



Hearing the ‘Voiceless’:

Examining the #FeesMustFall movement as an issue community

By

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Hearing the ‘Voiceless’: Examining the #FeesMustFall movement as an issue community

The hashtag #FeesMustFall was adopted by students on social media platforms as a rallying cry to unite students and the public to support the cause for free education in South Africa (Thomas, 2015). This study aims to ‘listen’ to the voices of #FeesMustFall 2016 on Twitter. Literature focussed on exploring how issue communities (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012) and social curation (Villi, 2012) provide insight on the characteristics of the #FeesMustFall movement. Furthermore, this research investigates the conversations of this online community on matters of free education. Therefore, the conversations were examined using the norms of the Hauserian (1999) public sphere, which focusses on discourse and not the group enacting the discourse. Because this research explored aspects of ‘hashtag activism’, this type of analysis proved useful to understand new types of civic engagement which occur on online platforms like social media. In terms of methodological framework, this study was grounded within cultural studies and network theory as it explored the discourses within the conversations and the network structure of the community. This helped uncover the underlying topics discussed in the community, and identify the most influential members.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

‘The revolution will be hashtagged’ - an appropriate phrase to understand the current status of social activism on social networks with the likes of #BlackLivesMatter and, to bring it closer to home, #FeesMustFall. Opinion writers have described the hashtag as “Twitter’s watercooler” (Mzuku, 2016), enabling people to gather and converse within community groups. It can be argued that digital technologies have ushered in a new form of participation in social debates and the hashtag has allowed for voices to be heard, stories to be told and change to be instigated. This has led to reconfigured civic engagement, with interested members employing the use of novel techniques like ‘hashtagging’ to discuss social issues.

As a movement #FeesMustFall at surface value was an economic issue but there were underlying calls for decolonization and transformation at universities in South Africa. Research revealed that “over the years, historically black universities have been characterised by multiple and violent student protests, well before the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015 and 2016” (Langa, Ndelu, Edwin and Vilakazi, 2017: 7). And although, student protests have been constant in post-apartheid South Africa, they received limited media coverage until #FeesMustFall. Media reported that students from various universities were marching under one unified banner, rather than as individual institutions (although, as will be discussed, this was not actually the case as some universities were far more dominant than others).

Although #FeesMustFall 2015 and #FeesMustFall 2016 were, theoretically, fighting for the same cause, they produced disparate images on social media. #FeesMustFall 2015 was a movement hailed for igniting “a long-overdue national dialogue about progressive change within the South African education system” (Bean, 2015). However, the presence of private security and police on campus conveyed a violent image of #FeesMustFall 2016 across the institutions (Langa, Ndelu, Edwin and Vilakazi, 2016). As a result, deep divisions began to emerge within the community, and these were broadcasted on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This research focused on the conversations

that were posted on the Twitter social network and considers these disparate voices which became apparent and also investigate how these discourses were shared.

Based on this context, the study aimed to discover how the #FeesMustFall social movement was represented on Twitter, as well as analyse the communication behaviours of the members of this community. Thereafter it sought to explore whether the conversations within this community could be considered an alternative public sphere, considering that this became a space where a number of issues were debated.

These objectives then informed the following research questions:

1. Which conversations of the #FeesMustFall movement were socially curated most often by the #FeesMustFall issue community on Twitter?
 - a) What topics of conversation emerged from the issue community as being the main drivers of communication among users?
 - b) Could this social curation be considered an active form of participation?
 - c) Based on the characteristics of a Hauserian public sphere, can the #FeesMustFall issue community be considered as an alternate public sphere?

Therefore, with this in mind, this study aims to look at the #FeesMustFall community from a communication perspective. Most specifically, it will deal with effects of protest communities being online and whether the debates surrounding the movement were an example of a type of public sphere. Although the movement's activities did transcend the online space and have offline effects this study will focus on its online representation.

Therefore Chapter 2 begins with a synopsis of New Media, from its architecture (Castells, 2010) to the principles of a new media logic, as theorized by Manovich (2001). Thereafter, the chapter conceptualizes social media, by looking at the type of logic it brings to the communication field. The chapter then focuses on addressing the concept of online issue communities, derived from processes of identity negotiation, inclusion and exclusion, self-perception as part of a collective, and establishing common paths for action (Mareider

and Schwarzenegger, 2012). Therefore, an exploration of what constitutes an online community is also discussed.

Thereafter the chapter focuses on how digital environments have shifted communication from “an asymmetrical one way model to a collective and participatory model” (Zeng, 2015: 80). This provides a critical foundation to the discussion on social curation, which is a seminal concept guiding this study. The chapter then discusses how the internet has provided opportunities for previously marginalized groups to be given a voice, and as a result how the idea of alternative types of public spheres are formed (Papacharissi, 2002; Khan, 2014; Akinbobola, 2015). What is particularly poignant for this study is the notion of hashtag activism, spurring movements like #BlackLivesMatter. Therefore, this study aims to explore whether a similar social movement like #FeesMustFall, garners similar patterns of interaction on social media.

It was thus important to use the work of Akinbobola (2015) who identifies the African digital public sphere. His work is largely related to how the African diaspora contributes to political and social issues back home. To complement this, Khan’s (2014) work on how cyberspace has provided an opportunity for counter-publics is also discussed. This discussion results in looking at which voices make up these digital public debates and considers how it is limiting to look at the notion of public sphere from a ‘universalistic’ perspective as was characteristic of the Habermasian public sphere. Therefore, Hauser’s (1999) rhetoric public sphere became a major part of the methodological framework because it guided the analysis of the interactions extracted from the #FeesMustFall community.

Following the Literature Review, Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used for this study, firstly considering the research design, secondly outlining the sampling and finally explains the tools used for data analysis. Chapter 4 then provides a detailed exploration of the findings generated through data analysis. It discusses the network structure of the #FeesMustFall community as well as the main actors. It also expands on the sharing techniques employed by members of the community and identified the themes within the

tweets. The final chapter then sums up the study, discussing the major findings and looking at further areas of research that can be explored.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

“The year 2015 will go down in history as a year second only to 1976 in the way students have shown their muscle in trying to alter the direction of the wheel of history.”

Msila, January 2016.

Whether one agrees if the #FeesMustFall student protests were something important or not, it cannot be denied that they have left a mark on South African history, especially because parallels have been drawn with the struggle of the nation trying to emancipate itself from its class and racial divides. What is particularly interesting about this student protest from a media perspective is the use of social media for mobilization, dissemination and mediation of the movement. However, this is not a new phenomenon because in 2011, social media was at the core of major protest stories and drove 2011's biggest news stories, from Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring (Fox, 2011). Thus, social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook “defined [2011's] social movements by giving rise to a new generation of activism” (Fox, 2011: para 1). Furthermore, “in 2008, Barack Obama's campaign was touted for its social media prowess” and one common thread in all these is “grassroots organization by average individuals” (Fox, 2011: para 1). Following from this many other social movements have also been attributed to the same principle, which includes South Africa's #FeesMustFall.

This study aims to unpack grassroots mobilization by exploring its reconfigured civic engagement that is so vested in online community participation. The following chapter discusses foundational concepts which describe the media landscape both locally and globally by looking at the nuances of new media, and how it enables public participation in political and social affairs. Additionally, a deeper discussion of new kinds of participatory logic in relation to social media platforms will be done. However, to avoid the argument being too technologically deterministic, the ideas of virtual communities will be

explored, focusing on the inherent need people have to connect with others (Rheingold, 1993) and how these connections inform the foundation of online communities.

However, new media authors like Kozinets (2015), do not agree with the definition of 'communities' to describe the aggregations of people online, because it is based on the assumption that membership is geographical. Therefore the concept of 'communitas', proposed as a better fitting term by Kozinets (2015), will be discussed. From this discussion, a foundation from which to investigate 'issue communities' (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012) is established, creating a lens through which the #FeesMustFall online community will be analysed. Furthermore, Bennett, Segerberg and Walker's (2014) concept of stitching technologies and peer production packages, inherent to social media platforms, show how social mobilization online is possible to achieve a specific goal. These two concepts will also be explored in relation to the #FeesMustFall community

After discussing the environments in which these movements occur, focus then shifts to the efforts of the audience, especially through the discussions of social curation and hashtag activism. The co-constructive relationship between medium and audience informs the success of a social movement and this chapter discusses the concepts surrounding the public sphere and how they have been reconfigured to suit the new media landscape. This discussion provides the backdrop to the values of the rhetoric public sphere, a central concept to be used in this study, especially focused on how it gives premise to the content of conversations that surround a specific topic as being the main foci of a public sphere.

2.2. The Network Society

Early writers of the Internet highlighted its ability to consolidate communication and postulated the formation of a global village where a seamless exchange of ideas and goods would occur across cultures (Postman, 1992; Roscak, 1986). However, others criticized it as a tool that would further divide the economic and social disparities around the world (Postman, 1992; Roscak, 1986). Despite this, the Internet can be set apart from previous mediums due to the ways it has transformed communication. It has integrated various modes of communication to form an interactive network, which

assumes “all communication modes from the typographic to the multisensorial” and allows a culture of ‘real virtuality’ to become possible (Castells, 2010: 403). In other words, it creates a space a user can ‘live’ within. For example, if one considers the influence of television during the ‘mass media’ époque of the mid-twentieth century, the degree of activity was lower and messages were designed to entertain the recipient without any immediate contribution from that recipient. Therefore, rather than looking at how the consumer has changed, focus should shift to how consumers change the media landscape. Consequently, it can be argued that specific time periods do not have more active users than others because it is the media environment that has evolved to facilitate the activity of users. Before taking this discussion further to consider the roles that the audience play within the new media ecosystem, there is need to discuss the effects of networks as mediums of communication (Castells, 2010; Gane and Beer, 2008).

In the late 1990s, Manuel Castells popularized the idea of the network society. Discussing the cultural issues of new media communications, helps with understanding the architecture that informs it. The definition of networks has shifted from the realm of computer science to social sciences. It is signified as “a new societal arrangement characterized by a culture of individualism and the accelerated mobilities of people, commodities, capital, signs and information across the globe” (Gane and Beer, 2008: 16). According to Rainie and Wellman (2012) individual-centred concepts of culture and community have become characteristic of the network society. They listed a set of principles that define networked individualism, which provided the groundwork to the complexities of this new architecture of the media.

They argue that networked individuals are inclined to have dispersed networks of diverse associates rather than a relatively small number of core associates (Rainie and Wellman, 2012). This is mainly due to the growth of social media networks which allow users to have partial membership to many networks which are not necessarily tied down to individual established groups. However, it would be naïve to assume that people do not still have permanent groups to which they subscribe, rather the point is that membership has become more fluid. Furthermore, the lines of communication, information and action

have become increasingly blurred (Rainie and Wellman, 2012) as the internet, performs a dual role of being an information source as well as the grounds for the communication.

Another salient feature of networks is the ability of the system to be reflexive, and to give almost instant feedback to the user, which was often lacking in other mass media systems (Galloway, 2010). In other words, individuals input information into the networked communication system and it gives information back. Thus, a two-way relationship begins to form between audience and medium, which was not as obvious with mass media technologies previously.

Kozinets (2015) builds on this and explains that people are connected in two fundamental ways, socially and by topics. These social connections are based on the friendships established in society, and topics are centred on politics, popular culture and social issues, for example. According to Kozinets (2015), the 2014 Pew Internet Research provided 6 archetypal forms of network structure: audience networks; customer support networks; topical networks; polarized issue networks; tight social networks; and interest group alliances. The following sections will explain these in more detail and how people share topics and messages with one another.

2.2.1. Audience and Customer support networks

Networks in these categories are distinct because they provide a structure for the re-broadcasting of major news and media organizational information (Kozinets, 2015). For example, Twitter networks usually take this form when retweets consist of breaking news stories and posts from well-known media outlets. However, most members within this network are not engaging in conventional conversation because information is just copied and re-shared. Therefore, the audience is disconnected as they link only to news sources and not to each other (Kozinets, 2015).

2.2.2. Topical and polarized issue networks

These networks are populated by users that share particular interests but do not necessarily know each other. As a result different conversations emerge and polarized groups begin to form in the network. What makes this specific network quite unique is that there is limited interconnectivity between disparate groups. Members only connect

with those in their immediate groups and rely on specific sets of resources, like specific websites, for information.

2.2.3. Social Connections – tight social networks and interest group alliances

However, this research is most interested in tight social networks and interest group alliances because they shed light on how people communicate online, or as coined by Kozinets (2015), engage in ‘online sociality’. These network structures are based on the concept ‘communitas’, first introduced by Turner (1969). It describes the inherent need people have to connect with other people with similar interests and it moves beyond the idea of community, which Kozinets (2015) criticizes for being too concerned with geographical proximity rather than with sociality.

Therefore, ‘communitas’ describes a “sense of being equal with your comrades, having kin, being a member of a group, and also an internalized sense of membership [...] a way to fulfil needs [of] belonging, affiliation, acceptance and love” (Kozinets, 2015: 27). This description differs from the work on early Internet, theorists described the interaction that occurred online as being cold and unsociable (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986) because of the lack of non-verbal cues in written text. For example, the work by Sproull and Kiesler (1986), looking at electronic mail exchanges, hypothesized that the lack of social cues in this kind of communication caused the content to lack depth, and therefore no strong affiliations between senders and receivers could constitute a community. However, the pioneering work done by Rheingold (1993) on virtual communities seven years later, who also used electronic mail to communicate, paints a different picture. He discovered that members of virtual communities could still share a deep bond despite never meeting physically (Rheingold, 1993), and Kozinets’ (2015) research in online sociality highlights that virtual communities take on different forms depending on the topic discussed and the space it takes place.

Kozinets (2015) highlights two types of network structures or ‘spaces’: tight social networks and interest group alliances. Tight social networks are “composed of the most highly interconnected people with very few isolated participants” (Kozinets, 2015: 46). Participants within these networks conduct “large and open conversations about similar

topics, responding to one another in a form that resembles the coherent threads of a newsgroup or forum" (Kozinets, 2015: 46). The ties that govern these networks are "mass and widespread practices of sharing and mutual support" (Kozinets, 2015: 45). These interestingly mimic kinship or family structures, although they may consist of members that have never met.

Interest group alliances however, are more complex because they consist of multiple smaller groups that unite due to popular and widely shared topics formed around various social hubs. These hubs have their own separate audience, set of influencers and sources of information. They form for a short period of time, such as when people have an interest in a specific topic like the Olympics and then dissipate after the event is over. These are not as unified as tight social networks because they have multiple centres of activity and tend to reveal the "multiplicity of conversations and viewpoints on a single topic shared through social media" (Kozinets, 2015: 47). Therefore, analysis of online experiences needs to shift from the concepts of 'communities' to those of particular network structures, as these govern repeat social interactions that are topically, temporally and locally based (Kozinets, 2015). However, in order to understand this fully, the architecture of new media needs to be discussed as it provides an understanding of the societal change brought about by new technologies (Siapera, 2011).

2.3. The New Media environment

The current new media environment is based on Web 2.0 technologies. What makes this platform inherently different from Web 1.0, for example, is its ability to be domesticated for the end user. In other words, people no longer need specialized skills to create content because "certain technical refinements [have] made it possible...for users who are relatively unskilled from a technical perspective to interact with the web in ways that had been previously difficult" (Harrison and Barthel, 2009: 158). For example, the introduction of web design programs like Dreamweaver¹ made creating and editing webpages possible, although users did not need to have knowledge of HTML².

¹ Adobe Dreamweaver is one of many HTML editors - used to create Web sites

² HyperText Markup Language - It's the way web pages and email templates are coded so that text is formatted and images are added

Web 2.0 is also based on the notion of ‘architecture by participation’ which describes how users are able to interact, construct and share knowledge on the platform. Furthermore, new media technologies are unique in that they combine forms of production, distribution and communication (Harrison and Barthel, 2009; van Dijck, 2013). Media texts that were previously separate, like images, sounds and texts, co-exist within the same environment. This assists the media system to be reflexive and provide a platform where users can interact simultaneously with the media they consume. Furthermore, the platform’s functional infrastructure has matured and become a space where users have moved their everyday activities to online environments (van Dijck, 2013). These environments ranged from social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (to communicate with friends) to virtual spaces like online games (van Dijck, 2013) which offer versions of simulated reality.

When considering new media platforms like social media, the meaning ‘social’ encompasses two concepts, namely connectivity (which is automated by algorithms) and connectedness (which speaks to human relations) (van Dijck, 2013). As well as with social network analysis one has to consider the implications of the layers that make up the environment. In as much as there is a ‘social layer’ that allows for communication, ranging from personal to work related, there is also a technological layer that cannot be ignored.

Manovich (2001) and van Dijck (2013) both discuss the technological layer which informs the new media landscape. This layer structures platforms like social networks to enable a user to participate within them. The word ‘within’ is used here appropriately because the media is no longer a mediator, with a role outside of our personal space, because it has encompassed what it means for us to be social. Algorithms have the cognitive power to decide what pops up in our social media timelines (Beer, 2009) and blur the concept of independent choice. If something appears on one’s Facebook, it is because the algorithm understands your taste in products based on past online behaviour. Thus, this technological layer comprises of “a vast set of automated communications that are a part

of how we live but are often not a part of our day-to-day conscious existence" (Beer, 2009: 988). Decisions have been made on which content a user should consume, although one would not necessarily be aware of that choice.

Furthermore, media consumers have always had some degree of engagement (Hall, 2001) with media texts, although their role in new media technologies is not the same as in previous époques. For example, negotiation between consumers and media texts usually took place in the privacy of that consumer's home or work environment. However, the interactivity embedded in new media technologies allows these private negotiations and utterances to be posted on platforms like social media (van Manen, 2010). This creates a disjunction of what is considered private and public, because although these utterances are on a 'personal page' of a user, they are on a public platform that can be seen by all their acquaintances and more. Thus, the internet is no longer an elite structure used by a few, but has been re-configured to suit the communicative needs of the many, which has led to Facebook and Twitter.

Manuel Castells (2010: 406) discusses how as a result of this development, localities have become "disembodied from their cultural, historical and geographical meaning and reintegrated into functional networks...inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places" (Castells, 2010: 406). Consequently, the world can be likened to a hub where each node (locale) influences the other and the concept of a network society is evident. As explained by Castells (2010: 445)

"the main dominant processes in our society are articulated in networks that link up different places and assign to each one of them a role and a weight in a hierarchy of wealth generation, information processing and power making that ultimate conditions the fate of each locale"

Social media are part of this network society and considered to be 'performative infrastructures' (Beer, 2009) that tailor the user's platform experience to their input, into the software. In other words, the software performs the data that we input on to our social profiles (Beer, 2009; Lash, 2007), to create an online experience that we then see on our mobile or computer screens. However, the role of the audience is to provide information

that is later used to configure the online experience, highlighting the co-constructive relationship between software and user. The experience is inherently tailored by the user's choices because their profile is based on what they want to tell their community of friends.

Although social media are considered to be interactive, according to Manovich (2001) it is meaningless to describe them as such. He explains that all computer media is interactive and focus should rather be on the different kinds of interactivity offered by new media platforms through their operations and structures (Manovich, 2001). Computer media are able to externalize and objectify the mind's operations (Manovich, 2001). For example the concept of 'hyperlinking' "objectifies the processes of association often taken to be central to human thinking" (Manovich, 2001: 76). Furthermore, it also reflects "mental processes of reflection, problem solving, recall [which] are externalized [and] equated with following a link, moving to a new page, choosing a new image or scene" (Manovich, 2001: 76). This could also be likened to rhizomatic thinking, conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) in their work, *A Thousand Plateaus*. They highlight the nomadic nature of thinking, which does not follow a hierarchical route. The concept is based on the "principles of connection and heterogeneity [where] any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything" else in the structure, which further highlights the multiplicity of choice available when thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 380). This is similar to the way in which hypertext is linked through networks.

Therefore, new media gives users the option of following "pre-programmed objectively existing associations" which is a subtle reminder of Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' as we are asked to "mistake the structure of somebody else's mind for our own" (Manovich, 2001:77). Online content often has hyperlinks on phrases or images, which then structures *how we think* of that text. However, Hall's (2001) concept of an active audience can be applied in this context as well. Users still retain the ability to reject or accept the meanings derived from the texts that they consume. However, what makes social media unique is the idea that these negotiations can be vocalized because there is an option to comment on a text. To understand the dynamics of this relationship a discussion of Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) concept of 'social media logic' is required. This

concept is based on the idea that social interaction is mediated by an “intricate dynamic of mass media, social media platforms, and offline institutional processes” (Van Dijck and Poell 2013: 11). They highlight the prematurity of focusing on one medium and conclude that one type purposes the ‘most’ interaction from an audience (Van Dijck and Poell 2013).

The logic of social media is informed by four grounding principles: programmability, popularity, connectivity and datafication. Although social media has risen to the forefront as one of the main communication mediums, mass media still plays a significant role in the legitimization of content found on social media. News articles that circulate on social media, for example, are often verified by users in conventional newspaper articles or news broadcasts (Muchena, 2014). An element of social media logic which supports this is programmability. According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013: 5) programmability can be defined as the

“ability of a social media platform to trigger and steer users' creative or communicative contributions, while users, through their interaction with these coded environments, may in turn influence the flow of communication and information activated by such a platform”.

Programmability can be split into two parts: technology and human agency. On the one hand, the technological part of programmability is related to Beer's (2009) work which explores the power of the algorithm and its subtle control of communication on social media platforms (Beer, 2009). Both platforms and users rely on how algorithms assess information, much like mass media audiences rely on experts or evidence that provide a clearer understanding of the discourse of a particular text (Gillespie, 2010), such as, when expert analysts from certain fields are invited to give comment on news bulletins.

On the other hand, human agency speaks to the degree of autonomy users retain regardless of the technology, especially through their own contributions and the freedom to resist coded instructions or defy protocols (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Therefore, audiences have a say in shaping a platform and software developers need to cater to the tastes and needs of the user to remain relevant (Van Dijck and

Poell, 2013). For example, the formal introduction of the hashtag and retweet feature on Twitter was a result of requests by users to have mechanisms designed to make sharing and categorizing information easier. Thus, the co-constructive relationship of audience and algorithm is further heightened by users' ability to manipulate the flow of an algorithm. For example, by massively retweeting or liking particular content, users have the ability to push a topic to trend and shape algorithmic mechanisms, by either 'going with the flow' or manipulating coded interaction (van Dijck and Poell, 2013).

The second principle of social media logic is popularity and, like programmability, is conditioned by both algorithmic and human components. Various social networks have "distinct mechanisms for boosting [the] popularity of people, things, or ideas, which is measured mostly in quantified terms" (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). For example, Facebook's EdgeRank and Twitter's Trending Topics are algorithms that highlight certain topics over others. However, it must be noted that popularity speaks to both content and user, with some users being more influential than others. This is because the network tends to be dominated by a few users with large followings and assigns more weight to highly visible users (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). These metrics are based both on algorithmic efforts and users' efforts to raise someone's credibility regarding a certain issue. For example, journalists may treat tweets from celebrities or politicians as quotes (van Dick and Poell, 2013) because of the number of followers they have (popularity) and from this the credibility of their content is justified. This reaffirms the role mass media plays in legitimizing content that appears on social media platforms (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). As explained by van Dijck and Poell (2013: 7) "popularity becomes enmeshed in a feedback loop between mass and social media, and [...] becomes part of a larger cultural arena where different institutional discourses and counter-discourses engage in a struggle to make their logics more pressing".

The third grounding principle of social media logic is connectivity which importantly notes the subtle difference between connectedness and connectivity. Connectivity is born of software, linking people to products and people to platforms through recommendations or prompts (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Conversely, connectedness highlights the

sociological component of social media, which focuses on the linking of people to other people, based on similar interests or localities. An example of this would be Facebook's 'People you may know' feature, showing you people you know by association with other friends or by the area you live. Although users have the freedom to ignore these suggestions, the fact that they appear, and have the potential of influencing their decisions, is worth noting. For instance, "automated links between users and products via Facebook Likes help advertisers utilize recommendation tactics for promoting products to 'friends'—even if users are unaware of their being used for these purposes" (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Therefore, although an individual user may decide not to accept the prompt offered by the platform, their personal data is still used to inform recommendations to their Facebook friends. This highlights how the power of connectivity, where autonomous objects, like two friends, are able to influence each other's timeline content on social media.

The fourth and final element of social media logic is datafication which provides the foundation all the above elements inter-operate within. Datafication is the ability networked platforms have to quantify aspects of the world (Mayer-Schoenberger and Kenneth Cukier, 2013). This is not reserved to demographic or profiling data from customers taking part in (online) surveys, but also metadata³ derived from smart phones which can be deeply personal (Mayer-Schoenberger and Cukier, 2013). Facebook, LinkedIn, and particularly Twitter process users' behavioural data regularly. The value of social media data is its real time or "live" appearance because "platforms claim they can track instantaneous movements of individual user behaviour, aggregate [this] data, analyse [it], and subsequently translate the results into valuable information about individuals, groups, or society at large" (Van Dijck and Poell: 2013). Therefore, social media data streams are "increasingly used as real-time analytics to complement or replace traditional polls issued by news media or professional agencies" (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013: 10). Furthermore, data extracted from social media networks is not "intrinsically [ascribed to] either commercial or public meaning" (Van Dijck and Poell,

³ a set of data that describes and gives information about other data.

2013: 10) because it is actually institutions and individuals that ascribe meaning to the data. This is why platforms like Twitter generate data that may be relevant to researchers interested in understanding social movements or group behaviour (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013), as is the case with this study.

Therefore, considering the above, the success of a social movement is not dependent on the media in which it was mediated. Rather, to understand social uprisings within a network society, the complex connections between platforms that distribute social media logic need to be explored. These include the “users that use them, technologies that drive them, economic structures that scaffold them, and [the] institutional bodies that incorporate them” (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013: 11). However, before discussing social movements, the community building capacities of social media must be highlighted. Therefore, the next section will focus on how networks facilitate the creation of ‘communities’.

2.4. Online Communities

Rheingold’s (1993) concept of online communities describe social collections borne of communication via the Internet, and as a result of human feeling form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. As already mentioned early internet theorists discounted the idea of deep human connectedness on the internet because they felt there was a lack of physical connection (Rice and Rogers, 1984; Rice and Love 1985; Sproull and Kiesler, 1986; Walther 1992). However, Rheingold (1993) provided evidence that rich interaction occurred on the Internet even in its early phases. Furthermore, despite writing in 1969, Granovetter’s (1969) ideas surrounding communities and how they are formed is useful when considering online communities. He explained that people who have no social tie, either through kin or acquaintance can share weak connectedness through people who are homophilous to them (Granovetter, 1969). In other words, people have a tendency to have stronger ties with people who are similar to themselves. Therefore, weak ties in networks have the potential to link people with similar interests to one another. This is because structurally, networks do not have “natural” boundaries, and in fact, a disconnected network allows for evolution and growth. For example, online communities, like social media networks, are places where people meet, but can also be used as tools

to find information (Rheingold, 1993). On the one hand, there are some users that might be interested in finding out information on specific topics like ‘Parenting’ (Rheingold, 1993), while on the other, there could be others seeking support from fellow parents. Thus, an online community is not just an aggregation of people communicating, but also a place to find emotional support and information. Although Rheingold (1993) provides a rich understanding of the socio-cultural consequences of network communication, his writing does not explain how a medium’s structure can shape communication. Granovetter’s (1969) theory of the weak ties offers some explanation of how autonomous members, can link to each other, and inform one another. The idea behind this is that weak ties, act like bridges which enable people to hear things or meet people who are not in their immediate network. The ‘mutual friends’ recommended in social networks serve as an example of bridging ties because they link various users to one another, and people have the option to accept these suggestions and potentially gain a new ‘friend’.

