 5 (b)



Tweet 6 (b)

THEME 4: PROTEST OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

➤ **Jan25 – key tweets**



Tweet 1 (a)



Tweet 2 (a)

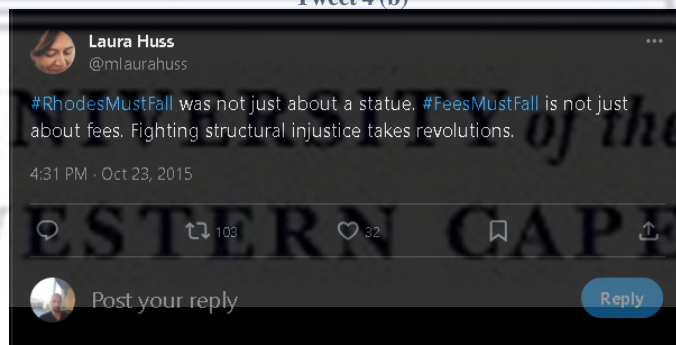


Tweet 3 (a)

➤ **#EMF – key tweets**



Tweet 4 (b)



Tweet 5 (b)



Tweet 6 (b)

Appendix C - Ethical Clearance



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535
South Africa
T: +27 21 959 4111/2948
F: +27 21 959 3170
E: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za
www.uwc.ac.za

18 September 2019

Mr WM Jafta
Anthropology & Sociology
Faculty of Arts

Ethics Reference Number: HS19/1/21

Project Title: A discourse analysis of social activism and social movements on social media networks: Towards an understanding of the emergence of virtual public spheres.

Approval Period: 17 September 2019 – 17 September 2020

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Josias'.

*Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape*

Appendix D – Plagiarism Report

Turnitin Originality Report

3272810:WJafta_MA_SOC_Thesis_December_2023_Final.docx

by Jafta W



From thesis (74558a22-bde0-4141-81cf-c7f75c58935f)

- Processed on 16-Dec-2023 21:26 SAST
- ID: 2260802015
- Word Count: 31535

Similarity Index

20%

Similarity by Source

Internet Sources:

19%

Publications:

8%

Student Papers:

10%



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE