



Examining online and offline community perceptions of Social Media activism in Zimbabwe: A case of a Facebook campaign against ‘child sex work’ in Epworth, Zimbabwe.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my son Nashe Vitalis Chikoko. Thank you for giving me purpose.  
Never put limitations on your dreams, possibilities in this lifetime are endless.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give my thanks to God Almighty for seeing me through this journey.

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## ABSTRACT

Zimbabwean activism is migrating from physical activism to new media platforms. Noting these changes, this research seeks to investigate the perceptions of the online audience as well as local offline communities on the use of social media as a platform for activism, using Doubt Chimonyo's Facebook campaign against child sex work in the high-density community of Epworth (Zimbabwe). Social media activism scholarship tends to prioritise seminal case studies such as the Arab Spring, while leaving out relatively small-scale case studies that show contextualised social media practices at the local level.

However, there are multiple factors that pose as challenges for the Zimbabwean populace to fully utilise social media. These include the digital divide and retrogressive laws stifling social media use. In the context of this study the extreme poverty in Epworth is attributed as a main driver of child sex work in the area. Scholars have noted that efforts by both government and NGOs to curb the practice are not producing desired results. Consequently, social media activism attempts to fill the gap as exemplified by the Facebook campaign under study. This study contributes to the understanding of the perception of social media activism within the complex specificities a high-density community within Zimbabwe. More specifically it presents findings on, 1.) the principles and practice that constitute someone as a social media activist, 2.) the ways in which Facebook, as a participatory platform, mediates activism in Epworth (Zimbabwe), and 3.) if/how social media activism resonates with online and offline communities, using Chimonyo's campaign as a case study. These findings are analysed in relation to Henry Jenkins (2006) theory of participatory culture.

Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, comments from the online audience in response to the videos presented on Facebook, and literature from key scholars. Two focus group discussions were conducted with a sample of Epworth community members in order to gain an understanding of their perception on the campaign against child sex work. A semi-structured interview was conducted with Doubt Chimonyo as the creator of the campaign against child sex work with the purpose of establishing the preferred reading of the campaign in order to draw comparisons with the Epworth and online responses.

In comparison to other online campaigns discussed in this study, such as #Thisflag campaign (2016), #ZimbabweanLivesMatter (2020) this study concludes that political campaigns have more potential to create resonance offline unlike social campaigns such as the campaign against child sex work. Considering that the campaign set out to involve the Epworth adult community in finding solutions to curb child sex work in the area, the choice of an online platform is questionable as it effectively excluded the Epworth audience thereby rendering this particular campaign not successful.

**Key words: child sex work, encoding/decoding, Facebook, participatory culture, social media activism, Zimbabwe.**

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

UK – United Kingdom

POSA – Public Order and Security Act

KPK – Corruption Eradication Commission

DJ – Disc Jockey

SMO – Social Media Organisations

ZEC – Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

WHO – World Health Organisation

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Children

PACT – Protection of Adults and Children Team

UN – United Nations

DREAM Act – Development, Relief and Education for Alien and Minors Act

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

POTRAZ – Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe

GSMA – Global System for Mobile Communications

ROOTS – Real Opportunities for Transformation Support

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

LGBTQI – Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual Transgender Queer Inter-sexual

CID – Criminal Investigation Department

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

HIV – Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

AIDS – Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

COVID -Corona Virus Disease

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

This research is inspired by my work as a radio presenter/producer for the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's Classic263 radio from March 2018 to April 2019. One of the broadcast's topics was the surge of 'child sex workers'<sup>1</sup> in Zimbabwe's high-density communities. In preparation for the show, I visited different suburbs and engaged in the communities to try and understand the problem from their perspective. Epworth was one of these communities. Subsequently, I saw a Facebook advocacy campaign against child sex work in Epworth. I found myself comparing the on the ground experience of my visit to Epworth with the online campaign. The concept of this comparison piqued my interest into conducting a project that explores participatory culture in terms of civic engagement and activism in Zimbabwe's high-density suburbs. Interrelated was my interest in exploring the emergence of social media as a platform for activism in the Zimbabwean context.

This chapter provides a background to the study as well as presenting its problem statement and significance. The guiding objectives and concomitant key research questions reveal the study's focus. A brief description of the study's theoretical framework and methodology is also included.

### Background

The case study for this research is a campaign against child sex work created by Doubt Chimonyo, a United Kingdom (UK) based journalist and Disk Jockey (DJ) as his profile read at the commencement of this study in 2019. However, he has since added a talk show called DDC (Doubt Dehwa Chimonyo) Skool of thought<sup>2</sup> that hosts. Chimonyo created the campaign after he was "shocked to learn that informal settlements such as Hopely and Epworth were now hunting grounds for perverts who abuse both girls and boys from child-headed families, some

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'child sex worker' is in quotes because it is debatable among child rights activists, citing that children cannot consent to sexual activity; therefore, children cannot be referred to as sex workers. However, going forward in this research, it will not be quoted. The reason for this term's selection is explained below.

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/doubtdehwa.chimonyo>

as young as 10 with the community watching” (*Newsday*, 25 December 2018)<sup>3</sup>. He ran the campaign on his personal Facebook page<sup>4</sup> to raise awareness on child sex work in Epworth, calling the adult Epworth community and other individuals, organisations and the government to act to end child sex work and mobilise resources to help the affected families (Interview with Doubt Chimonyo, 20 January 2020). The campaign ran for a month in November 2018, after which Chimonyo founded the Protection of Adults and Children Team (PACT), an organisation that seeks to assist the vulnerable in Zimbabwean communities<sup>5</sup>. The campaign had multiple videos addressing the child sex work issue, but this study utilises only two videos. The first video features one of Chimonyo's colleagues interviewing a young sex worker, who states her age and then explains the circumstances that lead her into sex work. The inciting video attracted, 52 reactions (30 sad, 15 likes and 7 angry), 55 comments, 30 shares and 8.7 thousand views by 2 November 2018. The second video is a recording of the live chat that Chimonyo hosted, intending to raise awareness and engage the audience on the issue of child sex work in Epworth. By 2 November 2018, this live video had 99 reactions (63 likes, 22 loves, 10 sad, 4 laughs), 528 comments, 12 shares, 5.1 thousand views. The campaign did not have a name, but this research refers to it as the ‘campaign against child sex work’.

Over time sex work has become a preferable term to prostitution when referring to transactional sex (Sibanda, 2015). However, when referring to children, neither prostitution nor sex work is accepted by activists and women organisations, who maintain that because a child cannot consent to sex, it can only be deemed as exploitation (Katswe sistahood<sup>6</sup>, 2017). Mushohwe (2018) classifies child sex work to a broader class of child sex abuse but maintains that it be termed sex work because “it is survival sex by children below the age of 18”. More so, this study applies the term sex work because Chimonyo, the campaign creator, argues that:

A minor cannot consent, but they are still selling sex. The problem with people is we try to run away from the truth and from reality and we try to sugarcoat things that are happening. But the truth remains, there are children out there who are selling sex for commercial purposes. So, there is no other better way of defining (interview with Doubt Chimonyo, 20 January 2020).

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3 Available at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/12/music-promoter-journalist-fight-child-abuse/>

4 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/doubtdehwa.chimonyo>

5 For more information see, <https://www.pactzw.org/about-us/>

6 Katswe sistahood is one of the recognised movement of dynamic young women fighting for the full attainment of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) by women in Zimbabwe.  
<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/our-partnership/member-directory/katswe-sistahood/> accessed 4 December 2019

## **Objectives and Research Questions**

Broadly speaking, this study combines social media activism research alongside a cultural studies perspective of the active audience. They are framed by Henry Jenkin's (2006) participatory culture. More specifically, the study's objectives are to:

- 1) Investigate the principles and practices that constitute a social media activist.
- 2) Examine ways in which Facebook, as a participatory platform, mediates activism in Zimbabwe.
- 3) Explore how and if social media activism resonates with online and offline communities.

These objectives are broken down further into guiding key research questions:

- 1) In what ways does doing a social media campaign make one a social media activist?
  - In what ways does Doubt's social media campaign make him an activist?
- 2) How does Facebook as a participatory platform mediate activism in Zimbabwe?
  - In what ways do the comments on Doubt's Facebook campaign demonstrate the role of the interactive audience in social media activism?
- 3) In what ways does social media activism resonate with the offline community?
  - What is the Epworth audience's reading of Doubt's campaign?

## **Problem Statement and Significance of the Study**

In an era of rapidly evolving media, worldwide and on the African landscape, there have been calls for "urgent research specific to African media audiences and users" (Willems and Mano, 2017:1). On the other hand, social media is a recent communication tool partly defined by its high malleability in the hands of audiences and users, and one such use is the propagation of activism. Against this background, this study interrogates the perceptions and place of social media activism by online and offline communities, focusing on the campaign on child sex workers in the high-density communities in Zimbabwe.

### *Child sex work and Poverty in Zimbabwe*

Child sex work is surging in Zimbabwean high-density communities (Masara 2015). Efforts by both government and NGOs to curb the practice are not producing desired results (Mashayamombe 2017). The challenge is further compounded by a local lack of expertise in child sex-work policies and developmental research and practice (Mabvurira *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, social media activism is poised to fill the gap, as exemplified by the campaign under examination.

Child sex work is illegal. Subsequently, it is not well documented, and its practice is well-hidden in Zimbabwe (Mabvurira *et al.*, 2017). Finding the exact information or contributing factors still needs to be researched (Masara, 2015). Therefore, there is no clear definition of the practice, though Kembo and Nhongo (2002: 61) define child sex work as "sexual exploitation of a child for remuneration in cash or in-kind, frequently but not organised by an intermediary who may be a parent, family member, procurer or teacher"

The location of the study is a high-density<sup>7</sup> suburb in Harare, Zimbabwe, called Epworth. In Epworth, there is a place called 'Kubooster' that the Epworth residents consider to be one of the hotspots of child sex work. The high rate of child sex work in Epworth is acknowledged by former Epworth Legislator Zalerah Makari, who said, "The increasing trend of child 'prostitutes' in my constituency is worrying, and poverty is the major driver" (*H.Metro*, <sup>8</sup>2016: 5). According to the 2012 census<sup>9</sup>, Epworth has a human population of 160 000, and 70% of the people in Epworth live in squatter camps locally referred to as '*magada*', meaning squalor. Statistically, poverty levels in Zimbabwe are at an unprecedented peak, with vulnerability increasing (Masara 2015). Research conducted by Zimstat<sup>10</sup>, the World Bank and United Nations (2016) concluded that Epworth has the poverty prevalence of 64.5%, and the

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<sup>7</sup> High density suburbs are low resourced communities usually over-populated (Manjengwa *et al.*, 2016)

<sup>8</sup> *H.metro* is a local Harare tabloid newspaper <https://www.hmetro.co.zw/the-child-prostitutes-of-epworth/>

<sup>9</sup> The most recent census that could be found to provide background for this study.

<sup>10</sup> Zimstat is the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency and is the main source of statistics in Zimbabwe. It has the authority to certify and designate any statistics produced in the country as official statistics.

Zimbabwe Poverty Atlas notes that about 65% of township folk in Epworth live on less than a dollar a day (*DailyNews Live* 2018).

Henry Jenkins (2016) argues that social media should be a participatory platform for all. However, the poverty levels in Epworth affect community participation. Moreover, participation on social media platforms is compromised by the cost of access. David Reid (in Fourie, 2017: 231) explains that the, “high cost of data means that the poor are excluded from the world of social media communication”.

Epworth also suffers from a lack of social services. Most notably, roads, which do exist on council blueprints but not in the community itself. The difficult circumstances faced by the Epworth community is an essential consideration for the residents' (who constitute the participants of this study's focus group discussions) culture and perception's which is significant in qualitative research.

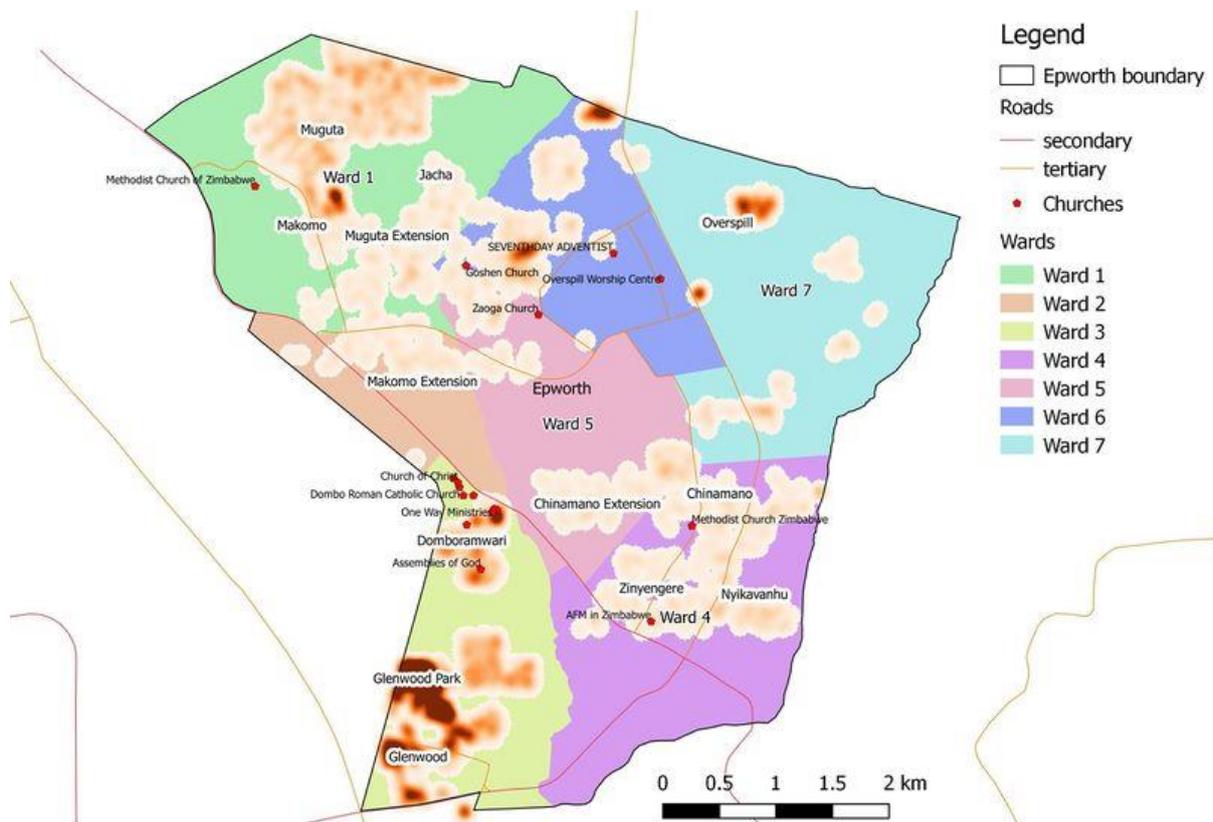


Figure 1: Map of Epworth

Source: [https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/File:Epworth\\_heatmap.jpg](https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/File:Epworth_heatmap.jpg)

### *Social Media and Activism*

Social media has been defined as a form of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Ellison, 2007). In Zimbabwe, Facebook dominates the most used social media platform with 41.47% usage as compared to all other social media platforms (Stat Counter GlobalStats, 2019). For this reason, individuals use Facebook as a platform for their activism to reach out to a larger populace. Facebook is perceived to be an interactive platform. Therefore, it is imperative to examine how the interactivity of Facebook is perceived by Zimbabwean audiences in high-density communities when used as a platform for activism, a point buttressed by Stokes (2013: 174), who believes that audience research allows a greater understanding of the social uses of media. In this regard, this research examines the perception of social media activism in high density suburbs using the Epworth audiences' case, mainly because they were the intended recipients of the campaign under study.

The advent of social media implicates the operation of global and local media and communication industries. Social media's effect on media industries has been felt in activism, "playing a leading role in the mobilisation of social and political protests around the world" (Mutsaers 2016: 3). This is primarily because social media allows people with the same views and ideas to come together and feel part of a larger community and movement (Corrigan, 2016). Incorporating the changes brought about by social media, this research investigates the perceptions of the Zimbabwean online and offline communities on the use of social media as a platform for activism.

Zimbabwean activism is migrating from physical activism to new media platforms (Chitanana, 2020). United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has argued for a new strategy and new communication models that will enable social media to work better "to support shifts in public policy, fuel social engagement, and increase private and public resources for children" (Tuftes, 2017: 151). However, in Zimbabwe, retrogressive laws stifling social media use (Mboti, 2017). Chitanana (2019) opines that in addition to the legislation, some pockets of Zimbabwe do not have good internet access and, by extension, social media. Even with the laws to censor social

media voices, there are campaigns such as #thisflag<sup>11</sup> that were successful in Zimbabwe. However, this was a political campaign; hence this study uses a social campaign against child-sex work in view of the prevailing social media environment.

The principle of who qualifies to be a social media activist in the age of social media has been questioned by scholars such as Lim (2013), who questions whether initiating and implementing an advocacy-awareness campaign can make one an activist. Social media activism “has a tendency of being fast and thin” (Lim, 2013; 637), resulting in the coining of terms by social media activism authorities such as; slacktivism (Fuchs, 2017), paid activism (Mutsvairo, 2016), armchair activism and clicktivism (Lim, 2013) to describe some of these forms of social media activism. Comparable to Lim, this study interrogates the type of social media activism undertaken by Doubt Chimonyo.

Globally, the lines between communication<sup>12</sup> and advocacy<sup>13</sup> are blurring, and citizen-sparked campaigns that are fuelled by digital media are beginning to drive social movements and achieve political change (UNICEF, 2014: 5 in Tufte 2017). The same could be said for Zimbabwe in terms of political change, as witnessed during the This Flag Movement (#thisflag), a citizen-led social media campaign that had a successful national shut-down in 2016 (Mutsvairo, 2016). However, studies of social media activism have tended to prioritise seminal case studies such as the Arab Spring, while leaving out relatively small scale but not less important case studies that show contextualised social media practices at the local level bounded by local contexts and history (Matsilele, 2019). It is against this background that this research investigates how social media advocacy campaigns have accounted for non-political issues affecting only high-density suburbs in Zimbabwe, noting multiple challenges including, lack of access to digital platforms due to low internet penetration rate in Africa (Reid in Fourie, 2017: 231).

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*11* This Flag movement was led by Pastor Evan Mawarire, where he called for the populace to not go to work or do any activity on Wednesday 6 July 2016 in protest against the government over human rights abuses and lack of governance. There was a record success in all the big cities in Zimbabwe (Chitanana, 2019).

*12* Communication is defined by Lunenberg (2010) as common, which suggests that there must be a common understanding of the message between the source and the receiver concerning the message being communicated.

*13* Advocacy is described by Servaes and Malikhao (2012:229) as a key term in development discourse, aiming to foster public policies that are supportive to the solution of an issue or programme.

Social media-driven campaigns have been noted globally, with mobile communication increasingly playing a leading role in mobilising social and political protests around the world (Mutsvairo 2016: 3). However, the context within which social media activism is changing communities is important (Mutsvairo 2016: 4), and the context in which it is researched, because communities have their own history. Social media's challenges and opportunities presented to Africans should best be understood from an African perspective (Mutsvairo 2016, 4). Media as objects, texts and institutions cannot be said to have a universal meaning but gain relevance in different ways in each and every context. Therefore, social media activism and civic engagement must be studied from specific demographics as this study employs the Zimbabwean high-density community of Epworth..

Culturally, the community is responsible for looking after and reporting any social ills taking place (Prisca Mupfumira in *The Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2017)<sup>14</sup>. Every social process, including cultural participation and participation in the cultural sphere, has a political dimension to it (Yule, 2012). This means that the social and cultural custodians, in this case, the Epworth adult community, require agency to participate in the campaign itself or towards the goals of the campaign which is to eradicate child sex work in their community.

When giving a platform to a voice of those who have stood outside the mainstream media channels for a long time, it is important to consider a shift in the current communication model (Tufte, 2017: 151). This study acknowledges this shift in communication models, hence the reason for an exploration of the perception of the communities who are addressed using these new communication models such as Facebook. It is important to consider strategies that focus on advocacy communication driving change by moving people to act in activism. Thomas Tufte (2017) calls for a critical approach to the promise of social media. In support, Lim (2013) posits numerous questions, including; how activism relates to the issues of identity and feelings of community, whether doing an advocacy-awareness campaign can make one an activist, and the question around the influence of social media on offline communities. It is important to develop a new research agenda that tackles the transformation of collective identity in a digital era (Gerbaudo and Emiliano, 2015) for activism. This study attempts to address that call by exploring how Doubt Chimonyo's campaigns were read by the online audience and the Epworth community, where aspects of identity veracity to community concerns are explored.

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<sup>14</sup> Prisca Mupfumira is the Zimbabwean Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. This interview published in *The Herald* is available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201709110658.html>

Furthermore, one cannot overlook ethics, which is fundamental in activism, especially when the issue centres on minors<sup>15</sup>. This problem arises specifically because of the nature of social media; it allows anyone, even those who are not properly trained in journalism to practise journalism, running a risk of non-consideration of ethics thereby compromising the protection and safety of the concerned minors (Masara, 2015). Mutsvairo (2016:6) echoes that some activists live on the margins of being simultaneous journalists and activists, due to the power of social media which has turned “ordinary citizens making use of mobile phones and digital technological platforms to consider themselves activists too”. The advent of social media has provided the opportunity for non-professional users to participate in media production processes (Wasserman in Fourie, 2017; 328). However, the rise of social media has made information available to a group of users and producers, much larger than simply trained professional journalists, who may not be aware of or interested in following ethical journalism guidelines (Urban, 2011; 328).

In 2002, the Zimbabwean government introduced the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), which gave the police the power to ban any public gatherings and this act was put in place to restrict street demonstrations, thereby restricting (traditional) street activism (Mutsvairo, 2014). As a result, activism is slowly transferring from the streets onto social media (Mutsvairo, 2014). However, with the popularity of social media activism, the government of Zimbabwe introduced the Cyber Crime and Computer Bill (2017), a law that seeks to limit people from accessing, sharing or exchanging information that promotes dissent (Mboti, 2017). Additionally, the introduction of the Criminal Codification Act of 2006 stipulates restrictions and limitations of citizens’ freedom of expression (Chitanana, 2017). Therefore, this study examines, how communities in the Zimbabwean environment perceive social media activism with the existing cyber laws for the regulation of online activity.

### *Social Media and Social Change*

According to Lim (2013), social media should not be perceived as a causal agent having a pivotal role in promoting social change or advancing democracy. She argues that “there is

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<sup>15</sup> According to the 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution, a minor is someone below the age of 18. Specific to the focus of this research are female minors from age 16 and below because the age of sexual consent for females is 16 years and below as per the 2013 Constitution.

nothing intrinsic in social media that automatically achieves this potential” (Lim, 2013: 21). At the heart of the debate on the democratising nature of the internet is the concept of participation. There are ongoing and growing concerns about public participation (or lack thereof) in modern democracies where online activism is often perceived as banal, superficial and failing to transform or renew democratic institutions (Lim, 2013: 3). Similarly, this study explored how social media as a participatory platform may/may not play a role in the mediation of activism in the Zimbabwean context.

This inquiry seeks to investigate the complexities and opportunities of running a social media activism campaign for minors, targeting high-density suburbs in Zimbabwe. This was achieved through examining the perceptions and the resonance (or lack thereof) of the online activity on the offline community in social media activism in the Zimbabwean context using the case of the Facebook campaign against child sex work. This is with an acknowledgement of the challenges of poverty in Epworth, children being a vulnerable age group, the challenges of alleged slacktivism (Fuchs, 2017), armchair activism, (Lim, 2013), and paid activism (Mutsvairo, 2016) as labels that are placed on social media activism.

### **Framing the study**

This study is framed using Henry Jenkins’ (2006) Participatory Culture for civic engagement to investigate how social media activism is perceived by Zimbabweans in Epworth.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Participatory culture is a theory that proposes maximum engagement and participation of everyone, including disempowered communities. Jenkins (2016) explains that participatory culture embraces the values of deep democracy and instrumental participation of marginalised populations through a broad range of forms and practices. Through the lens of this theory, this study investigates how social media activism is perceived by the online audience, as well as the offline Epworth community.

Jenkins (2016) explains that participatory culture embraces the values of deep democracy and instrumental participation of marginalised populations through a broad range of forms and practices. This study places human experience in the centre of participatory culture to study the parallels and variances of online and offline activities (Williams, 1958; Jenkins *et al.*, 2016:

12). However, the researcher acknowledges the emergent techno-evolution of the digital divide to describe inequalities brought about by emerging technologies in Zimbabwe (Chitanana, 2019). Participatory culture frames ways to bridge the digital divide. It is with this in mind that, participatory culture is used to advance this study's aim to articulate participants' perception of social media activism in their own context.

### *Methodological Approach*

Due to the evasive nature of the area under study, a qualitative approach is used. Padgett (2008) notes that qualitative research is suitable when pursuing a topic of sensitivity and emotional depth. Morris (2006:3) buttresses this point that qualitative inquiry may be the only option available for researchers interested in behaviours considered taboo or stigmatised, which applies to the issue of child sex work. The reason for this is that qualitative research is best positioned to interpret intangible issues such as attitudes, social norms and people's personal experiences.

Qualitative data has the power to produce detailed descriptions of social constructs (Wahyuni 2012: 71). No knowledge can be produced without some pre-knowledge (Jensen, 2012: 267). Against this backdrop, my prior knowledge of child prostitution in high-density suburbs merited a qualitative approach to embark upon comprehensive research. In qualitative research, statements and actions are interpreted with reference to their contexts and studies, which depend on access to primary data (Jensen 2012). Therefore, it is through qualitative research that this study sought out understanding of the particular context within which the respondents acted and influenced their participation and/or reading of Doubt's campaign.

Data was collected using multiple methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, comments from the online audience in response to the videos presented on Facebook, and literature from key scholars. Two focus group discussions were conducted with a sample of Epworth community members who were purposively selected in order to gain an understanding of their perception on the campaign against child sex work. In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with Doubt Chimonyo as the creator of the campaign against child sex work. This was to collect data and establish the preferred reading of the campaign in order to draw parallels on how he intended the campaign to reflect on the Epworth community. By collecting the comments on the Facebook campaign video, the study intended to use the data

to examine how Facebook as a participatory platform mediates activism in Zimbabwe, in addition to exploring the role of an interactive audience in activism.

Findings that are generated from qualitative research are often rich and complex as there are different ways of perceiving and analysing social life (Punch, 2014:168). This study adopted two approaches in analysing the data, namely i) reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2020) and ii) Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory. Both inductive and deductive themes were identified in relation to the ways in which social media activism resonates with online and offline communities. These themes are interpreted in relation to theories and literature on social media activism (Mutsvairo, 2016; Lim, 2013; Fourie, 2017) and guided by participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). The focus group responses from the Epworth participants, as well as the comments by the online community, were organised according to the encoding/decoding model in order to identify which thematic responses demonstrated a dominant, negotiated or oppositional response to Chimonyo's preferred messages embodied in the campaign against child sex work.

### **Structure of study**

The first chapter establishes the study's background, problem statement, significance and objectives. Chapter two contextualises the study by reviewing relevant literature that is thematised as social media activism (Mutsvairo, 2016; Lim, 2013 ), social media and the law (Mboti, 2017; Matsilele, 2019), child sex-work (Masara, 2015; Mabvurira *et al.*, 2017) and audience analysis (Livingstone and Das, 2013). Chapter three, as the theoretical framework, describes Henry Jenkins' participatory culture (2016) and its relevance to this study. Chapter four, as the methodology chapter, delineates the operationalisation of the study by explaining the paradigm in which the research is placed as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter five presents the study's findings and analysis. The concluding chapter six summarises and synthesises the findings in direct relation to each of the study's key objectives and ends with suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The growth in social media has introduced new forms of “participatory democracy that reinvigorates the public sphere” (Fuchs, 2017: 134). Several popular citizen social and political campaigns have successfully used social media, of note, Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring (Castells, 2012). Closer to home, attention has been given to South Africa’s Fees Must Fall campaign (Bosch, 2017) and the Zimbabwean This Flag campaign (Mutsvairo, 2016). However, alongside its potential to be a liberating platform, social media activism is faced with numerous challenges (Lim, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2016). This chapter examines the relevant academic and policy literature that contextualises this study’s focus on social media activism in Zimbabwe. It is presented according to themes based on the study’s research questions. These include social media activism (Mutsvairo, 2016; Lim, 2013), social media and the law (Mboti, 2017; Matsilele, 2019), child sex-work (Masara, 2015; Mabvurira *et al.*, 2017), and audience analysis (Livingstone and Das, 2013).

### Social media activism

This study aligns with Christian Fuchs’ call to consider what makes social media ‘social’ while directly relating it to social media activism. In defining social media, Fuchs (2017:6) explains that we need to consider what constitutes media to be social, the social aspects of social media, and how social media works. This study starts by discussing social media and activism separately.

The Oxford dictionary defines activism as “the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one”. Similarly, Martin (2007: 19) articulates activism as:

Action on behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine.  
Activism is action that goes beyond conventional politics, typically being more energetic, passionate, innovative, and committed.

Based on the above definitions, social media activism can, therefore, refer to as; the use of web-based media platforms to collectively or individually take action to affect change.

Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) refer to social media as a term for online technologies and practices used to share opinions, information, promote dialogue and build relationships. This definition, however, does not account for the current functions of social media, such as business

promotion, market places, and an activism platform. Social media can also be defined as “an alternative means of mass communication that make use of new information and communication technologies, such as the internet and mobile phones, to create, store and distribute multi-media messages” (Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013: 415). This definition places social media as a subordinate form of media to mass media. However, this study subscribes to the idea of social media as a stand-alone form of media that sits at the “opposite sides of the spectrum” from mass media (Gourvenec, 2016 :1).

As such, the following definition is useful to this study:

Web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Ellison 2007: 210).

Within the parameters of this definition, this study sites social media as a public sphere. In addition, Ellison’s (2007) definition is heterogeneous as it accommodates the current functions of social media and allows room for evolving functions, acknowledging that social media functions are dynamic.

Social media activism falls under digital activism, which has also been called ‘online activism’ (Mutsvairo, 2016) and ‘web activism’ (Earl and Kombart, 2011). Furthermore, it has been defined by Joyce (2000) as “digital technologies used to expedite change in the political and social realms” (Mutsvairo, 2016:8). Social networking sites, for example, Facebook (which is the platform under scrutiny in this research), have introduced an opportunity for wide-scale, online social participation (Rotman *et al.*, 2011). This has seen an increase in the visibility of national and international priorities, yet there is little known about the benefits and possible costs of engaging in social activism via social media (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019). This study investigates this gap in knowledge by exploring the reception of social media activism by Zimbabwean online and offline communities (Nip, 2004).

Globally, the face of activism is changing by migrating from the realm of physical activism to the digital domain of social media. This trend has been paralleled by Zimbabwean activism since the inception of the phenomenon (Matsilele and Ruhanya, 2020). In an effort to adapt, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has argued for new strategies and new

communication models that will enable social media to function more effectively and “to support shifts in public policy, fuel social engagement, and increase private and public resources for children” (Tufte, 2017: 151). As technological tools, social media’s role in society is contingent on human agency, which is true in social media activism.

While Zimbabwe has utilised social and digital media during significant protests, their [political] impact should not be overstated. Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019) argue that without offline support, certain social media campaigns merely stockpile ‘hashtags’ and ‘likes’ without quantifiable results. This study seeks to examine the perceptions of scholars and social media authorities regarding the social media activism of Zimbabwe’s online and offline communities.

### *Arguments on the impact of social media activism*

There are two schools of thought on the impact of media activism, one which posits that social media activism does not work (Lim, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2016, 2018; Bosch, 2016) and another which believes social media activism works better in this day and age of new media (Morozov 2011; Tufte, 2017; Jenkins *et al.*, 2016; Fourie, 2017).

A concern that may arise from the use of social media as a conduit for activism is whether or not there are unintended adverse effects through low-risk and low-cost technology-mediated participation (Reid in Fourie, 2017). It is with this consideration that this study used an anti-child sex-workers campaign as a case study. This campaign may be deemed low-risk and low-cost at face value because it was run on Facebook (by Doubt Chimonyo). This study examines the perception of Zimbabweans living in the high-density suburb of Epworth to explore both the possible positive impact and unintended negative impact of social media activism.

Mutsvairo (2016) provides insights into the complexity of new media technologies and their relationship with the aspirations of democratic and social changes of sub-Saharan Africa from an activist’s perspective. He critiques the real impact of online campaigning and civic engagement. However, some scholars perceive that the role of social media has become the catalyst for activism. While critics like Mutsvairo (2016) and Lim (2013), see hashtag

activism<sup>16</sup> as a form of slacktivism<sup>17</sup> for ‘keyboard warriors’<sup>18</sup>, Burger in Fourie (2017) sees hashtag movements as having the potential to raise widespread public awareness of social justice issues.

Social media activism is usually associated with small wins. Since the 1980s, small wins have been a highlight in social activism, as signalled by Weick and Browning, who, in 1986, qualified small wins as concrete, complete, implemented outcomes of moderate importance. Furthermore, they added that small wins initiate a snowball effect. Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion that create another. Since some scholars attribute social media activism as a tool for awareness, this study uses Chimonyo's Facebook campaign to examine the possible materialisation of these small wins.

The efficacy of social media activism is contentious. Using an Indonesian case, Lim (2013) puts to test the effectiveness of social media activism. In her exploration, she gives a detailed analysis of why some social media campaigns became popular and successful in Indonesia compared to the rest of the world, which yielded less effective results. Using two successful examples of a high case of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and a low-profile case of an ordinary citizen (Prita case) for analysis, Lim (2013: 12) concludes that social media activism can be successful in mobilising mass support by “embracing simplified narratives, popular symbols and low-risk activities”. Amid the successes of a handful of campaigns that sprouted from social media in Indonesia, there are several failed ones, to which Lim refers. Like Zimbabwe, Indonesia is a third world country; therefore, Lim’s (2013) findings and analysis may be relevant to the Zimbabwean case study, which will be further explored in Chapter 5.

Speaking to the scepticism of the effectiveness of social media activism, Lim (2013) queries why there are not so many successful cases of social media activism (in Indonesia) if social media is truly a tool of social change and democracy. There have been similar scenarios in the Zimbabwean social media landscape where campaigns emerge frequently and often quickly disappear without a trace (Chitanana, 2019).

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<sup>16</sup> Hashtag activism is activism that unfolds through Twitter hashtags (Clark, 2016)

<sup>17</sup> “Feel good online activism that have zero political or social impact” (Morozov, May 19 2009 in Foreign Policy Newspaper <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/05/19/the-brave-new-world-of-slacktivism/>)

<sup>18</sup> Keyboard warriors are activists who practice their activism only on their phones and computers but out of touch with the reality on the ground of the cause they are fighting for (Mutero, 2017).

Social media activism critics have cautioned online activism for privileging easily accessible tools over the efforts of activists in the real world (Lim, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2016). Likewise, Lovink (2012:2) criticise social media activism, describing it as “forms of detached engagement and communicative capitalism which is, feel-good online activism that has zero political and social impact.” Lim (2013) weighs in with terms such as lazy activism, clicktivism (click activism), armchair activism, keyboard activism, emphatically questioning the worthiness of social media activism. Currently, there are calls for a potentially universal theory to determine the current trends, challenges and opportunities of social media activism holistically (Mutsvairo, 2016; Chitanana, 2019). However, social media activism’s success and failure relies on several factors, including the internet penetration rate, specifically in low-income areas (Mpofu, 2011; Zimstat, 2018). Epworth, the area under study in this research, is a low-income area with 60% of the population living on less than a dollar a day (Masara, 2015).

Fourie (2008) asks crucial questions of who constitutes the ‘we’ of social media activism, what it means to belong and how identity is shaped by such belonging (Milton & Mano in Fourie, 2017: 185). Fourie (2017), cites an example of Los Angeles filmmaker, Ramaa Mosley who was accused of trying to cash in on the #BringBackOurGirls<sup>19</sup> campaign. Kimberly C Ellis, an Africana studies scholar, similarly accuses Mosley of essentially stealing an African woman’s voice (Milton and Mano in Fourie, 2017). Commenting on the Mosley issue, Fourie explains, “because there are many different ways in which moaning about the world can be constructed, it matters profoundly what and who gets represented [...] and how things, people, events [and] relationships are represented” (Milton and Mano in Fourie, 2017: 186), which speaks to the aspects of identity and representation and their importance in activism. Likewise, this study explores issues of representation and identity through how the campaign against child sex-workers audience perceive the fact that Chimonyo, who lives in the United Kingdom, ran a campaign on behalf of the Epworth community.

Although social action is dependent on the collective (Milton and Mano in Fourie, 2017), what constitutes the “we” in social media activism is fragmented, thereby putting the aspect of the collective and representation at odds. Milton and Mano in Fourie (2017: 185), therefore, questions, “How do identities and social action articulate together when experience illustrates that ‘we’ are so often ideologically, spatially and racially at odds?” (Kavada in Gerbaudo and

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<sup>19</sup> #BringBackOurGirls was a Nigerian campaign that called for the release of more than 270 Chibok girls who had been kidnapped by the Nigerian extremist group Boko Haram in 2014.

Trere, 2015) works towards this question by exploring how social media was appropriated in the construction of the 'collective' within the Occupy Wall Street movement, arguing that Facebook and Twitter were used as part of the process of 'identisation' of the movement, which further amplifies the politics of identity and representation in activism.

### **Practicalities of Participation**

Despite participatory culture's efforts to involve all people in media participation, quite often, the reality of participation differs from the rhetoric on many grounds (Nelson and Wright, 1995 in Yule, 2012). There are ongoing and growing concerns about public participation (or lack thereof) in modern democracies where online activism is "often perceived banal, superficial and failing to transform or renew democratic institutions" (Lim, 2013:3). Most people might agree that social media participation raises awareness of, if not knowledge, about social issues. However, it is less clear whether raising awareness translates into more meaningful and tangible societal benefits (Rotman *et al.*, 2011).

While recognising social media's potential in activism, Mutsvairo (2016) challenges social media's participatory and emancipatory nature. He questions the emancipatory aspect of owning a mobile phone when one cannot afford to service it. He further argues that it is implausible to expect those finding it difficult to put food on the table to be active in online or offline activism. Mutsvairo (2016) acknowledges that online activism's success relies on several factors, chief among them is effective coordination with offline activities. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, where internet penetration is low, the online-offline connection has yet to become universally plausible. Internet access in Zimbabwe has improved with the popularity of mobile technology through cell phones; however, it is still out of reach for the majority living in poverty communities such as Epworth (Chitanana, 2019).

One key element contributing to the success of social media campaigns is how the movements (campaigns) are framed (Lim, 2013). The concept of framing is significant in explaining how meaning is constructed to legitimise collective activities and actions (Lim, 2013). Some movements need to frame themselves to impersonate successful viral stories in mainstream popular culture. Lim (2013) argues that social media does not inadvertently generate an ideal public sphere in which effective and robust public participation occurs. So, frames allow individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label events and experiences in their life, space and world (Lim 2013). Frames for collective action perform this function by simplifying reasons and rationales for participation (Lim 2013).

Parallel to the aspect of frame, is context. Context is a determinant factor on how to frame a campaign and the perception towards it on social media. For example, the well-known “Arab Spring”, which refers to popular citizen-led protests that took place in North Africa (mostly Tunisia and Egypt). The protest was primarily driven by social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, and therefore exhibited the significant role and the further potential of social media networks in enhancing political expression. Juxtaposing it with Zimbabwe on October 19, 2019, when a vendor accused of stealing police helmets died in police custody awaiting his bail hearing (Nehanda Radio, 2019<sup>20</sup>). Zimbabweans, including leaders of the opposition, ‘activists’ and lawyers took to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to call out the government to account for the vendor’s death (Lucky Mabiza, 2019<sup>21</sup>), but after a few weeks, the momentum for the calling for justice for his death faded away. Through the Ministry of Information, even the government took to Twitter to ‘assure’ the general populace that they will investigate the vendor's death. They tweeted: :

@Ministry of Information, Publicity & Broadcasting @InfoMinZW Govt would like to inform the public of the death in custody of an individual who was on remand in the custody of Prisons and Correctional Services. The individual was remanded in a condition of unwellness and immediate medical care was sought for him and he was hospitalised. He was attended to by doctors. All deaths in custody are thoroughly investigated. We now await the result of a post-mortem to ascertain cause of death. We wish to convey our condolences to the bereaved family and friends of the deceased. May his soul rest in peace.

These are same circumstances using the same medium to raise awareness, but the difference in contexts yielded different outcomes. Server (2002), argues that information technology affects the construction of, and response to, social problems such as poverty and inequality whilst, on the other hand, he admits that it can promote organising efforts in disadvantaged communities. In the above example, the platform used to call out the government about the vendor’s death in police cells is the same platform that the government used to counter the accusations and seemingly proffer solutions. This example speaks primarily of participation in that the technology itself allows any group with the resources to participate; however, one needs to examine what participation means. Participation in this and many other activism cases (social media or otherwise) is directly linked to intention. With the given scenario, the government’s

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<sup>20</sup> <https://nehandaradio.com/2019/10/19/vendor-assaulted-by-police-dies-in-custody/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://mbaretimes.com/2019/10/20/zimbos-react-to-the-death/>

participation was to do damage control as much as it was to control the narrative of the vendor's death which happened in their custody. Be that as it may, beyond just intention, ethical conduct should be consideration in all participation (Carpentier, 2019).

#### *Public / Private Matters*

One of the most complex ethical issues related to the use of social media, particularly in activism, is how or where to draw the line between what should be kept private and what could or should be made public in a campaign. Social media's double-edged sword is that: it simultaneously makes ethical problems larger and complex, and at the same time, it offers new solutions and ways to participate in ethical journalism (Wasserman in Fourie, 2017), which is evident in the use of social media for activism in that, there is no clear emphasis on the responsibility of users or audiences to ensure ethical content online. In the case of Chimonyo's campaign against child sex-work, one of the videos feature some young children speaking in front of the camera with only half of their faces blurred. Since it was for the campaign, maybe having the children in the videos was to draw sympathy and authenticate the video, but one wonders if there was prior consideration of ethics that prohibit children in vulnerable circumstances to be exposed to the public, which shall be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

#### *Relationship with mainstream media and practical activism*

Another factor that social media activism's success depends upon is its congruency with the mainstream media culture. Some scholars observe that social media activism is most successful when its narratives, icons, and symbolic representations mimic those that dominate contemporary popular culture (Mutsvairo, 2016). By understanding the nature and limitations of social media activism and its conditions for success, activists may utilise, employ and transform it into meaningful civic engagement and political participation (Lim, 2013).

Social media activism is viewed as complimentary activism to 'practical activism'. Rotman *et al.* (2011: 3) define practical activism as, "use of a direct, proactive and often confrontational action towards attaining a societal change". This definition of practical activism renders online activism less practical, as incomplete without physical activism. This study explores the perception of social media activism by online and offline audiences, including whether social media can be a stand-alone platform of activism in Zimbabwe to achieve results and not be

viewed as only a prelude to physical action. Admittedly, even in popular cases such as the Arab Spring, social media worked as a platform for a call to physical action, but with the ever-changing dynamics of activism and social media, there is a need to re-evaluate.

Furthermore, influencing the outcomes of social media activism is the aspect of reportage and presentation of issues and subjects being represented. Jenny Runnacle (2019), in her article on the protests in Hong Kong (2019), acknowledges the role of technology and social media, particularly Facebook, in that it made her feel part of the protests from London. Reportage by someone on the ground who can relay the realities to an online community is paramount. Subsequently, a potential benefit of social media activism is that it allows social media to coordinate online and offline activities.

Studies on social media campaigns such as #Rhodesmustfall, #Blacklivesmatter, Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and so forth tend to focus on using online platforms to organise ‘serious’ political activism (Kasiyamhuru, 2019). Studies of social media activism have tended to prioritise seminal case studies, such as the Arab Spring, while ignoring relatively small scale but no less critical case studies that show contextualised social media practices at the local level, bounded by local contexts and history (Matsilele, 2019). This study addresses this gap by examining Chimonyo's campaign in the context of its local social, political and economic discourses by speaking to local Epworth residents.

### **Social Media Activism in Zimbabwe**

To appreciate the state of social media activism in Zimbabwe (online and offline), it is essential to explore activism in Zimbabwe with its history that established definite stances in activism and an evolving narrative that far predates social media influences. Before the turn of the new millennium and the introduction of the internet to the broader Zimbabwean populace, the prevailing form of protest and activism was through music and street protests known as ‘Toyitoyi’. From 2012, Zimbabwe witnessed growth in digital activism (Matsilele, 2019). However, this by no means represents the beginning of online campaigns; platforms like Kubatana<sup>22</sup> and Sokwanele<sup>23</sup> were established in the early 2000s and contributed to the then-budding forms of

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<sup>22</sup> Kubatana is a Zimbabwean publication that focuses on making the civic and human rights information published by civic society in Zimbabwe accessible to members of the public. (<http://kubatana.net/>)

<sup>23</sup> Sokwanele is a civic action support group in Zimbabwe (<https://allafrica.com/list/aans/post/af/cat/zimbabwe/pubkey/publisher:editorial:00010524.html>) that publishes articles on human rights situation in the country.

citizen-driven online socio-political activism in the country. The growth in social media use since 2012 coincided with the economic and political recession that resulted in ‘activists’ and ordinary citizens harnessing online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to challenge the status quo (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019).

Zimbabwe’s social media activism is still very narrow and full of contradictions. While Zimbabwe has had significant protests employing social and digital media, their impact is contentious (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019). Several studies have explored the relationship between new media technologies and political and social development in Africa (Mutsvairo, 2016; Olorunnisola and Douai, 2013). The advent of the mobile phone in Zimbabwe is attributed to playing a vital role in processes of “individual expression and identification” (Chiumbu and Nyamanhindi, 2012: 66). On the other hand, the Zimbabwean government argued that digital activists are Western-backed regime change agents bent on creating a moment of political instability to unseat the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)<sup>24</sup> party from power (Chitanana and Mutsvairo 2019).

#ThisFlag, an online protest movement sparked by a social media video by a Zimbabwean cleric Evan Mawarire in 2016, could be considered as a significant turning point in the history of Zimbabwean social media activism. These protests became the first-ever campaigns to be organised entirely online and without traditional social movement organisations that rely on significant on-the-ground coordination (SMOs) (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019).

Social media and public internet access in Zimbabwe have an economic and political class challenge, as cemented by Chatora (2012:2), who admits that class inequalities still exist in social media use, with for “the most part, online and mobile social media remaining largely tools of the metropolitan social elite and middle-class populations”. Divisions in social media arise in literacy, financial, geographic, and personal inclination dimensions, where economic and geographic factors play a more vital role (Chitanana, 2019). Social class divisions are apparent in social media protests like #FreePastorEvan<sup>25</sup>, whereby middle class and white-collar activists came out in full support, yet their participation is almost absent from a street-level protest. A few years earlier, Itai Dzamara, a journalist-turned-activist, had regularly faced

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<sup>24</sup> ZANU PF is the ruling party that has been in power in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980

<sup>25</sup> Pastor Evan the cleric who began the #thisflag movement was arrested by the government and the public campaigned for his release

similar charges to Evan Mawarire and even greater persecution. Dzamara came from a low-income neighbourhood and background and did not receive the same solidarity as Pastor Evan, who hails from the northern suburbs<sup>26</sup>. Dzamara's one-man protests were ridiculed as a futile search for relevance. The contributing factor to Dzamara's ridicule also highlights the evident digital divide in Zimbabwe. Debates around the digital divide are related to issues of poverty and access (Chitanana, 2019). Subsequently, in the case of Dzamara, those who could have rallied behind him and his cause belong to the lower and working class which struggle to afford access to social media.

Communication technologies' transformative role should therefore not be seen as universal. In places where these technologies are scarce and unaffordable, they may be low on the list of necessities. Trusted channels like word-of-mouth would be favoured with little reliance on modern technologies (Mutsvairo, 2013b; de Bruijn and Heuvelhof, 2018). Furthermore, in environments where poverty is rife, citizens will most likely devote their time to activities that guarantee their survival instead of 'wasting' time participating in political activities that may not produce any immediate or beneficial outcome for them (Chatora, 2012).

Risk is not always associated with physical action. Low-risk actions such as clicking can also be perceived as high-risk if the movement represents or involves non-mainstream ideology (Lim, 2013). In Zimbabwe, some individuals were arrested for clicking the share button on Facebook or retweet button on Twitter. The case of Martha O'Donovan is an example. She was charged with "subverting the government and undermining the authority of the President"<sup>27</sup> after she was accused of owning the anonymous account of a Twitter character called @Matigary who tweeted, "We are being led by a sick and selfish man". Similarly, during the 2018 'harmonised' elections, a man from Chitungwiza<sup>28</sup> was arrested for sharing a post from a parody account of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission chairperson Priscilla Chigumba.

Brabham (2012) argues that social media research has tended to focus on stand out cases and has used extensive data collecting methods to make generalised claims about human experience and sociality. Instead, he believes that researchers should consider "the everyday normal experiences of most social media users, to consider the place of social media in a broader social

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<sup>26</sup> Northern suburbs are the affluent suburbs in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2017/11/breaking-cid-seize-computers-belonging-magamba-tv-organisation-martha-odonovan-works/>

<sup>28</sup> Chitungwiza is a city in Zimbabwe

context, and to consider marrying big data approaches with interviews and surveys of users” (Fourie 2017:1). This study aligns itself with Brabham's sentiment by examining a population that is under-researched for a myriad of reasons, principally, their social class, which will be examined below.

### *Paid activism*

Dzikamai Bere, the national director of ZimRights,<sup>29</sup> says that activism in Zimbabwe “as a concept and practice is begging for redemption” (Dzikamai Bere, 2020:30). Bere bemoans the state of activism in Zimbabwe, rendering it “confusing and a subject of derision” (Bere, 2020). Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019) similarly opine that active civil society organisations resemble formalised Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), whose activities are principally funded by donor agencies, implying that the programming of these NGOs’ is influenced by the “calls for proposals” from different funding institutions. This influence compromises the sincerity of activism in Zimbabwe, as it may be considered fulfilling donor agendas.

Furthermore, social media activism in Zimbabwe takes different shapes and forms, with content creators taking centre stage. Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019) concur that other forms of activism have emerged in the structure of start-up media organisations, such as BustopTV, who use satire and skits to challenge the status quo and bring awareness to the political, social and economic turmoil in Zimbabwe. However, BustopTV, like other NGOs, are dependent on donor funding (Mutero, 2017); therefore, they fall into the predicament of undertaking what Mutero (2017) labels ‘scripted’ activism. A point underpinned by Mutsvairo (2016:8), “[a]ctivism in Africa is hugely dependent on external donor funding which provides another constraint as, without foreign funds or links, locally bred ideas may continue to be seen as lacking credibility and legitimacy”.

While bearing the above in mind, Mutsvairo (2016) proposes that it is too soon to celebrate the opportunities created by new media technologies, particularly when, for some activists, participation in online activities has meant spending more time in jail. This is because some activists focus on criticising the government, which sometimes leads to arrests, and the arrests translate into huge paychecks from NGOs, which Bere (2019) refers to as “fancy and elite-

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<sup>29</sup> ZimRights is one of the most influential “grassroots movement of ordinary people for human rights in Zimbabwe”. <https://www.facebook.com/ZimRightsLIVE/> -Accessed on 7 May 2021

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.thestandard.co.zw/2020/03/15/why-activism-matters/>

minded”. This type of activism is referred to as “paid activism” (Chitanana, 2019) and tends to cause more hype about the activists themselves than the issues they advocate.

*Barriers to online participation: Affordability, Language and Lack of contextuality*

The three elements to consider for the viability of social media platforms for interaction and governance are accessibility to high-speed infrastructure, availability of secure internet connection, and affordability of new communication technologies such as mobile telephones and tablets (Fourie, 2017:242). The percentage of people using the internet in a country or area is known as the internet penetration rate (Fourie, 2017). Unfortunately, in Zimbabwe, the penetration rate is still low (59,9% according to POTRAZ<sup>31</sup> 2020), with some pockets of Zimbabweans without steady internet access and, by extension, social media (Chitanana, 2019).

However, this study explores the role of social media at a time when some scholars deem accessibility and internet use in Zimbabwe to be on the increase (Mutsvairo, 2016), although the penetration rate overall (59.9%) is still low. This increase in internet accessibility has seen a rise in the frequency of online campaigns, such as the #Beatthepot campaign (2016) led by Thokhozani Khupe of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The campaign was by women for women, asserting that they were incapacitated due to economic hardships (Matsilele, 2019). However, the overall low penetration rate meant that the campaign did not gain the desired traction. Tellingly, the high cost of data exempted them from the same platform they intended to raise economic awareness from and the people for whom they were raising it. This predicament is shared by most of the world’s population, hampering their right to freedom of expression via social media (Fourie, 2017). Furthermore, it relegates activism into a niche realm of superficiality where identity and agency are now refracted through the keypad, touch screen and smartphone camera (Matsilele, 2019), which not everyone has.

It is essential to study social media activism within the specificity of context while considering the idiosyncrasies of history. Subsequently, the opportunities and challenges presented by social media to Africans should best be understood from an African perspective (Mutsvairo, 2016). In order to understand the relationship between social media and society, context is crucial, and Africa has its own history (Mutsvairo, 2016). Some campaigns in Zimbabwe are run in English and create a barrier for the uneducated to participate in. Such participation would

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<sup>31</sup> POTRAZ is the Postal Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe.

increase if these campaigns were simply contextualised in the Shona or Ndebele<sup>32</sup> dialect and culture.

Africa still grapples with disparity issues, especially in terms of the urban/rural divide and diaspora/local splits, which are vital when discussing political and democratic conditions in the continent. Diasporic communities play a crucial part in the socio-political spheres of many nations, especially in the developing world. Mpofu (2011) questions whether Africa has ‘African media’ or rather it’s ‘media in Africa’?, exposing the identity crisis that sees Zimbabwean campaigns tending to emulate western countries’ campaigns and adapting them to Zimbabwean contexts. Runnacles (2019), on the 2019 Hong Kong protests, writes that she could not rely on only Western reportage for her to understand why the people of Hong Kong took to the streets in such great numbers, which buttresses the importance of local reportage and its context value. It also has relevance to this study because the Facebook campaign, used as a case study in this research, was run by an individual living in the United Kingdom, yet it was on ‘behalf’ of a community in Epworth, one of the poorest suburbs in Zimbabwe.

Qualitative research typically assumes that communication should be examined in its naturalistic context. Naturalistic attitude primarily entails an “ambition of considering those contexts in which particular communicative phenomena may be encountered and examined” (Klaus 2012: 266). It is generally assumed that new media activism, in the wake of the ‘Arab Spring’ political protests in the Middle East, can promote and effectively enable social and political changes in contemporary societies. This assumption is a somewhat exaggerated view that is prevalent in Africa, where a lack of empirical evidence has seen policy-makers, commentators and journalists making extraordinary conclusions justifying the Internet’s perceived potential to shape political processes on the continent (Mutsvairo and Sirks, 2015). This, in more ways than one, could be the defining influence of internet capitalism which is widening the social class gap when it comes to social media access.

### *Social Media and Social Class*

Is social media another form of capitalism whereby the rich get richer through the participation of the poor/underprivileged? In order to truly investigate the success of social

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<sup>32</sup> Shona and Ndebele are the two major languages in Zimbabwe.

media activism, one is required to interrogate the relationship between social class and online participation in social movements (Kedijang, 2018).

Henry Jenkins *et al.*, (2016:12) speak of “participatory culture,” a concept that guides this study. Jenkins describes a culture embracing the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other. However, evidence of social media directly driving participation, at least in the case of Zimbabwe, remains limited (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019).

Karl Max defined social class in terms of the ownership of productive property. As proposed by Marx’s theory about mass media, social media accessibility has class levels embedded. Free market forces that are embedded in new media institutions, for example, can push the weak to the fringes of society, undermining their assumed equality and politically disenfranchising them. The question of power – who benefits and who is exploited from the use of a commodified social media – is thus pivotal (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019).

Jenkins *et al.*, (2016) question if participation becomes exploitation when it occurs on commercial platforms where others make money out of our participation, where we do not even own the culture we are producing. Facebook makes money off created content. Chimonyo, the creator of the campaign against child sex-work, admits to having gained traction from this campaign which saw the birth of his NGO called Protection of Adults and Children Team (PACT), which brings to the fore the issue of paid activism and the use of social media platforms to run campaigns which eventually translate into financial gains offline for activists.

Zimbabwe’s social media use and public internet access have economic and political class challenges (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019). The technological and economic divide in the online space undercuts the democratic potential of social media in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, it reinforces deep-rooted inequalities, further disenfranchising other sections of the society, and creates a false perception of participation. Many of the current core debates centre around the terms of participation, questioning if participation can occur under corporately controlled circumstances when our ability to create and share content is divorced from our capacity to participate in the governance of the platform through which that content circulates (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016).

Issues propagated by mainstream media that engage urban middle-class interests typically receive the most coverage (Lim, 2013). Subsequently, the poor lack the voice and recognition necessary to engage in civic action (Appadurai, 2004). Framing the struggle for the poor to resonate with the urban middle-class interests is a particular challenge (Lim, 2013), yet the middle class constitutes the majority of the social media users. The existence of this digital divide, or lack of access to Information technology for certain segments of the population, is evidence of the ability of technology to aggravate existing inequality (Servon, 2002).

“Social media have [...] increased the disempowerment of citizens who lack access of the ability to use these platforms to full effect” (Mutsvairo 2016: 2). While social media provides a window of opportunity, there is a catalogue of factors, including power relations and poverty within the context of African society, that could hinder its ability to influence social and political changes.

In mid-2011, Econet, the largest of Zimbabwe’s three mobile phone companies, announced that 1.8 million of its subscribers were using a mobile broadband connection to access the internet. Internet in high-density communities, such as Epworth, is mainly received via mobile data, yet 71% of mobile phone owners use the phones for purposes other than calling and sending text messages (Dondo *et al.*, 2014). The rise of online social networks, in varying fields, has in the past decade seen and called upon the need for their analysis (Borgatti *et al.*, 2016). Increasing data prices is a government’s way of regulating social media use in a ‘poor economy’ marked by the general poverty of the populace (Matsilele, 2019). This observation helps illustrate one of the critical advantages of social media in an era where traditional media is highly concentrated with (profit-seeking) conglomerates. Unlike developed countries, a large percentage of Zimbabwe’s population remain unnetworked. These factors limit the impact of social media. Furthermore, increased online presence in Zimbabwe does not automatically translate into a geographical and demographical spread (Matsilele, 2016).

Contrary to Servon’s (2002) findings that while, in virtually all countries, internet users tend to be young, male, urban and relatively well educated and wealthy, in Zimbabwe, internet access is evenly distributed between men and women. Those who work may access Wi-Fi from their workplace, thereby adding to the percentage of those who can access the internet, but that does not translate into them being wealthy. The fact is that living on the wrong side of the

digital divide, as do the persistent poor in high-density suburbs in Zimbabwe (like Epworth), means being disconnected from the information society. Therefore, the digital divide is a symptom of a much larger and more complex problem relating to persistent poverty and inequality (Servon, 2002).

Regarding the role of economic power in social media, the concept of the commodification of media comes into play. Social media has become a marketing tool where data is a commodity to sell to advertisers. In turn, users build their own influence and social capital, which convert into another layer of commodities (Mutsvairo and Chitanana, 2019). In this way, social platforms become more self-producing platforms where consumers are also products and capitalist ideology reinforces itself as the best and only system (Fuchs, 2017). For example, in the campaign against child sex-work, Chimonyo, the campaign's originator, went on to form a Non-Governmental Organisation soon after running the campaign on social media. One could argue that this is another case of an online campaign reaping offline rewards.

#### *Facebook as a Participatory Platform*

In 2004, while still a student at Harvard University, Mark Zuckerberg, along with Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes, founded Facebook. (Matsilele 2019). Facebook was initially a localised college socialising site that began extending to members beyond the University. By 2008, it had placed itself as the seminal online site of our time, spanning and dominating the socialising, business and media landscapes. While Facebook is a corporate construct, it barter on the notion that it is free and accessible and inclusive. Since its inception, there has been a tremendous increase in worldwide users.

However, in Zimbabwe, Facebook is accessed primarily in the urban areas and amongst the middle and working classes (Mutsvairo, 2013) and remains somewhat excluded from those in the high-density areas, Epworth included. In 2008, Facebook became the leading social networking site (Mpofu, 2011). With an increase in usage came the harnessing of Facebook as a “safe” platform for activism. Simultaneously, the Zimbabwean government imposed stringent laws to police demonstrations and protests. However, there have not been many studies that examine how the migration to social media activism has been embraced by Zimbabwean audiences, particularly those in high-density communities who have limited access to sites like Facebook (Mutsvairo, 2013).

According to Hootsuite,<sup>33</sup> as of January 2019, active social media use among Zimbabwe's populace was at 7%, mobile social media users at 5,8%, with Facebook ranking in the top three of the top google search queries in Zimbabwe, and dominating the most used social media platform with 41.47% usage as compared to all other social media platforms (Stat Counter GlobalStats, 2019).

Even with the popularity of Facebook, questions remain about its contribution to activism and how activism is conducted in Zimbabwe via the platform in terms of representation? Added to this is the existing gap between what the media reports and the country's realities (Servaes and Lie 2015). Social media statistics are taken between urban and rural populations, neglecting the fact that the urban population is divided into different demographics: low, medium and high density (Manjengwa *et al.*, 2016), which, furthermore, all have different interactions and perceptions to social media activism. Therefore, this study aims to create a more nuanced understanding of Facebook use in a specific demographic of high-density communities.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, activists in Zimbabwe use social media as a safer alternative to offline public spaces to circumvent repression and expand the public sphere where they deliberate on issues of concern (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019). Facebook makes it easier to spread information and diffuse a cause. However, as Lim (2013) notes, this does not guarantee that an issue travels far and wide or that any Facebook mobilisation would be successful. Facebook is perceived to be an interactive platform; therefore, it is crucial to examine how the interactivity of Facebook is perceived by Zimbabwean audiences in high-density communities when used as a platform for activism. Stockes (2012) buttressed this point by linking the research of audiences for media and culture and describing it as a process that allows us to investigate the social uses of media. In this regard, this study examines the perception of social media activism in high-density suburbs using the Epworth audiences' case, mainly because they were the intended recipients of the Facebook campaign under study.

Among other factors that affect the smooth mediation of Facebook for activism is the digital divide. The digital divide is the term for a broadening gap that excludes the most vulnerable communities (Chatora, 2012) who cannot afford to access social media. This amplifies the challenge of power relations in social media whereby while empowering one group, it may do the opposite to the other (Servaes and Lie, 2015). In Zimbabwe, for instance, it was mostly the

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<sup>33</sup> Hootsuite is a social media management platform based in Canada.

urban youths, elite and middle-class citizens who participated in the #ThisFlag<sup>34</sup> and other protests throughout the country, facilitated by social media. However, the issues that these protests addressed were bread and butter issues affecting almost every Zimbabwean. Matsilele (2019) asserts that the shutdown seemed to demonstrate the coordination of the online and offline communities, but there is no conclusive evidence that only social media mediation influenced offline cooperation. Hence this study incorporates the voice of the offline audience in a smaller, more focussed case study in the hope that the relationship between online activism and offline communities may become more apparent.

### Zimbabwean Law and Social Media Activism

After the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe, there was an increase in social activists on social media, including Occupy Africa Unit Square (OAUS) (2013), #ThisFlag (2016), #Tajamuka (2016), and #GenerationalConsensus (2018). These voices arose to counter the ZANU PF party, which has ruled the country since independence and was (at the time) on the verge of winning another election. Against this surge in online opposition, the State became increasingly intolerant of online dissent (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019) and initiated repressive laws to control protests both physically and online. The unleashing of police; and the army, who would open fire on protestors, made physical protests more dangerous to attend. Subsequently, some scholars argue that the internet has then become an escape route.

Authorities seem to be unsettled about social media, which they intend to control through social media regulations. In Zimbabwe, the Criminal Codification Act stipulates restrictions and limitations of citizens' freedom of expression, also known as the Codification of Reform Act (Kasiyamhuru 2019), which regulates cyber activity by introducing new legislation. There was an adoption of the Cyber Crime Bill in 2017 and the creation of a full-fledged ministry of Cyber Security, Threat Detection and Mitigation in October 2017. It was renamed the Ministry of Information Communication Technology and Cybersecurity between November 2017 and September 2018 and was tasked with policing social media and other Cybersecurity threats (Matsilele, 2019). The campaign against child-sex work may be perceived as a low-risk

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<sup>34</sup> #Thisflag made a collaborative effort with #tajamuka calling for a #ZimShutDown, a national call for people in cities and towns to stay at home in a show of defiance at the government's economic failures. This effort was wildly successful as it turned the country's capital Harare and most of the major cities into ghost towns (Matsilele, 2019)

campaign (Mutsvairo, 2013) since it does not include politics, but the increase and prominence of child sex-work in high-density communities expose the shortfalls of the responsible authorities, thereby turning it into a socio-political challenge. Therefore, the risk associated with doing such a campaign and being persecuted for it is equally high.

On the other hand, while the Zimbabwean constitution incorporates fundamental civil liberties in the constitution,<sup>35</sup> including freedom of assembly and association (Section 56), freedom to demonstrate and petition (Section 59), freedom of expression (Section 61), and freedom of the media (Section 66), in reality, there are few guarantees. The state's traditional attitude in response to citizen dissent on social media has been extensive policing and criminalisation of self-expression (Matsilele, 2019). The above laws counter the rights enshrined in the constitution and stifle the potential of social media to liberate. Even satirical skits have seen comedians abducted for disrespecting the president and government. A case in point is of a comedian who was "abducted and tortured" by "state agents"<sup>36</sup> after performing a social media skit which she reports, they accused her of "being too young to the mock the government through skits" (*Newsday*, August 2019)<sup>37</sup>.

### **What Defines an Activist?**

There are multiple ways to define what constitutes an activist. For example, the Merriam Webster dictionary 11<sup>th</sup> online edition (2003) defines an activist as "one who advocates or practices activism or a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue". On the other hand, Cambridge online dictionary (2007) defines an activist as "a person who believes strongly in political or social change and takes part in activities such as public protests to try to make this happen".

Conceptually, the advent of online activism has brought the question of what merits one to be called an activist. Mutsvairo (2016: 13) argues that "traditionally, activism had been reserved for 'activists', but in the information age, dominated by the powerful presence of social media, ordinary citizens making use of mobile media and technological platforms consider themselves

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<sup>35</sup> These rights are enshrined in the Zimbabwean constitution of 2013.

<sup>36</sup> It is not confirmed that it is state agents who do these abductions because they never accepted responsibility, however it is their modus operandi for abductions that is known (Mutsvairo, 2013)

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2019/08/gonyeti-speaks-out-on-abduction-torture/>

activists too”. Mutsvairo contends that in some cases (mainly in Africa), the “overarching belief that everyone with internet access is potentially an activist is fundamentally flawed” (2016: 6). Similarly, this study builds on the argument to investigate the circumstances and actions that merit one to be labelled an activist.

Some activists do their work to gain the attention of Western embassies, which are said to finance their activities (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019). Online social movement activists incline towards drawing attention to themselves as the inadvertency of their activism efforts transforms them into overnight heroes and ‘keyboard warriors’ (Mutero, 2017). An example of this is a Zimbabwean transgender woman named Tatelicious, who uses her Facebook page to talk about transgender issues while also using the agenda and platform to ask for money from her ‘fans’. She openly admits on her page, which is public, that she sought asylum in Sweden using her Transgender status against the background of homophobia in Zimbabwe. The majority of the LGBTQI+<sup>38</sup> community label her an activist, seeing her as an ‘inspiration to be unapologetically themselves’ (Sibanda, 2018).

Beyond Chimonyo’s campaign against child sex-work Facebook, this study aims to explore Chimonyo himself and the notion of an online activist. Soon after running the anti-child sex-work campaign, Chimonyo went on to find and launch an NGO called Protection of Adults and Children Trust (PACT) in early December 2018 (Chimonyo, 2020). Cynics may argue that he only created the Facebook anti-child sex-work campaign to gain traction or perhaps legitimise his ability to run projects. On the other hand, an optimist could argue that Chimonyo has a background in journalism and the belief that social media, specifically Facebook, has the power to affect real change and that his anti-child sex-work campaign expressed his genuine concern for the issue.

The advent of social media has allowed non-professional users to participate in media production processes (Wasserman in Fourie, 2017; 328). The rise of social media has, however, made information available to a group of users and producers, much larger than trained professional journalists, who may not be aware of or interested in following ethical journalism guidelines (Urban, 2011; 328), thereby compromising the protection and safety of the concerned minors. Mutsvairo (2016:6) echoes that some activists live on the margins of being journalists and activists simultaneously; this results from the powerful presence of social

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<sup>38</sup> Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex plus other terms describing sexuality other than heterosexual.

media, which has turned “ordinary citizens making use of mobile phones and digital technology platforms consider themselves activists too”

### **Child sex-work and child protection laws**

Child sex-work is surging in Zimbabwean high-density communities (Masara, 2015) even though there are child protection laws in place. Efforts by both government and NGOs to curb the practice are not producing desired results (Mashayamombe, 2017). The challenge is further compounded by a lack of expertise in child sex-work policies and developmental research and practice (Mabvurira *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, social media activism attempts to fill the gap, as exemplified by the campaign against child sex-work.

The use of the term sex-work concerning children (anyone below the age of 18) is still being debated. Child rights activists in Zimbabwe and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Justice for Children’s trust, Tag a Life International (TALI) *et al.*, dispute that, because a child cannot consent to sex then he/she cannot be termed a ‘sex-worker’. They state that if a person above the age of 18 engages in sexual activities with a child, it is either rape or exploitation. As noted in the first chapter, Chimonyo uses the word ‘prostitution’ in his campaign, but for this research, ‘sex-work’ and ‘anti-child sex-worker’ are the applied terms. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the general definition of sex-work, is “provision of sexual services for money or goods”, but for this research, that is the definition used to refer to the children engaging in transactional sex. The group of child sex workers applicable to the study are girls aged 16 years old and younger. According to the Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013, the age of majority<sup>39</sup> is 18 years yet, the age of sexual consent and marriage for girls is 16 years old, while the boy’s age of marriage consent is 18 years old. Ilet (2010), posits that child sex work is a gendered issue with more girls affected than their male counterparts.

This study understands and conceptualises child sex-work in Zimbabwe as a structural crisis. “While participatory politics does raise hope for fostering a more democratic culture, it cannot in and for itself overcome structural inequalities that have historically blocked many from participating in civic and political life.” (Jenkins, 2016). While the government’s responsibility is to restore the economy, it is also to ensure that vulnerable members of society are cushioned

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<sup>39</sup> Age of consent

from a poorly performing one by investing in social protection schemes in which children fall under the most affected. Zimbabwe's lack of social investment and the general structural crisis has increased vulnerability in disadvantaged families and children (Machacha, 2015; 9), resulting in a child sex-work marketplace. Bringing these issues into the public domain is the self-confessed role of the social media activist. Chimonyo and others' campaigns have rallied and relied on being entities that seek to address the balance of the government's flawed structure by bringing the incarnations of these flaws to the front of the social conscience. Subsequently, using Chimonyo's campaign as the case study, this research interrogates how effective these activists are and how social activism is received and perceived in high-density communities.

Some laws protect the rights of children. These include international legislation called the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Even though 194 countries have ratified the CRC, many countries, especially African ones, have not domesticated its provisions (African Child Policy Forum, 2008). The CRC envisions a society that guarantees children's rights, enabling them to reach their full potential as rights holders (UN 1990; Machacha, 2015). Zimbabwe has not ratified that law and therefore cannot be held fully accountable. The limitations are that many African leaders interpret the CRC and other international laws as an imposition on them by Western countries; one of the motives to get African leaders to rectify this is to avoid international sanctions (African Child policy forum, 2008). Because of this fact, they do not implement this international law as a form of protest.

For instance, the Zimbabwean government has often accused its diaspora population of fermenting resistance against the government on cyberspace, with one minister calling the political diaspora audience 'social media dissidents' and 'cyber terrorists' (Matsilele, 2019) or 'regime change agents'. In the case of Chimonyo and his campaign, bearing in mind that he lives in the diaspora, the exposure of the child-sex work in Epworth could be viewed as anti-government intending to taint the regime's name.

To add, children's experiences, needs and concerns matter in their own right requiring a critical analysis in the present. How does online risk affect offline risk (Livingstone, 2009)? Socio-economic context-awareness of Zimbabwe's social and economic landscape is essential to understanding the situation (Dunn, 2001) of child sex work. Chimonyo's inclusion of children

in his online campaign is a case in point. What about their lives offline, and to what end did their consent to be interviewed benefit them?

The occurrence of child-headed families is a far too common phenomenon in Epworth, particularly because of the avenues that it opens up into the child sex-work arena. How we identify and define a problem is a function of our culture's implicit assumption, limiting potential solutions and predetermining who and what are seen as problems. Based on this, the lack of internet and failure to access social media can be perceived as a core problem in trying to make social media activism work in a Zimbabwean context. Hence this study examines if and how Facebook can mediate activism to address child sex-work in Epworth.

### **Ethics and online activism: a double-edged sword?**

In any form of media and communication, it is important to consider ethical values. Livingstone (2009: 326) articulates that children's best interest should always be considered in media. However, the advent of social media has altered journalistic processes in many ways, bringing differences in scale, reach, and speed which all have ethical implications (Wasserman in Fourie, 2017: 328). The media has been accused of applying victimisation framing (Lim, 2013) in their reportage. In the case of child sex-work, the media reported the stories with no remorse as if laying the blame on the children affected (Masara, 2015).

Victim blaming ideology refers to the "tendency to find individuals responsible for their problems despite the antecedent and contextual economic, social and political factors" (Seidman and Rappaport, 1986: 4). According to the victim-blaming mindset, child sex-workers in the Epworth case are perceived as "responsible" for ending up on the streets selling sex. Some solutions often perpetuate the problems that they were designed to solve or simply provide the appearance of change while maintaining the status quo. For example, Masara (2015) believes that instead of raising awareness of the problem, many local Zimbabwean newspapers inadvertently blame the child-sex workers themselves. Instead of portraying them as victims of social-economic circumstance and ultimately sexual abuse and exploitation, they highlighted their symbiotic relationship with their customers and their environment, painting a picture both in Zimbabwe and abroad of them being 'willing participants' and 'victims by choice' (Mushohwe, 2018). They also failed to explore the daily problems the children face while operating in a high-risk environment where they are vulnerable to their 'customers' and

at the same time also exempt from social welfare services and health rights because of the stigmatisation they face from the small community of Epworth.

Viewing the children in this way generates complacency in adults who see them as ‘wayward’ and beyond redemption, thereby perpetuating the problem (Masara, 2015). Structural social work theory notes a deliberate political choice to keep inequalities and insufficiency by politicians. In this regard, it can be argued that challenges faced by child sex-workers can be alleviated, but the political resolve is not there (Machacha, 2015). The problem is further compounded by the shifting of blame and the lack of responsibility to assist them. With the emergence of social media, the hope for using it to raise awareness and mediation for such children’s issues and participation has been upstretched.

Most literature on child sex-work speaks more about the phenomenon itself than the tools employed to address it. Thus, this study focuses on how Facebook mediates activism by examining its place on the activism landscape and how it is perceived by audiences living in high-density communities of Zimbabwe. The surge of child sex-work; and the Zimbabwean status quo (economic, political and social), merits a social media activism focus as an alternative intervention.

### **Online and Offline Audience Research**

Most audience research studies are empirical studies done in developed countries (Graham, 2016), while this study focuses on Zimbabwe, a developing third world country. With the advent of social media, the growing body of theoretical and critical studies produced are far removed from the practical day-to-day problems and issues faced by offline audiences. With the rapid change of communications technology and audiences, research has become more vital.

This study is framed to understand that audiences and/or prosumers play an integral part in activism. Audience is defined by Bertrand and Hughes (2005; 37) as the receiver and consumer of a text. Online communities may be recognised as an audience because they consume and decode messages. However, the term prosumer is also applicable here as it still positions the online community members as consumers, but if they generate content in relation to the campaign, they are then also deemed content producers. “This idea of the blurring of

distinctions between producers and consumers is finally realising the predictions of Toffler (1980) about the rise of the prosumer and of Fiske (1987) about the emergence of a semiotic democracy engineered by a media-literate ‘active audience’ (Des Freedman, 2012:76).

Questions could be asked about the relevance of speaking with offline communities in the context of an online activism study. Miller and Sinanan (2017) conducted an extensive analysis of social media activism in Trinidad, where they emphasise the importance of the broader offline context as integral to account for the online activity. The use of a specific country as a case study demonstrates that Facebook is culturally specific and is always encountered with respect to some particular population (Miller and Sinanan, 2017). Miller *et al.* (2016) also analyse how, contrary to popular studies which focus on how Facebook has changed the world, the world has changed Facebook. In relation to audiences, social media is defined as the contents posted on platforms rather than the platforms upon which people post (Miller *et al.*, 2016), thereby emphasising the centrality of producers<sup>40</sup> vis-à-vis audiences in social media activity. In this regard, this research examines the perception of social media activism in high-density suburbs using the Epworth community’s case, principally because they were the intended recipients of the campaign under study.

Social media is about social relations and social networking. Accordingly, networks created in social media resemble those existing offline (Lim, 2013). For example, in Indonesia, the internet acted as a ‘cyber-civic space’ in which individuals and groups generate collective activism online and translate it into real-world movements in offline settings (Lim, 2013),. Bringing it closer to home, the #feesmustfall (2015) also used the internet as a cyber-civic space. Looking at the classification of the social media audiences in Zimbabwe, this resemblance is questionable because the class that can access social media [Facebook to be precise] is in a different class from those offline and is relevant to the present study on the Epworth community, which has higher poverty levels.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>40</sup> Prosumer refers to an individual who is engaged in the activity of produsage (conflation of “production” and “usage”), a term coined by Bruns Axel (2008).

This chapter reviewed literature that established the scope of this study's examination and assessed research on social media activism, audience research and child sex-work. Broadly, the literature agrees that social media is making waves on the activism front. However, most recorded successes are political campaigns. There is a consensus that evaluating the impact of social media activism should be done from a specific contextual angle. More so, there is a direct correlation between poverty, unemployment, and child sex-work. Other factors that affect social media activism include social class and local laws. Additionally, the recurring aspects of activism that contribute to social media activism include access, digital divide, identity, agency and representation. The reviewed literature gives an insight into the importance of audience participation in social media activism and the factors that influence how audiences participate and subsequently perceive social media activism.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

This study is framed using Henry Jenkins' (2006) Participatory Culture for civic engagement to investigate how social media activism is perceived by Zimbabwean online and offline communities using a case study of a campaign against child sex-work in Epworth. Jenkins investigated not only participatory culture but media, audiences, activism and participatory politics. Participatory culture embraces the values of deep democracy and instrumental participation of marginalised populations through a broad range of forms and practices (Jenkins, 2006). The study places human experience in the centre of participatory culture to study the parallels and variances of online and offline perceptions (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016:12).

The purpose of participatory culture theory in this study is to help frame and interpret the perception of social media activism by offline and online communities. The main objective is to interrogate the perceptions and place of social media activism in Zimbabwe by online and offline communities. The use of participatory culture in achieving this study's objectives is explained below, focusing on the campaign against child sex-work in the high-density community of Epworth, Zimbabwe. The following sub-objectives guide and structure this aim:

- 1) To investigate the principles and practices that constitute someone as a social media activist.
- 2) To examine ways in which Facebook, as a participatory platform, mediates activism in Zimbabwe.
- 3) To explore how and if social media activism resonates with online and offline communities.

### What is Participatory Culture?

Jenkins and Carpentier (2019) explain that participatory culture provides criteria to explore what has been achieved in participation. This criterion includes but is not limited to the presence of an equal distribution of decision-making power amongst all participants who are afforded dual roles as members and active contributors through opportunities to exercise creative agency (Lim, 2014). These and other aspects of participatory cultures are important in exploring how participation plays a role in the perception of social media activism. In his

article titled ‘Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory culture’, Jenkins (2006<sup>41</sup>) admits that he initially pioneered participatory culture in the 1990s, promoting the idea that fans (now audience) are “among the most active, creative, critically engaged, and socially connected consumers of popular culture and that they represent the vanguard of a new relationship with mass media”. Participatory culture gives power to the (now) audience in the age of Web 2.0 and social media. This power gives an individual or group the ability to participate in conversations or just click and share other audience members’ thoughts and opinions. Participatory culture is a constructive theory in this study as it assists in assessing how one can be considered an online social activist and the perceptions of online and offline communities of this activism. Being based in Zimbabwe, this examination is different to the context in which Jenkins bases his research. However, with the ubiquity of social media, it is essential to assess how these concepts can (or cannot) account for modes of participation in activism within high-density African communities like Epworth.

Like a playground, referred to as *Dariro*<sup>42</sup> in Zimbabwean (Shona), social media is seen as the modern-day *Dariro* for activism. *Dariro* also works in reference to the Public Sphere, to which Habermas (1964:49) refers to as “the realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed”. At a *Dariro*, social, political, economic, religious and cultural issues are brought to the fore for discussion. Therefore, participatory culture is a normative fit because it accommodates the discussion of a plethora of issues and should allow everyone present and concerned with the issue to contribute and participate, just like a playground, where everyone is allowed to play freely.

Participatory culture is a theory that proposes maximum engagement and participation of everyone, including disempowered<sup>43</sup> communities. Participatory culture embraces the values of deep democracy and instrumental participation of marginalised populations through various forms and practices (Jenkins, 2016), such as participation on social media platforms.

In elucidating his theory, Jenkins (2016) borrows his definition of culture from Raymond Williams (1954), who defines culture as a “sum total of human experience” (in Jenkins

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<sup>41</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256600155\\_Fans\\_Bloggers\\_and\\_Gamers\\_Exploring\\_Participatory\\_Culture](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256600155_Fans_Bloggers_and_Gamers_Exploring_Participatory_Culture) Accessed May 12, 2021

<sup>42</sup> *Dariro* may interchangeably be used to mean playground and platform.

<sup>43</sup> The idea of “disempowered communities” in this study refers to those without access to social media platforms to participate or use their voice and agency on the platform.

2016:12). Jenkins emphasises that, in participatory culture, a social connection should exist between individuals and everyone's contribution should be significant. The making of culture is inherently participatory. However, Jenkins *et al.*, (2016) acknowledge that technology-centric uses of the term "participatory culture" implicitly define participation through the use of a platform rather than a shared practice. In acknowledging that social media can be participatory, Jenkins also admits that although Facebook itself is not exactly participatory, it is a tool that participatory communities sometimes use as a means of maintaining social context, and this study concurs with that notion. In this light, participatory culture theory is used to frame the perception of social media activism by online and offline audiences as well as to detect how Facebook, as a participatory platform, mediates activism.

The importance of exploring both online and offline communities in activism is supported by an example given by Jenkins *et al.* (2016) of a group called The DREAMers. They were primarily undocumented youths who had been fighting for education and citizenship rights in the United States of America. The young American Muslims used coordinated online and offline action to rally behind the passing of the DREAM Act, which was initially proposed in 2001 and forced the then United States President Barack Obama to wield his executive powers to pass the bill in 2012 (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). Their analysis of the campaign using participatory culture theory (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016) used the word 'activist' to describe the young people involved in the DREAMer movement. Contrary to most cases where participatory culture research focuses on youth and social media, this example illustrates that it is also applicable to cases where offline and online activities are coordinated. The theory is context-based and can be tailor-made to different contexts and demographics (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016).

The hallmark of social media activism practice is participation by audiences. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, where internet penetration (and subsequently social media access) is low (59.9% as reported by POTRAZ, 2020), participation becomes compromised (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019). I acknowledge the emergent techno-evolution of the digital divide to describe inequalities brought about by emerging technologies in Zimbabwe (Chitanana, 2019). Participatory culture frames ways to bridge the digital divide. In this regard, participatory culture is used to advance this study's aim to articulate participants' perception of social media activism in their own context.

Jenkins *et al.*, (2016) believe that participatory culture can serve as an infrastructure that can be used in socio-political activities to transform activism. However, context is key, and despite the aims of participatory culture in communities to involve all people, quite often, the reality of participation differs from the rhetoric on many levels (Nelson and Wright, 1995). When applying this idea to the Zimbabwean context, there is a need for a tailored approach to examining threats of social media activism, such as digital disparities. Such an approach ought to be situated within Zimbabweans' realities and be informed by the experiences of harnessing social media technologies to address their socio-economic need. Chitanana (2019) promotes the adoption and adaption of new media and its uses to benefit the marginalized and for social media campaigns and participatory culture to allow for the inclusion of the offline audiences to participate, as is the case with this study.

From the description of what participatory culture by Jenkins (2006) is, it can be deduced that participatory culture is a heterogeneous contextual body of knowledge. It provides opportunities "to actively participate in political discussions, collective production, and to interact and communicate in global networks" (Schafer, 2011:173). Its heterogeneity describes a transformation of cultural production (Schafer, 2011), thereby offering a relevant perspective to locate this study. In the context of this study, offline communities that could not be part of the online interactive audience due to digital disparities cannot be labelled as passive victims whose identities can be narrated in a one-way process by those privileged to access online content. Therefore, participatory culture provides a suitable interpretive framework for understanding and interpreting decoded and encoded accounts of the offline (Epworth) community to recognise their perception of social media activism.

Over time, participatory culture has adjusted to the evolution of the Internet, tapping into its uses and interaction with users and audiences. Jenkins (2016: 2) admits that his "understanding of participatory culture itself as a theory has evolved dramatically". Explaining that "When I first used the phrase in *Textual Poachers*, I was contrasting participation and spectatorship, really only making descriptive claims about the cultural logic of fandom", but now fandom has also evolved into audiences (Jenkins, 2016: 1). As the 'godfather' of participatory culture, he further admits that his shifting of "definition of participatory culture between descriptive and normative definitions without clarity of the difference between the two may have contributed to confusion" (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013; 266). These disclosures confirm the idea that there

is no one size fits all in participatory culture but context and surrounding circumstances to which it is applied defines how it may be used and perceived.

### **Participation in participatory culture**

Participation is an anchoring aspect in participatory culture, as propounded by Jenkins *et al.*, (2016), who relates participatory culture as being concerned with how that information and communication technology have encouraged participation in society. Participation as a critical concept regained popularity in communication and media with the advent of Web 2.0 (Jenkins, 2016). There are multiple definitions of participation. Participation is “equalisation of power relations” (Carpentier, 2011:354). Arnstein (1969:216) refers to participation as “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded, to be deliberately included in the future”. Pateman (1970) define full participation as the equal power position of all actors in the decision-making process. The common denominator of these and other definitions of participation is the presence of power and power-sharing.

“Participation is a floating signifier that can take on many different forms, potentially and theoretically, it can shift in any possible direction” (Carpentier and Ribeiro, 2019:353). Participation is embedded in a democratic culture. Participatory culture is a term often used for “designating the involvement of users, audiences, consumers and fans in the creation of culture and content” (Fuchs, 2017:69) and this involvement, in part, is what defines participation. In reference to participation, Fuchs (2017:345) uses the phrase ‘the logic of commons,’ which he further defines as the “logic of common humanity that has realised that all humans should be equal participants and beneficiaries of society”, which is the same equality that participatory culture seeks. In this respect, participatory culture theory will enable an understanding of the manner in which offline and online audiences negotiate their power or lack thereof to participate in activism on social media.

#### *Exploring technocentric and human-centred participation*

Social media provides a space for individuals to participate in the act of consumption and in the production and distribution of ideas, knowledge and culture (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009). This very act of participation is what Jenkins called participatory culture, and in Facebook terms, this can be clicking a reaction emoji, liking, sharing the post, video calling or commenting.

How and who participates in a campaign determines the perception and the outcome of the campaign. However, not all forms of participation are equally meaningful and empowering. Against this backdrop, for participation in activism to be meaningful and empowering, the campaign(s) should be framed within the cultural context of the recipients of the campaign, for it is not technologies that are participatory but culture (Jenkins, 2016). In this light, participatory culture theory is used to frame the perception of social media activism by online and offline audiences and detect how Facebook as a participatory platform mediate activism.

Sandor Vegh (2003:72) related three forms of social activism: Awareness/Advocacy, Organisation/Mobilization and Action/reaction. The child sex-work campaign under study in this research falls under awareness/advocacy. It tries to make the audience aware of the child sex work happening in Epworth, a high-density community in Zimbabwe, and perhaps motivate the community to eradicate the phenomenon. Currently, there is often a gap between what the media report and the realities of the country (Fuchs, 2017). The campaign happened on social media, Facebook in particular. The campaign was meant to shed light on child-sex work (Interview with Doubt Chimonyo, 20 January 2020), a social issue that has become rampant in Epworth, an offline *Dariro*. Dumitrescu (2015) calls out future researchers to concentrate on if online network's members are participatory in offline activities, and this is what this research sort out to do, applying the lens of participatory culture as a determinant.

Bemoaning the lack of representation in participation in social media activism, Miller (2017:251) suggests that the rise of a phatic online culture in social media activism has thinned “the potential for digital communications technologies to help foster social change by creating a conversational environment based on limited forms of expressive solidarity as opposed to an engaged, content-driven, dialogic public sphere”. The modes of participation afforded to people by particular media and communication infrastructures that mediate social, cultural or political spheres of life always differ. Like how people engage with, accede to, negotiate or explore, and invent new ways of connecting through and around (Livingstone & Das 2013), Facebook is different depending on the mode and circumstances within which they access the platform.

#### *Challenges to participation*

Participatory culture holds the promise to allow for a culture where groups collectively and individually make decisions that impact on their shared experience. However, one cannot make a general assumption that participatory culture always has positive effects (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016:

20). There are multiple barriers to full participation. Some of these barriers are explained in this chapter below. Participation is about changing power relations, and yet this comes as a double-edged sword. While empowering one group, it may do the opposite to another. It does so by seemingly giving an upper hand to those who participate in ‘real time’ (online audience), in the case of my study. Real-time, referring to the time during which the campaign was live on Facebook, excludes those who were offline at the time. At face value, the online audience had the upper hand in the child sex-work campaign by participating as the campaign happened compared to the offline audience.

While we live in a more participatory culture, we do not yet live in a world where it is fully practised because participatory culture risks being both everything and nothing (Carpentier, 2013). Admittedly, Facebook makes it easier to spread information and diffuse a cause. However, this does not provide any assurance that an issue can travel far and wide or that any Facebook mobilisation would be successful (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, Jenkins (2013) asserts that participatory culture has no confines of how or where it is applied, but due to that fact, it is now often used in very ostensible ways by all kinds of groups that want to allure audience’s participation but do not want to give up any real control. In no way does this suggest that participatory culture is destined to fail. The success of participatory culture calls for a consultative process with participants and audiences to hear their perceptions improving the use of social media to achieve ‘equal’ participation. Although not every member must contribute, all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that their contribution will be appropriately valued (Jenkins, 2006).

Fuchs (2013) and Jenkins (2008) have identified the process of users uploading content and utilising social media platforms as a form of exploitation. For example, Facebook “has developed a commodification system that is especially based on commodifying networks, contacts, user profiles and user-generated content that are created by unpaid user labour” (Fuchs, 2017:342). Consequently, most users are seen to not be in control of the content that they post or share, thereby evidencing social media’s inexact interface for self-expression. In some cases, one’s content can be taken down if someone reports it, thereby taking away the ‘democratisation’ (Jenkins, 2006) nature of social media and free expression. Against this background, it is evident that social media can easily become exploited labour and leave us with the paradox of ‘controlled participation’ (Terranova, 2000).

There is a risk of discrediting participation itself through its alignment with the dark side of human behaviour. The dark side of human behaviour includes cyberbullying, trolling and addictive use, yet this can also be labelled participation (Hoffman and Lutz, 2017). Ribeiro and Carpentier (2019) resist this movement. They warn that researchers and practitioners should not subscribe to the broad definition of participation as inclusive of all forms of interaction. In other words, simply because people engage in something, it does not necessarily mean that they can be said to be participating. In this regard, Carpentier (2011a, 2011b) proposes a different model of participation, where access and interaction are defined as participation's necessary preconditions, even though he still considers them to be distinct from participation. These two components are elaborated upon and mobilised in the data analysis (Chapter 5) related to activism.

Fuchs (2017:341) adds that “capitalism, crisis, class and unequal power relations are the main contexts of social media and society today”. He expounds that we live in capitalist societies and that capitalism needs to be considered as the context of the internet. Barassi (2015) compounds the idea that the relationship between the contemporary form of social protest and internet technologies remains under-investigated. She admits that digital capitalism has impacted on cultural processes, which subsequently have a bearing on activist cultures (Barassi, 2015). Chuma (2016) and Wasserman *et al.*, (2018) agree that the media as a public sphere is a privileged communicative space driven by commercial imperatives. Accordingly, this raises the question of whether or not (or rather, *in what ways*) participatory culture can be successfully used to address social issues on a platform that is considered capitalist like Facebook [*my emphasis*]? This study grapples with this question, with specific reference to the research question on how Facebook as a participatory platform mediates activism, which will be explored by engaging the perceptions of the audiences of the campaign in question.

#### *Participation enablers*

The section above highlighted the challenges of participation, and so in order to provide a balanced discussion, this section highlights circumstances that enable participation. Participation is both a means and an end. Garret (2006) suggests three aspects which encourage participation, low cost of participation, promotion of collective identity and online communities. These three aspects are facilitated by social media as a platform. Social media provides a space with limited constraints that enable users to easily express themselves and engage with other users to easily express themselves and engage with other users in discussions about issues affecting them (Mokonehatse, 2018).

The aspect of listening, or in the case of social media, reading or viewing content, has been determined to be an essential aspect in participation, and for this to happen, an audience is equally essential (Mokonehatse, 2018). Despite many advantages of communication that social media has provided, face to face communication is still said to be the best in providing data such as body language and facial expressions, which are limited when using the Internet (Sade-Beck, 2004). However, it is 2021, and we have access to video calls that equally serve the purposes of face-to-face interaction, even though one may argue that it does not equate to face-to-face physical interaction.

Not all of the audience participate, and not all participation is mediated. These questions in relation to Facebook may ask how Facebook may become more participatory; and establish if citizens' voices are being heard, and if so, which voices are going unheard and what should be done about it (Livingstone and Das 2013). Subsequently, in response to these pertinent questions, this study adopts Jenkins' (2016) participatory culture theory as it allows for the tailor-making methods of making social media, specifically Facebook, based on the context of the issues being articulated.

### **Benefits and shortcomings of social media as a participatory platform**

Social media provides space for individuals to participate in the act of consumption, production and the distribution of ideas while affording them a source of knowledge and a connection to culture (Lim, 2013; Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). Jenkins *et al.*, (2009) proffer that participatory culture can serve as an infrastructure borrowed and used by socio-political activities and transformed into civic engagement. This is because social media, at its best, facilitates and amplifies a culture that helps establish a foundation, a training ground and a learning space for individuals to express their opinions (Lim, 2013) and is arguably a hallmark of participatory culture as envisioned by Jenkins. To add to the aspects of the mediation of Facebook is the idea that it strengthens social ties, yet it also raises concerns about privacy and disclosure (Fourie, 2017). The child sex-workers campaign's inclusion of the affected children's videos, and as it turns out, without adult's approval (since they are heads of their homes), brings into question the boundaries between campaigning and possible inadvertent infringement of privacy and ethics.

Jenkins *et al.*, (2016) acknowledge that participatory culture is an ongoing process because each new technology changes the grounds of participatory culture (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2012: 2). Jenkins first used the term participatory culture in 1992, but it has different meanings for different people and platforms today. Many platforms that describe themselves as participatory

do not encourage the “development of any collective understanding of cultural production: the emphasis is on the individual expression” (Jenkins and Carpentier 2012: 8). Web 2.0 platforms over-promise and under-deliver their promises to participation (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). Although that is the narrative that seems to dominate, other schools of thought believe that social media (in this case, Facebook) can be an alternative digital public sphere, where ordinary citizens can voice their counter-hegemonic ideas in the face of "elite and politically dominated public spheres" (Mutsvairo, 2016) which are characterised by the exclusion of marginal voices.

Networked and decentralised media allows audiences and consumers to avoid the passivity demanded of them by television in the face of active participation (Holmes 2009). Sibanda (2018) postulates that online media has become popular, including in Zimbabwe, where much of the populace has access to mobile phones, giving them a technological avenue to use online media, which subsequently liberates them. Still, does it really liberate? It is an alternative platform where people express their divergent views on various issues, including activism, and also a good source for people’s perceptions of certain subjects. However, there are certain aspects necessary in activism that make social media (Facebook) a particularly participatory culture, as stipulated by Jenkins (2006) participatory culture. Some of these aspects are outlined below.

### **Advocacy activism and participatory culture**

Advocacy activism themes emerged from the literature on social media activism in addition to other themes from the data collection process, as explained in the methodology chapter (4). Below are some of the themes that emerged from the literature, and these include; agency, identity, access, language, voice, ethics and representation. These will be discussed in depth in the data analysis chapter, but this chapter explores their intermediary role in social media activism and how participatory culture theory influences them and vice versa. These same themes, or issues, have been cited by Tufte (2017) in his work on participation in social change processes.

#### *Agency*

As noted, the balance of opportunities granted and taken away by the internet remains a topical debate. In this research, the question arises if social media activism creates room for marginalised groups to own their agency. Papacharissi (2008) contemplates that the internet serves merely as a tool but does not contain the agency to effect social change. Another school of thought believes that social media gives agency to individuals to participate in topics they

would have faced challenges to discuss through traditional media due to censorship (Burgees and Green, 2009). With Zimbabwe being one of the countries with media censorship, Papacharissi's notion may be true. However, importantly having agency in a participatory culture does not prescribe or describe how the agency should be and finding one's agency is achieved through participation (Tufte, 2017).

Despite the Zimbabwean government's intention to control the flow of information, Zimbabweans did not remain passive. They have demonstrated agency and found other means to receive and pass information, and this was made possible by the emergency of social media (Mutsvairo, 2016). Emerging literature that explores the various ways Zimbabweans produce and access alternative information (Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012) and Facebook has since become the principal '*Dariro*' for free speech.

Agency is to be understood, not as simple acts (e.g., clicking on a button), but as "the longer processes of action based on reflection, giving an account of what one has done, even more basically, making sense of the world so as to act within it" (Couldry, 2013: 13), this emphasises the importance of gaining agency through active participation as compared to passive participation. Active participation is more significant in participatory culture, and Facebook has been attributed to having increased participation by providing a more individualised experience to their users, enabling them more control in their online experiences and giving them a sense of agency and autonomy (Mokonehatse, 2018). Comparatively, television and other mass media provide viewers passive participation without an opportunity for instant feedback.

### *Identity*

The use of social media platforms helps to form common bonds and identities. For example, in the DREAMers project, YouTube was their '*Dariro*' to circulate messages and reach beyond their physical confines. Sharing their stories on YouTube, often in the form of confessional straight-to-camera 'coming out' stories, YouTube is attributed to as the agent or media used to have helped DREAMers to identify and forge common bonds with others who shared similar backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016) and this is how they created a common identity through social media.

In social movements, identity can be linked in two ways, social (group) identity and individual identity (Fearon 1991). By definition, social identity is "a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes"

and individual identity, as “some distinguishing characteristic (s) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable” (Fearon, 1991:2). As mentioned before, participatory culture is not homogeneous. Therefore it is imperative to coalesce the meaning of identity starting from an individual level to a social level in social media activism because this study subscribes to the idea that it is the individual that forms the collective (Gerbaudo, 2015).

By engaging with other individuals who share the same interests and concerns, social media users are encouraged to discuss and gain knowledge about relevant issues (Weller *et al.*, 2014), allowing for social boundaries to be challenged as users engage with identity practices of everyday life and participate in issues of identity politics. For instance, cultural identity plays a key role in these participatory processes through the logic of identity and how we define ourselves (or how we are being defined) as audience members or members of an elite, and so on (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013). Similarly, activism participants can identify with a campaign if the issue under discussion is relatable in social or religious or geographical terms.

Stuart Hall conceptualises cultural identity in two ways, one as “shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside, any other” (Hall, 1989:223). Secondly, Hall “recognises that, as well as the many points of similarities, there are also critical points of deep and significant differences” (Hall, 1989: 225). Additionally, he acknowledges cultural identity as forever being in the process of transformation and becoming, which supports his encoding/decoding theory positions, stipulating that there is no single way of reading a message because different circumstances shift and influence how one perceives a message/situation. Similarly, participatory culture acknowledges that culture is dynamic. Therefore, one could argue that Hall’s (1989) association of identity with culture means that as (social media) culture changes, so does identity. These ideas around identity and social media use are essential to this study in ascertaining the reasons as to why (or why not) certain study participants paid attention to, or even identified with, Doubt’s anti child sex-work campaign.

#### *Access*

Servon (2002:6) opines that “definitions of access should include: physical access to Information Technology, access to training, access to salient local content in the language of user and access to the process by which telecommunications decisions are made”. He further pronounces that the question should no longer be about “who has got access” but rather “what

are people doing with technologies and what are they able to do when they go online?”. Access is only one of the challenges to bridging the digital divide; another is the low level of information technology knowledge in users, which compounds the challenge of access. Accordingly, the argument in this study is mindful that capacities for access and use of the Internet differ due to geographical, social, cultural, economic and organisational contexts, with high densities and rural areas being the most affected (Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, 2018).

Carpentier (2013) positions access as a prerequisite for actual participation to happen. Facebook is viewed to provide an alternative public sphere (Chibuwe and Ureke, 2016:1), but because of the poverty levels in the community of Epworth, Facebook is a public sphere that is ‘expensive’ to get on, thereby making it beyond the reach for many. Thus, the internet’s ability to democratise the public sphere remains a dream in Zimbabwe’s context because “we are still far from getting the majority of the population to access internet” (Ncube 2019:118). The world of social media activism (online) is a very different world to the Epworth community. However, within this lucid picture, we get a clear notion of the steps to be taken and how internet access can bridge the gap between these two worlds and play an integral role in social media activism.

As noted above, social media promotes participatory culture but it does not guarantee that the principles of participatory culture will exist because of power dynamics and inequalities that still exist. A telling limitation of social media and participatory culture is that those who express themselves and get a more significant number of retweets are perceived to have a higher value of participation (Mutsvairo, 2016). Social media participants tend to translate online likes, shares and comments to be an accurate reflection of offline participation (Mutero, 2017), resulting in a 'false' representation of and to the community offline. Conversely, there is improved participation when people feel a sense of belonging in society, achieved through having access and being included in decisions (Dahlgreen, 2005). These gradations highlight the inter-connectedness of identity and access and how they both influence participatory culture in social media. Access to social media requires financial contribution and is considered a privilege (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019), which excludes the marginalised no matter how self-empowered they are or their potential to contribute to public (social media) issues. Conclusively, the reactions online do not always account for the communities within the same population without access to online platforms.

### *Language*

Language can be described as an image forming agent that provides a group with a whole conception of themselves individually and collectively (Zanamwe, 2013). Language is a carrier of culture, and therefore it can also signal the change of people's culture (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012). Most internet sites are formatted in English or other colonial languages, leaving many Africans out of social media participation (Mutsvairo and Ragnedda, 2019). Although a translation option has been introduced to Facebook, it is often inaccurate when applied to Zimbabwe's main languages Shona (all dialects) and Isindebele. Even though websites and content by people who speak different languages are available and prevalent on Facebook, they are dominated by English content. The campaign under examination had a mixture of English and a paltry inclusion of Shona dialects. Online audiences primarily used English, whilst focus group discussions for this study in Epworth largely used Shona as the primary language. This language barrier immediately differentiates between online and offline audiences.

Most of Zimbabwe's poor communities speak local languages. Hall (1997:1) discerns language as being "central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings". Even with access to social media, the Epworth community's situation is still complicated by the language barrier. The lack of English language skills needed to interact with most content insulates them from the international community. As previously mentioned, existing translation applications are flawed and local idioms and metaphors are often mistranslated, as illustrated in Chapter 5. The politics of power are highlighted here because third-world countries have to conform to using foreign languages and their difficulties in social media participation accentuate the already existing power struggles. It is crucial to encourage diverse content in local languages for the media and ICTs, bearing in mind the potential of interactive technologies to carry multimedia content (Servaes and Lie, 2015).

### *Voice*

When talking about voice in activism, the statement, "Anything for us, without us, is against us"<sup>44</sup> rings loud and true. This statement also rings true to activism that is done for

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<sup>44</sup> This statement became a mantra in a movement for people living with disabilities. The originator of the statement is unknown though it was popularised by James Charlton who wrote a book with the same title. He also credits two South African disability activists whom he heard the phrase from and upon inquiring from them they said they had heard it from an unknown East European activist at an international disability rights conference (Wikipedia) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing\\_About\\_Us\\_Without\\_Us](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us)

marginalised communities like Epworth. The importance of their voice in issues concerning them cannot be over-emphasised. In a participatory process, individuals are educated about the decisions because it is impossible to make a collective decision that satisfies everyone (Mokonehatse, 2018), and this is another way of giving them a voice.

Voice remains a fundamental element of the potentially “vibrant, inclusive and empowered body of politics” (Tuftte, 2017;178). Even UNICEF argues for a shift in communication models to take up challenges of voice, reach and engagement (Tuftte, 2017). Servaes and Lie (2015) argue that; there is a need for effective linkages that give voices to the poorest and can engage with policy and influence decision making.

An interesting point to note is that the possibility of giving voice to the marginalised (oppressed) is constrained by institutional discourses that “excessively empower expertise and close off to citizen participation through a technologisation of issues and associated depoliticisation” (Fernandes-Jesus *et al.*, 2019: 68). For example, a person with more Twitter followers gets more audience and engagement on their posts. It then becomes the case that the loudest voice is most listened to, leaving out those who may have ‘real’ issues but few followers. All people have agency and voice, but not everyone has the opportunity to connect this agency and voice to a broader public stage and the sites of power (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). This study foregrounds the importance of voice in its investigation of the perceptions of social media activism and if/how the people involved feel heard.

### *Ethics*

Ethical considerations are as imperative as any other advocacy-activism aspect. In relation to Doubt’s inclusion of videos of the children on his Facebook campaign, one questions whether or not implications for the children were considered. At the same time, how does one intervene for children without a voice, bearing in mind that “Anything for us, without us, is against us” (Zimbabwe Junior Council, 2019)<sup>45</sup>. These questions politicise the boundaries between representation and ethical conduct. With the emergence of Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society, there has been a reported increase in activism due to the ‘brown envelope’<sup>46</sup>, also referred to as paid activism. This trend questions the sincerity of activists and whether they

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<sup>45</sup> The Zimbabwe Junior Council adopted the phrase from James Charlton who popularised the phrase. It’s appropriate to quote the Junior council in this case as they represent all young people below the age of majority in Zimbabwe. <https://genderlinks.org.za/casestudies/zimbabwe-junior-councils-press-for-youth-friendly-services/>

<sup>46</sup> Brown envelopes are commonly known to be used to put money into for payment of bribes

are sincerely representing the marginalised or are willing to break ethical conduct for the incentive that comes with it. Participatory culture calls for the consideration of ethics for all involved in the use of social media, be it for activism or otherwise (Liew and Cheetman, 2016).

### *Representation*

With all its promise to be an open platform that promotes participation, social media activism is widening the crisis of representation of the ordinary citizen and the marginalised in particular (Tuftte, 2017). Tuftte (2017) elaborates that with the popularity of social media, it is tagging along with a critical shrinking of the public space for deliberation and the exclusion of participation and the experience of ordinary citizens to the general public debate, particularly those without access to platforms where these debates and discussions are conducted. The issue of representation is a complex one, especially in cases where offline and online communities are involved. How does one represent offline communities on their issues as they are being discussed online? Is representation alone a worthy form of participation? These questions grapple with locating the importance of representation in participation. Hall (1997:2) opines that, “culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and making sense of the world, in broadly similar ways”. Hall’s position informs this study in that, it acknowledges that the online and offline community are an assorted audience. Therefore their reading of the campaign against child sex-work will be different as well.

There are two schools of thought that expand on whether representation alone is a worthy form of participation. Gross (1994:143) posits that “Representation in the mediated “Reality” of our mass culture is in itself Power” on the other hand, scholars such as Carpentier (2016) argue that there needs to be more than just representation for it to be participation. This study subscribes to the idea of culture being central in campaigns such as the campaign against child sex-work because audiences actively interpret texts as influenced by their specific socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, cultural representation becomes central as well in such campaigns. This study explores the question of the importance of representation in participation within the confines of participatory culture.

As Jenkins *et al.*, (2009) allude to, some activities become widespread only if the culture supports them. Is social media activism supported by the Zimbabwean culture, or more specifically, the Zimbabwean way of doing things? For instance, in the Shona culture, an

expression that says ‘*chidembo hachivhiirwi pavanhu*’<sup>47</sup> meaning private issues should not be discussed in public. Child sex-work is regarded as a sickening and embarrassing issue, hence discussing it in the public domain of social media exposes a private issue that would otherwise have been discussed low key. The former Zimbabwean Minister of Social Welfare, Prisca Mupfumira, is on record criticising NGOs for exposing the child sex-work in high-density suburbs, stating that by publicising the issue, they “abused the rights of the children”, and it was the government’s responsibility to protect the children and handle the issue (Pindula News, 2017)<sup>48</sup>. From a patriarchal position, discussing a ‘taboo’ such as child sex-work in public is frowned upon because it tarnishes the image of the society. Also, from a political angle, it exposes the failures of the politicians who are the custodians of the law, yet on the other hand, from the ‘activists’ point of view, it is a call for intervention.

The technological tools required to get online make it more difficult for an ordinary person to participate on social media; therefore, they require representation. Jenkins *et al.*, (2009) suggest that this can be circumvented by focusing on the concept of participatory culture rather than interactive technologies. Bringing it back to culture, is the Zimbabwean culture supportive of the fact that the public domain of social media is used to discuss their (Epworth) ‘private issues’? The answer to this question helps shape Epworth’s perception of social media activism.

### **Participatory Culture and the Digital Divide in Zimbabwe**

Participation in the new digital environment requires a renewed debate on access and local decision making framed within discussions on the digital divide (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2019). The digital divide in Zimbabwe and how it relates to participatory culture theory warrants its own section in this chapter as it is a crucial barrier to participation (Mutsvairo, 2019). The digital divide refers to “the gap between those who do and those who do not have access to new forms of information technology” (Van Dijk, 2006: 221). This technology gap has been defined narrowly as a problem of access, policies and programs that have been narrowly focused (Chitanana, 2019).

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<sup>47</sup> Loosely translated it means you can’t slaughter a skank in public. A skank is known to smell really bad and therefore slaughtering it in public is polluting/poisoning the air with bad breath.

<sup>48</sup> <https://news.pindula.co.zw/2017/09/11/not-aware-child-prostitution-minister-mupfumira/>

The digital divide is one of the biggest threats to a participatory culture. It is argued that the digital divide is about more than access because one can have access to technology without the knowledge of that technology. Mutsvairo (2016) notes that; the digital divide, for certain segments of the population, is evidence of the ability of technology to exacerbate existing inequalities, as is evident in the African context. Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) highlight the significant impact of the digital divide on how Africa is developed, shared and perceived. They add that those with the lens to pan, zoom and focus on the African stories get to share what they choose to share with the world and more often than not, this comes with many misrepresentations of facts and truths. Therefore, this study analyses offline communities' perception of social media activism using the participatory culture lens, despite their purported failure to access online activities due to the digital divide.

Information technology has brought some positive strides to humanity's everyday life, specifically the advent of the smartphone that enables easy access to social networking sites (Mutsvairo and Ragnedda, 2016). Even with this positive stride, a digital divide is evidently present in Zimbabwe and plays a huge role in being a deterrent in the online participation of a large percentage of the population in Zimbabwe (Epworth community included). Only 10% of Africa's 1.216 billion population have access to online activities even though 70% of this population in sub-Saharan Africa are reported to have mobile phones (GSMA, 2017). As of January 2020, Zimbabwe had 4.81million Internet users, a 33% penetration rate, 6.6% social media penetration rate, demonstrating that over half of the population is still unnetworked (Hootsuite DataReportal, 2020<sup>49</sup>). For countries like Zimbabwe, sitting on less than one thousand US dollars per capita (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012), and with many living on less than a dollar a day (Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, 2018), access to the internet is a luxury, a factor that makes it hard to pass it as a public sphere on which all citizens can participate.

There has been a call to policymakers and governments to prioritise information technology in schools and for its citizens but as described by Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019), not every African government considers access to digital information a right. For example, when seeking permission from the Ministry of Social Welfare to conduct this research, they requested that a written letter be dropped off in person since they did not have a functional email address for the Ministry. When a whole Ministry does not prioritise the importance of digital

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<sup>49</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-zimbabwe#:~:text=There%20were%204.81%20million%20internet,at%2033%25%20in%20January%202020.>

communication it poses a harder challenge for the marginalised to join the online community and participate in the online participatory process.

The digital divide focuses on the gap in the intensity and the nature of information technology use rather than mere use of it (Ncube 2019). Jenkins *et al.*, (2009) suggest a shift of focus from the tools that are available to what the culture chooses to do with those tools. The focus of the digital divide recourse should shift from technological access to opportunities for participation and the development of cultural competencies and social skills needed for full involvement (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009).

It is challenging to separate the digital divide from Africa's knowledge and information divide (Mwin and Kritzinger, 2016). The present state of things worldwide, specifically in Zimbabwe, stands testimony. Covid-19 transformed the way things are done. Lockdown restrictions saw most businesses and schools closed. However, after the initial month of lockdown, some schools, mostly private schools (expensive elite schools) in Zimbabwe, resumed their studies online using available information technology platforms such as zoom, skype, and Microsoft teams. Students attending government public schools were left out because the government could not resume classes online, citing the expensive data and the lack of access to technology and information. Some students in the rural areas even missed national examinations because there was no way to communicate to them that exams were set to continue (from a conversation with the headmaster of a rural school in Zimbabwe, Bikita, 2020). The primary word of mouth communication they receive from school staff became unavailable when the schools closed. Face-to-face is the most common mode of communication in rural areas because there is still "low usage of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and others due to high internet illiteracy, high cost of internet access and incompetence to go beyond the basic texting" (Chiyadzwa, 2014: 66). The Covid-19 pandemic and its ramifications demonstrated that disasters also exacerbate existing digital inequalities.

### **(Inter)active audiences in social media activism and participatory culture**

Jenkins is one of the first scholars to chart the ever-changing role of the audience in an increasingly changing digital environment. Prior to Jenkins' exploration of media audiences, Stuart Hall (1973/1980) devised his encoding/decoding to acknowledge an audiences' importance in meaning-making and how audiences transform with each given technology. In the late 1970s, Morley followed up on the encoding/decoding theory by applying it to his *Nationwide* study on how different British audiences decoded the news show (Morley, 1980).

In his adoption of the model, he points out how the model may be viewed as incomplete. He argues that; Hall's decoding/encoding theory is dependent only upon the internal structure of the television message (semiotics) and the viewer's cultural background. Instead, there needs to be a separation between the reader's understanding of the text, juxtaposed to the sender's intention and the possible interpretation of the text by the reader (Schroder, 1987).

To analyse two distinct types of constraints on the production of meaning, Morley (1991:69) describes the constraints as 1) internal structures and mechanisms of the text/message/program and 2) cultural background of the reader/recipient/viewer. Arguably, the interaction of these two constraining structures defines the parameters of a text's meaning - thus avoiding the traps of the notions that either a text can be interpreted in an infinite number of (individual) ways or the formalist tendency to suppose texts determine a meaning absolutely. Whether a program succeeds in transmitting a preferred or dormant/negotiated/oppositional reading will depend on "whether it encounters readers who inhabit codes and ideologies derived from other institutional areas which correspond to and work in parallel with those of the program" (Morley 1991, 81). Morley (1991) argues that decoding cannot be traced solely to the socio-economic position since members of the same sample occupying the same class location can produce different readings. Relatively, the Epworth community will not read the message in Doubt's campaign the same way, even though they fall into the same socio-economic bracket based on their location.

The weakness in Morley's critique of Stuart Hall, as identified by Bertrand and Hughes (2017), is that his audience is a construct from the research, not independent of it. They add that Morley did not distinguish between habitual viewers and those who did not usually watch television. He treats the groups as representatives of their social class, without defining what he means by class or explaining how individuals were assigned to class groups such as 'skilled upper working class. At the same time, "he misses the opportunity to investigate the social dynamics of the focus groups themselves" (Bertrand & Hughes 2005: 55). Similarly, social media audiences are dynamic; hence this research aimed to explore their perception distinguishing the online from offline audience.

Despite its shortcomings, contemporary scholars continue to use the encoding/decoding model. In 1984, Radway adopted a model from her study on a group of mid-western women who were fans of romance novels and applied it to a study on how specific individuals receive and interpret messages based on their backgrounds. In the 1990s, Livingstone used

encoding/decoding theory to study British viewers' reception of soap operas, eventually concluding and suggesting that text and audiences are intertwined. She states that, "[t]ext and audience can no longer be seen as independent or studied separately. As audience reception and reader-response theories have made clear, text and reader are interdependent, mutually conceived, joint constructors of meaning" (Livingstone, 1994:3). This development of audience research influences Jenkins' (2006) participatory culture.

Participatory culture emphasises an interactive audience that participates through user-generated content and less on those who merely view the content (Jenkins, 2016). Web 2.0 accentuates the life of audiences and their importance in the use of social media-specific, in this case, social media activism. In addition, web 2.0 presents a paradigm shift in media audiences characterized as prosumers since they can simultaneously produce and consume media content (*Africa In*, 2012).

Castells (1998) notes how the blooming of cultural/social movements around the late 1960s and mid-1970s gave birth to the emergence of the network society, a new culture and the culture of real virtuality. He also propounds on the idea of "mass self-communication", a concept central to activism and therefore crucial to this study. "Mass communication potentially reach a global audience" at the same time, "it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content [...] is self-selected" (Castells, 2009: 55). All this is made possible in social media activism through the interaction of the interactive audience.

#### *Audiences: Death or Metamorphosis?*

As discussed above, audiences are always situated between text and context (Livingstone and Ranjana, 2013). There are key audience scholars (Livingstone, 2013; Morley, 2009) who report on the 'death of the audience' since the advent of new media. However, another school of thought, which includes Jenkins (2016), posits that the audience is alive and well but has evolved. This idea of the changing social and technological conditions driving the evolving contexts within which people engage and with different media is a notion to which this study fully subscribes. Interactivity emerges from the design of technology, while participation emerges from social and cultural processes and practices (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013). For example, there has been a debate on the passivity of the television audience. However, television as a form of technology offered fewer options for direct interaction and feedback

from the audience. Nevertheless, the audience was in no way passive as they chose to watch certain programs and frequently commented on programming as they watched in their homes (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013).

Livingstone and Das (2013) believe the claim that the audience is dead is exaggerated and highlight the growing interest in the validity (or otherwise) of the theoretical claim. Bertrand and Hughes (2005) postulate that the audience exists nowhere; it inhabits no real space, only positions within analytic discourse. Elizabeth Bird (2009), in *'Not dead yet'*, observes that digital media enable the externalisation of much audience activity – “from silent responses to visible practices of interpretation” (Livingstone and Das, 2013: 107). This claim elucidates the notion that the audience still does exist, just that they keep evolving together with the evolution of new media. This study holds that the audience does exist, but not in a traditional sense. As technologies transform, so do audiences, and with social media, audiences attain more agency in their interactivity. Not only can the interactive audience point out inaccuracies and falsehoods, but they can also contribute to constructing ethical principles and practices themselves (Bosch in Fourie, 2017).

In contradiction, even if audiences are alive and well, it may not follow that users of digital and online technologies have anything in common (Livingstone 2013). Two vital dimensions of audiences that are precisely worth preserving in the digital age are: “1) the concept of ‘use’ recognises no texts, only objects; 2) users are resolutely singular, they cannot encompass the collectively captured ‘audience’” (Livingstone, 2013:10). This study problematises Livingstone's distinction of referring to online audiences only as 'users' and television audiences as 'audiences', arguing that they are made interactive through the process of decoding and interacting. Following this argument by Livingstone on the role of decoding in constituting a group of people as ‘an audience’, this study includes offline communities that are typically described by their geographical locations and shared identities such as religion, ethnicities (Baxter, 2002). Online communities form through shared values and interactions (Groenewegen and Moses, 2014, Wellman, 2001). Kevin Robin (1999) questions if online interactions are sufficient to constitute a community/audience. This study reiterates the same question in the context of activism, to explore whether online communities can be regarded as audiences for participating in an online campaign that was intended to address an offline issue. Furthermore, this study examines their perception of this campaign to determine whether or not they constitute an audience.

Over time, scholars have realised the need to combine content production and audience research in order to understand the audience's reactions to the content (Schiappa and Wessels, 2007). A reception design was therefore used for this study to analyse both offline and online responses. Since this study explores audience participation to gather their perceptions, participatory culture is a suitable fit to use as a frame to explore the role of an interactive audience in social media activism. This analysis is supported by Schiappa and Wessels (2007) advice that it is unsafe to make conclusions on behalf of audiences without listening to audience members.

Participatory culture insists on interactivity. With specific reference to this study, interviews can be argued as a participatory form of audience research as it engages in dialogic communication in order to understand their attitudes, opinions and perceptions (or reading) of social media activism. Participatory culture and the notion of the interactive audience complement each other. For participation to happen, there should be participants and an interactive audience comprised of these participants. Likewise, activism depends on 'audience' participation.

#### *Hall's encoding and decoding theory: Value and Critique*

Stuart Hall initially formulated the encoding/decoding model in 1973 for television discourse. Hall (1980) created the theory as a reaction to the behaviourist approach, which he claims to be oversimplified. The encoding/decoding theory stipulates that audiences interpret a message based on their social position, leading to different interpretations by different groups (Livingstone and Ranjana 2017). A plan for integrating audience research with cultural criticism was presented as a research initiative in Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model proposed in 1973. The model articulates as a guide to a meaning-centred semiotic study of mass communication (Hall, 1980). The promised benefit of the encoding/decoding model centred on situating structures of production, text and audience (reception) within a framework where each could be read, registered and analysed in relation to each other (Nightingale, 1996).

The model has been adopted and applied by many media theorists, namely, David Morley, another Birmingham scholar (1992), who extends Hall's findings. In the late 1970s, Morley used the encoding/decoding model to conduct his *Nationwide* Project. stating that members of the same sample occupying the same class location can produce different readings. Morley's research addressed questions relating to media and consumption and the effect it has on its audiences. He argues that audiences interpret a message based on their social position, leading

to different interpretations by different social groups (Morley, 1992). Livingstone (2015) concurs with Morley, arguing that Hall's position is faultily concerned with only the ideological processes of class struggle and excludes other equally relevant social categories such as ethnicity, gender and age.

In 1984 Janice Radway, a cultural studies scholar, applied the theory to conduct a study on women in terms of romance reading, and Dicks (2000) applied Hall's encoding/decoding model to a local heritage museum with the understanding that heritage and the museum visitors can be studied as a form of social communication (UKEssays, 2018).

This study is influenced by Shaw's (2017) extension of the encoding/decoding model's use in online media. Since its development, the encoding/decoding model has migrated from strictly mass media cases to online media. Shaw (2017) explores the concept of affordances concerning Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding (1980) model to better account for how certain types of interactivity are promoted or discouraged by new technologies and platforms. In the same vein, this study employs the encoding/decoding model to explore online and offline audiences' perceptions of the use of social media for activism.

Many years later, Jenkins' (2016) participatory culture theory similarly places the human experience at the centre of participation inquiry.

In summary, and reference to this study, decoding and encoding afford different message readings, as supported by participatory culture. Meaning, in media and face-to-face interaction, is generated according to the communicative repertoires of the decoder(s), and there is no natural fit between the encoding and decoding (Hall 1973). Morley (1992) made the crucial suggestion that what we need to know is precisely what kind of difference it makes to the decoding of messages when the decoder has direct experience of the events portrayed by the media as compared to a situation in which the media account is the audiences only contact with the event (Morley, 1992). Participatory culture assesses whether a direct experience - offline account of child sex-work is comparative to that presented on social media, leading to a tendency towards a dominant, negotiated or oppositional decoding of the messages by both the online and offline audiences. For the reasons above, this study adopts the encoding/decoding theory to interpret the perceptions of demography that constitute the Epworth audience and the online audience.

### *Reception Theory and Activism*

The notion of active audiences implies that reception research sees itself as continuing and redirecting a thrust towards empowerment of audiences in the cultural process. The active audience concept implicates audience members in constructing social, political and cultural identities and the collective production of social reality. However, determining the reception of a message is a two-way process. As the media environment becomes the infrastructure for all social life spheres, people must engage with media (Livingstone and Das 2013). Some audiences are left on the peripheral of the conversations and activities that go on online because of a myriad of factors discussed before in this chapter. These usher in more inquiries about audiences. For instance, the Epworth audience might not engage, because they do not have access to social media conversations, even a campaign that addresses their problems, so what does that mean to them as the audience? Are they still an audience if they are the intended recipients of the campaign but they do not have agency unless it is given to them by someone else, in this case, the researcher of this study?

In order for meaningful activism to stay alive, we need to “collectively make sure that the twiddle of our thumbs mirrors collective offline participation through advocacy if we are ever to embody the history created by activists in our liberation movement” (Kedijang, 2018<sup>50</sup>). The same point is augmented by Miller and Sinaan (2017) who emphasise the importance of the wider offline context as central to account for this online activity. Mutsvairo (2016) adds that the success of online activism is reliant on several factors’ chief among them, the effective coordination with offline activities. In sub-Saharan Africa where access to the internet is still very low in comparison to other regions of the world, the online-offline connection is yet to become universally plausible. All these scholars magnify the importance of the coordination of offline and online audiences in activism which is one of this study’s exploration.

Interpretation refers to the way in which people make sense of their lives, events, processes and texts they encounter. Reception studies share with other hermeneutic approaches to research, the fundamental assumption that the meaning of a message, including media messages, is not fixed but must be interpreted by its recipient (Livingstone & Das, 2013). This explanation is an extension of Hall’s encoding/decoding theory (1980) which gives interpretative power to the decoder from their perspective vis-à-vis context. Meaning is considered to emerge from context-dependent interaction between a polysemic text and an

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/guestcolumn/digital-activism-a-new-wave-or-nah-20180803>

interpretive reader (Fiske 1991 in Livingstone and Das 2012). Hall emphasises the role of audience members' social positioning leading to the differential interpretation of texts by different groups. Jenkins (2016) participatory culture coalesces with encoding/decoding theory as it places the audience at the centre in social media activism, meaning the perception of the audience in activism is imperative in the determination of the outcome of a campaign. This study subscribes to this idea.

Beyond encoding/decoding, Morley raises the question of how we make sense of the world the media offer us. He explains that “[t]his is to pose our activity in our sitting rooms watching the television, as an active process of ‘reception’ or consumption of messages” (Morley, 1992: 70). Morley proposes that for us to make any sense of the images and sounds that we see and hear, we are engaged in active work of interpretation (Morley 1991, 70) and this is what constitutes anyone who encounters a given message to be classified as an audience. There is always a possibility of disjunction between the codes of those sending and those receiving messages through the circuit of mass communication. Social position may set parameters to the range of potential readings through the structure of access to different codes (Morley 1991,80). He gives an example of a working-class black man who is uneducated listening to opera or a white upper-class man listening to reggae. This example, however, may come across as stereotyping of audiences, taking away their agency to interpret messages. Contrary to anticipating the audience's reception of messages, this study places importance on the audiences' agency to personally interpret the campaign against child-sex work as prescribed by activism aspects. The intentional choice to end this chapter by discussing reception theory is because reception theory informs my research design to be delineated in the succeeding chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the theoretical framework for the study. Jenkins' concept of participatory culture (2006) provides a framework, specific to understanding and interpreting the perception of offline and online communities on the use of Facebook as a platform for activism. Moreover, it extends the trajectory of active audience research, crystallised in Hall's encoding/decoding model. Audience interaction with a campaign is imperative to the outcome of a campaign, be it social media or otherwise. The presence of interaction allows for a degree of participation which can only take place in conditions where freedom of expression is encouraged and the supposed 'unrestrictive' nature of social media enables this trait (Burges

and Green, 2009). This chapter elaborated on the components that contribute to a participatory culture in social media activism. There is a realisation that to achieve a participatory culture, audiences – audience participation – participatory culture, are the anchoring aspects.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter highlights the methodological approach employed for this research which seeks to examine the perceptions of social media activism by online and offline communities in Zimbabwe, using a case study of a Facebook campaign against child sex work in Epworth. This chapter accounts for how primary data was collected through the use of interviews and focus group discussions. It frames this data collection within the broader social constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach. The research is designed as a case study, the aptness of which is supported in the chapter. Thematic analysis guided the data management whereby key themes are then discussed in relation to theory, literature and critical research questions. Ethical considerations and a reflection on limitations and challenges conclude the chapter.

### Research Paradigm: Social Constructivism

The social constructivist paradigm informs this study. Social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Kim, 2001). The definitions and functions of social constructivism and social constructionism are contested by scholars, as is the relationship between the two. The consensus is that constructionism views reality as a product of social processes, while constructivism views reality as subjectively defined through individual cognitive processes. Crotty (1998:42) defines constructionism as “The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world”. However, this study positions itself within the social *constructivism* paradigm because of its alignment with an active audience and participatory culture theory (Livingstone, 2013). More specifically, the study is interested in the *subjective* responses of individuals to a specific campaign, hence placing it firmly within a social constructivist paradigm.

Fosnot (2014) notes that the social constructivist paradigm holds that “the truth is emergent, developmental, non-objective, viable constructed explanations by humans engaging in meaning-making in cultural and social communities of discourse”. This paradigm is appropriate because this study places the Epworth communities (audience) as the anchor in exploring their perceptions and participation in social media activism. Focusing on separate

online and offline audiences adheres to the constructivism paradigm that emphasises the importance of culture and context in an individual's understanding of society events and their construction of knowledge based on this understanding (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006).

Social constructivism proposes that “realities are local, specific and constructed; they are socially and experientially based and depend on the individuals or groups holding them” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:109-11 in Punch, 2014: 17). Correspondingly, this study's design accommodates engagement with individuals of the Epworth community to ascertain their views, thoughts and beliefs of the campaign initiated by an issue affecting them on a day-to-day basis. Observations made on Zimbabwe showed that strong cultural and religious beliefs, directly and indirectly, have a substantial bearing on how most people view the child sex work issue (Cultural Atlas, 2021<sup>51</sup>), as reviewed in Chapter One.

Social constructivism would argue that the setting and the background of a child's location influences how she is perceived as much as how the reality of the context of the audience shapes how they perceive the child. In essence, social constructivists believe that people can derive meaning from social interactions (Crotty 1998). This study adopts this approach as it seeks to explore the perceptions of those who can access online platforms (in this example, I would label privileged), as well as the perceptions of those who live in the impoverished settlement of Epworth, where ownership of a mobile phone and internet access is perceived a luxury (Mutsvairo, 2016). Subsequently, this highlights how class influences how a person or a phenomenon is perceived based on the consensus and negotiated agreements that the community members make (Brennen, 2017).

Social constructivism emphasises active participation and de-emphasises formalised approaches to research (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). The researcher embarked on ethnographic-type fieldwork in Epworth, a natural setting for child sex work, aligning to a social constructivist criterion for research to occur close to the natural context in which the phenomenon plays out (Blanche *et al.*, 1999). To understand the world from the experiences and subjective meanings that people attach to it, social constructivists share with interpretivist researchers

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<sup>51</sup> <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/zimbabwean-culture/zimbabwean-culture-religion>

the convention of interacting and having a dialogue with the studied participants (Wahyuni, 2012).

There are varying conceptions on the use of the terms interpretivism and constructivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2011), Creswell and Poth (2018) classify post-positivist paradigms under the interpretive frameworks, thereby submitting that the terms are interchangeable. Yanow (2006) also submits that interpretivism is an umbrella term for all the post-positivist paradigms. Both interpretivists and constructivists share the notion that “the inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors” (Schwandt, 1998:222). In other words, the interpretivist research philosophy relates to the constructivist epistemology and holds that reality is constructed by social actors and people’s perceptions of it. As human experiences and perspectives are subjective, social reality may change and have multiple perspectives (Wahyuni 2012). Another school of thought conceptualises interpretivism and constructivism to be separate paradigms. Schwandt (1998) submits that the user's intent shapes the meaning of each term. I concede that the two paradigms share the foundation that human experiences and the world relate through lived experiences (Sandberg, 2005). Additionally, this study falls within the social constructivism paradigm because it believes in the knowledge and truth based on the actors (participants) perspective (Schwandt, 1998). In this case, the online and offline audiences for the campaign against child sex work.

Jenkins (2016) explains that participatory culture embraces the values of deep democracy and instrumental participation of marginalised populations through a broad range of forms and practices. The study places human experience at the centre of participatory culture and studies the parallels and variances of online and offline activities (Williams, 1958; Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, this relates to constructivism as a research paradigm in which the researcher represents “a view of the world as it is structured by the participants under observation by eliciting phenomenological data” (Clarke, 2005:46). As such, this paradigm co-relates with this study, defined within the theoretical framework of participatory culture. Subsequently, it is then suitable for findings from this research to be interpreted through the participatory culture framework.

## **Research Approach: Qualitative**

This study adopted a qualitative approach to account for the delicate nature of child sex work. Such an approach is suitable when pursuing a topic of sensitivity and emotional depth (Padgett 2008). Morris (2006:3) buttresses the point that “qualitative inquiry may be the only option available for researchers interested in behaviours considered taboo or stigmatised”, the demography within which my study falls. Qualitative research does not engage with data in the form of numbers, and it is best positioned to interpret intangible issues such as attitudes, social norms and people’s personal experiences (Punch, 2014), which is the case with this inquiry.

Before meeting with the participants for the focus group discussions (FGDs), I walked around the research site of Epworth, Overspill, to re-familiarise with the environment since it had been more than a year and a half since my last visit to the area. Accompanied by personnel from ROOTS, a non-governmental organisation working within Epworth and the so-called gatekeeper in this research, and my research assistant, we set out. It was around midday, and there had just been a heavy downpour, but it was ‘business’<sup>52</sup> as usual as we witnessed sex workers, including young girls visibly below the age of 16 (despite their attempt to disguise their age with make-up). The ROOTS representative assisted me with identifying some possible adult participants based on their existing relationship with the community since sex work, in general, is part of their mandate in the Epworth community.

By understanding the context of the social setting, the researcher can understand the participants’ perceptions and culture (Sibanda, 2015). Qualitative research assures the examination of communication in its naturalistic contexts. Naturalistic attitude primarily entails an ambition of considering those contexts in which particular communicative phenomena may be encountered and examined (Jensen, 2012). The emphasis on the importance of context has been recurring throughout this research because considering the context enabled this study to locate it within a broader framework (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013) of the Epworth, Overspill society. Resultantly, this research held the FGDs in a location amid Overspill where child sex work is rampant. There was a stark difference between this area and that of the low-

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<sup>52</sup> Not formal business as we know it, but beer drinking, illegal vending, unemployed sitting and milling around.

density suburb where I interviewed Doubt Chimonyo, who had briefly visited Zimbabwe from the United Kingdom, though still lived in a comfortable region of Zimbabwe.

Even though qualitative research encompasses a broad scope of inquiries, its dominant concern is to:

Help us to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about: · Why people behave the way they do · How opinions and attitudes are formed · How people are affected by the events that go on around them · How and why cultures and practices have developed in the way they have (Hancock *et al.*, 2009:7).

With the core objective of exploring the perceptions and place of social media activism in Zimbabwe by online and offline communities, there was a need to gain in-depth knowledge about the subjects of the case study. Matsilele (2019) articulates that good qualitative research must add more detailed data collection when describing context or the alteration of techniques and focal points. Qualitative research emerged as the most appropriate methodology due to its strong quality of supporting exploratory research: one that seeks to unearth people's life histories and everyday behaviour (Silverman, 2001), as this influences their outlook and perception of life.

Qualitative data has the power to produce “rich descriptions of social constructs” (Wahyuni 2012: 71). Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) advises that, although pre-conceived ideas can get in the way of empirical research, the fore-shadowing of problems that may arise in the field is of critical consideration. Subsequently, my prior knowledge of child sex work in high-density suburbs merited a qualitative approach and comprehensive research to exceed the findings from the radio show that introduced me to the rampant child sex work issue. The statements and actions of a qualitative approach are interpreted within their contexts and studies and depend on access to primary data (Jensen 2012). Accordingly, I understood the particular context within which a respondent acts and the influence that context has on their participation and or reading of the campaign against child sex work.

For the offline audience, I employed FGDs, but for the online audience, I interrogated their perceptions using their comments posted on the Facebook campaign against child sex work, discussed in more detail below. A qualitative approach was appropriate because I derived meaning and perceptions from comments and their interaction with the campaign online.

Despite it being a multidisciplinary entity, the over-arching concerns of qualitative enquiry are to unearth people's behavioural patterns and "developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are." (Hancock *et al.*, 2009: 7). Keeping in mind the core objective to explore and interrogate offline and online audience perceptions of social media activism by Zimbabweans, these and other questions were pertinent to this study. There was a need to gain in-depth information and knowledge of offline and online audiences within their environment separately and draw out their perceptions towards social media activism in Zimbabwe.

Qualitative researchers have been dismissed as mere "journalists or soft scientists who have been made to feel like second class citizens whose work typically evokes suspicion, where the gold standard is quantitative research" (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:4). Besides the fact that this statement places qualitative research as subordinate to quantitative research, another element to consider is how researchers are perceived by research communities. One of the participants for the FGD said to me, "*Madzoka futi vanhu imimi, tahwa nevanhu vanouya kuzotivhunza mivhunzo, voenda vondowana mari dzavo kumadonor nemashoko edu asi chachinja kucommunity kwedu hapana*" (You people are back again, we are tired of people who come to ask us questions then they go and get money). This scenario made me reflect on the research process and encouraged me to reduce what Wengraf (2001) calls "hierarchies of power," which are common in research processes and may be detrimental to the generation of meaningful data. By making the FGD conversational, the hierarchy plateaued, deposing me as a leader and making me part of the group.

## **Research Design**

The design of a study refers to the way a "researcher guards against, and tries to rule out, alternative interpretations of the results" (Punch, 2014: 114). This study employs a case study design of an awareness/advocacy activism campaign referred to in this study as campaign against child sex work". Case studies aim for an in-depth understanding of a case in its "natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context, with the general objective of developing a full understanding of this case as much as possible" (Punch, 2014: 120).

The case study in this research falls under the advocacy/awareness category of activism, and the campaign was run on Facebook. Facebook pages have fast become primary conduits for

emotional protest, which can subsequently be taken to the streets (Mutsvairo, 2016). In a political context, Mutsvairo (2016: 45) also notes that “in authoritarian regimes, Facebook pages and groups have found a way to allow activists and social media to bypass offline public spaces which are generally repressed, and fear invested”.

The campaign under analysis was run by Chimonyo, on his personal Facebook page<sup>53</sup>, to raise awareness on child sex work in Epworth, calling upon individuals, organisations and the government to act and end child sex work as well as mobilise resources to help the affected families/children. Doubt, based in the United Kingdom, created the campaign after he was “shocked to learn that informal settlements such as Hopely and Epworth were now hunting grounds for perverts who abuse both girls and boys from child-headed families, some as young as 10years old with the community watching” (*Newsday*, 25-12-18)<sup>54</sup>. The campaign ran for a month in November 2018, after which Doubt founded the Protection of Adults and Children Team (PACT), an organisation that seeks to protect the vulnerable in Zimbabwean communities.

Facebook is the most popular social media platform in Zimbabwe. According to Hootsuite (2019), of the total 6.8 million active internet users, 1.10 million are Facebook users, with all other social media platforms sharing the rest. In Zimbabwe, very few studies (Mare, 2014 and Mwatwara, 2015 and Sirks, 2015) have discussed the impact of Facebook pages on offline political processes (Mutsvairo, 2016). However, among Zimbabwean case studies, the Facebook campaign against child sex work is positioned outside the reigns of politically motivated campaigns, hence its selection for research in this study.

The constitution of Zimbabwe, since 2013, states that the age of majority is 18 years, but the age of sexual consent is 16 years. Accordingly, the campaign focuses on sex workers below the age of 16. The legal definition of age of majority as defined by Merriam Webster<sup>55</sup> dictionary is “the age at which a person is granted by law the rights (as ability to sue and

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53 <https://www.facebook.com/doubtdehwa.chimonyo>

54 <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/12/music-promoter-journalist-fight-child-abuse/> accessed 12 September, 2019

55 Age of majority. In Merriam-Webster.com legal dictionary. from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/age%20of%20majority> Accessed February 2, 2021

responsibilities) as liability under contract) of an adult”. Subsequently, the focus was on subjects below the age of 16 who cannot legally consent to sexual activity.

Although this study explores social media activism, a subject studied by multiple scholars (Mutsvairo, 2016; Lim, 2013), my case study is embedded in the phenomenon of a pervasive nature that is child sex work. Crowe *et al.*, (2011) note that an instrumental case study uses a particular case to gain a broader appreciation of an issue or phenomenon. The case study of a Facebook campaign against child sex work is instrumental in accomplishing my objective of examining the online and offline perceptions of social media activism in Zimbabwe.

The study of the campaign against child sex work becomes a thought-provoking study of the relationship between online activism and offline activity. Scholars such as Lim (2013) write about the blurring line between online and offline activism, and there have been debates around the interactivity between the virtual world and the real world (Hine, 2000). The ‘One social world’ notion referred to by Garcia *et al.*, (2009) conjures up the fact that,

The distinction between online and offline worlds is...becoming less useful as activities in these realms become increasingly merged in our society and as the two spaces interact with and transform each other (Garcia *et al.*, 2009: 52-53).

The assertion noted above (Garcia *et al.*, 2009) supports the choice of this study to use a case study of an online campaign to address an offline phenomenon to explore how social media activism resonates offline.

## **Sampling**

### *Sample population*

The sample population for this study is divided into two, the online Facebook population that participated through commenting in the anti-child sex worker Facebook campaign and the selected offline Epworth adult community members, who participated through the focus group discussions. This research targeted the adults in Epworth as the cultural gatekeepers of the community, who have a cultural responsibility to look after and report if they identify social ills taking place (Minister Mupfumira, *the Herald*, 2018).

### *Recruitment and Sampling procedure*

This research used purposive sampling. The participants were selected deliberately based on their “ability to provide needed information” (Padgett, 2008:76) with the assistance of the gatekeepers as well as already established networks in recruiting the initial participants. In this study, the inclusion criteria sought participants who had existing knowledge of child sex work in the Epworth area and may have directly or indirectly interacted with the phenomenon.

I also used purposive sampling to select the two campaign videos used in this study. They were selected on the basis that they both were the campaign’s conversation starters and were the most popular out of all the videos uploaded for the campaign<sup>56</sup>. One is the interview of a child sex worker. The other is a follow-up Facebook live discussion, facilitated by Chimonyo, based on the impressions from the initial video of the child sex worker being interviewed by Chimonyo’s representative. The benefit of purposive sampling is that it ensures flexibility to select samples purposively to represent views and experiences (Meadows, 2003: 522 in Nyarko 2014). In the case of this research, one of the participants was an adult sex worker in Epworth and therefore had particular knowledge and expertise regarding child sex work as she claimed to be one of the ‘protectors’<sup>57</sup> of the young sex workers who directly associated with them in the trade. The admission by this participant to be a sex worker, in addition to the confession by some male participants to being customers of child sex workers, makes it imperative to strictly uphold anonymity, as explained in the confidentiality and anonymity section below.

In recruiting study participants, I used an already-established network of guardians from the community that I had met through my previous work as a radio presenter/producer and, in particular, whom I had met in preparation for a show on child sex work in Epworth. These individuals are Epworth residents who live in the Overspill area and have lived there for about two years or more. Together with these guardians, I worked with the assistance of the gatekeeper from the ROOTS organisation, who granted permission (See appendix 1) and assisted with informants they believed were useful to the study. ROOTS personnel are aware

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<sup>56</sup> The statics of the campaign reflect this fact. Live video: 99 reactions (63 likes, 22 loves, 10 sad, 4 laughs), 528 comments, 12 shares, 5.1 thousand views. Inciting video: 52 reactions (30 sad, 15 likes and 7 angry), 55 comments, 30 shares and 8.7 thousand views. (02 Nov 2018)

<sup>57</sup> The role of protector to the young girls is explained in the analysis and findings chapter 5.

of child-sex work in their working jurisdiction and were adept at locating adult participants who made valuable contributions to the research. They connected me to one male and one female and, two females were contacts from my former job. These four then assisted me in snowballing for the other eight participants (three females and five males) for the focus group discussions, guided by the inclusion/exclusion criteria as outlined in the inclusion/exclusion criteria section below.

A snowball sampling technique aided the selection of participants identified by the initial participants for their knowledge on the subject under research for the focus group discussions. Browne (2005) defines snowball sampling as “sampling that employs research into participants’ social networks to access specific populations”. In this study, snowball sampling mostly worked in the case of selecting initially sceptical male participants who suspected me of being a law enforcement official intending to arrest them, as one participant said, “*Tatichitofunga kuti muri mumero ka*” (We thought you could be the police) (Field notes, 11 January 2020). As we became engaged in the FGD, some men admitted that they had and still do solicit services from underage girls operating as sex workers, hence their apprehension that I could have been a police officer. However, they received convincing I was an academic researcher. Snowball sampling is effective when the population under investigation is veiled by the sensitivity of the topic (Browne 2005). This qualitative sampling technique was crucial because, with the secretive nature of child sex work, it would be difficult to locate (male) adults willing to discuss the issue with a stranger.

It was necessary to recruit offline participants to collect data on a Facebook campaign because the study concerns itself with exploring differences and similarities in the perceptions of social media activism by offline and online audiences. This action is necessary to avoid the spiral of silence: a phenomenon described as a process whereby people keep their opinions to themselves when they think they are in the minority, fearing separation or isolation from those around them (Noelle-Neumann 1974; Lim 2013). Hence it was fundamental to physically locate them and include them in the online conversations from their offline setting, a technique which I employed in my data collection.

I gave each participant a copy of the informed consent form (see appendix 258). After the informed consent process, I asked the participants questions according to the FGD questions sheet (see appendix 3) that in some instances generated conversations where participants asked questions of me and each other.

Doubt was intentionally selected as an interviewee because he was the campaign's originator and best positioned to provide information about how and why he chose to use social media to address child sex work in Epworth. The interview set out to establish the preferred message at its inception and compare how it was received by the online and offline communities.

### *Sample size*

I conducted separate offline FGDs, one with males and the other with females. The separation by gender was because of this researcher's understanding of gender disparities in certain Zimbabwean communities allowing men to be less restricted and more vocal than women on sensitive issues (Hanzi, 2006). Each focus group included six members of varied ages of 20 years and above. This number increased the opportunity for varied inputs regarding the topic under study. To understand perceptions by age range, the varied ages of the FGD participants included young adults aged between 20 and 25, an age group described as being more active and adept at new media like Facebook (Chitanana, 2019), and adults of 30 years and above who belong to the working class. This categorisation is based on the pretext that diverse classes and age groups have different means, reasons and levels of accessing social media. Therefore, their interpretation and perception of social media content varied.

"Qualitative sample sizes are generally smaller as they require a deep analysis and large sampling may eventually result in repetition of information derived" (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013: 83). Accordingly, two focus groups with varied individuals proved sufficient.

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<sup>58</sup> All the participants accepted the English consent form, saying they clearly understood. I still went on to explain, just to make certain.

*Inclusion and exclusion selection criteria of offline participants*

Inclusion Criteria:

- Adults (18 and above) living in the Epworth community around the Overspill (kuboster59).
- Knowledge about ongoing child sex work in the area.
- Lived in the area for two years or more.
- Recruited participants for the focus group discussion from Epworth
- Consented
- Have interacted or had an opinion on the campaign against child sex work.
- Posts that react to the selected videos under study only.

Exclusion Criteria

- 18 years and below living in the Epworth community around the Overspill area
- Refusal to give informed consent.
- Lived in Epworth for less than two years
- No consent.
- Have not interacted or does not wish to give an opinion about the campaign against child sex work.

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59 Ku-is the Shona root of the word meaning (at the) booster. Here, I put it in Shona as it is referred to by the locals.

- Posts that react to other uploads which are not from the selected videos under study.

## **Data collection**

The research question relating to ways in which one can be defined as a social media activist is concept-driven to establish best practices of social media activism. Therefore, data is collected from literature sources by authorities in best practices of social media activism (Jenkins, 2006, 2016; Miller 2011; Fourie, 2017; Mutsvairo, 2014, 2016 *et al.*). I was informed by the definitions and explanations of who and what an activist is in literature by scholars such as Lim (2013), Jenkins (2006, 2016), Fourie (2017), Tufte (2017), Castells (2009), Mutsvairo *et al.*, (2014, 2016). They hold varied perceptions (as explained in Chapter 5), from defining an activist as an individual who takes to the streets to an individual who just clicks and shares a post on social media.

### *Social Media as a research tool*

Markham (1998) posits that social networks have become fertile ground for eliciting information on different cultural practices, a result of the “ability of social media to provide greater interactivity” as asserted by Salman *et al.*, (2011:3). In this regard, Facebook is the pre-eminent interactive social network. My study uses it to examine the perception of online and offline communities’ perceptions of social media activism, by collecting data from comments and reactions to the video posted by Chimonyo on his Facebook campaign against child sex work.

Facebook profiles of the online participants played a vital role in establishing the backgrounds of the online community in the sampling and data analysis stages. As buttressed by the encoding/decoding theory (Hall, 1980), the context and background of a person play a critical role in how they read a (media) message. Subsequently, it was important to investigate the backgrounds of the online participants to establish how their contexts may influence their reading and consequently their perception of social media activism. While ethical conduct is a potential concern when viewing online participants’ profiles and data without their consent, it also raises the question of what is to be considered as private or public data. This question is often easier to determine in an offline environment (Östman and Turtiainen 2016). So, for the online participants whose profiles I visited, the question of ethics is addressed by the fact that Facebook is within the public domain and intended to be accessed by the broader public, as

most of their profile settings are on 'public'. (Matsilele, 2018). Additionally, none of their information was used directly in this research except to establish their backgrounds and contexts.

### *Facebook Online Perceptions*

To collect data for analysis on how Facebook mediates activism in Zimbabwe (2018), I analyse the interaction between the audiences and the campaign content framed within the participatory culture theory (Jenkins, 2006). *Social media as a research tool*: Ali Salman *et al.*, (2011), highlight that social media is a global new media that has become very popular for its ability to provide greater interactivity. As a result, social networks<sup>60</sup> have become a fertile ground for eliciting information on different cultural practices (Markham 1998).

The major issues that the Facebook campaign highlighted were identified from the selected videos of the campaign and the Facebook comments on the videos. Doubt (2018) used both pre-recorded and Facebook live videos, so online audiences participated through live calls, reactions and comments. However, the study collected and focused on data from the social media user comments on the two campaign videos<sup>61</sup>. These videos were purposively selected because they were both the campaign and conversation starter and received more traction compared to all the other campaign videos uploaded. The two videos are from the month of November 2018, the period within which the campaign ran. From these online interactions, I analysed the perception of the online audience on social media activism based on the comments made. In addition to the framing of comments, this exploratory study also considers what role the various interactive Facebook features, such as the ability to 'like' or respond to another user's comment, played in the online virtual audience participation (Harlow, 2012).

### *Focus Group Discussions with Offline Community Members*

This study incorporates a reception analysis of an offline audience of the campaign against child sex work under investigation. "Reception research is the empirical study of the social production of meaning in people's encounter with media discourses" (Schroder 2003, 147).

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<sup>60</sup> These are web based software that people use to interact within particular contexts and framings (Raybas and Gajjala 2007:2).

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/doubtdehwa.chimonyo/videos/10155970511901305> and <https://www.facebook.com/doubtdehwa.chimonyo/videos/10155972100776305>

Reception research explores media experiences through the medium of extended talk. It seeks to illuminate audience practices and experiences by getting those involved to verbalise them (Schroder, 2003), thereby emphasising the importance of the voice of audiences in media, particularly social media activism in this regard.

Two focus group discussions, each with six participants, were conducted with the selected Epworth community members representing the 'offline' community. Data was collected on their perceptions of social media activism, specifically focusing on the campaign against child sex work. The participants were selected as explained in the sampling section. The questions for the focus group discussion (See appendix 3) were semi-structured and open-ended. Punch (2014; 147) posits that "semi-structured questions are used to explore people's interpretations and meanings of events and situations and their symbolic and cultural significance". The value of semi-structured interviews is that they address the needs of both 1) comparable responses with the same questions being asked of each participant and 2) the need for the interview to be developed by the conversation between the facilitator and the participants (Wisker et al., 2001). This research incorporated the merited insights of semi-structured questions for the focus group discussions to understand the anti-child sex work campaign readings by the Epworth community participants within their environment where child sex work is a daily reality.

Epworth is a close-knit community (Masara, 2015). The employment of FGDs enabled me to directly observe the social production of meaning as participants negotiated their readings of the campaign against child sex work in an environment of personal engagement (Schroder *et al.*, 2003). I functioned as a facilitator/moderator in these discussions, but the atmosphere was exceptionally conversational and interactive. I understand child sex work to be a community problem and not (only) an individual problem. Tellingly, FGDs proved to be more suitable as a construct due to the sense of community through contributions in conversation. Child sex work is a community social issue and, to a certain degree, the group situation "stimulated people in making explicit their views, perceptions, reasons" (Punch, 2014: 147).

Out of all the recruited participants, none had heard, come across or interacted with the Facebook campaign against child sex work, so I played the selected videos from the campaign and proceeded with the discussion thereafter. According to Hall's encoding/decoding (1980) theory, the responses were categorised into three hypotheses: the dominant, negotiated, and the oppositional reading, as explained in the data analysis section below.

The two FGDs increased the opportunity for varied inputs. The FGDs participants perceptions did not reflect the whole community's views and opinions, but they indeed produced valuable and in-depth information for this case study to determine how people think about social media activism, their reasoning about why things are as they are, and why they hold the views they do (Laws, 2003; 299).

#### *Individual Interview*

I conducted a semi-structured interview (See appendix 4) with Doubt Chimonyo in his capacity as the creator of the campaign under analysis to collect data on the preferred reading (Hall, 1980) of the campaign. The data was structured to draw parallels on how he intended the campaign to reflect on the Epworth community compared to how the Epworth community perceived it. Semi-structured interviews were privileged in this study because through their flexibility, they dismantle the interviewer/interviewee binary (Burgess 1984). The semi-structured aspect was applied in both the one-on-one interview with Chimonyo and the FGDs. The merit of semi-structured interviews lies in their maintenance of balance between flexibility and consistency (Briggs 2000 & Lofland *et al.*, 2006).

#### **Research analysis**

According to the Save the Children report by the Open University<sup>62</sup> (2014: 13), regarding methods of data collection and analysis, qualitative data analysis is “a process that seeks to research and make use of vast amounts of information, often from different sources so that different impressions that shed light on a research question emerge”. The report adds that qualitative research is a process where one takes descriptive information and offers an explanation or interpretation (The Open University, 2014). Findings generated from qualitative research are often rich and complex, engendering different ways of perceiving and analysing social life (Punch, 2014: 168). This study adopted two approaches in coding and analysing the data, namely, i) Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory and ii) (reflexive) thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2020). Compilation of online and offline data and looking

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<sup>62</sup> The relevance of quoting the Save the Children report is because, Save the Children is one of the recognized international organisation that deals with children and children's issues, likewise, this study uses a case study that is based on a campaign for children.