However, the most important things to highlight from these two writers is that online communities can still be emotionally vested in topics that they discuss, and it is not necessarily a place to communicate without an emotional tie. Furthermore, Granovetter’s (1969) work on weak ties provides a sound foundation for concepts like ‘social curation’, because of the social activity related to sharing information. However, before discussing social curation, it is important to understand how communities engage with media content, especially in light of online communities in social media networks.

Jenkins, Ito and boyd’s (2015) work on fan culture points to the active, social and collaborative work that occurs on the Internet when people who share similar interests come together to participate in online communities. This is because “access to virtual worlds makes participatory cultures come alive” (Halverson, Kallio, Hackett and Halverson, 2016: 3), and provides access to a wide range of interest-based communities. However, to describe these virtual communities as groups would be limiting to their true definition. The characteristics that constitute offline communities, like membership for example, would not be sufficient to describe online communities that have people who retain their individuality despite their affiliation to the community.

Thus there is a need for new concepts relative to these cultures to help them understand them. Gee and Hayes (2012) introduced the concept of ‘affinity spaces’ to explain the environments in which online communities participate. Constructs like membership in affinity spaces are fluid, and not permanent. For example, membership can range from lurkers (people interested in watching or listening to content) to content sharers and content creators (Gee and Hayes, 2012). Due to the fluid nature of membership, none are considered more participatory than others. Membership criteria is based on whether a member engages with content, either through sharing, posting or reading information, and this is what merits a user to be affiliated with a space. However, affinity spaces also possess ‘group-like’ characteristics, such as setting boundaries. This is because spaces “give people a sense of belonging” and they develop a mentality of ‘us’ (insiders) against ‘them’ (outsiders) (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 7). Furthermore, there is cooperation and competition among members as they can communicate politely and also engage in hostile or insulting interaction (Gee and Hayes, 2012). Therefore, even though interaction is performed online, members are still emotionally vested in these spaces – a point to be discussed shortly in the section on ‘affective publics’.

Nonetheless, Gee and Hayes’s (2012) explanation of affinity spaces is not meant to be exhaustive but rather provide theoretical understanding of some of the ‘communities’ that emerge on social networking platforms. Although his work focused on gaming mostly and the virtual worlds related to that, he does stress that these features can be related to many spaces within the virtual realm (Gee and Hayes, 2012), like social media. Thus it is imperative to look at user activity within these frameworks to consider how social media platforms facilitate ‘affinity spaces’.

Jenkins, Ito and boyd (2015) describe four key functions that underpin the operation of participatory cultures in these spaces: affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem solving, and circulations. Firstly, affiliations highlight the ‘interest’ aspect of participatory cultures and allows users the capacity to experience new perspectives by interacting with those who share interests and benefit from collective information (Jenkins et al, 2015). Within affinity spaces, people are connected by a shared interest and not necessarily societal constructs like gender, age, class or race. This is possible within virtual realms

like social media because people are able to enjoy a degree of anonymity if they wish. Furthermore, users are not necessarily attracted to join a space based on the characteristics of people that make it up, but rather on the topic being discussed. As described by Gee and Hayes (2012: 10),

“there is no assumption that younger people cannot know more than older people or that they do not have things to teach older people. Older people can be beginners; indeed, anyone can begin at any time”.

Secondly, expressions define the production aspect of participatory cultures, as members generate, express, and distribute ideas (Jenkins et al, 2015). While, listening or watching is considered peripheral participation it helps contribute to the community’s functioning. ‘New’ members learn about the topic at hand, as well as the discourses used and through learned behaviour become more familiar with the culture. Soon these users begin to communicate like other members and finally produce content like full members. This reiterates the characteristics of an affinity space where everyone, regardless of their role within the space, shares a common space. As explained by Gee and Hayes (2012:11), “the whole continuum of people from the new to the experienced, from the unskilled to the highly skilled, from the slightly interested to the addicted, and everything in between, is accommodated in the same space”. Therefore membership in these spaces is fluid, and no roles are not placed above others.

Furthermore, “there are many different forms and routes to participation” (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 20). People participate in affinity spaces in different ways and at different levels, by participating peripherally in some respects, and centrally in others. What is unique in these spaces is that “patterns can change from day to day or across larger stretches of time” (Gee and Hayes, 2012 20). Therefore, ‘established’ members could take a more peripheral role, when the discussion takes a different turn for example, and new members could assume a more instrumental role. In affinity spaces,

“People sometimes lead, sometimes follow, sometimes mentor, sometimes get mentored, sometimes teach, sometimes learn, sometimes ask questions, sometimes answer them, sometimes encourage, and sometimes get encouraged.” (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 21).

A fluid membership does not restrict entrance into a community because a willingness to listen and adapt is all that is really required to be part of the space. Participation is not dependent on producing content. Listening is also considered an important type of participation and social media provide examples of people being ‘peripherally aware’ of issues with a wide range of media texts appearing on timelines and newsfeeds. However, the level of engagement with these texts is what separates someone knowing of an issue and someone following an issue.

Jenkins et al’s (2015) third function is collaborative problem solving and this is the knowledge-building aspect of participatory cultures (Jenkins et al, 2015). Members work together to address questions and coordinate collaborative inquiry toward solving these questions. When answers are found they are distributed across the community, and the cycle continues as new questions arise (Jenkins et al, 2015). Distributed knowledge originates from the space and is an aggregation of knowledge possessed by the individuals within that group, whereas ‘dispersed knowledge’ is “assumed to be necessarily specialized and context-specific” (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 17). Dispersed knowledge is considered expert advice from external sources or spaces. This can include links to other social media platforms, links to news articles, videos hosted on their sites, for example.

Dispersed and distributed knowledge are encouraged within affinity spaces (Gee and Hayes, 2012). It helps members to search for solutions or updates to answer specific questions. This activity assists with developing information pools that even new members can refer to (Gee and Hayes, 2012). They are generated through members sharing lived experiences, for example, in lifestyle orientated communities. In addition, knowledge sharing is open to everyone, and more production than consumption is encouraged in these spaces to ensure all users within the spaces participate in the community. The information generated within the space is complemented by ‘outside’ information. This is

why social plugins⁴ have become important to include with information texts, like news articles, because people need to be able to transfer knowledge to their various spaces, to either legitimize existing knowledge or expand on new information.

Finally, circulations describe networks through interactions and information flow (Jenkins et al, 2015). Structurally, new media technologies are able to accommodate large numbers of people from different communities and locations. This helps to generate different views that infiltrate other communities that could help answer questions or diversify a topic to bring an interesting edge. It is also a novel way of recruiting new members into the community. Content in affinity spaces is not fixed because it is “transformed by interaction” (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 13). As explained above, different views are accommodated by the network structure. Thus, people “comment on and negotiate over content and, indeed, over standards, norms, and values” (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 13). This is clear when thinking about a discussed topic within social media, for example. It will take on different tones, evolve to accommodate more views and take on different meanings as it migrates from one space to the next, resulting in smaller audience communities emerging from a topic (Villi, 2012). These “smaller, networked audience communities” (Villi, 2012: 615), caused mass media audiences to be replaced by ‘plural audience communities’. In other words, personal media consumption has shifted toward a collective experience that works on a many-to-many communication framework (Villi, 2012).

Mareider and Schwarzenegger’s (2012) work based on the 2009 Austrian student protests, highlighted how students used social media to organize and build support for their movement using plural audience communities. Consequently, Mareider and Schwarzenegger (2012) coined this protest, an issue community because it was an online community with a common purpose, despite members retaining their individuality. The “issues of issue communities [are] contingent but not arbitrary” (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012:182), although any issue can garner support, the success of

⁴ Social media plugins are easy ways of sharing content with other people via social media platforms. The most common way is a Share or Like button.

lobbying activities for example, is dependent on the people communicating the issue. In the case of the Austrian student protests, the majority of people communicating were students and thus they were the group most inclined to call for better education (the point of the protest). However this is not to say that other social groups such as lecturers, parents and fellow Austrians, for example, were not involved too.

Based on Mareider and Schwarzenegger's (2012) findings, using social media platforms allowed organizers of the protests to familiarize their movement with potential members because they were using familiar technologies. As is the case with most protests, gaining sympathy and support from the general public is essential for it to succeed. Therefore, it was beneficial to use platforms that provided access to the general public. Furthermore, merits of using social media also included access to information, which was relatively easy because it was available on various platforms via newsfeeds and/or timelines. For example, Facebook distributed information widely because the network interconnects users. The content on one person's timeline affected the content on another because of how the platform recommends content based on user's interconnectivity. Users on Twitter, however use hashtags, which are keywords that categorize conversations into specific topic groups. By searching for a hashtag, messages and conversations related to a topic were followed, including messages sent by users outside of their personal contacts. Users were able to follow conversations live and, if they liked, get immediately involved in the conversations. Thus messages were distributed across networks and large numbers of people were made 'peripherally aware' of the movement. (Naaman et al. 2010). This highlights how audiences become aware movements, not necessarily based on 'calls to action' from protest organizers, but through their choice to follow a topic (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012). Giving people this responsibility helps them to develop an affiliation to a movement, because their interest in it develops organically.

Mareider and Schwarzenegger's (2012) study also highlighted that users moved away from official texts, such as newspapers to gain information about the protest. Rather personal networks became the primary distributors of information and sharing content within these personal networks became key to the successful mobilization of members. Besides the mobilization of people, social media also helped with organizing resources

and coordination. For example, members were able to establish their own private WiFi after university management shut down the public one (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012).

Moreover, the low degree of obligation and the ease of leaving these communities makes them quite attractive to join. According to Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012: 182) "the absence of a clearly structured and regulated procedure of the protests [made] it both easy and attractive to participate in and to identify with the movement". Moreover the issue needed to be based on an open concept which people could subscribe and relate to. In the Austrian case, the issue was 'better education', which offered various interpretations for different social groups. Although this may cause differences later on, it was still an organizational tactic that created a large issue community to start with. Regimenting internal and external communication counteracted the 'open' concept of issue communities (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012). Thus social media enabled the general public to witness the identity of the community unfold by reading tweets and Facebook updates. Seeing various comments, likes and retweets on the posts encourages potential members to feel like they could also contribute to the conversation.

Bennett, Segerberg and Walker (2014) also point to the importance of individuality in mobilizing issue communities. Their work is based on the Occupy movements⁵ and their research considered stitching technologies and peer production as tools to mobilize individuals without leaders or bureaucratic organizations. They proposed that Twitter is a stitching technology because it is able to provide a space for diverse and often dispersed networks to meet and form one cohesive network. They also argued that 'peer-production mechanisms' employed by the community encouraged its growth and survival. These mechanisms include production, curation and dynamic integration (Bennett, Segerberg and Walter, 2014).

⁵ The Occupy movement is an international socio-political movement against social and economic inequality and lack of "real democracy" around the world, its primary goal being to advance social and economic justice and new forms of democracy.

By definition, production mechanisms involve “creating and publicizing (sharing) various kinds of resources within an action network” (Bennett, Segerberg and Walter, 2014: 239). Therefore, the network needs to have content that is relative to its community, which highlights Mareider and Schwarzenegger’s (2012) argument of issues being contingent and not arbitrary. Furthermore, content doesn’t necessarily need to come from one platform and only be distributed there. For example, Twitter allows various forms of content from other sources, like websites and podcasts, to be present within its network. As a result, Twitter’s “fine-grained routing, and quasi-broadcast qualities may make it particularly well suited to thread together the network of other networks that characterize crowds” (Bennett and Segerberg and Walker, 2014:239).

The mechanism of curation assists production by the “preservation, maintenance, and sorting of digital assets created in the production process” (Bennett, Segerberg and Walter, 2016: 239). Members within the community actively negotiate and select content that will be preserved and create an archive of information for other interested members to consume. Bennett et al (2014) propose that this mechanism creates norms and boundaries in online communities to help sort through the plethora of information found on social networks. For example, Twitter posts are only visible temporarily before being replaced by more updated information however, users remedied this feature by retweeting or hashtagging content to elevate important posts out of the spam and commercial tweets; thereby highlighting how members of the community can tailor the network according to their needs.

Finally, the mechanism of dynamic integration “enables contact, transmission, and switching among different actors, networks, platforms, and technologies” (Bennett, Segerberg and Walker, 2014: 239). Unlike, the first two mechanisms which are concerned with the provision and ordering of resources, dynamic integration ensures that various networks are linked, which is essential for coherent organization. One way communities integrate networks is by circulating specific kinds of content, and cross linking it between platforms. Bennett et al (2014) describe this mechanism as linking widely used platforms or national campaign sites to social media platforms. This helps communities interested in protests achieve greater attention, and potentially recruit interested members.

Furthermore, especially in the Twitter context, it is vital to insert more than one hashtag into a post as this will elevate it into different sectors of the community simultaneously.

Mechanisms of peer production are all forms of production types involved in the organizing process, but do not highlight the role of the audience explicitly. Fortunately, Bennett et al (2014) provide a dichotomy between core and co-producers in order to highlight how different actors contribute to the sustenance of the community. Like, Mareider and Schwarzenegger (2012), Bennett et al (2014) highlight that participants will have varying roles and degrees of engagement in the network. For example, Bennett et al's (2014) study indicated that roughly 27% of network produced content were considered the core of the network. The remaining 73% amplified members in the core community by crowdsourcing them to prominence. This involved mentioning them in tweets, increasing their following, retweeting their content and liking their tweets. This is illustrated further by the following excerpt of their findings:

"What is interesting is that even though the core contributors started out with less-explicit recognition, the crowd propelled them to greater visibility over time [...] the average increase of new followers was greatest for the accounts tweeting the most diverse array of links" (Bennett, Segerberg and Walker, 2014: 253).

2.5. Social Curation and Twitter

Therefore, following this discussion, the idea of user distributed content is evidently a salient feature of online communities because even though the majority of Internet users are only listening, reading and sharing content, and only seem to appear episodically they are still very present (Villi, 2012).

Therefore, social curation becomes a valuable framework to understand the role audience play in the participatory culture. Rather than mere distribution, curation adds value judgement, critique, assessment and selection to the process. It is also a form of social activity, as it encourages communicative interactions and relationships between two or more individuals (Villi, 2012). Conventionally in the art world, a curator recognizes and nurtures emerging trends, within the industry, to the rest of the public and act like 'mediators' between the 'artist' and the 'observer' (Villi, Moisander & Joy, 2012:491). For a curator to capture the attention of the audience they are dependent on a skill known as

'curation writing' and involves identifying labels, discussions on trends embodied in the art object; or how it mirrors social norms. It is a skill used by curators to craft context and to pique and sustain interest from the audience (Villi, Moisander and Joy, 2012). When related to social media, social curators can be considered knowledge brokers, who interpret, endorse and publicize content on behalf of their followers or friends (Villi, Moisander and Joy, 2012). Curation differs from algorithm based content because items are shared based on human judgement (Villi, 2012). Social media users rely on information that has been curated and shared by their peers, because they trust it over content produced by media houses (Muchena, 2014). The judgement of peers which accompanies content is generally what informs a user's decision to engage with content (Muchena, 2014).

Twitter serves as an example of a space in which social curation can occur, especially considering that it is a stitching technology which links various networks on the platform (Bennett et al, 2014). As a microblogging service that was started in 2006, Twitter is a social software phenomenon that has attracted various users, from journalists, politicians, celebrities and general social media users. Nielsen South Africa (2015), a global media agency that researches consumer behaviour on social media, reported that in 2015 approximately 7.4 million users were registered on the social network. In addition, at least 3 in 5 people that used the Internet accessed the network using their mobile devices. Most users fell between 25 to 44 years and constituted 53% of the overall Twitter users in the country.

Bruns and Moe (2014) conceptualized a model that differentiates communication on Twitter into three distinct layers, namely: "the micro level of interpersonal communication, the meso-level of follower-followee networks, and the macro level of hashtag-based exchanges" (Bruns and Moe 2014: 16). The 'Meso-level' is one of the defining characteristics of Twitter because it describes the relationships among users. A primary characteristic is the access 'followees' have to their 'followers' timeline and according to Bruns and Moe (2014:16), "this group of followers is the account owner's 'personal public'". The action of tweeting to this audience is the same as "making a public statement

to a known group of friends and acquaintances [or] a speech at a family gathering, [or] a lecture to a class of students" (Bruns and Moe, 2014: 17).

The 'Macro level' are hashtagged exchanges between users, which is a fairly new characteristic of the Twitter platform. Hashtags and the practise of hashtagging will be discussed in the following sections, but essentially, hashtagging is the "inclusion of a topical hashtag in a tweet [and this] means...the message has the potential to reach well beyond the user's existing number of followers" (Bruns and Moe, 2014: 17). Furthermore, the "hashtag takes communication on Twitter from the meso to the macro layer" (Bruns and Moe, 2014: 18) by joining like-minded people in discussion over a topic by curating information flows to topic-specific messages.

The third level of communication within the Twitter platform is the 'Micro level', which describes how the '@' symbol enables conversation between users. This technique is popularly known as 'mentioning', and users are able to address one another directly regardless of whether they are within their follower network or not. However, not all @mentions are attempts to start conversations and could be tagging accounts which belong to a celebrity user, brand, or institution. For example, when a user uses their handle rather than their 'offline' name to show affiliation or support, like 'I support @BarackObama'. Users can also use Twitter handles to illicit a reply or action from people of authority (Bruns and Moe, 2014).

These layers although described as separate categories, overlap especially when a user retweets. The growing popularity of users sharing information on Twitter, prompted developers to integrate a 'retweet' button into the network's interface. Retweeting may seem like a 'simple' act of copying and broadcasting, but "the practice contributes to conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context" (boyd et al, 2010:1). Thus it can be considered as a form of information, as a means of participating in a diffuse conversation and as a way of curating information. Spreading tweets is not simply to get messages out to new audiences, but also to validate content and to engage with others in the network (boyd et al, 2010).

Retweets are a user-generated communicative convention on Twitter, just like the @mention and the hashtag (Bruns and Moe, 2014). This convention is “a mechanism which is inherently designed to move tweets across layer boundaries” (Bruns and Moe, 2014: 22). Users achieve this by habitually using the tool to bring messages from the hashtag or @mention level, for example, to the attention of their own followers. For example, “Hey @zimbochique, look at this: RT @AfroBotanicsHair. We are giving away free hair products #AfroLovers”. In this example this tweet has transcended both the micro and macro level, by addressing one user directly (@zimbochique) and also an entire ‘topic community’ (#AfroLovers).

The popularity of this practice, on Twitter, and social media platforms alike, has caused boyd et al (2010) to look at the various types of retweeters. They argue that there are two types of users that share information on Twitter: preservers and adapters (boyd et al, 2010). These definitions are centred on authorship because during the editing process ‘retweeters’ alter tweets in such a way that the intellectual ownership of the tweet becomes blurred. Preservers, on the one hand, emphasize “maintaining the original intent, context and content” and adapters on the other “are willing to remove various parts of the tweets to suit their own purposes” (boyd et al, 2010: 5). These retweets, therefore move horizontally across the users’ follower network or personal public (the meso layer) to the personal public of the retweeter, thus exposing the tweet to an entirely different group of followers (Bruns and Moe, 2014). Although, preservers give credit to the original author of content, adapters are ambiguous in terms of who ‘owns’ the content. Messages posted by this retweeter are altered and it is difficult to discern who is being addressed and who is being cited (boyd et al, 2010) to the point where in most cases it is unclear whether the content is being shared by the author or the last referent. (boyd et al, 2010).

However, following prompts from users, Twitter introduced an alternative retweeting mechanism, the ‘button retweet’ which generates a verbatim, non-editable retweet (Bruns and Moe, 2014). Unfortunately, this “streamlined functionality also meant that adding hashtags, @mentions, or any other new material to the retweet was now no longer possible” (Bruns and Moe, 2014: 22). Thus according to Bruns and Moe (2014:22) the “button retweets can no longer serve the function of transitioning tweets between the

three layers of communication on Twitter" (Bruns and Moe, 2014: 22). However, this may be partially true because some users still subscribe to the old way of retweeting to accommodate the adding of hashtags and @mentions.

According to boyd et al (2010: 6) Twitter users acknowledge retweeting both as a "productive communicative tool and a selfish act of attention seekers". However they also highlight a number of motives why users would retweet:

1. To amplify or spread tweets to new audiences;
2. To entertain or inform a specific audience or as an act of curation;
3. To comment on someone's tweet by retweeting and adding new content, often to begin a conversation;
4. To make one's presence as a listener visible;
5. To publicly agree with someone;
6. To validate other's thoughts;
7. As an act of friendship, loyalty or homage by drawing attention;
8. To recognize or refer to less popular people or less visible content;
9. For self-gain, either to gain followers or reciprocity from visible participants; and
10. To save tweets for future persona access

Other motives include users thinking on behalf of their imagined audience, and posting information that is relevant and 'shareable' to their network. Some users retweet content due to general interest, but others are more concerned with the audience they are 'retweeting' to. Furthermore, what people retweet is closely linked to the reason why they retweet and to which users they share this with. The majority of 'retweeters' often share time sensitive material and breaking news (boyd et al, 2010). Based on boyd et al's (2010) research, breaking news is shared in the form of links. However, time sensitive information, like popular trends, are posted according to the preferences of the audience, with some being more receptive to images and others preferring posts with hashtags.

Twitter allows users to create their own hashtags which are usually borne to describe specific events. Such hashtags have the ability to rally ad hoc publics to form around that hashtag, (Bruns and Burgess 2015) like the hashtag #spill which was created after a BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico during the first half of 2010. However, topical hashtags, because of the large numbers of people they rally, can often lead to splintered conversations that might be used to describe a completely different issue. For example, #spill used originally for the BP oil spill was also used to describe the leadership challenge in the Australian Labour Party in June 2010.

Users also use hashtags as emotive markers, such as #fail, #win or #facepalm (Bruns and Moe, 2016). Bruns and Burgess (2015) would describe these hashtags as having the “qualities of emoticons like ‘;-)’ or ‘:-O’ [...] to convey extratextual meaning, in a Twitter-specific style” (Bruns and Burgess, 2015: 23). Such hashtags do not tend to rally people around a given topic, but are rather used to enhance tweets. Furthermore, a number of other practices using hashtags are also evident. A looser interpretation of hashtagging is present in tweets which simply prepend the hash symbol in front of selected keywords in the tweet, for example “#japan #tsunami is the real killer. #sendai #earthquake” (Bruns and Burgess, 2015: 23). In this case it would be most likely an attempt by users to establish a hashtag for a given issue. Thus, it can also be used as a tool to categorize an issue and to separate it from other flows of information occurring within the Twitter network. Most importantly though, the consistent use of a hashtag allows a user to follow and interact with the conversation or context surrounding the hashtag (Moulaison & Burns, 2012). Thus, the “hashtag [can be considered] a community building linguistic activity” (Caleffi, 2015: 46).

Romero et al (2011) studied the mechanisms of information diffusion on Twitter, and found that popular hashtags were determined by either one of two variables their stickiness or persistence. Stickiness refers to the likelihood a hashtag will be adopted by Twitter users and is based on the number of exposures it receives. Conversely, persistence is the extent to which a hashtag is repeated, and whether it becomes recognizable which results in the hashtag having the ability to create an invisible boundary of communicative spaces to discuss a particular issue.

Communities created around hashtags contain members that are linked by their interest in the same content (Caleffi, 2015). According to Bruns and Moe (2014:18)

“Tweeting to a topical hashtag resembles a speech at a public gathering - a protest rally, an ad hoc assembly - of participants who do not necessarily know each other, but have been brought together by a shared theme, interest, or concern”.

This analogy gives insight into how hashtags can become a ‘community creating’ activity. Although there have been questions on using the term community, there is ample evidence showing how “hashtags... bundle together tweets on a unified, common topic, and that the senders of these messages are directly engaging with one another, and/or with a shared text (or texts) outside of Twitter itself” (Bruns and Burgess, 2015: 25). Therefore, even with members reading, typing and sharing information, adding a hashtag to their post enables other members to comment, praise or criticize their thoughts. It is also a way for brands and events to get promoted and for breaking news items to receive updates (Caleffi, 2015).

Therefore, Caleffi (2015) describes hashtagging as a tool that facilitates the spread of information and as a form of folksonomy. By definition, folksonomies are a collection of tags built by the action of user-tagging. Besides being user-generated, tags within folksonomies can be reused by others and provide information about the popularity of the tags as well as flag emerging areas of interest within a given topic (Hayman and Lothian, 2007). Users create and manage their content, and this then forms folksonomies around specific topics. A group of ‘taggers’ becomes a folksonomy when it becomes public and large numbers of users subscribe to the tags created.

The benefits of folksonomies include them being multidimensional as users are able to assign a large number of tags to describe a topic, and some tags maybe combined to form a niche of the topic. Users also utilize language and concepts that are relative to the topic being discussed. Furthermore, because tags can be shared they have the potential to aggregate a large following which enables them to have collections of tags that describe different facets of the topic. Tagging systems are established within the group,

which creates a sense of community. The aggregation of tags is also an example of an information pools for potential members and a valuable resource for those that are professional providers and managers of information (Hayman and Lothian, 2007).

Similarly hashtags were first created to improve the “contextualization, content filtering and exploratory serendipity within Twitter” (Bruns and Burgess, 2015: 5) by creating a system of channel tags using the hash (#) symbol. This conceptually meant, people could follow and contribute to conversations surrounding a specific topic. Messina (2007) proposed for the mechanism to be an ‘eaves-dropping’ tool on the platform, which enables the creation of ad-hoc channels. Thus, hashtags and tagging are not inherently different but the syntax of the hashtag is unique to the Twitter platform. As a result, many areas of research have emerged to explore the various uses of the hashtags. (Small, 2011; Bruns and Burgess, 2012 and Scott, 2015).

2.6. Hashtag Activism

Stache (2015) analysed the opportunities and pitfalls of incorporating hashtags into activist campaigns or movements because online spaces, like social media allowed interested participants to witness the transformation of a movement. A movement’s information and where it comes from are interlinked. Different participants discuss the issue by providing information relative to the movement and give curious viewers a chance to cross-reference information and decide whether to join. Furthermore the use of hashtags allows conversations about the issue to continue “beyond the originating dialogue by creating an identifier or tag for fellow activists [...] to track multiple uses of the same phrase.” (Stache, 2015: 162). This acts both as an opportunity and a pitfall, because although it allows for various viewpoints to be heard, the issue at hand could be diluted and lose its substance.

Colleoni (2013) described hashtags as empty signifiers that invite ideological identification of a polysemic orientation because there is a chance that dialogue stretches beyond the original intent. Furthermore, as already discussed, a hashtag has the potential to be misused or misunderstood by other users and risk dilution. One example is the inappropriate use of the #WhyIStayed hashtag, as highlighted by Stache (2015).

#WhyIStayed, was a campaign where survivors of abuse tweeted intimate stories about the emotional manipulation characteristic of domestic violence in response to critics of Janay Rice. Rice was a celebrity wife who stayed with her abusive husband, ex-American football player, Ray Rice. However, the #WhyIStayed hashtag was adopted by DiGiorno Pizza, and used in an inappropriate manner. The company tweeted, '#WhyIStayed You had pizza' and followers of the original hashtag were offended and outraged. To calm the situation DiGiorno Pizza immediately removed the tweet and apologized for their error, explaining that they did not know that the hashtag was being used for such a sensitive topic. This example indicates how easily a hashtag phrase can "inadvertently dilute an activist message." (Stache, 2015: 163). Therefore Stache (2015:163) contends that a

"hashtag is a good way to allow members of an advocacy or social justice group to show public support, but it may not be a great tool for educating those who are not aware of, or who do not care about the original intention of the campaign".

Conversely, Freelon, McIlwain and Clark (2016) showed how the movement, #BlackLivesMatter had civil consequences on the American population. They found that the use of digital tools allowed the movement to "generate alternative narratives about police violence to counter the so-called neutrality of the mainstream press" (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2016: 78). As a result the narratives "affirmed the value of unarmed Black lives and roundly condemned all those who defended police actions to end them" (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2016:78). Furthermore, the structure of Twitter allowed for direct links between the platform and other stories on the Web which allowed a reciprocal flow of issue related news tailored to the community's taste. The major narrative of the community was police brutality and thus the information circulating within the community and beyond highlighted this.

One of the major findings of this study was that hashtag communities acted as spaces for learning. The majority of their participants cited education and amplification as primary goals for engaging with #BlackLivesMatter content. Furthermore, they used the hashtags to learn about "structural anti-Blackness and inequality," (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2015: 79) which exists in American society. They found #BlackLivesMatter content surged

on Twitter during the Ferguson protests⁶ which heightened conversation within the community. These protests were not directly related to #BlackLivesMatter, but because they were about the shooting of an unarmed African American by a white police officer, it fit the rhetoric which surrounded the hashtag.

Therefore, Freelon et al (2015) argued that activists may receive limited support and coverage, if they do not incorporate other issues in society to spur debate within online communities.

This is further reinforced by Koopman (2004), whose work is based on the evolution of the German radical right in the 1990s. He identified three ‘selection mechanisms’ that influence the extent to which ‘contentious messages’ are spread. He argued that authorities take interest in social movements depending on how they are interpreted in mass media and activists gauge their next moves on the reactions or non-reactions of the public they have provoked through the media (Koopman, 2004). Therefore a message is spread successfully based on its visibility, resonance and legitimacy (Koopman, 2004) and both activists and authorities rely on the mass media to serve as the go-between when airing their views. Therefore, “the success of born-digital social movements may be linked with the specific issue being championed” (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2016: 83). The movement cannot be based on an abstract term that is open to varied interpretations, it needs to have a clear goal. As was the case with the #WhyIStayed campaign, it had the potential to describe a number of scenarios. However, something as specific as #BlackLivesMatter allowed the issue to focus on a specific group of people. Although the hashtag could have been open to interpretation, it was closely linked to the target group being discussed. Furthermore, the tag line ‘stop killing us’ soon accompanied most messages that were posted, further highlighting the clear desires of the community.

Furthermore, “the lifecycles of hashtags [...] on Twitter provide insight into the dynamics of issue publics” (Bruns and Highfield, 2014: 12). The idea of issue publics is closely related to the rendition offered by Mareider and Schwarzenegger’s (2012) issue

⁶ In 2014, police officer Darren Wilson fatally shot unarmed teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, as a result the words “Black Lives Matter” morphed from a public outcry into a national movement.

communities. Where it differs however, is in prescribing a timeline to the public or community. Bruns and Highfield (2014) provide a distinction based on these timelines of two groups of publics that are present within hashtag communities, and these are namely issue publics and public sphericules. What makes these two publics different is that issue publics are typically temporary and dependent on the nature of the topic that has sparked their interest (Bruns and Highfield, 2014). For example, on the one hand, Twitter has been described as an ‘ambient news network’ (Hermida, 2010), and the topics found within the platform “can form very rapidly, peak at high levels of activity, and may dissolve just as quickly once the breaking news issue is resolved” (Bruns and Highfield, 2014: 12). Public sphericules however, constitute a long-term hashtag community. They are “networks of like-minded friends in social media environments that group together to discuss certain themes that are of mutual interest” (Bruns and Highfield, 2014: 12). Sphericules are self-forming and gather on their own motivation rather than being a community that pre-exists or is motivated by a mass media institution. It is important to note though that issue publics can stem from public sphericules, depending on the topic at hand.

Bruns and Highfield (2014) also illustrate that different clusters of users may spark debates of different themes which constitute a specific kind of public, such, ‘student culture’. Within such a cluster various other temporary issues could arise, like increasing fees for example, that either constitute a temporary ‘issue community/public’ or an emerging ‘public sphericule’.

When considering the ‘Must Fall’ movements in South Africa, the initial issue was addressing the continued presence of colonial figures at universities across the country thus inspiring the hashtag #RhodesMustFall and the community thereafter. Shortly after, the hashtag to #FeesMustFall was created, which addressed increasing tertiary fees, and the struggles experienced by students to pay off university debt. Although this is an example of another type of issue public, it is also highlights remnants of a public sphericule by including ‘Must Fall’ in the movements. This was further reinforced when the hashtag was further reconfigured to #ZumaMustFall, asking for the South African president to step down from office, then #DataMustFall, asking telecommunication companies to lower the costs of internet packages, and then the humorous

#MkhabaMustFall shortly after the festive season to encourage people to lose their belly fat. Based on the various descriptions of the ‘MustFall’ movements the following can be deduced from Bruns and Highfield, (2014: 12):

“Publics exist at various levels, for different lifespans, from the long-standing topical clusters … to more ad hoc assemblages and issue publics developing in response to particular stimuli, which, while relevant to specific topical publics, are not restricted in their scope to these groups.” Bruns and Highfield (2014: 12).

2.7. Reconfigured Civic Engagement

The affordances of the Internet have highlighted new forms of freedom of expression, as can be deduced from the arguments above. Therefore, many scholars have theorized that spaces within Internet represent a new kinds of public sphere (Jansen and Kies, 2005; Bode, Edgerly, Sayre, Vraga and Shah, 2013).

Iosifidis (2011) however, has a different view of the Internet as a public sphere. He argues that although open participation on the Internet is possible, there is a danger for it to be ‘chaotic’, saying “there might be no model rules of behaviour, thereby allowing no structured conversation” (Iosifidis, 2011: 624). Firstly, he criticises content as being an example of “anarchic, rather than democratic, forms of participation” and that many sites are not representative because they are “dominated by white male voices and polarized opinion” (Iosifidis, 2011: 624). He also alludes to the limitations provided by the digital divide, stating that “not all people [have access] because they lack the money and skills set” (Iosifidis, 2011:627). Furthermore, although he recognizes that people share news on various political or social issues this might just be a desire to broadcast their own activism and does not necessarily “result in enhanced political awareness or more politically engaged citizenship.” (Iosifidis, 2011: 627).

Additionally, he questions the usefulness of online mediums. For example, he believes that Twitter is not able to facilitate critical debate structurally because of its limited characters (140 words per post) and because of the sheer volume of data on the platform none of it is “substantive social and political dialogue” (Iosifidis, 2011: 624). Moreover he

argues that although there is heavy investment in social media it “has tended to be in technology and not in journalists” (Iosifidis, 2011: 626) and as a result, there is no real investigative reporting on issues (Iosifidis, 2011). However, when looking at statistics from a recent survey done by the Reuters Institute (2015), more young people, between the ages of 18 and 35 rely on social media to access news. Therefore, Iosifidis (2011) recommends a shift from Public Service Broadcasting, which represent mass media to Public Service Media (PSM). This new model incorporates the relationship between user and news agency to restructure the current media landscape to accommodate the distribution of digital content digitally, and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new platforms like social media.

Further criticism of new media technologies includes West’s (2013) argument questioning if the Internet is an emerging public sphere. According to West (2013) there are two components that make a public sphere and those are namely: the deliberative component and the plebiscitary regime. The first component is the ability that members of society have to discuss issues in a two way communication system with officials. The second component speaks to the degree of power these members have to influence government policy and legislation. These two components when performed together form an ideal public sphere, which according to West (2013) has never existed and is unlikely to emerge in the future. This is contentious for some because two years after the #FeesMustFall movement started in South Africa it could be considered a pioneering example of how online platforms facilitate deliberative conversations between students and government officials. For example, the previous Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan officially announced, as a result of #FeesMustFall, that funding for higher education would be made a priority and that “universities and students would benefit from an additional R17-billion over the medium term.” (Goba, 2016: para.1). However, West’s (2013) argument seems correct in the long run, because there has been little real change for students.

Although the above scholars have compelling arguments, their facts are based on European societies. Luckily, Akinbobola (2015) provides an insightful argument on how new media technologies have impacted the African media landscape. He suggests that “new media technology like the Internet and the mobile phone [...] have been credited

with narrowing the digital divide, as nine out of ten people in countries like Nigeria and South Africa own mobile phones" (Akinbobola, 2015: 49; Pew Research Centre 2015). This is based on the increase in competition and the subsequent lowering of prices for mobile phones and internet access, which has resulted in new possibilities for the ordinary citizen to interact with media (Akinbobola, 2015). As a result, Akinbobola (2015) attempts to theorize what he calls the African digital public sphere. His work on the digital public sphere is largely related to how the African diaspora is contributing to political and social issues back home. However, their physical absence from their countries does not hinder their abilities to contribute to the political and/or social debates that occur online. New media technologies allow them to have access to these debates (Akinbobola, 2015).

Furthermore, cyberspace has provided an opportunity for counter-publics based on political debates to exist (Khan, 2014). One prime example is the 'Baba Jukwa' social media account in Zimbabwe, which exposes political secrets and has garnered a large following. The content on the page is not found in mainstream media and provides an opportunity for Zimbabweans to critically engage with the state of affairs in their country. Because such social media accounts exist, there is some merit in arguments advocating for multiple public spheres co-existing within the Internet. These public spheres include individuals with shared identities, based on their dissent and expressions of socio-political conditions of life. (Khan 2014; Akinbobola, 2015). Therefore, these two scholars recommend that researchers should consider examining the voices which make up these digital public spheres.

By definition, the public sphere is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1964: 49). It is a space which "mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion" (Habermas, 1964: 49). The idea of "public opinion" refers to the "tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally and, in periodic elections, formally as well practices vis-vis the ruling structure organized in the form of a state" (Habermas, 1964: 49).

Most critics of the public sphere, are problematic as they still categorize different **people** (my emphasis) that participate in ‘public debate’ into defining categories. For example, Dahlgren (2005) and Webster (2013) both refer to the ‘political public sphere’, while Hartley and Green (2006) also describe a cultural public sphere which is shaped by various subordinate spheres like the business public sphere and/or the sporting public sphere. With new media technologies, theorists like Benkler (2006) call for a more technological definition which he appropriately calls a ‘networked public sphere’ to accommodate the changing nature of the media. Furthermore, even though new media technologies have been adapted to suit the definitions of new public spheres, like the ‘blogosphere’ and ‘Twittersphere’, it still groups users of these specific platforms to be homogenous in their communicative activities (Bruns and Highfield, 2014). These definitions do not take into account the diversification and fragmentation of the public, especially since the advent of the Internet. Furthermore, “even at the height of the mass media age, the public’s attention to public matters was never uniform, as individual audience members exercised their own agency in selecting issues of interest from all of the themes and topics covered by the media” (Bruns and Highfield, 2014:58).

Habermas (1964) puts great emphasis on the power of the mass media in writings of the public sphere. As theorized by Habermas, “...newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere.” Habermas (1964:49). However, it is unfortunate that conventional public sphere theory placed so much emphasis on formal mass media communications and not the informal avenues of information as well. This is perhaps why social media platforms have been criticized as platforms that do not allow users to engage in critical debate (Bruns and Highfield, 2016), as they do not fit into the conventional norm of the public sphere.

One of the major critiques of the Habermasian public sphere is its tendency to focus on the ‘elite’ rather than the full public as the communicator. Habermas (1964) hails the bourgeoisie as the group with the capacity to debate issues and fails to accommodate the wide range of people that engage in political or social affairs, who might not fall neatly into the categories prescribed. Furthermore, Habermas “fails to examine other, nonliberal, bourgeois, competing public sphere” like ‘subaltern counterpublics’ (Fraser, 1999:67).

These consist of members from subordinate social groups that invent and circulate counter-discourses which “permits them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and need” (Fraser, 1999:67). Similar to different subgroups social media technologies “encourage different ways of engaging with or participating within public, civic communication” (Bruns and Highfield, 2016: 65).

One of the unique ways that participation has changed is through ‘affective publics’ which explore the role mediated feelings play in connectedness and networked publics (Papacharissi, 2016). Thus, although hashtags act as ‘identifiers or tags’ for issues they are not empty signifiers (Papacharissi, 2016) because they serve as “framing devices that allow crowds to be rendered into networked publics [...] that want to tell their story collaboratively and on their own terms” (Papacharissi, 2016: 308). These networked publics are bound by sentiment and are affective because they convene around media platforms that “invite affective attunement; [...] support affective attunement [and] propagate affectively charged expressions” (Papacharissi, 2016: 309). For example, Twitter facilitates “collaborative filtering or curating of the news” (Papacharissi, 2016: 309), thus members in networked publics feel like they are involved in framing the issue at hand. Furthermore, Twitter affords marginalized publics and issues with voices and high visibility (Papacharissi, 2016). Communities become emotionally vested into a movement and individually identify with issues discussed such as #BlackLivesMatter. The participants of the community became part of a collective genuinely concerned with the lives of black people in America and the movement was used to frame discussions about racial inequalities. Therefore social media platforms “lend emerging publics their own distinct mediality” (Papacharissi, 2016:309). They are presented in a way that they have control over, and this “shapes the texture of the public” and the “affect becomes the drive that keeps them going” (Papacharissi, 2016: 309).

Therefore, a more dynamic way is required to accommodate these interactions. As discussed, many interpretations of the public sphere aim to look at specific categories of people, and treat that as the main foci, instead of the subject they talk about. Hauser (1999) advises that focus should rather be on discourse and not the group enacting the discourse because like with hashtag activism, action has been encapsulated into posts

on social media platforms. Therefore, it would be difficult to base analysis on the account holders posting information. The accounts could be anonymous or a pseudo account, making it difficult to place them into a specific group. What does remains ‘uncovered’ though is the discourse. In order to gauge whether online social movements like #FeesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter are indeed forms of public sphere, analysis needs to be based on the interactions surrounding the movement. This research, thus proposes that the principles of a rhetoric public sphere, as proposed by Hauser (1999), be used to examine the #FeesMustFall community.

As already mentioned, the core of a rhetoric public sphere is public opinion, analysis is based on discourse rather than class or category and its norms are derived from actual discursive practices (Bruns and Highfield, 2016; Hauser, 1999). It takes into consideration the many intermediate dialogues which exist and in relation to this study would include the various online communities forming one networked community. The norms of a rhetoric public sphere are: permeable boundaries, activity, contextualized language, believable appearance and tolerance. According to Hauser (1999) these five “rhetorical norms recommend themselves as criteria by which the defining conditions of any specific public sphere may be gauged and criticized” (Hauser, 1999: 76).

The first norm considers whether a public sphere has permeable boundaries and describes the idea of membership (Hauser, 1999). It is commonly assumed that people restrict their private discursive spaces to groups like families and friends. However, for a community to be considered a public sphere, it needs to be “alive with tension between openness and control” (Hauser 1999:77), as well as allow participation in a discursive space constituted by social actors, who meet to discover their common world. Although the community could have primary membership characteristics in the beginning, it needs to have permeable boundaries to allow a varied membership in order for it to thrive (Hauser, 1999). These discursive spaces could include social media, which exposes members of the community to different topics describing the issue they are following. Furthermore, the architecture of social media allows for permeability because online networks do not inherently have natural boundaries (Granovetter, 1969).

The second norm, activity is built as a result of these permeable boundaries, and emphasizes the need to have a public that is privy to various perspectives. Members of the community must hear multiple voices for them to realize they have freedom to respond to the issue at hand and to choose which views they can support (Hauser, 1999). Rather than being categorized into one group, and being stripped of their autonomy, individuals should have the opportunity not to be “insulated from and insensitive to [the] perspective of others” (Hauser, 1999:78). Consequently, although the public follows a guiding interest, for them to be considered active, various opinions need to exist within the group. This reiterates the arguments of Bruns and Highfield (2014) who stated that different subgroups within public spheres encourage participation in public or civic communication in ways unique to them.

Furthermore, a well-functioning rhetoric public sphere needs contextualized language to create a discursive arena that puts a public issue into perspective. This will assist members to understand the issue. Because a community is characterized by varied opinions, it requires a guiding agent, and language offers itself as the most fitting agent, because it provides a way for issues to be determined and expressed. Members of the community therefore “adhere to the rhetorical norm of contextualized language to render their respective experiences [or thoughts] intelligible to one another” (Hauser, 1999:78). For example, when considering hashtag activism, using the appropriate hashtag would help people to identify and relate to the issue at hand. This enables the community to be a space for more than just discussion. As already discussed, the #BlackLivesMatter community became a space for learning about the issue for interested and potential members.

The fourth norm, believable appearance, can be likened to visibility. This determines whether the group can be recognized by outsiders, as well as other members of the community itself. Hauser (1999) expresses that believability is an essential characteristic for a community to establish awareness within themselves, as a public and also garner support. One way this can be achieved is by looking at how mass media institutions help legitimize the appearance of a given movement and their issue. This resonates the ideas

of Koopman (2004), who argued that a message is spread successfully based on its visibility, resonance and legitimacy in the mass media.

Finally, Hauser (1999) describes a community as being constituted by difference rather than identity and diversity rather than unity. Therefore, contact with alternative ideas is inevitable and provides the foundation of the final norm, tolerance. A well-functioning rhetoric public sphere is one which recognizes that cooperation and coalitions with public actors who might differ in opinion provide weight in arenas of official action.

2.8. Conclusion

New media technologies cannot escape the technological layer that informs them and the powers of algorithms should not be underestimated. Beer (2009: 995) expresses how they act in “complex and even ‘knowing’ ways as information [...] is harvested to inform and predict” our online experiences on social media platforms. These algorithms are not all encompassing and dominant but “offer integrated affordances and boundaries around which Web 2.0 users participate” (Beer, 2009: 999). One of the many features of new media is how “web 2.0 applications, organize themselves through the self-organizing and predictive powers of the software” (Beer, 2009: 993), and within this software, we live our lives. Furthermore, user-generated metadata tags classify online content that enable the data to ‘find us’ (Beer, 2009: 993).

One such metatag are hashtags which are now used on majority of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. One of the reasons why hashtagging has become so prevalent is because of the growing need to organize and label information to make a user’s experience more personal to their topic preferences (Moulaison & Burns, 2012) and generally serve either as a social tag or as a prompt for comment (Moulaison & Burns, 2012).

Nevertheless, there is evidence to show users reconfigure communication platforms to suit their needs. The examination of social activity of online communities should include the co-constructive relationship between software and the audience. For example, the layers of communication on Twitter have been categorically described however, they often overlap, and also do not exist in isolation to each other. Nowhere, is this more

evident than in with the way that users adopt and in turn develop tools used by the platform. Thus, the rhetoric public sphere provides an apt framework to measure the interactions by these users which could occur in an issue community.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, new media technologies, especially social media platforms are governed by the architecture of the network. The definition of networks has shifted from the realm of computer science to social sciences and signifies “a new societal arrangement characterized by a culture of individualism and the accelerated mobilities of people, commodities, capital, signs and information across the globe” (Gane and Beer, 2008: 16). Despite this, people still use social media platforms to form online communities, and in some cases mobilize for social justice. For example, Mareider and Schwarzenegger’s (2012) concept of issue communities offers practical guidelines of how individuals use social media to organize social movements. By definition, issue communities are online communities that have a common purpose despite members retaining their individuality. The South African student protest, #FeesMustFall, which had different people uniting to address rising tuition fees at the universities across the country, serves as an example and the case study for this dissertation. This movement migrated from being debated about on social media to Parliament and in South African media. Thus, this study needed to have a methodology grounded within cultural studies and network theory because it aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which conversations of the #FeesMustFall movement were socially curated most often by the #FeesMustFall issue community on Twitter?
 - a) What topics of conversation emerged from the issue community as being the main drivers of communication among users?
 - b) Could this social curation be considered an active form of participation?
 - c) Based on the characteristics of a Hauserian public sphere, can the #FeesMustFall issue community be considered as an alternate public sphere?

3.2. Methodological Framework

Based on the posed questions it was determined that this study should be located within an interpretivist framework because this research discusses the social interactions of an online community. The premise of interpretivism is that “human perspectives and experiences” are highly subjective and the social reality in which they inhabit is laden with multiple perspectives, which the researcher cannot ignore (Wahyuni, 2012: 71).

Ontologically, interpretivism highlights that “reality is constructed by social actors and people’s perceptions of it” (Wahyuni, 2012: 71). This is key, especially when looking at the motivations that surround an event like the #FeesMustFall student protests. Furthermore, it “recognize[s] that individuals [have] varied backgrounds, assumptions and experiences [which] contribute to the on-going construction of reality existing in their broader social context through social interaction” (Wahyuni, 2012: 71).

Interpretivists reject the principles of positivism, because of its over-reliance on objectivity and single truths. The interpretivist approach rather, “understand[s] the social world from the experiences and subjective meanings that people attach to it” (Wahyuni, 2012: 71). Thus, interpretivist researchers prefer to interact and create dialogue from the studied data. They embody an ‘emic,’ or insider perspective, and attempt to “study the social reality from the perspective of the people themselves” (Wahyuni, 2012: 71). Due to the proximity of researcher and data, “the experiences and values of both [...] substantially influence the collection of data and its analysis” (Wahyuni, 2012: 71). This axiological argument is one of the defining features that separates qualitative research from quantitative. Ryan and Bernard (2003:86) explained that although “themes come from the data” they also come from the “investigator’s prior understanding of the phenomenon under study”. Therefore, interpretivist research emphasizes a better understanding of the world (Tuli, 2010) because data gathering methods are cognizant of context, as they enable “rich and detailed, or thick description of [that] social phenomena” (Tuli, 2010: 100).

The interpretivist framework calls for a qualitative research methodology which is centred on the evaluation and interpretation of data and is essential to understanding and

analysing it (Berger, 2015). As a result, because the study was analysing online interactions of a community, the research design needed to be ethnographic in nature. Fortunately, there is a type of ethnography that is suitable for online communities, known as netnography.

Netnography can be described as a “qualitative methodology that adapts traditional ethnography research techniques to the study of online cultures” (Kozinets, 2006 in Perez-Latre et al, 2011:68). It is a “content analysis of online communication and some authors classify this methodology between discourse analysis, content analysis and ethnography” (Beckmann and Langer, 2005 in Perez-Latre, 2011: 68). Coleman (2010) highlights ethnographic approaches suitable for digital media and divides these into three categories, namely vernacular cultures, prosaics and cultural politics. Vernacular cultures are described as groups that are personally or professionally vested in digital media like software hackers. While, prosaics, speak to users who have had digital media infiltrate their lived experience such as digital journalists (Kozinets, 2015). This study however, falls under cultural politics, which are ethnographies concerned with “how cultural identities, representations, and imaginaries are remade and subverted, communicated and circulated through individuals and collective engagement...” (Kozinets, 2015: 25; Coleman, 2010). Additionally, this study focuses on an online community’s interactions on Twitter so it is essential to centre the methodology within social network analysis.

Although the #FeesMustFall social movement was present on other social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, Twitter was chosen as the medium of choice because it was deemed most popular by the mainstream press during the student protests.

3.2.1. *Sampling*

Therefore, a purposive sampling method was used. Purposive sampling helped identify tweets that had particular features, relative to the research questions, which enabled detailed exploration to the central themes of the study (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2013). The data set extracted contained the key hashtag #FeesMustFall and was taken from the 30th September 2016 to the 31st October 2016. This timeline was chosen because this

was the period in which the most amount of violence was reported as happening in relation to #FeesMustFall (Nyadu and Twala, 2016; Nicolson, 2016) the discourse shifted from one of student unity to multiple conflicting narratives (Davids and Waghid, 2016; Torchia, 2016) and then Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, released comment on the Fees Forum, to which students then responded (Drum Digital, 2016; Times Live, 2016).

Consequently, more than 40,000 tweets containing #FeesMustFall were extracted from the Twitter API⁷, using Twitter Archiver, an add-on extension to Google Sheets⁸. After extracting the data required, the tweets were separated into weeks to make them manageable and this assisted the researcher to identify the themes and topics that were discussed by users. It is worth mentioning that this network is a fraction of the entire student protest network, which comprised of other social media platforms as well. However, the relationships between the various actors in this sample provided insight into the people that were talking about the cause and shaping the interactions which surrounded the community.

3.3. Analysis of Data

The analysis of data was two-fold. Firstly, a textual analysis consisting of a qualitative content analysis was conducted on collected tweets to determine whether the interactions in the community could be considered a public sphere. To perform this task a coding frame informed by the features of the Hauserian public sphere was developed. This categorized tweets according to the norms of this theory, which were permeable boundaries, activity, believable appearance, contextualized language and tolerance. The second stage used the network analysis tool Gephi to analyse the structure of the community's network and identify who the most influential users were and the content they shared. Therefore, the first stage of data analysis was grounded within cultural studies, by employing the techniques of a textual study and the second stage was grounded in network theory, in order to complete a social network analysis.

⁷ Twitter API – Application Programme Interface. This feature enables the programmatic analysis of tweets.

⁸ This is a service provided to all Google accounts and acts is an online version of Microsoft Excel.

3.3.1. Qualitative Content Analysis

According to McKee (2003:1) “textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world”. The foci of this study is the interactions of an online community, making textual analysis suitable. There are four approaches to textual analysis: rhetorical criticism; content analysis; interaction analysis and performance studies (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 1999). Rhetorical criticism is considered a systematic method to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate the persuasive nature of messages rooted within texts. Interaction analysis requires the researcher to have deep knowledge of the people he/she will be working with and be able to explain some of the non-verbal cues. Thirdly, performance studies is concerned with “the progress of dialogic engagement with one’s own and others’ aesthetic communication through the means of performance” (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 1999: 3). However this research will be using the principles of content analysis from a qualitative perspective.

Qualitative content analysis systematically describes the meaning of qualitative data “by assigning successive parts of the material to the categories of a coding frame” (Schreier, 2014: 170). Thus the researcher is able to reduce data to specifically answer research questions. Like quantitative content analysis it is concerned with the systematic description of data through coding by following a predefined series of steps. These steps include creating a coding frame; generating category definitions and segmenting the material into coding units (Schreier, 2014). Furthermore, the method allows for flexibility because the coding frame considers the context of the data and the focus of analysis provides detailed descriptions of the material. It also allows the coding system to be highly systematic. With this study, the whole data set was systematically examined according to the research objectives. The first objective was to concentrate on information that was shared the most in the community. The second objective was testing whether these tweets or interactions could be classified as a public sphere. This was done within a coding frame informed by the Hauserian features of a public sphere.

Therefore to achieve the first objective, the data set needed to be primed for analysis. It was decided to concentrate only on the tweets which had a retweet count above 20

because these were considered as the most popular in the network. Furthermore, the dataset was divided according to weeks and certain weeks within the data set emerged as the ‘heavy’ weeks of the data set. The tweets in Week 1 and 2 comprised of over 80% of the overall month’s tweet count and the dates for these were from the 30th Sept 2016 to 13th October 2016. Further inspection of the data set also revealed that the majority of the tweets in Week 3 and 4 were repetitions of the tweets in the previous weeks, thus analysis had reached a point of saturation. Separating the data also enabled the researcher to identify any discrepancies such as peaks and dips in certain weeks, as well as the progression from some themes being prominent in some weeks than others.

During the coding of the tweets, an *a priori* decision was made to code the members according to their profile within the community. This criteria was largely based on the information each member provided in their ‘bio’ section and enabled the researcher to see who was saying what. This helped provide further context for the posts they either posted or retweeted. Figure 1 below highlights what category of users were identified.

A	These users were students or part of the general population
B	These users were social or political actors (e.g. activists; politicians)
C	These users were part of the university management (e.g. academic staff; vice chancellors)
D	These users were considered high profile citizens within the South African social media landscape with more than 100,000 followers on their profile
E	These were Twitter accounts/profiles for media houses (e.g. The Citizen, The Mail and Guardian) and journalists.

Figure 1

The following section will highlight the governing rules for each main category and highlight the coding frame used for analysis. Once the identities of users were established the researcher developed a coding frame to analyse the tweets in relation to Hauser’s (1999) rhetoric public sphere.

The first category considered if the #FeesMustFall network demonstrated permeable boundaries. Figure 2, highlights the conditions which needed to be met in order to conclude that permeable boundaries were evident.

PB1	If the conversations were referring to other movements that were popular at the time, whether in the country or the world at large.
PB2	If the conversations were referring to societal issues
PB3	If the conversations showed evidence of being opposed to the views of the general population of the #FeesMustFall community.
PB4	If the conversations were receiving from other groups or social movements in the Twittersphere

Figure 2

The second category questioned if activity of multiple voices were present in the community. Figure 3 stipulates the possible ways in which tweets were identified to fit into this category.

A1	If the conversations were explicitly against the #FeesMustFall movement.
A2	If the conversations were explicitly supportive of the #FeesMustFall movement.
A3	If the conversations were against the government.
A4	If the conversations were against university leadership
A5	If the conversations were generally neutral. This sub code was also used for tweets that were from media houses or journalists.
A6	If the conversations were against the violence caused by police
A7	If the conversations were in support of specific social actors (e.g. politicians, student leaders, celebrities)
A8	If the conversations were about the affect the movement has had on the South African economy
A9	If the conversations were against violence that was a result of student protests (e.g. damaging of infrastructure; intimidation)

Figure 3

Figure 4 helped to identify if tweets demonstrated contextual language and how members were packaging content for other users.

CL1	If the conversations were humorous
CL2	If the conversations contained colloquial language
CL3	If the conversations referred to aspects of popular culture
CL4	If the conversations contained images

Figure 4

The fourth category looked to identify how believable the discourse of the #FeesMustFall network was considered. As can be seen in Figure 5, criteria for this was met if a conversation was mentioned by mainstream media, celebrities or other important offline social actors

B1	If the conversations were mentioned by mass media
B2	If the conversations were mentioned by political and social actors
B3	If the conversations were mentioned by anyone – treating it like an individual
B4	If the conversations referred to the political or social history of South Africa and Africa
B5	If the conversations referred to religion

Figure 5

The final category which measured tweets in relation to a rhetoric public sphere was tolerance. This was determined by noting if tweets were intolerant of other races, religions or gender, as seen in Figure 6.

T1	If the conversations contained racial discrimination
T2	If the conversations contained religious discrimination
T3	If the conversations contained gender discrimination

Figure 6

Even though the final category is not part of the rhetoric public sphere, it was important, based on the role that a public sphere is meant to play, whether there was evidence of offline mobilisation. Therefore, Figure 7 was developed as a framework to assess how conversations were trying to organize resources and offline action.

M1	If the conversations mentioned ‘calls for support’ for the movement
M2	If the conversations were informing people of meetings
M3	If the conversations were deliberately asking for a topic or issue to trend in the Twittersphere

Figure 7

The above steps were repeated throughout the data set until a point of saturation, which Schreier (2014) describes as a point where no additional new concepts could be found. The process also ensured similar sub-categories were not present to avoid double coding and inspecting whether most themes had been assigned a sub-category. Once each of these categories were used to analyse conversations, a social network analysis was completed to assess how these conversations and their authors, fitted into the overall #FeesMustFall network.

3.3.2. Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis begins by creating sociograms which offer a graphical representation of the relationship between nodes (users) and edges (conversations). A simple illustration of this is provided in Figure 8 below.

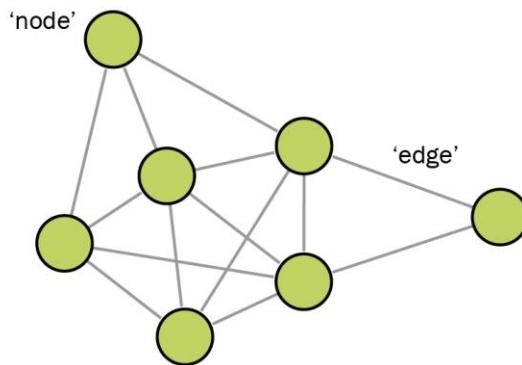


Figure 8

For purposes of this research, Gephi, a software package which converted tweets (raw data) from the #FeesMustFall network into complex sociograms, enabled the researcher to understand the #FeesMustFall network structure and how various users were linked to one another via conversations. It also helped the researcher to determine which users

were the most important in the #FeesMustFall community. Like the previous stage, the data needed to be primed for analysis. Therefore, the raw data collected by Twitter Archiver was downloaded as an excel worksheet, as presented in Figure 9.

Twitter Search Rule: #FeesMustFall "#FeesMustFall" #FeesMustFall lang:en				
	Date	Screen Name	Full Name	Tweet Text
2	9/30/2016 4:39:08	@queertwit	Tommaso Milani	We are with the students for free decolonized education #FeesMustFall https://t.co/oGeeFGSSG0
4	9/30/2016 4:39:11	@Nepo_Sk	Nepo_Sk	Abelungu and their brown friends 🇿 #FeesMustFall #UCTshutdown https://t.co/gn6qfDZEa9
5	9/30/2016 4:39:19	@Jus_Khanyi	Khanye	Cops for daysss on Soweto campus #UJFees #FeesMustFall #UJ
6	9/30/2016 4:39:27	@MsZondi06	Shazay	RT @kaveels: UKZN Westville students want to face off with police @News24 #FeesMustFall https://t.co/wGz22CALmO
7	9/30/2016 4:39:29	@DefineRacism	The Apartheid Museum	RT @ShabnamPalesaMo: Share This: @UKZNMF: Provincial #FeesMustFall meeting today 4pm @ Workshop Durban #DUT #UKZN #UNIZULU #MUT #FMF ht...
8	9/30/2016 4:39:30	@MS_RAMZ_	Black Child	RT @indie_impi: At Wits right now. Fees strangling student #FeesMustFall https://t.co/Gil4pWe5R

Figure 9

Thereafter, the researcher sorted all tweets and retweets, including if a user made mention of another user in their tweet, as shown in Figure 10. These tweets were then categorised by date into the weeks they appeared. From there, data was inputted into Gephi to create graphical representations of the data.

	Target	Source	Tweet Content
2	@queertwit	no node	We are with the students for free decolonized education #FeesMustFall https://t.co/oGeeFGSSG0
3	@Nepo_Sk	no node	Abelungu and their brown friends 🇿 #FeesMustFall #UCTshutdown https://t.co/gn6qfDZEa9
4	@Jus_Khanyi	no node	Cops for daysss on Soweto campus #UJFees #FeesMustFall #UJ
5	@MsZondi06	@kaveels	RT @kaveels: UKZN Westville students want to face off with police @News24 #FeesMustFall https://t.co/wGz22CALmO

Figure 10

However, these illustrations were still too general, so the researcher used the programme to sort data statistically into categories which measured average degree, graph density, average path length and network diameter. Understanding the average degree of the network was essential in understanding the minimum number of connections that each user possesses. The density statistics measured how connected the network was. Dense graphs, for example, tend to score higher average degrees which means more members in the community are connected to one another. Complementing this is the average path length which measures how quickly a user connects with another user.

Additionally, the researcher also sought to highlight the most connected members of the community. Using Gephi, the researcher identified how clusters and individuals were

positioned within the network. This helped with identifying how various clusters within the community revealed various topics of conversation.

3.4. Conclusion

Figure 11 highlights a graphical representation of the #FeesMustFall network developed using the aforementioned tools.

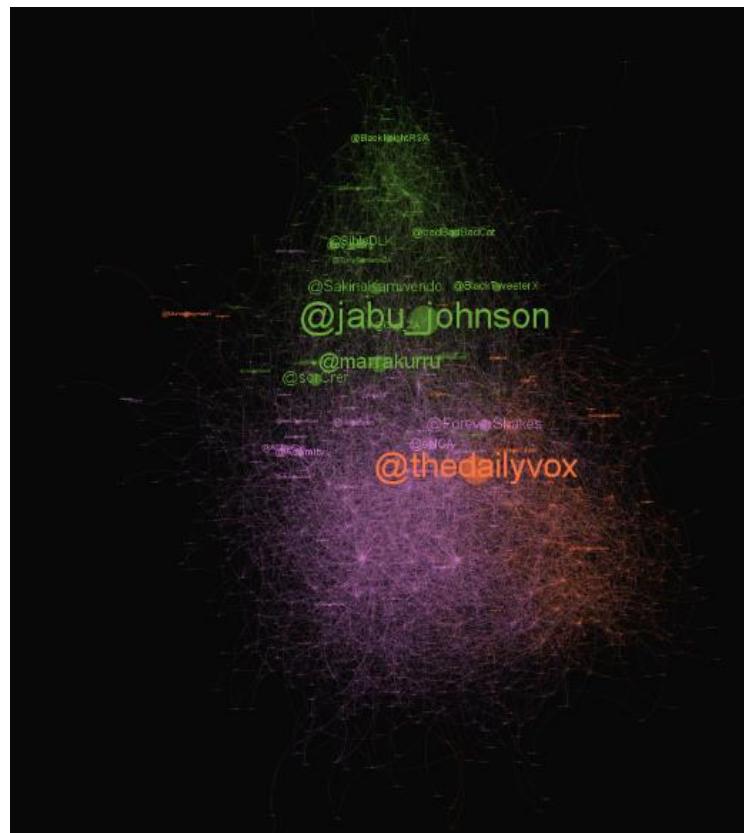


Figure 11

Employing these tools allowed the researcher to have an inside view of the degrees of participation within the network, answering questions like who were the thought leaders, and what elevated them to that point in the community.

Therefore, the following chapter will expand on the results of the two stages of analysis discussed and provide insight into which topics of the community were the most popular, which members of the community emerged as influential and whether social curation could be identified as an example of active participation in a community. It will also shed light on the themes which emerged from the analysed interactions of this community and

determine whether they can be considered a type of rhetoric public sphere, especially as the efforts of the #FeesMustFall community were to influence South Africa's opinion on free education.

CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

So far, this dissertation has unpacked various theories to highlight how online users share and curate information, and whether ‘sharing’ can be considered a form of ‘active’ participation in an online community. Consequently, this chapter extends this work to conceptualise how social curation operates on a collective level in relation to issue communities. The concept of issue communities, as already discussed in Chapter 2, is based on the work of Mareider and Schwarzenegger (2012). Their research described how online communities should be understood as collectives joined by a topic (Mareider and Schwarzenegger, 2012).

Furthermore, since the community under investigation debates as a collective in an online public space, it was imperative to include the principles of the public sphere. However, due to the restrictions of traditional public spheres, it was established that the rhetoric public sphere by Hauser (1999) would be the most useful. Therefore analysis of the conversations used principles of the rhetoric public sphere to examine the validity of the #FeesMustFall online community as a type of alternative public sphere and considered whether the activity which surrounded the online community could be an example of reconfigured civic engagement.

Structurally this chapter has been guided by the research questions which informed this project. Before expanding on these though, analysis of the network structure will introduce the chapter. This will concentrate on looking at who the participants of the network were, as well as the statistics which informed the community. Following this, the techniques employed by the community members to share information within the network will be discussed. Thereafter, the conversations extracted from the data set will be ranked according to which tweets were shared the most and ultimately garnered the most popularity within the network. Next, the chapter will look at the topics which lie within the messages, focusing on what was implied in the content and this will continue with an analysis of which members were central to the distribution of the content. Within the same

frame, the content will then be discussed using the principles of the Hauserian public sphere.

4.2. Network Analysis

As discussed in the last chapter the data analysed was taken from a specific juncture of the movement, where members of the community began to question the ideals of the movement after a string of violent disputes and divisive rhetoric. Furthermore, this juncture is also the time frame when the Fees Commission was held, which was evidence of Parliament putting #FeesMustFall on the national agenda.

However, before this can be analysed in any detail, it was important to determine who the active members of the community were. Figure 12 highlights the categories that members were placed into according to their activity within the community, and the information they presented in their 'bio' section on Twitter.

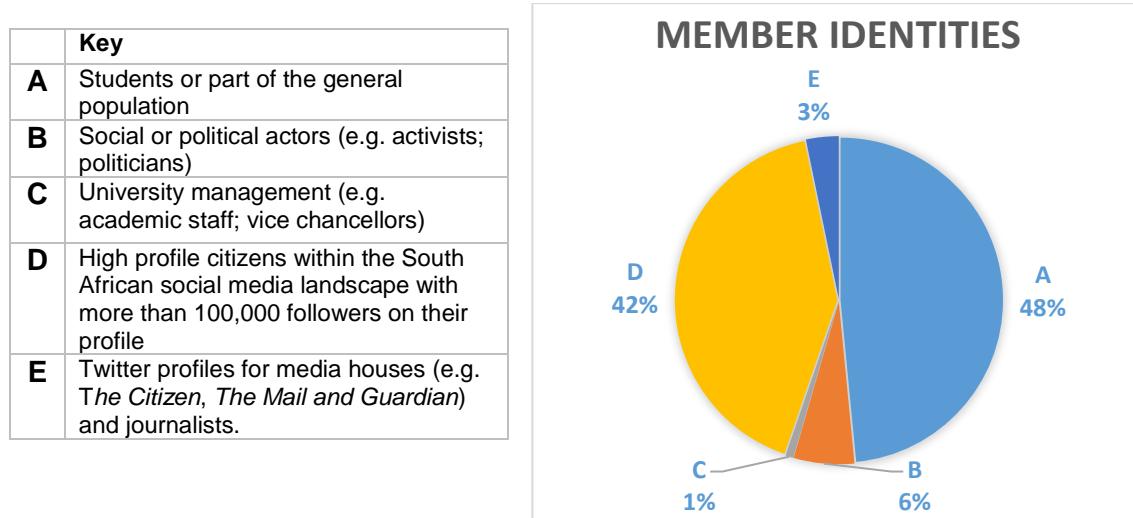


Figure 12- Member Identities

As seen in Figure 1, it was found that university students and the general public constituted almost half of the population in the #FeesMustFall community. Also, noteworthy is the high percentage of influential members tweeting about #FeesMustFall. As will be seen, this group played an important role in bringing information from Group A out of obscurity into greater light on Twitter and the larger public sphere.

This is supported further when analysing the network structure. The analysis of the network structure was two-pronged. First the overall network structure and its implications were revealed and second, it was imperative to look at the level of influence specific users had within the network.

Before identifying the influence of members, the raw network needed to be analysed by employing some of the statistics provided by Gephi. For effective analysis, the data set was first analysed in its entirety and then later divided into weeks. As discussed in the previous chapter, these first two weeks were classified as the ‘heavy weeks’ of the data set as over 80% of the overall data under investigation occurred from the 30th Sept 2016 to the 13th October 2016. Additionally, the division into weeks also allowed the researcher to take note of growth patterns and the evolution of the network from one week to the next. Therefore the statistics that were used to prime the networks were namely, average degree; graph density; network diameter and average path length.

Firstly, by looking at the average degree in the network, it was possible to understand the minimum number of connections that each user possessed. Based on the results in Figure 13, it was noted that the members within the community were connected, on average, to almost 4 other members in the network. However, as time went on, a decrease in connection was noted, showing a depleting community. This result is enhanced by the numbers in the graph density table (Figure 14).

Time period	Average Degree
October 2016	3.988
Week 1 (30 th Sept – 6 th October)	3.513
Week 2 (7 th October – 13 th October)	2.497
Week 3 (14 th October – 20 th October)	1.022
Week 4 (21 st October – 27 th October)	0.985

Figure 13 - Average Degree

Graph density measured how homophilous users in the network were. The closer graph density got to 1, the more diverse information in the network became. However, the further graph density fell below 1, the less diverse information became.

Time period	Graph Density
October 2016	0.002
Week 1 (30 th Sept – 6 th October)	0.003
Week 2 (7 th October – 13 th October)	0.005
Week 3 (14 th October – 20 th October)	0.011
Week 4 (21 st October – 27 th October)	0.015

Figure 14 - Graph Density

As was evident in the degree of connection, highlighted in Figure 14 there was a significant change between the first two weeks and the last two weeks, in relation to graph density. This is due to the significant drop in members within the community from the 31st of September to the 14th October, representing a decrease in the use of the #FeesMustFall hashtag and a point which is explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Thirdly, it became important to analyse how information flowed within the network, using the average path length and network diameter. The average path length, by definition is the average number of steps along the shortest paths for all possible pairs of network nodes (Chevren, 2013). In simpler terms, how quickly does one member connect with another member? If the average path length is close to the value of the network diameter this is an indication of an inefficient network because this represents a high level of homogenous exchanges in the community, meaning members are not willing to interact with other members outside of their immediate cluster or group. However, if the average path length is below the diameter then the network is efficient, and information flows easily within the network (Chevren, 2013). This was also an essential tool to help identify the betweenness centrality statistic which identifies those members conceptualized as information brokers. These brokers acted like bridges between members within the network, and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

As can be seen in Figure 15, the information flow in the overall #FeesMustFall network was quite efficient, with the average path length scoring well below the diameter,

however, as time went on the efficiency of the network deteriorated. Looking at Figure 15, Week 1 shows a network which had a good information flow with the average path length being below the diameter. This was due to the members of the community cross-communicating with members outside of their immediate network, as well as high use of the #FeesMustFall hashtag.

Time Period	Average Path Length	Diameter
October 2016	1.593	6
Week 1 (30th Sept – 6th October)	1.33	5
Week 2 (7th October – 13th October)	1.32	3
Week 3 (14th October – 20th October)	1.05	2
Week 4 (21st October – 27th October)	1	1

Figure 15 - Average Path Length and Diameter

However, Week 4 indicates a completely homogenous network with the average path length being the same as the diameter. This was due to members of the community abandoning the #FeesMustFall hashtag and often opting for another. Furthermore, the members that continued using the hashtag were no longer cross communicating with splinter groups outside of their immediate network, reiterating the high level of homogeneity in the network.

After examining the statistics of the network structure, analysis moved to consider how information was being distributed within the community. There was also a need to understand why the network structure fluctuated from being a diverse network, with many of the splinter groups communicating in harmony, to a homogenous network with no cross communication. Furthermore, analysis also needed to reveal why some community members abandoned the #FeesMustFall hashtag. Therefore, the following sections will expand on these areas, to provide insight into the members' sharing techniques as well as examining the various underlying themes within the conversations, as this would shed light on why the #FeesMustFall community abandoned the use of their primary hashtag.

4.3. Sharing in the #FeesMustFall issue community

One of the major objectives of this study was looking at the social activity within the #FeesMustFall issue community and what sharing techniques they used to spread

information. The most apparent technique used by the community to spread information was through retweeting. As discussed earlier, Bruns and Moe (2014) explained how retweeting enables tweets to transcend layer boundaries within Twitter. They describe retweeting as a user-generated communicative convention on Twitter, which enables other conventions like the @mention and, recently, the #hashtag to move tweets across layer boundaries. In their work, Bruns and Moe (2014) describe a tweet structure which brings messages from the hashtag (Macro) or @mention (Micro) level to the attention of the Meso (community) level. By retweeting a tweet with the @mention symbol and a hashtag can transcend both the micro and macro level, by addressing one user directly (with @mention) and also an entire ‘topic community’ (with the hashtag). When analysing #FeesMustFall tweets it was found that over 90% of the data set contained tweets with the same structure, as they usually addressed a particular Twitter user, along with the #FeesMustFall hashtag.

Furthermore, 99% of the tweets were preserved, meaning that the tweets were not altered (likely due to the retweet button integrated into the Twitter system). The distinction between preserved, adapted and original tweets is essential to understanding the implications of distributed content (boyd et al 2010). The definitions of these roles are centred primarily on authorship because the intellectual ownership of ‘shared tweets’ can become blurred. Fortunately, most of the tweets in the dataset were ‘preserved retweets’, and the intellectual ownership was thereby retained. Nonetheless, besides retweeting, additional techniques were used to share information and the following paragraphs will expand on these techniques.

As seen in Figure 16, the most prominent retweets were from the @WitsSRC account, followed by @indie_impi; @SihleDLK; @dailyvox and @kaveels. Despite having disparate groups, as each account highlighted different aspects of the movement, information was able to flow within the network, due to users curating and sharing information with their immediate networks, as well as cross-sharing with other communities.

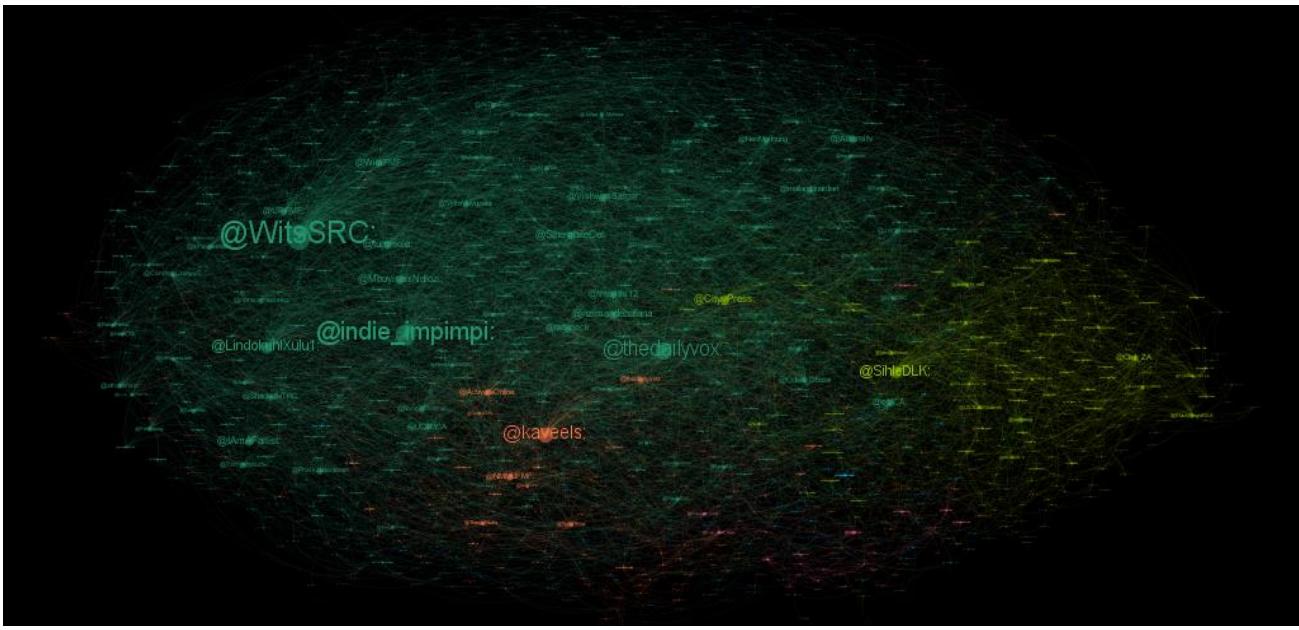


Figure 16

This allowed for the network structure to grow, especially in the first two weeks of the month. However, retweeting was not the only way users shared information.

Disparate clusters within the network provided a novel way of sharing information. Disparity appeared to allow opposing views between members. In some instances, this led members to abandon the issue due to offence, but further inspection highlighted that the more critique there was in the community, the more information was shared. This resulted in critics of the movement like @SihleDLK rising in profile within the network.

Furthermore, associations with prominent users within the network also proved to be a useful technique to share information. Tweets from smaller accounts were often brought out of obscurity by more well-connected users. For example @sorCrer, a user with a small network of followers, was able to gain popularity by commenting on a more prominent user's post (@Mulalo) which led to his comment being retweeted by others within the larger network. Thus, by commenting on a post, @sorCrer was now exposed to @Mulalo's 1000+ followers, as opposed to the 50+ followers on his account. As a result, @sorCrer's profile rose in the overall network, despite having a small number of followers.

Furthermore, like @sorCrer, other members of the community were also using the comments section to share news with their peers by ‘tagging’ them in posts. This highlighted, a novel filtering technique employed by the community. Members would package information for the individual, thus the sharer would ensure the post was received by specific members and not the rest of the community.

Interestingly, some techniques for sharing were not related to actual sharing of content on the platform, rather it depended on how content was packaged, which played a significant role in whether it was shareable or not. Members of the community used framing techniques to make content more relatable to other users. They used elements of humour and related aspects of popular culture to the movement. In some instances, users would ask that a tweet be shared for a specific reason by including the words ‘PLEASE RT’ at the beginning of the tweet. Although this might seem redundant, it was found that users often responded to these requests and these tweets would gain popularity in the community as a result.

In addition, upon inspection of the most popular tweets, it was also found that they either included an image, video, sound clip or a hyperlink to a source outside of the network. In most cases, the added media element helped emphasise the framing of the tweet’s content. Most times images seemed to refer to emotions and hyperlinks provided more context about an issue. This tweet structure influenced the way tweets were viewed and shared in the network. The affordance of the system to post media elements within tweets enabled people to use the 140 characters as pointers to specific information in the picture, video or link.

Lastly, members also used additional hashtags in their tweets to attract the attention of other social groups, as well as provide context for the tweet within the community. Due to the varied clusters within the network, it proved essential for tweets to be contextualized to represent a specific strand of thought. This also assisted with creating information pools, which were likely to benefit new or potential users who were unfamiliar with #FeesMustFall.

Because retweeting was the most common way members shared information in the #FeesMustFall community, it can be argued that retweeting was a form of social curation in practice. In other words, retweeting allowed users to actively search and engage with content relevant to their immediate networks. This was evident from the overall network structure discussed in the previous section, which highlighted that there were a number of distinct sub-communities within the #FeesMustFall community. Although diffuse, these communities still grew in number due to members sharing and re-sharing information around the #FeesMustFall topic, which reached a wider audience and created more topic based communities. This emphasized the value of social curation as a framework to help in understanding the role the audience plays in participatory culture, especially in the context of social media and the #FeesMustFall network. Participation moved away from 'just' distribution as it also added value; judgement, critique, assessment and selection to the process of media consumption (Villi, 2012).

Using the term sharing to relate the activity of spreading information in this particular network dilutes the intent of some of the messages that were distributed in the network. Rather the term curating should be used, because with further exploration, some tweets were 'shared' with the deliberate intent to evoke specific emotions or actions and to tell a specific story of what the #FeesMustFall movement represented. Therefore, retweeting was seen as a social activity which encouraged communicative interactions and relationships between individuals by linking them to other users who shared the same media consumption traits, thus making it a substantial community building tool.

However, what is yet to be discussed, in relation to this study, is which topics of the movement were socially curated most often. This will point to the kind of conversations that drove, and ultimately shaped, the movement. The tables in the following sections (Figure 17 & 18)⁹ present the most popular retweeted tweets which came from the first two weeks of October. These have already been classified as the 'heavy' weeks as they contained 41, 850 of the overall 44,000 tweets. Analysis of the data reached saturation

⁹ Some of the tweets in this table were presented as images. These have been included in Appendix 4.

level after week 2, with most of the tweets in the first two weeks also being popular in Week 3 and 4.

As can be seen in Figure 17, the tweets from the first week featured varied themes like references to political history, race and violence emerging. For example, the tweet by @BongoMuffin (highlighted in Fig. 11) shows how the white students were protecting the black students. This highlighted the rhetoric within the community which emphasised how police were violent towards black students and not white students.

Week 1	30/09/2016 – 06/10/2016
	Most Retweeted Tweets
30/09/2016	RT @SureKamhunga: From #FeesMustFall to #stopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh.. All led by brave young women
	RT @PearlPillay: A student who had a stun grenade explode on her. Who are the real thugs here? #Fees2017 #FeesMustFall #Wits
01/10/2016	Students offloaded their #FeesMustFall frustrations on Sundowns #MTN8Final #feesmustfall -3-Sundowns-0
02/10/2016	RT @RediTlhabi: Let it be recorded that it was not #FeesMustFall that started fire. It waa [sic] youths wearing Sasco and ANC tshirts.
	RT @JustZweli: South Africa DOES NOT have money problems, it has MONEY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS! #FeesMustFall #unionbuilding
03/10/2016	RT @indie_impipi: At Wits right now. Fees strangling student #FeesMustFall RT @MbuyiseniNdlozi: Whatever happens remember this: Unity in struggle is the only guarantee of victory! #FeesMustFall
04/10/2016	RT @Adamity: The #ANC @MYANC has betrayed the poor and principles of the #FreedomCharter e.g. #FeesMustFall #Poverty #Inequality RT @Julius_S_Malema: The time for free education is now, the police brutality will never succeed in suppressing a noble cause #FeesMustFall
05/10/2016	RT @Adamity: Do you support the right of students to protest peacefully to ensure #FreeEducation for the #Poor? #FeesMustFall RT @nomsa_maseko: #FeesMustFall What a shot! (Marco Longari/AFP)
06/10/2016	RT @BongoMuffin: I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad. #FeesMustFall
	RT @ericsayz: How to quickly deal with white privilege... #FMF #FeesMustFall

Figure 17 - Week 1 - Most Retweeted Tweets

Furthermore, in relation to race, the topic of ‘white privilege’ was also trending, with some students feeling like some white students were not sympathetic to the struggles of their black colleagues. Analysis revealed that this conception emerged due to counter-movements like #TakeWitsBack which were recognized as inherently white and not supportive of the cause. Such sentiment caused members like, @MbuyiseniNdlozi, to encourage unity among the students.

Moreover, tweets from political leaders like @JuliusMalema were popular within the community, especially because of his mention of police violence. What was also interesting was the interweaving of various societal issues with the movement. For example, the most popular tweet on the 30th Sept 2016 saw the female leadership of the #FeesMustFall being compared to the leadership of the anti-racist movement at Pretoria Girls High¹⁰.

Another interesting element taken from popular tweets on 2nd Oct 2016 were the framing techniques employed by the community. Most notably was how the community were addressing commentary that students were behind the violence and destruction of buildings. @RediThlabi’s tweet, the most popular tweet of the day highlighted politically interested groups were behind the destruction of buildings and not the students. The tweet by @PearlPillay also reiterated this idea stating: “A student who had a stun grenade explode on her. Who are the *real thugs* here?” From these tweets there is evidence that the community separated themselves from the destructive activity surrounding the movement and rather highlighted their vulnerable position.

The second week reiterated similar themes to the first, with some tweets also addressing issues of race, violence and political history. As can be seen from Figure 18, @BongoMuffin’s tweet referencing the white human shield was popular for two days that week. Additionally, @NomzamoMbatha addressed the remnants of apartheid still being present in today’s society, which supported the notion that black students were

¹⁰ Black pupils at Pretoria High School for Girls claimed to be victims of racism based on the school’s hair policy, this later sparked an anti-racist movement to redress the policy at the school, and in other schools across the country.

systematically disadvantaged and this further reiterated the white privilege theme present in the first week.

Week 2	Week 2: 07/10/2016 – 13/10/2016
	Most Retweeted Tweet
07/10/2016	RT @BongoMuffing: I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad.
	RT @Adamity: Do you support the right of students to protest peacefully to ensure #FreeEducation for the #Poor? #FeesMustFall
08/10/2016	RT @BongoMuffing: I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad.
	RT @Julius_S_Malema: We all know who sold our parents dreams in 1994 and promised free education, that should be a target. #FeesMustFall
09/10/2016	RT @samalamamsammidge: People need to see this. #FeesMustFall #WitsFeesWILLFall Beautiful voices to unite us...
	RT @Adamity: #SJM invites #Student #Leaders of #FeesMustFall to a meeting to discuss solutions for #FreeEducation for the #Poor
10/10/2016	RT @IAmAFallist: I'm crying [crying faces] #FeesMustFall #UCTshutdown #BringBackOurCadres http://bit.ly/2xYbjOW - link to video Please refer to transcription of this video (Appendix 1)
	RT @Adamity: The demand by @witsfmf #FeesMustFall students that "power" must meet them in public shows arrogance or ignorance of student leadership. #FMF
11/10/2016	RT @NomzamoMbatha: To those who say "stop using apartheid as an excuse, it ended two decades ago..." ... Please see below???? #FeesMustFall
	RT @Adamity: #Poll2 #FeesMustFall #FMF #SJM Can South Africa afford #FreeEducation for the poor? @WitsSRC @WitsFMF @MYANC @Radio702 @SABC
12/10/2016	RT @Adamity: The #ANC @MYANC has betrayed the poor and principles of the #FreedomCharter e.g. #FeesMustFall #Poverty #Inequality
	RT @Karabo_Mokgoko: Can we make Adv Thuli Madonsela president already #FeesMustFall
13/10/2016	RT @LindokuhlXulu1: "The decolonized national anthem." #Wits #Fees2017 #FeesMustFall http://bit.ly/2xXIMsR - link to video Please refer to transcription of this video (Appendix 2)

Figure 18 - Week 2 - Most Retweeted Tweets

However, despite these similarities, there was a growing trend in Week 2 of alternative narratives about the movement, such as the apparent arrogance of the #FeesMustFall leadership. For example, @Adamity's tweet stating that the @witsfmf leadership asked that "power" meet them in public was a sign of arrogance or ignorance. Thus far, the topics within the community had been critical of university or state leadership, however conversations in Week 2 began to address the issues with student leadership.

Furthermore, an interesting theme to emerge was the subversion of cultural and racial constructs that exist within the South African environment. For example, some students

formed a ‘decolonized’¹¹ version of the national anthem, highlighting the idea that the existing one perpetuates the injustices of apartheid (please refer to Appendix 2 for a full transcript of the song). As seen from the most popular tweets on 12th October 2016, the community began to criticize the government for not being able to keep the promises of the Freedom Charter. From this, the politicization of the #FeesMustFall rhetoric came to the fore and was further highlighted by some users referring to their colleagues as “cadres”. There was also clear support for specific political parties, with the African National Congress (ANC) party being branded as a traitor and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party proving more popular. This was evident in both weeks, with many users retweeting @Julius_S_Malema’s posts, which blurred the idea that #FeesMustFall was a pure student movement without political affiliation.

Upon further inspection of the data, exposing the shortcomings of the ANC emerged as an effective way to garner support from the community, evident in the following tweets: “RT @Julius_S_Malema: We all know who sold our parents dreams in 1994 and promised free education, that should be a target. #FeesMustFall”, and “RT @Adamity: The #ANC @MYANC has betrayed the poor and principles of the #FreedomCharter e.g. #FeesMustFall #Poverty #Inequality”.

Thus the #FeesMustFall movement can be described as being a space of affinity, as mentioned, in Chapter 2, because these spaces are characterized by patterns that changed from day to day and across larger periods of time. When looking at the overall structure of the #FeesMustFall network, it is evident that it took on different shapes depending on the day and/or week. This was due to the fluid nature of members’ roles in the community. In some instances, some members played an active role as a thought leader or as a bridging tie to a more peripheral listener or sharer. This reiterates Gee and Hayes’ (2012) notion of roles created in affinity spaces and highlights them as reciprocal and heavily dependent on the actions of others.

¹¹ <https://t.co/86IClvftRd>

However, before looking at which members of the community garnered the most influence it was important to unpack the themes identified in the most popular tweets. Therefore, the next section will begin with a detailed analysis of the conversations within the community, using the principles of the Hauserian public sphere. Following this will be an overview view of themes which emerged from the data set, inclusive of the entire data set and not just the most popular tweets. This helped to highlight whether the conversations in the #FeesMustFall community could be considered a type of public sphere, as well as looking at whether the social activity which informed participation in the community could be classified as reconfigured civic engagement. Thereafter, the following section will look at the most prominent members within the community who influenced the spread of information.

4.4. #FeesMustFall community as a Public Sphere?

The Internet has ushered in new forms of civic engagement, like hashtag activism, with the likes of #BlackLivesMatter and now #FeesMustFall. These are examples of movements that address social issues and mobilize support on social media platforms, like Twitter, although, some researchers like Iosifidis (2011: 624) argue that Twitter's limited characters do not facilitate "substantive social and political dialogue". Therefore, it was imperative to look at this civic engagement through the lens of a public sphere, especially one that is suitable for online interactions to determine if Iosifidis (2011) was wrong. Thus, the principles of the rhetoric public sphere were used for this analysis.

One of the major motivations for this research was investigating whether the #FeesMustFall movement could be classified as an interpretative issue community. This study aimed to extend Mareider and Schwarzenegger's (2012) work of issue communities, to look at how members within an issue community make meaning of the subject they were discussing. Therefore, the criteria for this type of issue community was based on Hauser's (1999) theory of the rhetoric public sphere, which describes public opinion as emerging from democratic discourse (Hauser, 1999). The rhetoric public sphere is based on discourse rather than on class or category and its norms are derived from actual discursive practices (Bruns and Highfield, 2015; Hauser, 1999). Therefore, rather than consider a conversation that goes on across a population as a whole, the

rhetoric public sphere highlights many intermediate dialogues, namely various communities forming one community, which, as will be shown, was a defining feature of the #FeesMustFall network structure.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the norms of a rhetoric public sphere are: permeable boundaries, activity, contextualized language, believable appearance and tolerance and as highlighted in Chapter 3, used to analyse the dialogue that surrounded the #FeesMustFall community. This is because according to Hauser (1999) these five “rhetorical norms recommend themselves as criteria by which the defining conditions of any specific public sphere may be gauged and criticized” (Hauser, 1999: 76). However, before expanding on the individual code categories, an overview is presented in Figure 19.

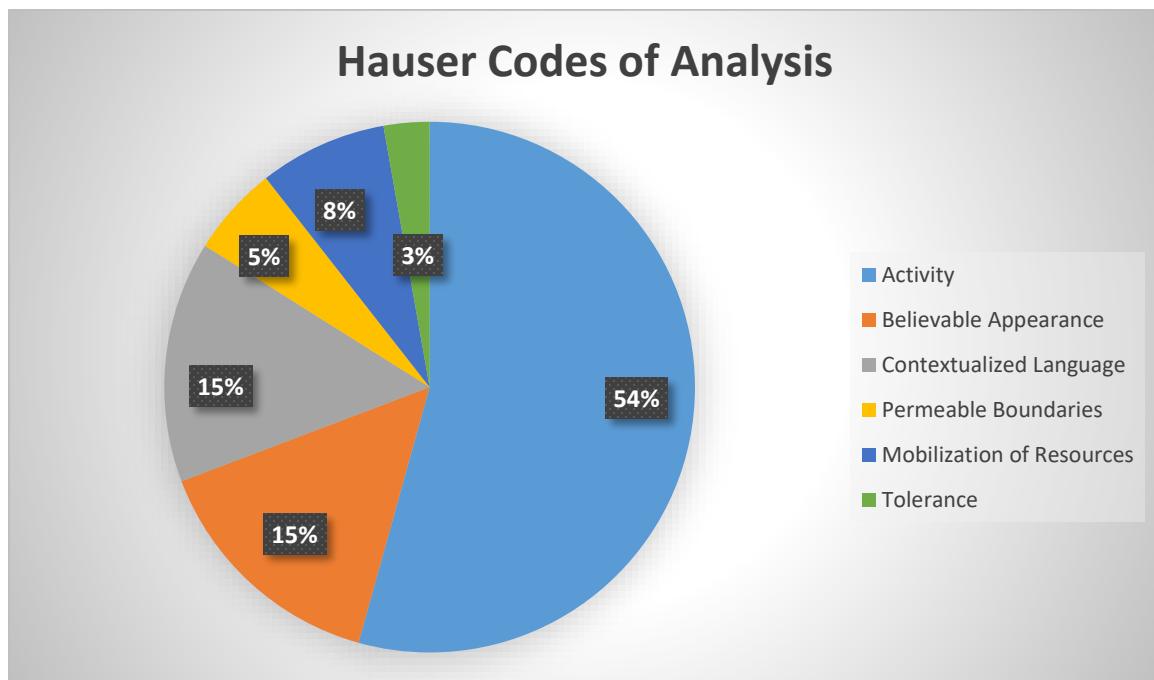


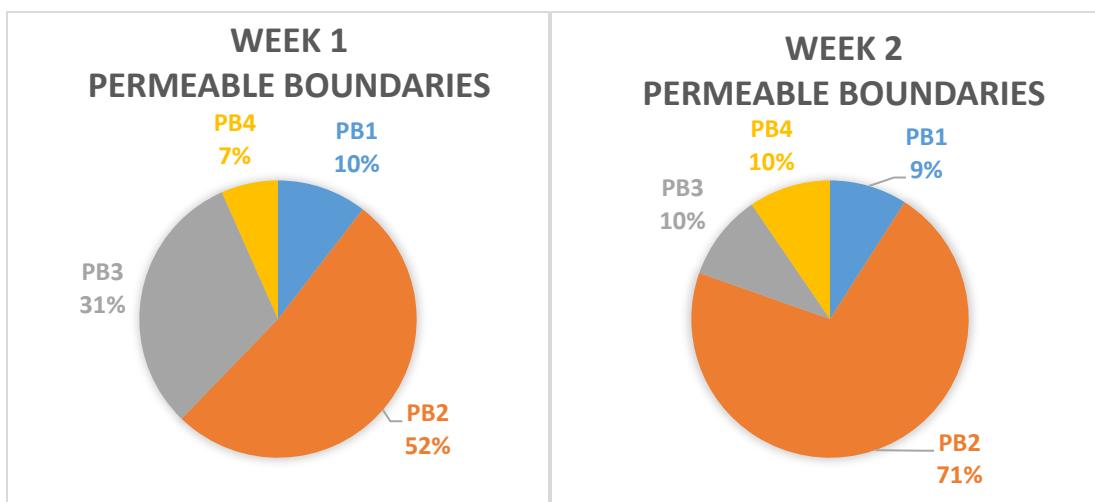
Figure 19

Looking at Figure 19 one might believe that the codes represented most often might be the most significant codes of the data set. However, they are a representation of the types of dialogue which surrounded the online community. Therefore each category should not be considered as more important than the other, rather they are an indication of the shifting contexts highlighted in the conversations. The discussion below focusses on

unpacking the categories in Figure 19 and looking at the various sub-codes which were explained in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

4.4.1. Permeable Boundaries

The code permeable boundaries was based on how varied membership was within the community. According to the data set, reference to social issues in both weeks was high resulting in 5% of the data set talking about other issues, in relation to #FeesMustFall. In order to contextualize the movement to suit potential members, the community could not deal with issues that were restricted to issues of fees alone. For example, the most popular sub code in Week 1 was PB2, which referred to general social issues. The tweets under this code mentioned issues like the weakening rand, the dismissal of then Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan and that then - Public Prosecutor, Thuli Madonsela was under siege from Jacob Zuma.



KEY	Permeable Boundaries Sub Codes
PB1	If the conversations were referring to other hashtag movements that were popular at the time.
PB2	If the conversations were referring to general societal issues
PB3	If the conversations showed evidence of opposition to the views of the #FeesMustFall community
PB4	If the conversations were receiving support and/or recognition from other groups or social movements in the Twittersphere

Figure 20 - Permeable Boundaries

Thus it can be argued that the potential members who were not aware of the community were alerted to the fees issue, as it had been placed as a matter of national concern, similar to other social issues in South Africa at the time. Additionally, as can be seen from Figure 20, the amount of constructive criticism (PB3) declined in Week 2 by a significant margin of 20%. However, upon inspection of the data this was not a decline in criticism but rather was a result of new hashtags that had been adopted to criticise the #FeesMustFall movement. Some of the hashtags included #TakeWitsBack, #OpenUCT and #WitsPoll, and pointed to keeping universities open for students who wanted to go to class.

Members often used other social issues to place the #FeesMustFall rhetoric into a context of social injustice as demonstrated by examples in Figure 21, where the one member likens the movement to the removal of then Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan. The members of the community then criticised the government for not paying attention to the issues that the country was facing. For example, the tweet in Figure 21 is a video of President Jacob Zuma dancing at a government function, although the country is “in a mess”.

Karabo Mokgoko @Karabo_Mokgoko

Follow

Our country is a mess!

#FeesMustFall
#PravinGordhan
#SABC
#SpyTapes
#WaterShedding
Rand weakening

Our President rn:

carien du plessis

0:00

4:44 AM - 12 Oct 2016

Figure 21

Although there was a degree of support in a majority of the tweets, they often criticized the tactics of the community to garner support as well as the violence which marred the movement. Another salient feature that was highlighted was that members were being judged for criticizing the leaders of #FeesMustFall. This pointed to discrepancies in what members considered to be the ‘ideal principles’ of #FeesMustFall and how leaders were not interpreting it correctly. For example, some members were in support of #FeesMustFall, but they argued that only those who ‘deserved’ it should benefit. This spurred debates within the community as to who the true beneficiaries should be. As can be seen in Figure 22 and some believed that the opportunities should only be given to those with higher than average marks and those that qualify to enter into university.

Figure 22

Yet the main argument from #FeesMustFall leaders, especially Mcebo Dlamini, was about the emancipation of the black students, because they usually did not have access to higher education due to their poor backgrounds. Therefore, based on this evidence, one can argue that #FeesMustFall network met the criteria for permeable boundaries.

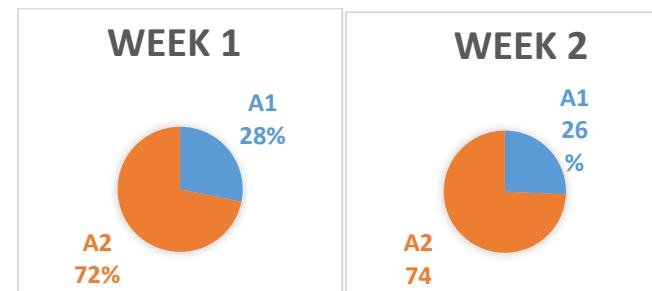
4.4.2. Activity

The next code, activity, is meant to measure the presence of multiple voices, and whether various opinions existed within the data set. This code specifically focussed on users that were using the hashtag to express their opinions about #FeesMustFall, especially in

cases where they were directly addressing an entity or individual. This category had the widest array of sub-codes and therefore yielded 56% of the data set in the overview chart (Figure 19). To avoid confusion, it was imperative to sub-categorise this code to understand the types of activity present.

4.4.2.1. *Sentiment*

Despite the criticism featured in the previous category, permeable boundaries, the majority of the tweets in the data set showed support for the movement. Both Week 1 and 2 scored above 70% for the A2 sub-code, as can be seen in Figure 23. Most of the support came from fellow students and political leaders like Julius Malema, Mbuyiseni Ndlozi and Dali Mpofu. Interestingly all the mentioned leaders are from the EFF political party, re-emphasizing the politicization of the movement.



KEY	Activity Sub-Codes: Sentiment
A1	If the conversations were explicitly against the #FeesMustFall movement
A2	If the conversations were explicitly supportive of the #FeesMustFall movement

Figure 23 – Activity Sub-Codes: Sentiment

Figure 24 shows the most popular tweet within the A2 category, which received 700+ retweets and 612 likes.



Figure 24

This tweet featured a video of Mcebo Dlamini¹² giving a speech (Appendix 1) which discussed the marginalization of the black population within South Africa, with which a lot of the members of the community identified. Thus, the support in this context is also linked to racial issues within South Africa and #FeesMustFall being recognized as a remedy to some of these issues. As can be seen within this excerpt from the speech one realises the underlying rhetoric of white people being the keepers of ‘power’.

“But then, what does whiteness have:

The land power

The economic power”

It can be argued that this speech also insinuates that whiteness hinders black excellence or success. Thus, in this specific context, #FeesMustFall is packaged as a way for the black population to receive their emancipation, both in terms of power and education.

¹² Dlamini was the former Wits SRC president. He vacated his presidential office on July 27 2015, after a series of legal battles and disciplinary charges filed against him.

This, like the popularity of EFF political leaders, further politicizes the movement to be an emancipation struggle for a select group. The idea of #FeesMustFall being an emancipation struggle is further emphasized by the use of the #BringBackOurCadres hashtag. It can be argued that using this rhetoric is then an attempt to place #FeesMustFall within the context of other emancipation struggles in South African like apartheid, however this will be discussed in more detail in the 'contextualised language' section.

Conversely the most popular tweet in the A1 category is featured in Figure 25. The member @ItsYourBoySas tweeted a thread of points directed to the #FeesMustFall community and leaders, highlighting that their frustrations were misplaced and were focusing their energy on the wrong aspects of the movement.

Your Boy Sas
@ItsYourBoySas

Follow

1 its not the universities that promised you free education but your beloved government #FeesMustFall

10:10 AM - 26 Sep 2016

277 Retweets 196 Likes

11 277 196

Figure 25

As can be seen in Figure 25, the blame should rather be on the government and not on the institutions. This is further highlighted in the comment section, where the member continues to expand on his thoughts, which numerous others then went and retweeted.

As can be seen in Figure 26, the member continues to highlight further the shortcomings of the government. This particular tweet proved interesting as it did not highlight the shortcomings of the movement per say but rather the tactics they were employing, which was a common feature throughout this sub-code. However, some of the tweets were explicitly against the movement, specifically student leadership.



Figure 26

Looking at Figure 27, we see some of the blame was placed squarely on the Wits student leadership, and community member @Adamity speculated that this was a form of sabotage. Therefore, A1 tweets were ‘against’ the leaders and tactics employed by the #FeesMustFall community and not necessarily the principles behind the movement.



Figure 27

4.4.2.2. Issues and Actors

The sub-codes under this category addressed specific entities and individuals' involvement with the movement. What is specifically noteworthy in this specific category is the fluctuating numbers of each social actor over the two weeks, as can be seen in Figure 28. The most popular category in Week 1 were tweets that were against government's actions as well those which discussed the effect of the movement on the economy. However, Week 2 produced a different result with the rhetoric moving from critique of the government to being against police violence. Analysis revealed that this was due to the proliferation of images within the community showing the extent police were going to control the crowds of protesters. Some students accused the police of using live ammunition and treating the student body like a target rather than something to be protected.

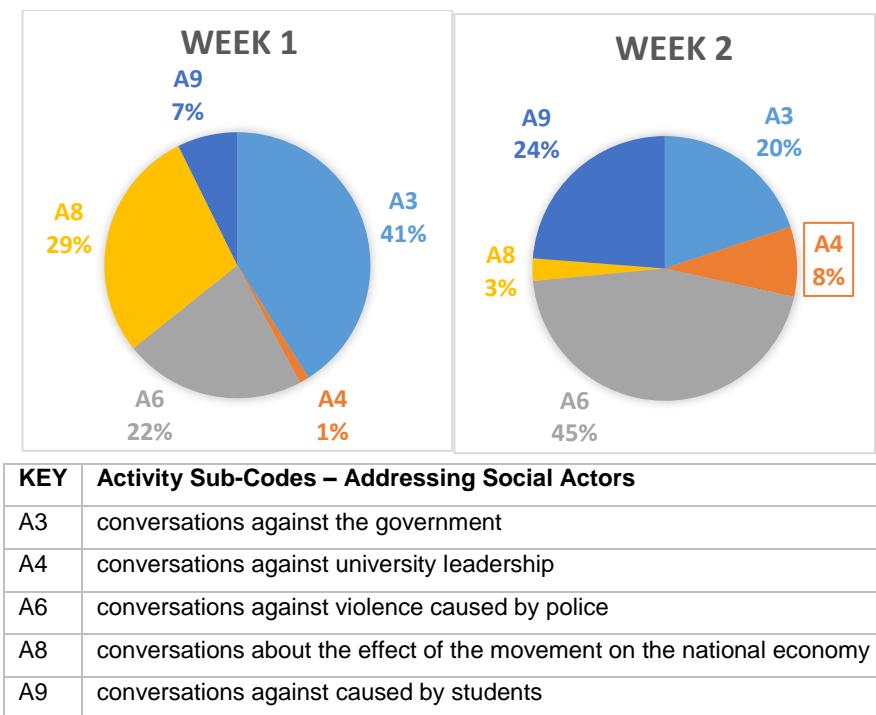


Figure 28 Activity Sub-Codes: Addressing Social Actors

However, Week 2 also saw a rise in tweets which focused on the destruction of university property and violence caused by students. The wording in tweets often point to how this destruction was damaging the ideals of the movement and highlighted how, as a result, the movement was losing support due to the use of violence by students.

Furthermore, it was interesting to see a tweet talking about how the corporate world was not willing to help universities and government realize the requests of the movement (Figure 29), which was one of the most retweeted tweets in this category. However, the comments which accompanied the tweet did not agree with this idea, and described it as something that corporate South Africa was not “responsible” for. This further highlighted the ambiguity of some of the arguments put forward by the community.

Thami Masemola
@ThamiMasemola

Follow

What is sad is how far back corporate SA has sat on this **#FeesMustFall** thing, despite being the biggest beneficiary of the graduate system.

3:35 AM - 19 Sep 2016

134 Retweets 74 Likes

Change The Vote @change_vote · 21 Sep 2016
Replies to @ThamiMasemola
Why should corporate SA fund your education, they are job creators not education policy makers. Who did you vote for?

1 134 74

Thami Masemola @ThamiMasemola · 21 Sep 2016
I generally don't discuss important matters with eggs.

1 134 74

Change The Vote @change_vote · 21 Sep 2016
.Free education wont buy you common sense ,now go wipe the egg off your face.Generally I dont dialog with apathetic minds

Glitter Quean @glitterquean · 19 Sep 2016
Replies to @ThamiMasemola
that's not their job. The biggest beneficiaries of the graduate system is actually gov.

Figure 29

This confusion was compounded further as tweets also pointed to police violence. As can be seen in Figure 30, the conversation surrounding this issue, was encapsulated with the hashtag: #PoliceBrutality. The majority of the tweets within this sub-code showed the extent of brutality that the police were using on the students, such as the use of live ammunition and intimidation.



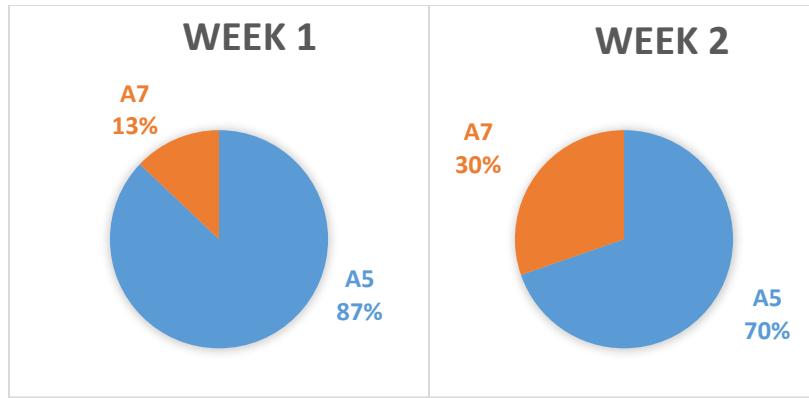
Figure 30

Furthermore, other violent events like the Marikana massacre¹³, were used by students to contextualize the events which took place on some campuses. For example, members like @WitsSRC posted the following tweet: "Habib has turned this campus into a war zone. More SAPS than students #HabibsMarikana #FeesMustFall". This was a result of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Adam Habib, allowing private security to patrol the campus to protect students who wanted to attend classes from protesting students. However, according to the #FeesMustFall community, the police on campus were endangering the students rather than protecting them.

4.4.2.3. Mentions

This category spoke to the mentions within tweets, which contained either tweets from the media or political actors. Tweets which came from mainstream media were mostly popular in both Week 1 and 2. These two categories were placed together to highlight how the community either promoted or refuted stories published by mainstream media by using quotations from social actors' official speeches or utterances to legitimize the movement.

¹³ The **Marikana** massacre, which took place on 16 August 2012, was the single most lethal use of force by South African police against civilians since 1960.



KEY	Activity Sub-Codes: Mentions
A7	If the conversations were in support of specific actors within the movement (e.g. politicians, students leaders, celebrities)
A5	If the conversations were generally neutral. This sub code was also used for tweets from media houses and/or journalists

Figure 31 – Activity Sub Codes: Mentions

Noteworthy though is the increase of the sub-code A7 in Week 2, as can be seen in Figure 31, and which could be the result of the rising criticism of the movement's ideals in the community.

Political actors that proved popular in this category were Thuli Madonsela and Julius Malema. Community members quoted them to express how important the movement was, as can be seen from this tweet, "RT @Julius_S_Malema: All students must join #FeesMustFall protest in all institutions of higher learning" and this quote, in Figure 32, from former public protector, Thuli Madonsela.

Azania (@Azania_)

"I invite you to concern yourself with #FeesMustFall. As long as there is injustice there will be no peace" Madonsela #bmfawards2016

1:10 PM - 7 Oct 2016

306 Retweets 245 Likes

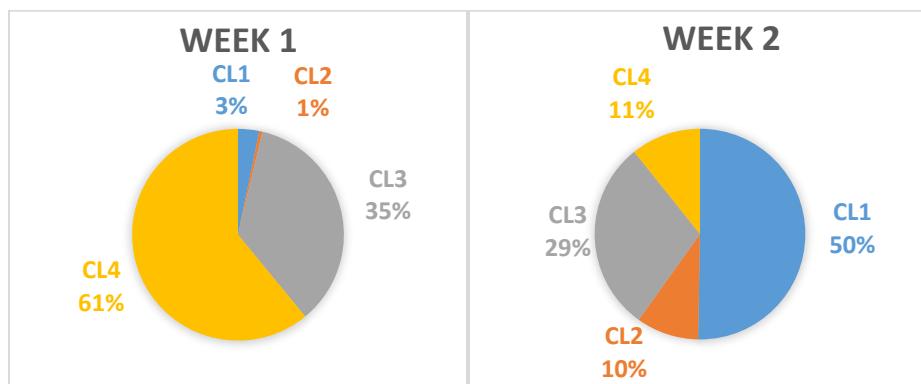
Figure 32

Framing the movement according to the actions or reputation of a social actor proved to be an interesting tactic to shape the rhetoric. For example, both actors are known for

being critical of the government in South Africa. Thus they would serve as mascots of sorts for the movement. Additionally images of vocal and influential actors, like Thuli Madonsela and Julius Malema, helped to improve the image of the movement. Their support assisted in reframing the movement from one which showed negative images of “selfish” student leaders and “violent” protests on campus to a legitimate social cause.

4.4.3. Contextualized Language

While on the subject of tactics the code contextualized language highlighted how members used specialized techniques to convey some of their messages. The #FeesMustFall community used images to support some of their tweets and was especially evident in Week 1. The majority of tweets in this sub-set contained an image, further emphasizing the statistics of Figure 33, which show sub-code CL4 as the most popular sub-code in Week 1. Perusal of data revealed members used images as forms of anchoring tweet content and providing ‘evidence’ for certain events.



KEY	Contextualized Language
CL1	If the conversations were humorous
CL2	If the conversations contained colloquial language
CL3	If the conversations referred to aspects of popular culture (From South Africa and the world)
CL4	If the conversations contained images likely to cause an emotional reaction

Figure 33 – Contextualized Language

Figure 34 is an example of how images were used to anchor tweet content. The tweet reads: “Not all heroes wear capes” and features an image of a white male holding up a sign that reads: “Keep Wits Open! It is my democratic right to an education too! Stop the

violence!!!” It then also features a black female who is reading the sign, who then proceeds to punch through it, showing a defiance to the statement.



Figure 34

With the tweet content providing a caption to the image this act has been described as an example of heroism, as opposed to an act of violence despite showing the woman throwing a punch. The second tweet (Figure 35) features a student who appears to be strangled by a rope with word “FEES” on it, providing further anchorage to the tweet which reads “At Wits right now. Fees strangling student”.



Figure 35

Thus images proved popular as a way for the community to express their thoughts and feelings about the movement. Analysis also showed that tweets with images were most likely to be retweeted than those without images. This, especially in relation to the #FeesMustFall community, provided a way to contextualise their movement with images borne from the movement.



Figure 36

Images were also used as a tool to reframe some of the preconceptions of the movement, which some members felt was a misrepresentation of their objective. For example, Figure 36 features an image of a young black man, presumably a student, holding a flower to a policeman with his hand on his heart – presumably as a peace offering. This contrasts with the rhetoric of protesting students as thugs and hooligans. Figure 37 also features a tweet with an image of a bruised student, showing the aftermath of an encounter with the police.

Otherwise?*
@PearlPillay

A student who had a stun grenade explode
on her. Who are the real thugs here?
#Fees2017 #FeesMustFall #Wits

Two photographs side-by-side. The left photo shows a person with a white bandage covering their face, with a small tear in the bandage over the nose area. The right photo is a close-up of a person's ear and cheek, showing significant bruising and swelling.

Figure 37

The caption in this tweet includes the words “Who are the *real* thugs here” and like the previous tweet also questioned the idea that students were thugs and hooligans.

Furthermore, a consistent sub-code within the category was CL3 which included tweets that referred to popular culture. Members used elements of popular culture to set some of the tweets in a ‘language’ that the members could understand. Figure 38 provides an example of this, with members using popular song titles to make their content quickly recognizable. In referencing #FeesMustFall @zuryism references pop star Akon’s popular single ‘Nobody wanna see us together’. The original song talks of a forbidden love and how those around him don’t want to see him and the girl he loves together. The ‘protest song’ implies that South African society doesn’t want to see the universities unite under the #FeesMustFall banner. This is implied by the image accompanying the tweet which shows a collage of university logos as a background to #FeesMustFall.



Figure 38

Incidentally, a considerable number of the tweets in the CL3 category referenced popular songs. @MikeyMashila referenced Nicki Minaj’s song “I Lied” in his tweet “He lied, He lied, He lied. @DrBladeNzimande still remember this? #Wits #FeesMustFall #FreeEducationNow #Fees2017”. In this instance he is referring to a video of former Minister Blade Nzimande talking about the possibility of free education in a parliamentary meeting in the 1990’s. This highlighted ‘whistleblowing’ tactics employed by the #FeesMustFall community.

Interestingly though, in Week 2 there is a sharp decrease in the use of images dropping from 61% to 11%. The dominant sub-code for Week 2, therefore, was CL1, which focused on tweets with elements of sarcasm and humour.

Nomsa Maseko @nomsa_maseko Follow
#FeesMustFall Oh dear! Cop spotted his relative in the crowd of protestors who were throwing stones. "Kanti lentwana yenza lamasimba nayo"
4:38 AM - 11 Oct 2016 from Johannesburg, South Africa
105 Retweets 53 Likes

Samuel L Maumela @smaumela · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @nomsa_maseko
I wonder if that ntswana will also get a rubber bullet..

Boitumelo 🇿🇼 @MissFeliciam · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @nomsa_maseko
😂😂😂 i am not laughing

Luthando Ndende @BlaxNdende · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @nomsa_maseko
@AndiMakinana lol...hahaha In war there's no family!

Luzuko @ZukoFlavour · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @nomsa_maseko
LOL

Figure 39

As can be seen in Figure 39, the tweets refer to the movement in a humorous manner and analysis of comments following these tweets shows that the community found the content as humorous. One of the tweets refers to a policeman finding a relative taking part in protests. His remark “Kanti lentwana yenza lamasimba nayo”, loosely translated means “So this kid does this type of shit too”. Some of the members then commented with remarks like “in war there is no family” and others barely containing their laughter saying, “I am not laughing”.

Figure 40 features a tweet from @_KaraboPhore who references the South African soccer team, Bafana Bafana, saying that the money they are receiving should rather be

given to #FeesMustFall. Again, comments found the tweet to be humorous, and some even advocating for @_KaraboPhore to be president for his suggestion.

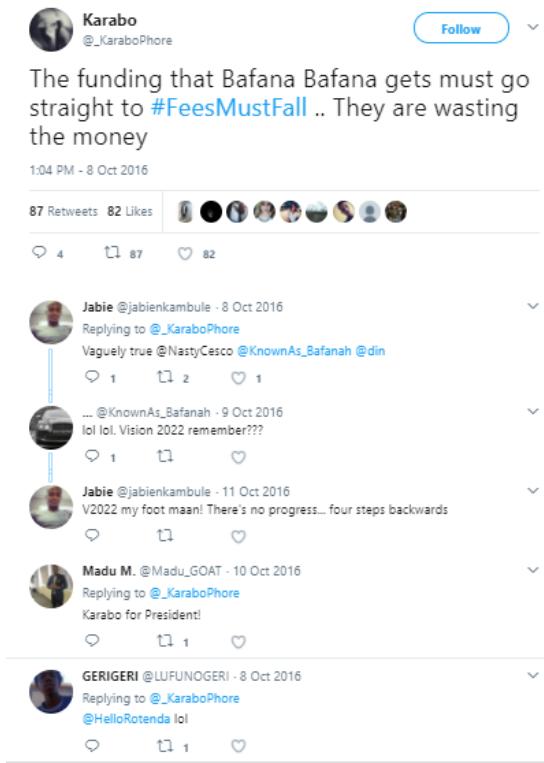


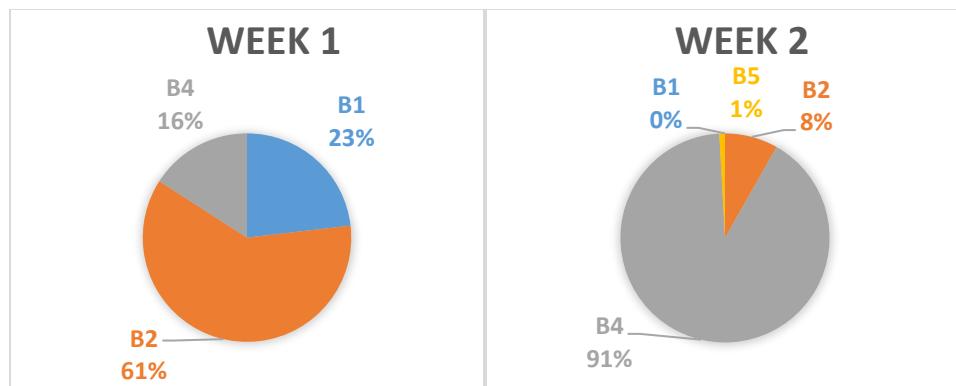
Figure 40

The last two codes, believable and tolerance were largely based on the results of the previous codes because they speak more to the general underlying messages which were identified in tweets. The previous categories concentrated more on the specific tactics and tools employed by the community to drive the campaign, whereas the following codes uncover what these tactics mean about the community as a whole, especially because a public sphere needs to have a high degree of believability and tolerance. Thus, the following sections delve deeper into these individual codes and unpack the sub- categories which guided analysis.

4.4.4. *Believable*

The code, believable, describes whether the movement was recognized by mainstream media, political or social actors and other governing authorities of the country. This sub-code resonates with activity sub-codes A7 and A5 which classified tweets that had

received mention from media and influential actors. However, the B sub-codes specifically focused on how the #FeesMustFall topic was discussed by these actors at a general level. It was also important to have a sub code referencing any mention of historical and political movements which shaped South Africa, like apartheid (B4). The reasoning for these sub-codes was to explicitly point to how members tried to legitimize the movement by packaging it according to other social movements in South Africa. They also helped answer questions like whether #FeesMustFall was important for South African society or was it simply an example of a trending campaign on social media.



KEY	Believable
B1	If conversations were mentioned by mass media
B2	If conversations were mentioned by political and social actors
B3	If conversations were calling attention to #FeesMustFall and treating it like an individual
B4	If conversations referred to the political or social history of South Africa and Africa in general.

Figure 41

Looking at Figure 41, in Week 1 the majority of tweets were classified into the B2 group. This was because of the number of accounts which were created to push the agenda of the #FeesMustFall movement. However, it was interesting to find that many were alternative accounts created to discount some of the conversations surrounding the #FeesMustFall movement.

Noteworthy from this category was the sharp increase between Week 1 and 2 in referencing apartheid and definitive moments of South African history. For example, the

tweet in Figure 42 drew comparisons between images from Wits University and the Sharpeville Massacre¹⁴.



Figure 42

Using South African history appeared to help fuel a discourse that was emotionally charged. The discourse of unequal rights and unjust violence defined the Sharpeville Massacre and this was transferred to the student protests by drawing comparison between the two events. The caption that followed these two images stated: "Whilst these pics are decades apart, it can't be that in 2016 this is ok!", thus implying that both movements suffered intimidation by police dogs and other tactics typically used in criminal operations. Although there are no students in the more recent picture, it is implied that the same tactics were used on them.

Looking at the tweet in Figure 43 there was also a general sentiment that students were betrayed by the ANC, who had promised free education before and now appeared against the ideals of #FeesMustFall. For instance, the wording in the tweet says "So many lies, for so many years. 2014, 2012, 1994. THIS ENDS NOW." The political significance of

¹⁴ The Sharpeville massacre was an event which occurred on 21 March 1960, at the police station in the South African township of Sharpeville in Transvaal (today part of Gauteng). After a day of demonstrations against pass laws, a crowd of about 5,000 to 7,000 protesters went to the police station

those years is important with 1994 representing the transition from the apartheid system to majority rule and the ANC coming to power for the first time. 2014 represents the last general election held in South Africa, which the ANC also won.



Figure 43

Lastly, 2012 represents the Marikana incident which occurred in August 2012. Other tweets reiterated the same sentiment, such as @TokeloPeter's tweet who said "The behaviour of @saps in #feesmustfall suggest that they have learnt nothing from the tragedy that was Marikana," and @WitsSRC's tweet saying "Habib has turned this campus into a war zone. More SAPS than students #HabibsMarikana #FeesMustFall". By referencing past injustices and movements which shaped the South African social landscape allowed the #FeesMustFall movement to be framed as another significant social event in the country.

4.4.5. Tolerance

The final code from Hauser's conception of a rhetoric public sphere was tolerance which spoke to the degree to which participants were willing to allow opposing behaviour. Although the country is trying to move away from racist discourse in the post-apartheid South Africa, there was evidence throughout of both subtle and overt racial intolerance in tweets

This resonated with the conditions of the permeable boundaries category as it reiterates the conditions of the PB3 sub code, which looked at whether the community was accommodating to opposing views. Although there was evidence of permeable boundaries in the community, the discourse on racial discrimination was an underlying theme in a considerable number of tweets. Therefore, the sub code T1, which was originally part of the permeable boundaries group was separated to fall under the 'Tolerance' code. Thus Figure 44 features the sub-code used as a governing rule:

KEY	Tolerance
T1	If the conversations contained racial discrimination

Figure 44

Approximately 3% of both weeks' tweets and retweets contain overt racist remarks. This does not include the subtle racial discourse which began to emerge in Week 2. Below, in Figure 45 and 46, are tweets that informed this code.

That white boy look too comfortable. Sies.
This photo captures so much 😢
#UCTshutdown #FeesMustFall



12:16 AM - 5 Oct 2016

119 Retweets 47 Likes

SuperHuman. @tkharbai · 5 Oct 2016
Replying to @yofromafrika
why is this about race now? #FeesMustFall will benefit all races

YVZ @yofromafrika · 5 Oct 2016
SA is founded upon racial friction. But nevertheless, UCT made it about race - it is very clearly only protecting the privileged.

SuperHuman. @tkharbai · 5 Oct 2016
facebook.com/unifiedsouthafrica... @yofromafrika

Figure 45



Figure 46

The two tweets (Figure 44 and 45) above point to some of the themes that emerged from this data set, namely ‘white privilege’ and that Wits leadership was pushing a racist agenda. Furthermore, it highlighted the creation of complementary hashtags to #FeesMustFall like #TakeWitsBack. Tweets like these caused divisions within the community because there were now different views on the true ideals of the movement.

For example, in Figure 47 a poll was created asking the community how they felt about #TakeWitsBack and the majority felt it was representative of white privilege, despite many #TakeWitsBack users claiming that their agenda was to reopen universities for educational purposes and not to undermine #FeesMustFall.

 Michael Cost
@MickyCost

Follow ▾

What are your views on #TakeWitsBack? RT for a bigger result #feesmustfall #wits #witsuniversity #fees #fees2017 #adamhabib #openwits

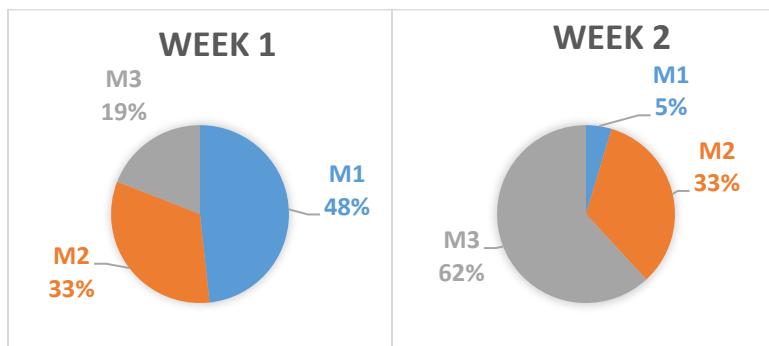
51% It's white privilege
 9% They are correct
 25% It's about educ. not race
 15% Poor vs Rich

279 votes • Final results

Figure 47

4.4.6. Mobilization of Resources

A code which emerged from the data set was mobilization of resources, which highlighted how students, particularly those who were intimately involved in the protest, were using social media to deliberately rally attention to certain aspects of the movement. These have been categorized in Figure 48 below.



KEY	Mobilization of Resources
M1	If the conversations mentioned 'calls for support' for the movement
M2	If the conversations were deliberately asking for a topic or issue to trend on Twitter
M3	If the conversations were informing people of meetings

Figure 48

One of the benefits of new media technologies is its ability to address a large number of people with little effort or cost. The data set comprised of tweets which featured deliberate calls to action, the locations of meetings and where to access supplies. This was an

example of how movement leaders were able to manipulate the system to ensure certain aspects of the movement kept trending in the Twittersphere.

In the first week, student leaders pushed for more support from members to spread information about meeting places, and which spaces were going to be occupied. In this context, occupation of spaces was a protesting tactic that student leaders used to gain attention of academic staff, the media and government bodies. Images of students in university halls (as seen in Figure 49) spread across the network, attracting the attention of journalists and media agencies. The tweet also refers to the ground being fertile, which is indicative of both the number of students birthing the cause and how the movement will grow.



Figure 49

Focus then changed in Week 2 from rallying support, to organising meetings and public opinion polls to test public sentiment, as can be seen in Figure 50. The tweet featured here is asking students what should happen at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) on Monday, following calls from some of the students for the university to re-open. Interestingly, the results of the poll show the majority of the students wanted the “academic program to resume”, which would explain why the SRC at UJ pulled out of the movement.

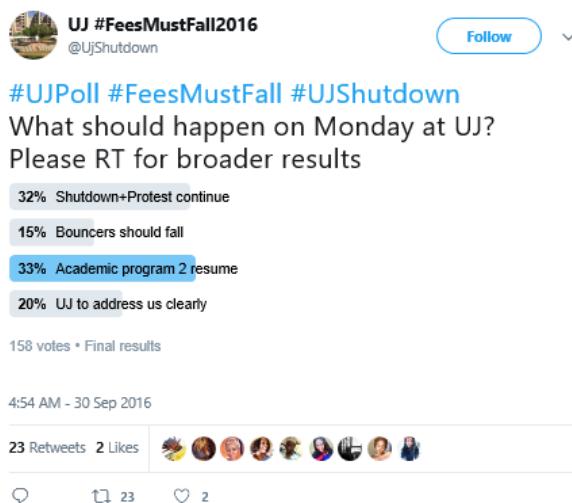


Figure 50

Similarly, other tweets informed members of what was happening on the ground in real time. One example of this occurred when a journalist (@kaveels) based in KwaZulu Natal faced legal complications after entering university property, as can be seen in Figure 51.



Figure 51

His arrest and also the arrest of other students, sparked fierce debates within the community questioning why the protesters were being treated like criminals, despite being peaceful. Other users were happy that some protesters had been arrested as they felt that they had overstepped the mark of peaceful protest.

4.5. Themes

Now that each category of the Hauserian public sphere has been discussed, a detailed thematic analysis of tweets using the principles of a rhetoric public sphere is considered. It was found that the main topics which featured in the most popular tweets of the network were related to race, critique of the leadership, politics, division among universities and violence.

4.5.1. Race

The element of race was a major topic in the data set, especially after Mcebo Dlamini's speech on black people's struggle for power was circulated. Rhetoric surrounding race during this period seemed to advocate that black students should be the main beneficiaries of the movement as they are the ones who are marginalized most often in South African society. However, students of all races had been protesting at universities across the country until it ended in a stalemate with university management. The academic year was paused to deal with the demands of the movement and the looming deadlines of year end assignments and exams resulted in a decrease in protest activity.

Sentiment around the issue was that some students (mostly wealthier) wanted the academic year to resume and that protest activity was disturbing their progress. Referring to Figure 52, students who were 'against' the #FeesMustFall movement were profiled as being white and wealthy. As can be seen in the tweet, the title for the University of Witwatersrand has been reconfigured to read: 'University of Whites with Rands'. Findings reveal that users who were in support of the opening of the universities adopted the #TakeWitsBack hashtag. As a result the rhetoric became racialized with some generalising users who adopted the #TakeWitsBack hashtag as white and those who used the #FeesMustFall hashtag as black. Despite some users like @ThatDarnKitteh explaining that #TakeWitsBack was not against the principles of #FeesMustFall, rather it is against the academic year being paused because of protests. However upon further inspection of the data, many black students advocated for the re-opening of universities. For example, @BlackKnightRSA tweeted "As a black student, I support #TakeWitsBack ... #FeesMustFall is racist, selfish and denying others of their rights". Consequently, tweets began to highlight alternative narratives relating to #FeesMustFall.

 **Cinzia Pompa**
 @ThatDarnKiteh [Follow](#) ▾
 #TakeWitsBack is not inherently against
 #FreeEducation or against #FeesMustFall .
 It's against #witshutdown .
 1:40 AM - 5 Oct 2016
 1 1 1

 **Mashomane a Dipheta** @twieterazzi · 5 Oct 2016
 Replying to @ThatDarnKiteh
 @Moketa_ @DaveMsibi We have to understand this in context.


Figure 52

This is further highlighted in the Figure 53, where @Alfred_StatesX recognizes that there are racial inequalities, however he criticizes the movement for not using tactics which will benefit generations to come.

 **Alfred States**
 @Alfred_StatesX [Follow](#) ▾
 #TakeWitsBack #Wits #FeesMustFall
 #Fees2017 #FeesForum Let's just be honest
 about this....
**It is true to say that:
 "Whites don't understand Black Pain", But it is ALSO true to say
 that: "Whites don't understand
 how burning Universities down
 and destroying the Educational
 Opportunities of yet ANOTHER
 Generation will reduce that
 Black Pain either".**
 3:25 AM - 5 Oct 2016
 39 Retweets 46 Likes

5
39
46

 **ichigo** @philittixy · 5 Oct 2016
 Replying to @Alfred_StatesX
 can i try to make you understand?

Figure 53

Arguing that “burning universities down” was not the answer to alleviate “black pain”. This highlights the rhetoric of race further, as the experiences of different racial groups were now being used to frame the movement, even though the movement was theoretically for all students.

4.5.2. *Critique of Leadership*

Another theme which emerged was criticism of leadership, including university management, government and student leadership. However, the most criticized was the inaction of government to implement relevant policies to deal with the rising costs of university education. The majority of tweets pointed to how the ruling government party, the African National Congress (ANC) was failing to redress the inequalities that exist in South Africa. For example, a prominent user within the network, @Adamity, started polls on his timeline, asking the #FeesMustFall community whether they felt the ANC was betraying the poor. As can be seen from Figure 54, the majority of the users agreed with this sentiment.



Figure 54

Opposing parties, like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) also took aim to discredit the government for failing to address inequality. Due to their increased support of the movement, an element of political campaigning could be identified, however subtle. As can be seen in Figure 55, the EFF openly supported the movement and assisted student leadership with some of their concerns. Looking at the tweets in Figure 54 and 55 we see

the ANC's position of power being questioned and the EFF's standing with the student body rising in popularity.

The figure displays two tweets from the Twitter account @effjoburg. The first tweet, posted at 1:05 AM on September 29, 2016, reads: "Our motion was adopted by council, JMPD must withdraw from all Campuses in Johannesburg! #FreeEducationNow #FeesMustFall". It includes a link to a statement document and ends with a call for justice. The second tweet, posted at 3:05 PM on September 30, 2016, reads: "We endorse #NDZ as the People's Hope" and "Congratulations to #EFF for the adoption of this resolution to allow peaceful student protests." It is a reply to @Adamity.

Figure 55

This is further highlighted by some of the tweets which were distributed within the network. For example, @sramphaul tweeted “~ 1) This is no longer about #FeesMustFall This is a battle between political parties @EFFSouthAfrica vs @MYANC & youth are in between...” and “2) ...fighting an agenda unknowingly! @EFFSouthAfrica @MYANC #FeesMustFall. The youth are being used, I wish the educated ones can see that!” (sic).

4.5.3. Political History

Although #FeesMustFall was first centred on the economic issue of rising fees, it also embodied the rhetoric of politics, especially political history. The movement was regularly characterized as reflecting the injustices of the apartheid era. Imagery of apartheid were regularly shown in comparison to images taken of the protest action in the universities.



Figure 56

Furthermore, political actors like Dali Mpofu, the EFF National Chairperson, not only supported the movement, but also framed it within the political history of South Africa, as can be seen in Figure 56, thereby legitimizing the movement, and allowing students to think of themselves as comrades in ‘war’. This is evident in some of the tweets which were remnant of struggle warfare, with members referring to each other as ‘cadres’ or ‘comrades’. For example, a trending hashtag within the community was #BringBackOurCadres, which was instrumental in outlining the arrests of students from various campuses. Some tweets alerted the community to those that had been arrested and were in need of legal assistance. Other tweets highlighted the arrests of notable leaders of the movement like Mcebo Dlamini and Catherine Busisiwe Seabe which further fuelled the ‘white privilege’ topic, as no white students were arrested despite also protesting.

4.5.4. Violence

Violence was a major topic discussed in the community and one which reflected a variety of different viewpoints. Some conversed about the destruction of university property by protesting students while others insisted that destruction was not caused by students, but other counter-revolutionary protestors bent on sullying the reputation of the movement. For example, @RediTlhabi tweeted “Let it be recorded that it was not #FeesMustFall that started fire. It was youths wearing Sasco and ANC tshirts”. This was following accusations that members of the community had been setting buildings on fire during protests in Braamfontein.

Other members spoke about how violent the police were towards students. Due to the proliferation of protests across institutions, university management opted to involve private security companies and the South African Police Service (SAPS). Rhetoric surrounding this issue pointed to the intimidating act of ‘militarizing’ learning institutions and the dangers this posed. Police brutality began to dominate the network shortly after the shooting of Father Graham Pugin¹⁵ was shot with rubber bullets. As can be seen in Figure 38, reports of the incident claim Father Pugin was shot by the police despite being unarmed. However, from the comments in Figure 57, other users within the network describe him as not being as ‘innocent’ as he had been portrayed.

Govan Whittles
@van1go

Father Pugin was shot by SAPS at close range while he stood with his hands up in front of the Holy Trinity Church. #FeesMustFall

6:44 AM - 10 Oct 2016

49 Retweets

Colin Drew @ColinDrewza · 10 Oct 2016
Replies to @van1go
@RanjeniM
And when you want them to shoot. This is deplorable.

Joey Muller @joeymul06 · 10 Oct 2016
Replies to @van1go
@RomanCabanac Yeah right! We all saw earlier photos where he and another priest were leading the mob!

Figure 57

Another group of members spoke about how white students were not subjected to violence in the same way that non-white students were. For example, @LindaMasilela2 tweeted “I hope the public saw for themselves how violent the system is to the black body. #FeesMustFall”, after reports of police opening fire on a group of students circulated in the community. Furthermore, some members claimed that white protestors were exempt from arrest and yet the ‘black’ protestors were being arrested and charged. As tweeted

15 Father Graham Pugin was a pastor at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, located next to Wits University. He allegedly provided a safe haven for protesting students in his church.

by @kaveels “One student tells me its (sic) bad because police aren't arresting Indian students only African students @News24 #FeesMustFall”.

4.5.5. Over-representation of Wits

Upon perusal of the data set it was interesting to note a considerable number of the tweets consisted of information tagging the University of Witswatersrand (Wits) and the University of Cape Town (UCT). As can be seen in Figure 58, in both week 1 and 2, UCT and Wits are mentioned in over 70% of content regarding universities even though #FeesMustFall was founded as a national student movement.

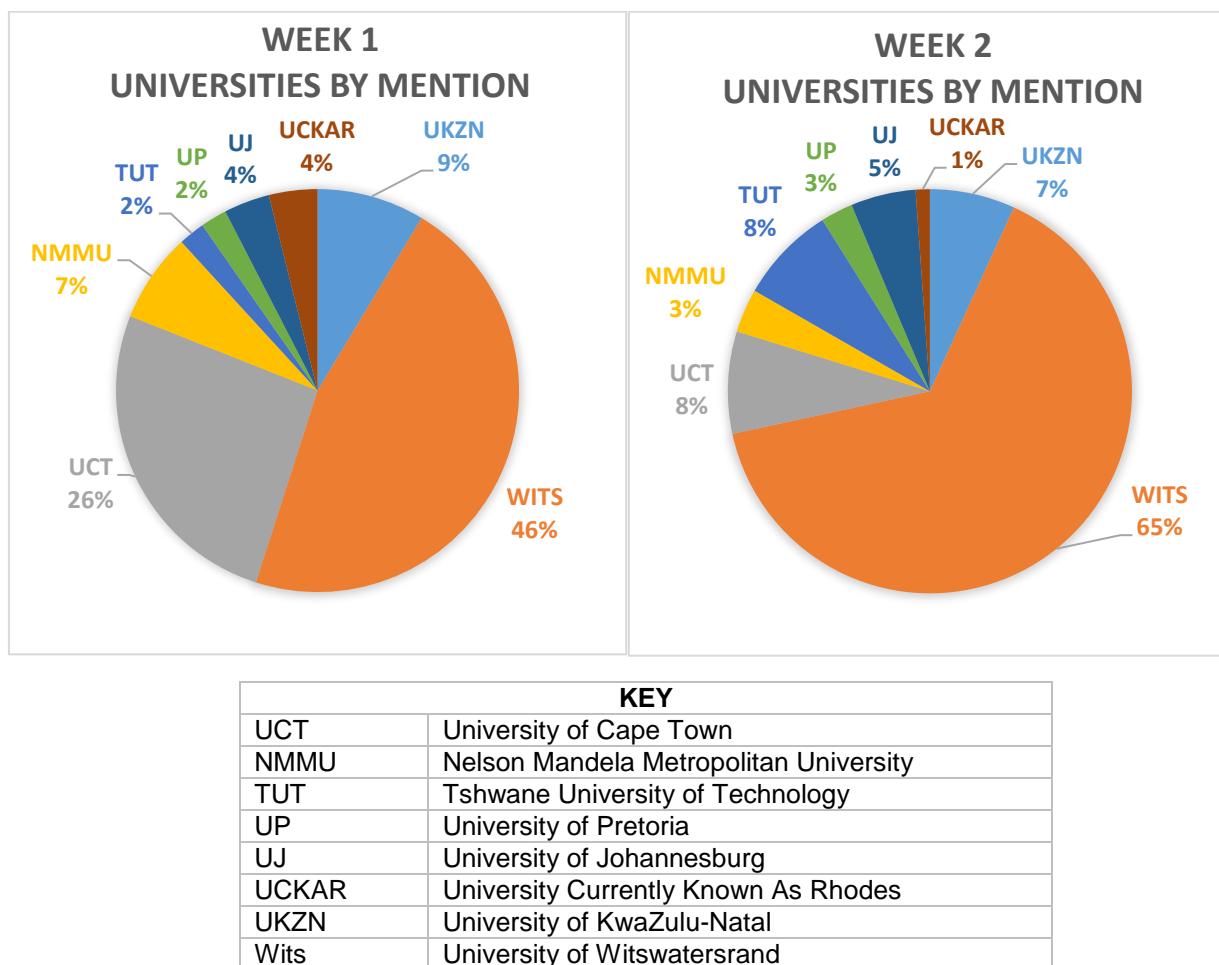


Figure 58 - Universities' Representation in the data set¹⁶

¹⁶ Figure represents 50% of Week 1 and 36% of Week 2's tweet content.

Despite a decrease in mentions for UCT, in Week 2, Wits continued to gain ground within the network, as well as Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and University of Johannesburg (UJ) which are both situated in close proximity to Wits. This highlighted a high representation of certain universities over others and as a result, users within the network asked why this was the case because most institutions were protesting. Most concluded that it was because Wits is an elite institution in comparison to other universities. As can be seen from Figure 59, users complained about certain issues, like the #WitsPoll taking preference over students getting arrested.



Figure 59

Furthermore, as can be seen in Figure 60, @kaveels contextualized this sentiment by pointing out how certain universities, like Wits, were given preference because of their political history, further reiterating the idea of white privilege.



Figure 60

It is also important to note that the accounts highlighted in Figure 59 and 60 are from users from KwaZulu-Natal who would have been aware of the arrests that were being under-represented. Further inspection of the data found that there were more journalists covering news in Cape Town and Johannesburg which also contributed to the over-representation of UCT and Wits.

Although the above discussion has been separated according to prominent themes within the data set, the majority of tweets did not fall neatly into these categories. In fact most were hybrids that fell into more than category. However, categorising tweets in this manner helped to provide an overview of the major thematic concerns spoken about in the community.

With topics fluctuating on a daily basis it was important to highlight different influencers and user behaviour, before combining results to consider the most important influencers for each week and the overall network. The tables in Appendix 3 have been separated according to the most influential nodes and the nodes' behaviours during the weeks which caused the shift in rhetoric and influence.

4.6. Centrality Statistics

This section of analysis was informed by the centrality measures within Gephi which helped to understand the relationships between members in the community. These are namely, betweenness centrality, eigenvector centrality and degree centrality. The latter has been split into two further categories which are authority, representing in-degree

connections and hubs which represent out-degree connections. By using these tools the researcher was able to discover which communication traits of specific members ended up influencing the flow of information in the network. It is important to note that the following section deals with those members who emerged as being the most influential in the community as a whole, however, weekly and daily influencers can be noted in Appendix 3.

4.6.1. Betweenness Centrality

Firstly, the betweenness centrality helped to identify those users who were connected to other users located in remote regions of a network (Chevren, 2013). One of the main objectives of this study was looking at the techniques members employed in their community to share information. This centrality statistic proved useful as it assisted with identifying members who were central in linking information to other users who were unaware of information surrounding #FeesMustFall. Members with a high betweenness centrality were classified as the bridges of the network. Although these members might have low influence when measured against other centrality measures, the network would not be able to function effectively without them. This is because they help reduce distances between members in the network and act as bridges between different sub-communities within the overall community.

Figure 61 shows members of the community that had the highest betweenness centrality. As can be seen from the graphic, @dailyvox and @jabu_johnson were the two users that various sub-communities linked to in order to connect with other users.

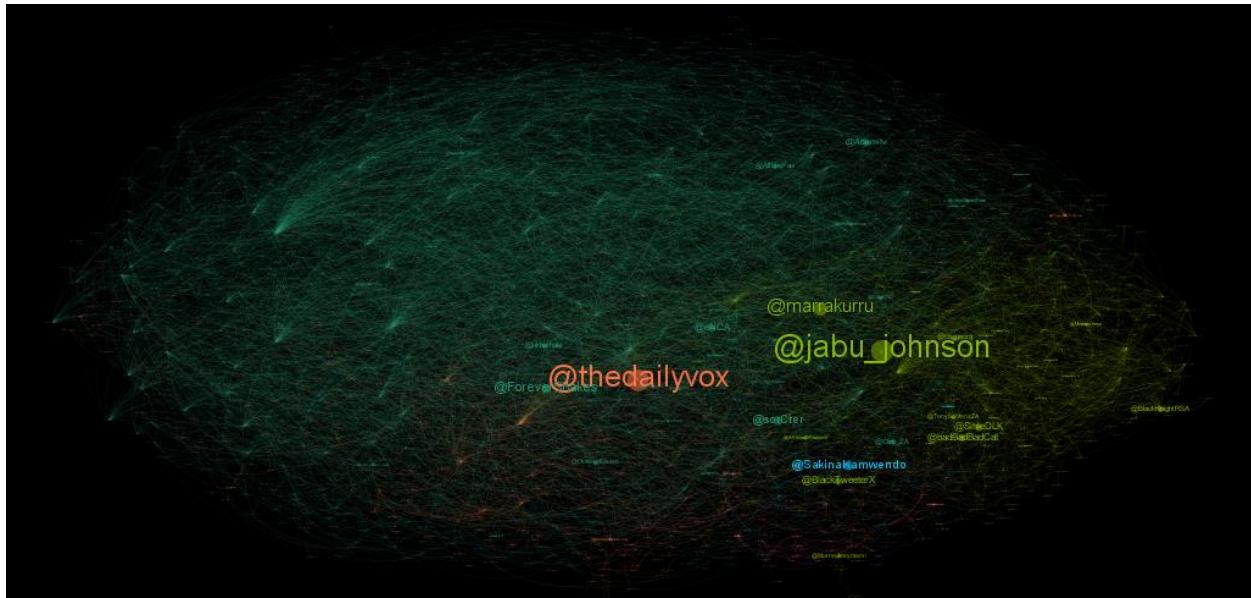


Figure 61

Furthermore, @thedailyvox was the primary bridging tie of the network, scoring a much higher statistic than @jabu_johnson. Upon perusal of the tweets within this data set, it helped explain why there were more representations of the Wits activities, than of other universities.

The @dailyvox handle is the account for a student publication that was following the movement's actions from some universities around the country. It seemed to provide news that was generally not covered by the mainstream press, like insight of #FeesMustFall from the perspective parents. What was interesting about this particular account is that statistically it was identified as a bridging node rather than an information hub. This occurred because it tended to offer curated stories from other accounts – like students, news accounts or prominent members of society – thus highlighting the stitching technology of Twitter and how it enables linking remote nodes in a network by a shared story.

Unlike @dailyvox, which acted more like a curator, @jabu_johnson provided personal opinion which encouraged debate among members. He often questioned the posts from the @WitsSRC account, as well as the actions and intentions of the movement leaders like Mcebo Dlamini. Primarily though, he spoke about the political rhetoric that the

movement was beginning to adopt, especially in relation to increased support provided by the EFF.

Simamkele Maqakaza @S_Maqakaza · 30 Sep 2016
The #feesmustfall movement is one of the most noble students struggles that exemplify the most courageous and brave spirits in our country.
1 reply 1 retweet 1 like

Dr. Johnson @jabu_johnson · 30 Sep 2016
Personally I see them as a bunch of Everything For Free (EFF) halfwits.
#FeesMustFall
1 reply 1 retweet 1 like

Simamkele Maqakaza @S_Maqakaza · 30 Sep 2016
Replies to @jabu_johnson
the call for #feesmustfall is a genuine, there are however those who seek to make it disingenuous. Its #Falling on deaf ears.
8:17 AM · 30 Sep 2016
1 reply 1 retweet 1 like

Figure 62

As can be seen in Figure 62, @jabu_johnson made it a priority to comment on information he considered as either false or misleading, which ultimately raised his profile within the community as a thought leader.

Due to his behaviour and positioning within the network, some members would call on him for comment on some information. For example, looking at the tweet in Figure 63, @marrakurru tagged @jabu_johnson for comment on a tweet which questioned whether the Wits SRC could be considered as “sell outs”.



Figure 63

Again, the rhetoric in his criticism was centred on @WitsSRC further explaining why their representation within the network was much higher than the other universities.

4.6.2. Degree Centrality

Degree centrality considers the number of other users linked to a specific user, whether through inbound or outbound connections (Chevren, 2013). Users which score highly in this category were considered central members of the community as they influenced how information flowed in and out of the community, and played a crucial role in dispersing information. This statistic was looked at from two perspectives, namely ‘in-degree’ centrality (inbound connections) and ‘out-degree’ centrality (outbound connections). Members with high in-degree scores are likely to be sought out by other members and could be considered as the hubs within the community, as they usually had links to high-profile members. Members with high out-degree scores were those that reached out to others for more information and could be considered as the foragers of the community. Thus, because they foraged for information they also scored highly as an authority because their accounts featured valuable information from the community.

4.6.2.1. Authority

There were two members which scored highly in this category as authority members.

The first was @raf_neck who rose to prominence by retweeting, or rather socially curating tweets from other users onto his page. Figure 64 is a list of some of the most popular tweets he featured on his page.

RT @MaageMohlabe: Interim results of student poll: Total Responses - 21730 Yes - 16739(77%) No - 4991(23%) #FeesMustFall #SABCNews
RT @NontoNkosi: My prayers go to those students who don't have accommodation, and relied on 24hr libraries for shelter. #FeesMustFall
RT @kaveels: An unidentified male in SASCO regalia says they will shut down UKZN Westville today. @News24 #FeesMustFall
RT @Artii_M: Scene at #RhodesUniversity as concerned staff join hands with #FeesMustFall students https://t.co/bV6N3VNnpg

Figure 64 - @raf_neck

As can be seen from the content within the tweets, most of the information he shared concerned journalist updates about the movement. Some spoke about the hardships faced by students, while others highlighted scenes from universities during the course of the day. Therefore, it appears as if the motive behind his retweeting was to inform his immediate network about what was going on in the #FeesMustFall community as a whole. Interestingly though he tended to refrain from retweeting tweets which either called for support or were advertising the event as something to join. This could explain why other users used this account to keep abreast of information because it tended to be more objective than the others.

Unlike @raf_neck, @Adamity, the other main user in this category, was more subjective and was interested in looking at the sentiments of the public, while also highlighting the social injustice rhetoric of the movement. This particular member scored highly in both betweenness centrality and out-degree centrality. He was classified as having a high betweenness centrality because he actively mentioned a considerable number of members in his tweets. However, further analysis of his tweets proved he should be considered an authority rather than a bridging tie.

As can be seen in Figure 65 he mentions an activist and media representative @Qlsmail in his post, linking followers within her network with his own, which would display characteristics of a bridging tie.



Figure 65 - @Adamity

However, he assumed the role of a thought leader because the majority of his tweets critically engaged with certain aspects of the movement. For example, in the same tweet in which he mentions @Qlsmail, he specifically addressed the issue of police brutality. Furthermore another tweet which addressed the ANC asked the community whether they believe the ruling party failed to solve the crises surrounding #FeesMustFall. Thus, his rhetoric was politically charged, and thus was popular within the community. His positioning within the network could explain why one of the major themes of #FeesMustFall was criticizing the government's actions. Therefore, by linking to the community with his tweets enabled @Adamity to shape some of the conversations surrounding the movement.

4.6.2.2. Hub

The next section of the centrality statistic looks at members with high in-degree scores or those who are considered to be hubs of information within the community. Hubs of the community are defined by their quality of connections, therefore they are usually linked to high-profile members. The two members considered as the hubs of this community were @WitsSRC and @indie_impimpi.

The over-representation of Wits University could also be due to the prolific positioning of the @WitsSRC account in the community. This account was used to inform people about meeting places for protest action, as well as quotes from student leaders like Mcebo Dlamini.

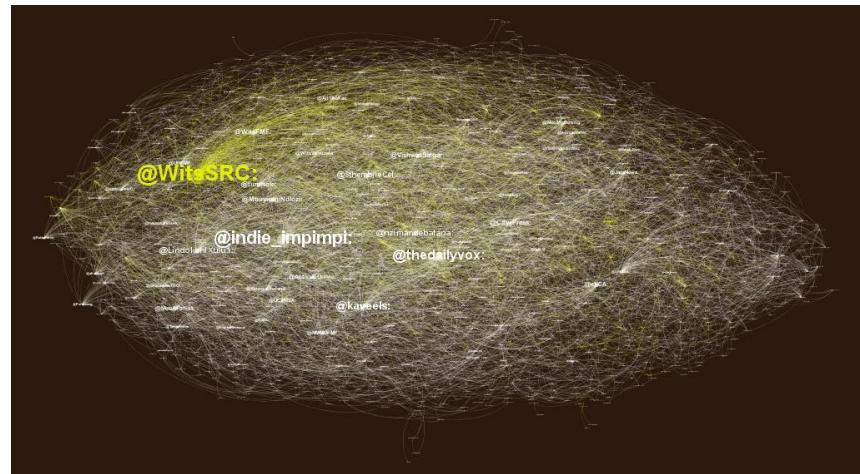


Figure 66 – Heat Map

Figure 66 is a visual representation of @WitsSRC's reach within the overall network, which has been highlighted in yellow. It was connected to almost 70% of the community using the #FeesMustFall hashtag. This account also scored high in terms of out-degree, however, it was classified as a hub because of its high in-degree scores. This account was sought out by members of the community based on its profile within the community. For example, they were mentioned by high profile members like Wishwas Satgar, a senior lecturer at the University of Witwatersrand and Ashraf Gardar, one of SAfm's radio hosts, as can be seen in Figure 67.



Figure 67

Although there were other #FeesMustFall and SRC accounts, most members referred to @WitsSRC for any movement related queries. The majority of information which came

from this account was about meeting times, successes of the movement and members, like @raf_neck, used mentions of this account to share information they posted.

Overall, the rhetoric used by @WitsSRC informed the community and the ‘world’ about the intentions of the #FeesMustFall movement and to rally support. What is particularly poignant with this account was that it was not specifically created to communicate about #FeesMustFall and yet it was the most vocal. Other universities had specific ‘FeesMustFall’ accounts, like @UJFMF and @NMMUFMF. Even Wits itself had a ‘FeesMustFall’ account, @WitsFMF. However, the fact that these other accounts did not become hubs in the same way, clearly indicated that there was a strong affiliation that existed between the Wits SRC leaders and the movement.

The other member who ranked most highly as a hub was @indie_impimpi, a journalist for the student publication, *The Daily Vox*. What is particularly interesting though, is that out of all the journalists active in the #FeesMustFall community this specific account had the highest out-degree score, and yet had the lowest mention rate compared to other journalists.

For example, @kaveels, a journalist for ENCA in KwaZulu-Natal was the most mentioned with 580 mentions, yet despite being the most mentioned in the network, his profile scored considerably lower than @indie_impimpi with the hub scores. This is primarily based on the perceived quality of links on his page and how often these were deemed important enough to retweet. Rhetoric surrounding the #FeesMustFall movement, especially from a mass media perspective, was centred on the activities of Wits University, and @indie_impimpi focused most of his articles on this topic.

4.6.3. *Eigenvector Centrality*

Finally, the Eigenvector centrality is concerned with the quality of connections a user possesses rather than their positioning within the network. Quality is assessed by how influential members are seen to be within the network often due to who they know. Information from a user who scores highly in this category is seen by prominent members in society, who then spreads their information across their large followership.

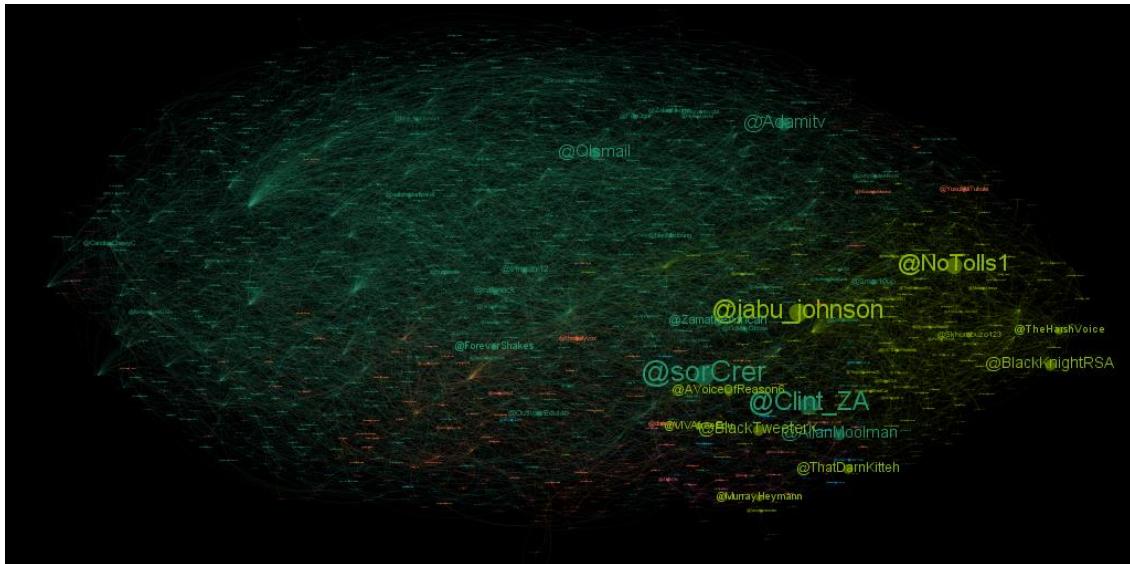


Figure 68 - Eigenvector Centrality

Looking at Figure 68, there were a few members with high Eigenvector centrality scores but the highest was @sorCrer. This is mainly due to the fact that he sourced information and then critically analysed it on his profiles, as well as commenting on other user's comments. @sorCrer emerged as the most surprising user in the network because he was from a community which was the most critical of the movement, and also had less than a 100 followers on his profile.

Although this user might seem obscure with less than a 100 followers, he had a very high quality of connection with those in his immediate network. This behaviour contributed to his positioning in the network as he sought out tweets or stumbled upon tweets which supported the movement and engaged with them. By choosing to engage he was exposed to communities outside of his own.

Examining Figure 69, it highlights the behaviour of the account in question although this example did not generate many retweets. The majority of his activity is seeking out specific members of the community and questioning their posts. This then enabled him to ask pertinent questions which critically engaged information and potentially swayed some members' opinions about #FeesMustFall, when they came across his conversations with other community members.

lindokuhle khawula @lindokuhle_khawula · 11 Oct 2016
#feesmustfall the thing is, this is a lesson to everyone that you should not go around promising people impossible things, never

10:30 PM - 11 Oct 2016

1 Retweet 1 reply 1 favorite

Jason Bourne @sorCrer · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @lindokuhle_khawula
#FeesMustFall The lesson is don't trust politicians. Especially useless self serving corrupt cunts like those we have.

1 reply 1 favorite

lindokuhle khawula @lindokuhle_khawula · 11 Oct 2016
#FeesMustFall very true, now they are on fire and I'm loving it, i just feel sorry for those students whowere doing their final years

1 reply 1 favorite

lindokuhle khawula @lindokuhle_khawula · 11 Oct 2016
#feesmustfall is another level now, the ANC government must deliver now what they always talked about "Free and Quality education for all"

1 reply 1 favorite

Jason Bourne @sorCrer · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @lindokuhle_khawula
#FeesMustFall 'free' and 'quality'? You do know this is impossible? #feesmustfall

2 replies 1 favorite

lindokuhle khawula @lindokuhle_khawula · 11 Oct 2016
#feesmustfall the thing is, this is a lesson to everyone that you should not go around promising people impossible things, never

1 reply 1 favorite

Jason Bourne @sorCrer · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @lindokuhle_khawula
#FeesMustFall The lesson is don't trust politicians. Especially useless self serving corrupt cunts like those we have.

1 reply 1 favorite

lindokuhle khawula @lindokuhle_khawula · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @sorCrer
#FeesMustFall very true, now they are on fire and I'm loving it, i just feel sorry for those students whowere doing their final years

10:37 PM - 11 Oct 2016

Figure 69

Although, this member did not retweet information onto his page, he actively repackaged the meaning of other members' tweets with his questions.

Dr. Johnson @jabu_johnson · 11 Oct 2016
That's rich, since you were a major contributor to fucking them up in the first place. Arseholes. #feesmustfall twitter.com/WitsSRC/status...

This Tweet is unavailable.

1 reply 1 favorite

Jason Bourne @sorCrer · 11 Oct 2016
Replies to @jabu_johnson
#feesmustfall Ask them why Shaeera Kalla isn't staying to pay tax and support a free education but is off to study in Canada!

12:38 AM - 11 Oct 2016

1 reply 1 favorite

Figure 70

For example, in the tweet featured in Figure 70, @sorCrer is provided additional information to that posted by @jabu_johnson, which presumably questioned the behaviour of the Wits SRC. He pointed out that former Wits SRC leader Shaeera Kalla was leaving to go to Canada, and was not going to be paying tax to contribute to the movement she had been fighting for.



Figure 71

Furthermore, Figure 71 also highlights how @sorCrer engaged in critical debate with individual accounts and brought to light novel information. In this case he argued that the majority of middle-class households were actually black, and thus the movement was counter-productive in saying that the main beneficiaries of the cause would be black students. This is particularly pertinent due to the racial discrimination which became characteristic of some of the conversations in the dataset. In the event that this information was verified, this might have been used as a quotation by another interested member.

4.7. Conclusion

Looking at the above discussion, it can be argued that issue communities have proven to be a useful concept for this study because it takes into account the nuances of reconfigured civic engagement, which occur on social media platforms. For example, one difference of debate on social media platforms is that people do not convene in physical spaces to deliberate an issue. However, the absence of physical space does not undermine the substance of debated issues online, as was seen in the last section. In fact, the anonymity offered by social media platforms might provide an added freedom of speech, in that people are less afraid of being prosecuted for their views. This was evident in the #FeesMustFall community in which multiple views existed within the community and allowed members to comment and negotiate over content. This

highlighted that the social activity of the community was interpretative and members took on different forms to accommodate the varying conversation which existed in the community.

Another novel feature of debating topics in issue communities is that a topic has the ability to take on different views without losing its primary objective, especially in the case where hashtags are used. This then allows a new member in the community to be exposed to a wide range of information, and still avoid being overwhelmed by choosing to follow a specific hashtag and sorting information. In addition, these multiple views allow for different members to rise to the fore despite their ‘offline identity’. Typically, journalists due to their profession might be considered the thought leaders of society, as they report information on behalf of the community. However, with issue communities, anyone has the potential to be a thought leader, as was evident in the #FeesMustFall community. This allowed the conversations to be shaped according to the lived experiences of members, making the information in the community authentic and relatable. With social curation as the primary form of activity in issue communities, this allowed users the ability to cross reference and back-up their views with links and images from other sources. This highlighted the inherently social characteristic of social media platforms, which allowed users to share their friend’s information and also form friendships based on this sharing activity.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The first objective in this dissertation was to explore how the #FeesMustFall social movement was represented on Twitter, and analyse the communication behaviours of the members of this community. The second objective looked to determine if the conversations within this community could be considered a form of public sphere, considering that this became a space where a plethora of issues were debated. Thus the scope for research included exploring the elements that constituted part of the #FeesMustFall community, in terms of network structure, as well as the content distributed. Understanding these two elements assisted in interpreting the flow of information within the #FeesMustFall community, as well as the types of conversations surrounding the movement on Twitter, particularly through the lens of a rhetoric public sphere.

Initially, the focus was to look at the growth of the community, however upon further inspection, the community's growth was stunted in Week 3 with most members abandoning the use of the #FeesMustFall hashtag, and opting for other hashtags. This was an interesting twist as although the topic was still relevant at the time, it had evolved from the original hashtag to something that had been negotiated and re-appropriated by community members. From analysis, the reasoning behind this might have been to accommodate the changing nature of the movement and to accommodate shifting narratives.

For example, some leaders of the movement were getting arrested, and thus a narrative of #BringBackOurCadres was trending. Furthermore, alternative hashtags that were in 'opposition' to the movement were on the rise like #TakeWitsBack and #UCTOpen. These two were mentioned due to the prominence they had within the dataset, however there have been many more that rose thereafter, such as #SaveOurUniversities. The co-constructive relationship between user and medium was highlighted in these examples as it was noted that a dialogue developed between the algorithms vested within Twitter

and the deliberate actions of users to bring certain topics to the forefront of the network. The #FeesMustFall narrative evolved due to this interplay and perhaps did not serve the purpose of describing the fees issue appropriately any longer. Although the topic had been set, the narrative was no longer centred only on fees falling. Furthermore, this shift from using the original hashtag could also be attributed to the transient and ambient nature of Twitter.

5.2. Themes and Conversations

The influence of users within the network was paramount to the distribution of information. Although there were various views concerning the movement, not all of them rose in profile due to the vast number of tweets shared in the network. However, there were certain users within the network, such as @sorCrer, which were able to rise from obscurity and influence the flow of information within the network. Their success was heavily dependent on the quality of connections they had within their immediate network, or the effort on their part to steer the narrative in a particular direction. Therefore, participation was not centred on activity alone, but also on association. In other words, members of the community based the quality of information not only on content but also on the person who posted it. This is why it was imperative to separate the different members of the community, according to their social standing.

The likes of Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, Julius Malema and Thuli Madonsela emerged as some of the most mentioned social actors in the data set. However, although their accounts were mentioned the most, less prominent accounts rose to the forefront as bridging users or information hubs of the network. For example, @WitsSRC, rose to the fore as an information hub of the network, due to the quality of content found on their page. They retweeted content from prominent social actors which helped the account become more visible in the network. This provided insight into the techniques employed by the #FeesMustFall community to share information. Rather than just sharing information from any account, some users strategically chose accounts with high numbers of followers. This further highlighted the principles of social curation where users chose and selected information they wanted to consume and post on their pages for their followers or friends to see.

The rhetoric used to describe the movement offered interesting insight into how the community was able to evolve the identity of the fees topic. This essentially economic topic, was often framed according to social issues like race, and the injustices of the past to highlight the complexities surrounding #FeesMustFall. Members of communities were called ‘comrade’ and ‘cadre’, reminiscent of titles given to struggle participants, which politicized the cause. This language is also reminiscent of the rhetoric used by the Economic Freedom Fighters. The EFF played a major role in the movement with some students wearing their regalia and ultimately linking the movement to the political party. Moreover, EFF leaders like Julius Malema and Mbuyiseni Ndlozi were very vocal about their support for the movement.

Being associated with political parties might have been an attempt to improve the chances of the movement receiving coverage from the media, but it also marginalized a significant number of individuals from participating in the cause. Many users speculated that the movement was a political ploy by the EFF to gain more political ground and thus #FeesMustFall had become detached from the community.

Due to the decrease of using the #FeesMustFall hashtag, other hashtags within the community gained popularity. These splinter hashtags described certain aspects of the issue community and later garnered support from members of the #FeesMustFall community. As a result, divisions were formed between students that wanted to go back to class and those that wanted to continue protesting for the cause.

Arguments and negotiations between these groups turned from online debates into separate offline movements. Some members also racialized this division and described it as something reminiscent of the apartheid system, as the white population were accused of pushing universities to open in order to oppress the black population. Looking at the fundamental ideals of the movement, access to free education for all, this came as a surprise, because this displayed a level of segregation.

However, from a communication perspective this could serve as an example of the community responding to the stimuli surrounding them. Realizing that the narrative

supported by the #FeesMustFall hashtag no longer served their purpose, users created other hashtags that were more in line with their beliefs.

Twitter is often described as an ambient news network and its structure evidently influences the communities who discuss issues on the platform. The #FeesMustFall community's depletion and splintering was not due to the topic losing relevancy or interest. Quite the contrary, it was an example of a highly active community, with the members consistently negotiating meaning. This supported the idea of 'subaltern counter-publics', argued by Fraser (1999: 67) "where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and need".

Hence it can be argued that some members migrated to other hashtags like #TakeWitsback because they identified with the narrative which had emerged from discussions within the community. The narratives governing the topic changed by the day and this was further heightened by the fluidity of roles in the network, as different users were influential on different days. Thus communities within the Twitter network were as ambient as the structure they inhabited.

5.3. Techniques for Distributing and Dispersing Information

Gee and Hayes' (2012) interpretation of affinity spaces provided a theoretical base for understanding dispersed and distributed knowledge. In relation to this study, distributed knowledge originates from a private space, like the #FeesMustFall community and is an aggregation of knowledge possessed by individuals within that group. Dispersed knowledge however, is "assumed to be specialized and context-specific" (Gee and Hayes, 2012: 17). It differs from distributed knowledge because it is considered expert advice from external sources or spaces, such as articles written by journalists, opinion writers and media agencies.

The distributed knowledge of the #FeesMustFall community was significantly different to dispersed knowledge. One case in point was the representation of Wits, which received widespread coverage in the media, although other universities were facing more serious issues. For example, opinions on the #WitsPoll dominated headlines in the second week

of October, and journalists covered the sentiments of the public over this issue, but did not consider the University of KwaZulu-Natal where some students and journalists were being arrested and charged for trespassing on university grounds. Distributed knowledge within the network saw many members rallying support for students who had been arrested, as well ENCA journalist @kaveels. The irony though, was that even ENCA covered the Wits Poll and not that one of their journalists had been wrongfully detained.

Further inspection of tweets also revealed an element of ‘whistleblowing’ from some members of the community. Thus, even though the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town were being mentioned the most in the network, it was not always with the intent of broadcasting their activities. Some members questioned the motives of student leaders like Mcebo Dlamini, or re-reported some news stories published by the media. One example involved media reports that students had been accused of stealing goods in Braamfontein. Members of the community took to Twitter to rectify what they saw as erroneous reporting, saying that this was an illegal activity and they were not involved. However despite this defence, such narratives soon damaged the image of the movement, with the protesters being referred to as ‘thugs’ and ‘vandals’. Another instance was when the community informed the public that live ammunition had been used by the police and private security. Some publications framed the altercation as violent, marring the movement, although most of the community advocated they were the victims.

Papacharissi (2016) appropriately defines Twitter as an example of a platform that ‘invites affective attunement and also facilitates “collaborative filtering or curating of the news” (Papacharissi, 2016: 309), as well as being a platform that “affords visibility and voice to publics and issues that are marginalized elsewhere” (Papacharissi, 2016: 309) like in the mass media. However, the issue here is not that revolutions are technologically determined by online platforms but that these platforms “lend emerging publics their own distinct mediality” (Papacharissi, 2016:309). They are presented in a way that users have control and this “shapes the texture of the public” and the “affect becomes the drive that keeps them going” (Papacharissi, 2016: 309).

Although the majority of tweets were emotionally charged they were representative of the disappointment that the community felt in the way they were represented, both by media and by student leaders. As already discussed, the community possessed an element of whistleblowing, which highlighted the frustrations with the way the movement was being represented. However, there were some publics that were offered their own mediality; #TakeBackWits is a case in point. Although it had been framed as a direct opponent of the movement, some members expressed they were in support of the movement, but wanted to complete the academic year.

5.4. The public sphere as a ‘relative space’

Defining the public sphere as a relative space provides an opportunity to discuss it in light of interactivity within an online community. As was the case with the #FeesMustFall community, members were able to package information relative to the narrative, guiding the conversation at the time.

The packaging of the rhetoric is vital – there is no point using jargon which no one is going to understand, because the space needs interaction. This is evident from different network structures which emerged from the data set of each week. Some showed high degrees of homophily and others not. This does not make any structure superior to the other, rather it exemplifies the fluid nature of online debate. The topic did not remain the same because it developed trajectories dependent on the communities negotiating them.

The term negotiation here is used deliberately, as the trajectories were borne of a perischule, which was discussed and debated among members which either became an issue public or another type of perischule. This accommodated the dynamic nature of what was considered public further reiterating the thoughts of Bruns and Highfield (2014: 12) who argued that publics exist at “various levels, for different lifespans, from the long-standing topical clusters [...] to more ad hoc assemblages and issue publics developing in response to particular stimuli, which, while relevant to specific topical publics, are not restricted in their scope to these groups.”

Many interpretations of the public sphere aim to look at the specific categories of people debating specific issues, and treat that as the main foci, rather than looking at the

interactions they enact, especially in the context of social media. For instance, the anonymity of some social media accounts makes it difficult to place them into certain categories. Thus the scope of looking at some of the deliberations that occur online would be limited if the main focus was only on the interpreters and not inclusive of the interpretations.

Furthermore, looking solely at interactions is also slightly limiting, because it does not take into account that contexts are mediated in conversations, whereas discourse does. Although the study aimed to look at the interactions which surrounded the #FeesMustFall community, coding them according to the principles of Hauser's rhetoric public sphere proved useful. This helped with discovering the underlying themes in the tweets, which provided rich analysis to see the motives behind some of the movement's actions.

5.4.1. Packaging Techniques

The #FeesMustFall issue community's presence on social media played a significant role in how it was received by the wider public and political officials. It was found that the main topics featured in the most popular tweets of the community were related to race, critique of the leadership, politics, divisions among the universities and violence. These all proved to be useful constructs for members to package their movement accordingly.

Social media has the ability to allow users to ask direct questions to other users, which in this case included students addressing political officials directly responsible for the issue they were debating. The exposure that is characteristic of social media warrants political officials to act accordingly for fear of jeopardising their efficiency to remedy these issues. This is why a lot of the information which surrounded the #FeesMustFall community was politicized, because members realised that failure to place this issue within a political context would deter its success. By pointing to the government as the entity responsible for free education, the story of #FeesMustFall was then packaged as a national issue, allowing it to receive more coverage.

This also created an opposition between students and government, highlighting students as heroes, fighting for a just cause and the government as villains who do not keep their promises. Most people understand and relate to these story lines, and most also root for

the hero. This was not the only juxtaposition used by members of the community to communicate as most themes highlighted a group being undermined by another. For example, the theme of race was an interplay between one racial group being valued more than the other, or the theme of violence highlighting the use of brutal force by the police over defenceless students.

5.5. Recommendations and Limitations

One area of research which could be explored is the whether the idea of hierarchy exists in online communities, especially from an African perspective. Time constraints hindered this research to explore this aspect, but would have been an interesting to uncover characteristics of social movements borne of Africa.

Furthermore, the Gephi network analysis tool proved to be a very useful framework to understand network structure, and it would be interesting to see it related to other social networks sites like Facebook and Instagram. It would assist with providing further insight into the composition of these networks, and identifying who the major influencers are within a given network. Although this study specifically used tweets from the public Twitter API it would be interesting to see whether the same results could be garnered from a larger data set extracted using a python algorithm, which has the ability to pull private tweets.

Some of the challenges faced during this research was that the dataset had to be confined to suit academic deadlines, it would have been interesting to see whether the network structure continued to evolve into the next month. Furthermore, analysis of the tweets would have taken a shorter time had there been a co-researcher for this study, as 40,000 tweets ended up being an overwhelming data set to analyse individually.

Furthermore, unfamiliar technologies like Gephi, although useful, were a challenge to understand at first. Social media case studies that have used Gephi as an analysis tool, are limited and thus familiarization with the tool took longer than expected.

5.6. Conclusion

Therefore, after identifying the major themes in the conversations and looking at who the most influential members were it is possible to gauge how the social activity in the

#FeesMustFall issue community provided an example of reconfigured civic engagement. According to West (2013), as discussed in Chapter 2, there are two components that make a public sphere, which are the deliberative component and the plebiscitary regime. The deliberative is the ability members have in a community to discuss issues in a two way communication system with officials, like political leaders. The plebiscitary regime speaks to the degree of power these members have to influence government policy and legislation. Therefore, when these two components are performed together they form an ideal public sphere, which according to West (2013) has never existed and is unlikely to emerge in the future. However, the #FeesMustFall community challenged this somewhat, with many of the members engaging in communication with political officials, like Julius Malema, Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, and the previous Minister of Education, Dr Nsimande. Furthermore, they were able to engage with government officials at the *Imbizo* (Fees Commission) which was created to deal with the issues highlighted by the community.

Furthermore, most public sphere theorists do not take into account the existence of multiple public spheres. Due to the fact that such social media accounts exist, there is some merit in arguments which state that there are multiple public spheres co-existing within the Internet. These public spheres include individuals that have shared identities, based on their dissent and expressions of socio-political conditions of life. (Khan 2014; Akinbobola, 2015). After using the norms of the rhetoric public sphere as the main tool of textual analysis, the voices of the members of the #FeesMustFall community were heard. This is specifically supported by the fact that counter-publics were able to exist in the #FeesMustFall community which were usually based on political debates (Khan, 2014). Furthermore, this issue community showed the merit of looking at the rhetoric of conversations as the main foci of understanding alternative public spheres.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Mcebo Dlamini’s Speech

MCEBO DLAMINI:

The cry of animal does not make sense

The cry of animal does not have value

The cry of animal does not spark or put a feeling in any individual

That's why then when you slaughter an animal, it does not matter.

No matter how much it cries

And that's what we are

Cause racism is not just prejudice

Prejudice is:

'I hate you because you are Muslim

I hate you because you are a woman

I hate you because you are that and that

But racism is a power dynamic system

CROWD:

[Hum in agreement]

Hmm

MCEBO DLAMINI:

One has got to have power not just to an individual but to people as a collective group, for that person to qualify to be a racist.

Hence black people can never be racist

CROWD:

[Jeers]

[Claps]

UNKNOWN FEMALE VOICE:

We have been saying

We have been saying, they don't listen

MCEBO DLAMINI:

[Inaudible]

What power do black people have?

Than to instill power to whiteness

To instill fear to whiteness

That's the only power we have

We instill fear to whiteness

MCEBO DLAMINI:

But then, what does whiteness have:

The land power

The economic power

UNKNOWN FEMALE VOICE:

[Hums in agreement]

MCEBO DLAMINI:

The social power

They decide social standards

Standards of beauty

Everything that exists in this country, culture, they decide how it operates

Where it operates and when it operates

That's power

UNKNOWN FEMALE VOICE:

Yho!

MCEBO DLAMINI:

But we are moving

We leave you with those words, that when you think now, you won't think based on other assumptions that have to do with colour

But based on what we have said with that is to do with our minds

CROWD:

[Jeers.] Yes!

[Clapping]

MCEBO DLAMINI:

I thank you very much.

Appendix 2 – Decolonized National Anthem

Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika

[Lord bless Africa]

Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo,

[May her glory be lifted high,]

Yizwa imithandazo yethu,

[Hear our prayers]

Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo.

[Lord bless us, your children.]

Sibe moyo munye

[Be one voice/ become united]

Nama sekunzima emhlabeni

[Even when it is difficult in life/ Even when have struggles]

Sihlukunyezwa kabuhlungu

[We are mistreated/ suffer harsh treatment]

Nkosi siphamandla okungoba

[God give us strength to overcome]

Silwe naSatane

[To fight Satan]

Appendix 3 – Overview of Influential Users

WEEK 1	Eigenvector Centrality	Betweeness Centrality	Authority
30/09/16	@kaveels	@jabu_johnson	@indie_impimpi
01/10/16	@FeesMustFallWC	@BlackKnightRSA	@GlenLewisSA
02/10/16	@WitsSRC	@SakinaKamwendo	@WitsSRC
03/10/16	@afrokanse	@thedailyvox @ForeverShakes	@afrokanse
04/10/16	@StembileCel	@thedailyvox	@WitsSRC
05/10/16	@UJFMF	@SakinaKamwendo	@nomsa_maseko
06/10/16	@WitsSRC	@thedailyvox	@WitsSRC
WEEK 2	Eigenvector Centrality	Betweeness Centrality	Authority
07/10/16	-	@BMFNational	@LindokulhuXulu1
08/10/16	@SihleDLK	@Adamitv	@ LindokulhuXulu1
09/10/16	@SihleDLK	@Faghrudean_W	@Adamitv
10/10/16	@simamkeleD	@SakinaKamwendo	@NeoMotloung_
11/10/16	@WitsSRC	@QIsmail	@Adamitv
12/10/16	@Emelomotsai	@SABCNewsOnline	@Adamitv
13/10/16	@kaveels	@thedailyvox	@kaveels

Table 1 - Week 1 and 2 - Influential Nodes

WEEK 1	In Degree	Out Degree	Hub
30/09/16	@kaveels	@tmurithi12	@oliver_meth
01/10/16	@SihleDLK	@iesu_manifesto	-
02/10/16	@WitsSRC	@raf_neck	@YusufAliTukule
03/10/16	@afrokanse	@CandiceChewyC	@TokoTekay
04/10/16	@SthembileCel	@CandiceChewyC	@ogchilla
05/10/16	@nomsa_maseko	@tmurithi12	@tmurithi12
06/10/16	@WitsSRC	@raf_neck	@mamaduza
WEEK 2	In Degree	Out Degree	Hub
07/10/16	@LindokulhuXulu1	@BMFNational	@lizlee_mazibuko
08/10/16	@LindokulhuXulu1	@tmurithi12	@tmurithi12
09/10/16	@SihleDLK	@QIsmail	@PEACActivist
10/10/16	@NeoMotloung_	@lare_Voldermort	@ForeverShakes
11/10/16	@WitsSRC	@tshepokingapple	@Adamity
12/10/16	@WitsFMF	@kutlwano_kaykay	@lyubomirablohi2
13/10/16	@kaveels	@death_to_self	@death_to_self

Table 2-Week 1 and 2 - Node Behaviour

Appendix 4 – Most Retweeted Tweets (with images)

Week 1	30/09/2016 – 06/10/2016 Most Retweeted Tweets
30/09/2016	<p>RT @SureKamhunga: From #FeesMustFall to #stopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh.. All led by brave young women</p> <p>From #FeesMustFall to</p> <p>#stopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh..</p> <p>All led by brave young women 🙌🙌</p>  <p>1:31 PM - 28 Aug 2016</p>
	<p>RT @PearlPillay: A student who had a stun grenade explode on her. Who are the real thugs here? #Fees2017 #FeesMustFall #Wits</p> <p>A student who had a stun grenade explode on her. Who are the real thugs here?</p> <p>#Fees2017 #FeesMustFall #Wits</p>  <p>2:08 AM - 22 Sep 2016</p>
01/10/2016	<p>Students offloaded their #FeesMustFall frustrations on Sundowns #MTN8Final #feesmustfall -3-Sundowns-0</p>

	<p>#feesmustfall -3-Sundowns-0 </p> <p>9:20 AM - 1 Oct 2016</p> <p>50 Retweets 67 Likes</p> <p>11 50 67</p> <p>Onke JonasZA™ @OnkelsMyName · 6 Oct 2016 Replying to @GlenLewisSA atlest they got 8million they can go back to class</p>
02/10/2016	<p>RT @RediTlhabi: Let it be recorded that it was not #FeesMustFall that started fire. It waa [was] youths wearing Sasco and ANC tshirts.</p> <p>RT @JustZweli: South Africa DOES NOT have money problems, it has MONEY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS! #FeesMustFall #unionbuilding</p> <p>NokokweteCatering @Nokokwetecater1 · 23 Oct 2015 Replying to @JustZweli @JustZweli @nealcol #FeesMustFall #unionbuilding imagine this thug earning R2,5 million without an qualification. #HlaudiPaybackOurmoney</p> <p>1 1</p> <p>james Ayika @AyikaJames · 23 Oct 2015 Replying to @JustZweli @JustZweli @dawisu A Nigerian said similar thing years ago see where we are now.</p>
03/10/2016	<p>RT @indie_impiipi: At Wits right now. Fees strangling student #FeesMustFall</p> 
	<p>RT @MbuyiseniNdlozi: Whatever happens remember this: Unity in struggle is the only guarantee of victory! f?????• "#FeesMustFall"</p>
04/10/2016	<p>RT @Adamityv: The #ANC @MYANC has betrayed the poor and principles of the #FreedomCharter e.g. #FeesMustFall #Poverty #Inequality</p> <p>RT @Julius_S_Malema: The time for free education is now, the police brutality will never succeed in suppressing a noble course #FeesMustFall</p>
05/10/2016	<p>RT @Adamityv: Do you support the right of students to protest peacefully to ensure #FreeEducation for the #Poor? #FeesMustFall</p> <p>RT @nomsa_maseko: #FeesMustFall What a shot! (Marco Longari/AFP)</p>

	
06/10/2016	<p>RT @BongoMuffing: I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad. #FeesMustFall</p> <p> Tsekelekker @ThabileMpe Follow ▾</p> <p>I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad. #FeesMustFall</p>  <p>5:14 AM - 20 Oct 2015</p>
	<p>RT @ericsayz: How to quickly deal with white privilege... #FMF #FeesMustFall [image unavailable]</p>

Week 2	Week 2: 07/10/2016 – 13/10/2016
	Most Retweeted Tweet
07/10/2016	<p>RT @BongoMuffing: I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad.</p> <p>RT @Adamity: Do you support the right of students to protest peacefully to ensure #FreeEducation for the #Poor? #FeesMustFall</p>
08/10/2016	<p>RT @BongoMuffing: I'm tearing up. The white human shield. This is both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sad.</p> <p>RT @Julius_S_Malema: We all know who sold our parents dreams in 1994 and promised free education, that should be a target. #FeesMustFall</p>
09/10/2016	<p>RT @samalamssammidge: People need to see this. #FeesMustFall #WitsFeesWILLFall Beautiful voices to unite us...</p> <p>RT @Adamity: #SJM invites #Student #Leaders of #FeesMustFall to a meeting to discuss solutions for #FreeEducation for the #Poor</p>
10/10/2016	<p>RT @IAmAFallist: I'm crying [crying faces] #FeesMustFall #UCTshutdown #BringBackOurCadres http://bit.ly/2xYbjOW - link to video Please refer to transcription of this video (Appendix 1)</p> <p>RT @Adamity: The demand by @witsfmf #FeesMustFall students that "power" must meet them in public shows arrogance or ignorance of student leadership. #FMF</p> <p></p>
11/10/2016	<p>RT @NomzamoMbatha: To those who say "stop using apartheid as an excuse, it ended two decades ago..." ... Please see below???? #FeesMustFall</p> 

The playing field was never level to start with and the more patronizing and condescending the next generation of colonial descendants are, the longer this country will take to heal. 'The sins of the father are to be laid on the children' (William Shakespeare – The Merchant of Venice), and surely we will pay the price for the rape and plunder of Africa by the likes of Rhodes and his bigoted ilk who think that dispensing the crumbs from their table will absolve them of the murder, theft and rape of the land. The legacy they have left us is very painful. #feesMUSTfall