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/resource/view.php?id=52658> Accessed on 7 October 2019

at other literature social media activism assist in the triangulation of data by looking at the encoder-decoder varied perceptions.

### *Activism and activist concepts*

The research question on what constitutes a social media activist calls for a definition to explore and describe the nexus between activism and social media. This implies some level of influence of social media use. Though, in the case of this research, not on the political terrain. As this question is concept-driven, I analysed who a social media activist is against what is derived from literature by the authorities of social media activism (Lim 2013; Jenkins 2006, 2016; Tufte 2017; Fourie, 2017; Castells 2009; Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2014, 2016; Chitanana 2019). The analysis stations within participatory culture in media activism and prescribes the best practices of what defines a social media activist. The analysis focused on the aspects of these definitions and explanations to establish who can be defined as an activist, and juxtapose the findings with Doubt and what he did with his campaign to examine how it satisfies the nature of activism as outlined by scholarly authorities on the topic (Jenkins 2006, 2016; Bakardjieva 2005; Miller 2011; Mutsvairo 2014, 2016 *et al.*).

I profiled other (self) proclaimed Zimbabwean social media activists to explore the trend that defines how one is labelled an activist within the Zimbabwean context. Following the Benford and Snow (2000) method of framing, I established categories to guide my analysis of Doubt's campaign based on the three framing tasks identified by Benford and Snow (2000: 615-617) which are "1) Motivational framing – Was the post a call to arms or motivational, 2) Prognostic – What solutions were suggested, 3) Diagnostic - How did the post define the problem". The status of whom an activist is was based on the content they uploaded on their social media campaigns and examined within the three frames.

### *Encoding/decoding theory*

In this research, I use Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980) to examine the perceptions of online and offline audiences on social media activism in Zimbabwe based on the interactivity of the campaign. I sifted through the responses from both online (Facebook comments on the campaign) and offline (responses from the focus group discussions) to deduce their perceptions. Shaw (2017) concedes that to understand the perceptions of social media activism by the online community, one can understand the reception of the online content using the

encoding/decoding theory (Hall, 1980). However, he extends Hall's theory in how it can be relevant to online research, exploring the concept of affordances in relation to Hall's encoding/decoding' (1980) model to better account for how certain types of interactivity are promoted or discouraged by new technologies and platforms.

Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory stipulates that on the encoding end is the preferred reading and on the decoding end is the dominant readings, in which the message is decoded with the same meaning intended when it was encoded. In the context of this study, the dominant reading of Doubt's campaign may be, for example, that the Epworth audience agrees with the campaign's meaning and intent and accepts the campaign's preferred reading which, in this case, is using Facebook as a platform to call to action the community in order to end child sex work. The second is a negotiated reading where the Epworth audience may partly share the campaign's intent and broadly accepts the preferred reading but question the preferred reading in a way that reflects their views and beliefs. The third is the oppositional reading, whereby members of the online and or offline audience do not share the campaign's intent and reject the preferred reading.

Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model is useful to explore how meanings of media texts can vary by their circumstances of production and consumption. It concerns itself with how socially differentiated readers produce readings of texts within a cultural context. This study explores the participants' responses to the campaign against child sex work in relation to participatory culture. However, at its first level, it identifies their readings as either dominant, negotiated or oppositional to Doubt's preferred message.

Morley (1992) concurs with Hall's three hypotheses and adds that the encoder creates a message with a 'code' which is the meaning and intent of the message which can be received in the three hypotheses. As cited by Davis (2004), the term "code" was introduced into linguistic analysis by Roland Barthes (1970). It distinguished between moments when the text's message is created by the producer and interpreted by the audience. She ascribes this as what enables Hall to identify a 'dominant cultural order' which allows society to share a range of understandings about the meaning of particular signs, terms, images and sounds. The three hypotheses (dominant, negotiated or oppositional) will be used to establish the codes of interaction between the campaign against child sex work and the online audience. The theory

will be applied to organise the comments on the selected videos of the campaign against child sex work. These readings will be analysed within the participatory culture framework.

There have been debates around interactivity between the virtual and real worlds (Hine, 2000 and Lysloff, 2003). Scholars such as Garcia et al., (2009) believe that the advent of social media has made the distinction between the online and offline world less useful as activities in these realms have become increasingly merged as they interact and transform each other. In this research, I use encoding/decoding theory to organise the responses from the FGDs and denote how the offline audiences interacted with the content on the anti-child sex work campaign in Epworth and whether the message of the online campaign resonates with them. The resonance or lack thereof of the message from the campaign could illuminate the offline audience's perception of the use of social media as an activism platform. By examining the interaction (responses) of the offline audience with the campaign, its emerging themes and highlighted issues are identified then analysed in relation to the theories of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). In addition, the encoding/decoding theory will be used to sift through the responses from the focus group discussions, which in this research represents the offline audience.

Reception studies share the fundamental assumption that the "meaning of a message, including all forms of media message, is not fixed or pre-given but must be interpreted by its recipient" (Livingstone and Ranjana, 2017: 1). Sifting the responses using the encoding/decoding model will be the first step to understanding relationships among the emerging themes and issues in this study's raw data and the theoretical framework (Chong and Yeo 2015). This will be followed by (reflexive) thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020), as explained in the following section.

### *Thematic analysis*

Braun and Clarke (2020), in their continuous exploration of thematic analysis, have re-termed it reflexive thematic analysis. Although the thematic analysis applied in this research is primarily guided by Braun and Clarke's (2020) recent work, which they refer to as reflexive thematic analysis, I borrow most of the concepts from their initial exploration of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as well as pointers from other scholars on thematic analysis (Trainor and Bundon, 2020). Ultimately, their original conception of thematic analysis provided accessible guidance for thematic analysis research that retained flexibility and emphasised the range of possibilities of different modes of engagement. These modes of

engagement aimed to open up, rather than close down, possibilities for thematic analysis research, encouraging creativity and wide-ranging use (Braun and Clarke, 2020). Their recent exploration of reflexive thematic analysis posits that themes do not pre-exist but are rather generated as a result of a robust analytical process by the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2020). This understanding of thematic analysis conforms with participatory culture, the theory guiding this research.

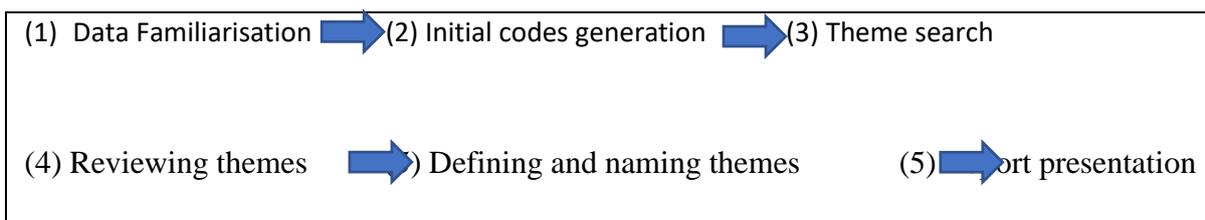
A thematic analysis will be employed extensively as the common-sense way of researching media content (Bell, 2001:13) for both the audience data collected from the Facebook campaign and the responses from the participants of the FGDs. Literature-driven themes, combined with data-driven themes for analysis, were used to maximise all the themes that may answer the research questions and avoid leaving material unaccounted for. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020) will be applied separately, between the online and offline audience responses. The need to apply reflexive thematic analysis separately arises from the idea that “audience (re)produce social relations by negotiating the material/social determinations that structure their everyday contexts of action” (Livingstone and Ranjana 2013: 2). Therefore, due to their differing contextual backgrounds, platforms of participation and access to the campaign, the themes arising from the online and offline audiences may not be the same. Braun and Clarke (2006: 57) define thematic analysis as “a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set.” By looking for meaning across a given set of data, reflexive thematic analysis permits the researcher to construct meanings from data through shared experience. Coding is the core of thematic analysis as it is the process of encoding qualitative information. Guided by the research questions and the data gathered, I coded the data into meaningful groups in preparation for theme generation.

Nyarko (2014) argues that a theme captures something important about data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. In this study, I analysed the data within the participatory culture framework. In this regard, the appropriateness of applying reflexive thematic analysis is cemented by its potential for some flexibility around the theory that frames the research (Braun and Clarke, 2020). The emerging themes identified from the literature, the campaign and comments of the FGD participants are analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to establish the role of an interactive

audience in social media activism and subsequently the perceptions of the offline and online audience on the use of Facebook as a mediation platform in activism in Zimbabwe. The role of Facebook as a mediation platform is important for interrogating the perception of social media activism by offline and online audiences.

I deemed a combination of deductive and inductive approaches as the most appropriate. This approach allowed me to deduce themes from the literature and be guided by the theoretical framework while simultaneously being open to codes generated by the data and satisfying the aims of the research. The deductive approach aligns with the theory, research questions and literature, enabling the study to focus on the study objectives (Schreirer, 2014) whilst the inductive approach aligns to the compiled data with the same focus of fulfilling the research objectives. Participatory culture places human experience in the centre (Jenkins, 2006), so it is paramount to incorporate themes from participants' responses in the FGDs and comments by participants on the Facebook campaign. Meaning, these themes are mainly literature driven and partly data-driven. Schreirer (2014) quotes Kracauer (1952), who explains that meaning is often complex, holistic, context-dependent and not necessarily apparent at first sight hence why it is important to incorporate themes from the data collected to understand how participants perceive social media activism within their context.

(Reflexive) thematic analysis recognises patterns within data, so that identified themes become categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:4). As mentioned above, I borrowed some of the concepts from Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis, following the six procedural stages (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87 – 93). I acknowledge the modification of these six steps by reflexive thematic analysis (Braune and Clarke, 2020). Therefore, I merged the 2006 and 2020 versions of the six-step guide. This was to organise the data collected from the Facebook comments and reactions, Doubt's interview, and the responses from the FGD participants. The stages are outlined below:



Source: Braun and Clarke (2006: 87 – 93)

The introduction of reflexive thematic analysis into this research was to serve as the base upon which coded data from the interviews, Facebook comments and reactions and the responses from the FGDs were extracted and thematically arranged for analysis, discussion and presentation (Nyarko, 2014). There are many benefits to following these six steps of thematic analysis, but of paramount importance and specific to this research is the fact that it assists the summarising of main characteristics of a large body of data and or offers a ‘thick description’ of the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Each of the six steps of thematic analysis applied in this research played an individual but imperative role in the data analysis. These steps were framed within participatory culture theory and were employed to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within data as tabulated below:

<b><u>STEP</u></b>	<b><u>FUNCTION</u></b>
1) Familiarisation	- Going through the collected data (Facebook comments and reactions), transcribing the audio recordings since I was recording. I also read, reflected and took the initial notes.
2) Initial coding	- Prescribing the initial codes and organising recurring and potential codes that match. Encoding/decoding theory is employed in this coding process. The three hypotheses (Dominant, negotiated and oppositional) of encoding/decoding theory were used to group the codes. The prescribing of initial codes and their organisation, according to the encoding/decoding theory, was also applied to the data-driven content.
3) Theme search	- Organising codes and regrouping them into initial/candidate themes. Again, the initial/candidate themes are sifted using the three hypotheses of encoding/decoding theory.

4) Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Picking themes that are relevant and useful in answering the research questions and fulfil the main objective. As mentioned above, these themes were predetermined based on the literature and theory. However, as accommodated by participatory culture theory, there was the incorporation of new themes as they emerged from the data collected. Specific to this stage is checking the candidate themes from stage three against the actual data extracts to see if they match and give a coherent storyline in relation to my research questions and theory. In this stage, I also identified potential new themes and revised my codes to ascertain whether or not I needed to recode, which was the case. In one or two cases of reviewing codes, new themes and sub-themes would emerge especially from the data-driven code.</li> </ul>
5) Naming and defining themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Giving specific names to the final themes that illuminate the perceptions of online and offline communities on social media activism in Zimbabwe. For each individual theme, a detailed analysis was given on how each theme contributes to the answering of the research questions. For example, the theme of the digital divide speaks to question three of whether or not online activism resonates offline. This is because the digital divide relates to aspects of activism such as access, voice and identity. Which, according to my analysis, are some of the pinnacle connections between online and offline activism.</li> </ul>
6) Report presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reporting on each of the final themes generated and how each of these influenced the perception of social media activism by online and offline communities in Zimbabwe.</li> </ul>

**Table 1**

### **Ethical Considerations**

The following ethical guidelines were followed and implemented throughout the research:

- a) **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the nature of the study and what the findings would be used for once the study had been completed. This action of consent meant that the participants had full knowledge of what they were getting involved in. (See Appendix 2 for informed consent form).
- b) **Data Privacy and Confidentiality:** The privacy and confidentiality of collected data were guaranteed for the sake of the participants. The recordings of the focus group discussions were done with a phone with assured security. The unlocking details of the said phone are only known to me, the researcher, to which research ethics bind me to uphold the privacy of data as stated in the consent forms I signed with the participants and I quote, “Researcher assures the participant that their anonymity and confidentiality will always be upheld. There will not be sharing of information for any other reasons outside the purposes of this research.” The recordings and transcribed data will only be shared with my supervisor, also bound by the privacy and confidentiality of the University of KwaZulu-Natal research ethics. The consent form states that “Research findings will only be shared with the supervisor who will be guided by the University KwaZulu-Natal research ethics.”
- c) **Participants’ confidentiality and anonymity:** There was high level of maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity of participants as detailed in the informed consent form. One of the measures to ensure anonymity was hosting the FGDs in an enclosed space where the faces of participants and the conversations were privy only to us. Additionally, there were no pictures or videos taken to reveal faces. Only voices were recorded. There was a strictly no-name mentioning policy. Initially, I had given the idea of using pseudonyms in the event that there was a need to refer to someone directly. However, I eventually decided to not use pseudonyms. I arrived at this decision when I realised there was a sex worker amongst the women and even more when I hosted the men, and there was an admission by some men to soliciting for services from child sex workers. The second and third person pronouns were used to refer to each other, such as ‘imi, avo, ivo, iwe, uyu’ (they, her, him, you, we). I had anticipated names slipping out by mistake and, in such cases, I was going to delete the names. However there was no instance when this happened. Without names or pseudonyms, no one can link specific information with individuals.
- d) **Voluntary:** Participants were informed prior to the commencement of data collection that their participation is strictly voluntary.
- e) **Honesty and Trust:** The researcher committed and guaranteed that the collected data will not be used for any other purpose except academic purposes.

- f) Ethical concerns relating to Facebook comments for the online participants whose profiles I visited, the question of ethics is addressed by the fact that the communication that I referred to from Facebook is within the public domain and intended to be accessible by the broader public as most of their profiles are set to public (Matsilele, 2018). Additionally, none of their information was used directly in this research except to establish their backgrounds and contexts.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness of data**

The epistemological position focuses on the details of a situation. The reality behind these details, subjective meanings and motivating actions (Guba and Lincoln, 2005) informed the collection and analysis of data in this research. Knowing how the data was collected helps the reader evaluate the trustworthiness and credibility of the results and the conclusions they draw. In definition trustworthiness or rigour of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry aims to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 290) and credibility is a well-defined precursor of trustworthiness of data.

Murphy and Yelder (2010) treat the concept of credibility and trustworthiness of data separately, stating that, credibility is a criterion to ensure trustworthiness. For this reason, I placed them under one section. Guba and Lincoln (2005) suggest four areas of focus to fulfil trustworthiness of data: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. However, in this research, I expound on three fundamentals to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Polit & Beck, 2014). The study's credibility and confidence in the truth of the study (and therefore the findings) are essential and inform the other fundamentals. I included all three with the exception of transferability because the qualitative and constructivist nature of my study means that the results may only be relevant to a particular context within Zimbabwe.

Credibility and trustworthiness of data are issues fundamental to all research. Livingstone and Das (2013) observe that audience reception cannot be predicted from analysis of text alone, for texts are polysemic and have no singular meaning. As concurred by Ang (1985) and Radway (1984), the significance of media messages from their audiences, cannot be known from the

analysis of the message alone. In this regard, to ensure credibility, I employed data from multiple sources which involves utilising the same data sources within the same method. This was used by collecting data from Facebook and offline FGDs in which I conducted two separate focus groups separated by gender. Additionally, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the campaign creator.

To add, I included multiple theoretical perspectives to analyse data using the encoding and decoding model (Hall, 1980)) as the first step of the reception analysis, followed by a thematic analysis of the components central in answering the research questions. Once identified, these themes are explained via participatory culture theory (2006) in response to the research questions.

I was fully aware of the potential bias in the data collection and analysis due to my prior knowledge of child sex work and social media activism. As far as credibility is concerned, I kept this self-awareness in check (Koch, 1994). In their revision of thematic analysis, I acknowledge that Braun and Clarke (2020) problematise the concept of bias avoidance as antithetical to qualitative research. Admittedly, my bias was not completely eliminated, but I maintain that my prior knowledge of child sex work combined with the radio program I did on the subject prior to this research did play a major role in minimising my bias towards the subject. This was ensured by continuously evaluating my conduct in the FGDs, the interview with Doubt, as well as the analysis of comments on Facebook and consciously separating my personal views from the participants' responses as I harvested them.

Regarding confirmability, I ensured this by providing quotes from participants to back up the claims that I make in my research report. Dependability was ensured by a clear audit trail in form of the raw data, transcribed data, notes and voice recordings taken during the FGDs as well as screen shots of the data harvested from the Facebook comments of the online participants the campaign used as the case study.

As Mills (1959) asserts, data collection methods matter when you are studying a particular community, reasoning that if studied in a symbolically reduced or statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that they will be perceived as docile (cited in Berg 2001: 3). Hence, I adopted qualitative research methodology for my study because of its focus on communities.

Social constructivists believe that individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and their environment and that is how knowledge is created (Jensen, 2012). Within this frame, qualitative methods employed in the collection and analysis of the data in this research are trustworthy and credible. Although, to avoid bias, the qualitative research employed is also inductive in nature as themes and patterns in the study determine the research results and conclusion (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

### Methodological Summary

Below is a tabled summary of my research questions, theoretical framework and data collection methods employed for each question.

<b><u>Research Question</u></b>	<b><u>Data Collection Method (Qualitative Research)</u></b>	<b><u>Theoretical framework</u></b>
<p><b>1) <i>In what ways does doing a social media campaign make one a social media activist?</i></b></p> <p><b>a) <i>In what ways does Doubt's social media campaign make him an activist?</i></b></p>	<p>- Concept driven to establish best practices in activism.</p> <p>- Data will be collected from primary sources of literature from renowned authorities in social media activism. Lim, Jenkins, Tufte et al.</p>	<p>- The study is underpinned by Henry Jenkins' participatory culture theory,</p>
<p><b>2) <i>How does Facebook as a participatory platform mediate activism in Zimbabwe?</i></b></p> <p><b>a) <i>In what ways do the comments on Doubt's Facebook campaign demonstrate the role of the interactive audience in social media activism?</i></b></p>	<p>- Thematic analysis of the content in Doubt's campaign, including the comments by the participants.</p>	<p>- Participatory Culture theory</p>

<p><b>3) In what ways does social media activism resonate with the offline community?</b></p> <p><b>a) What is the Epworth audience's reading of Doubt's campaign?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus group discussions with the Epworth community</li> <li>- Semi-structured interview with Doubt, the campaign creator.</li> </ul>	<p>Participatory Culture Theory</p>
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**Table 2**

**Challenges and Limitations**

Bosch in Fourie (2017: 60) notes that some of the “challenges of researching new media: Definition of the field site of research, boundaries of a sample when working with social media data, ethical considerations and issues of anonymity among others”. These challenges resonated in my research process as well. There is an influx of social media use, specifically Facebook, by individuals and groups for campaigns which creators and followers label as a form of activism. In 2020, social media traffic increased with the COVID19 lockdown restrictions across the globe (*New York Times*, 7 April 2020),<sup>63</sup> which saw the world’s community at large, confined indoors with only the internet and social media as modes of connecting and staying in touch. During this period, there was heightened human rights abuses (AP, 15 September 2020),<sup>64</sup> thereby making social media the only accessible platform to “speak out”. As a result, more social media activism campaigns emerged. I had to fight through the temptation of not including more social media campaigns as they appeared on my timeline to add to my data to answer my research questions.

My preconceived ideas on the topic of child sex work and how it has affected communities in Zimbabwe compared to how it was being addressed on social media posed a challenge. Moving away from my personal stance of what I knew about the situation of child sex work in Epworth and taking outside neutral perspective was a challenge. Jensen (2012) opines that, no knowledge can be produced without some pre-knowledge. Therefore, I capitalised on my

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/07/technology/coronavirus-internet-use.html> Accessed 15 January 2021

<sup>64</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/zimbabwe-virus-outbreak-archive-harare-508cfd55afe1eadbe4351c4341d956e2>

previous knowledge the phenomenon, using it as a background to the study. Also, coming from a radio background I had a personal bias on how social media functions, as a media platform, compared to my use of radio as a platform experience.

Additionally, there were ethical challenges concerned with this research. A central question concerns what is to be considered as private or public data. Ostman and Turtiainen (2016) opine that the question of public and private data is often easier to determine in an offline environment. Equally challenging was taking into consideration that the issue concerned children. I examined an online case study whereby children spoke about their experiences. However, as the researcher, I was not able to engage and converse with them. I believe I would have amassed more robust data with the input of the affected children and their perception of social media activism to address child sex work within which their life is centred. But due to ethical considerations, that could not happen. The closest account of the children's lifestyle was relayed by the adult sex worker participant in the focus group discussions, and which was incorporated into the data collection.

Researching online communities comes with its own unique challenges considering that “no general ethical rules of thumb exist yet to guide research across digital platforms and in accordance with the laws of countries” (Sormanen and Lauk 2006). Furthermore, “asking for permission, rights for citing, identities of informants/subjects to research and so on seem to be important ethical matters” (Östman and Turtiainen 2016: 69). Protecting the research subjects “depends on how one defines both the harm that might be inflicted on the unprotected person and also a research subject” (Sormanen *et al.*, 2016: 77). I had to devise ways to anonymise identities of the online participants for the campaign whose comments I use in this study because their broader quality, but were not consented for this study. In order to uphold the ethical consideration, the subjects in the comment section of the campaign used are not mentioned in full. The communication (names) that I extracted from Facebook was of a public, institutional nature, and all of it was intended to be accessible by the broader public.

Another challenge that arose during the focus group discussions was that some of the participants had pre-conceived ideas towards social media use and the fact that none of them had heard or seen the anti-child sex work campaign. I realised there was no way they were going to sit through a two hour viewing of the live video. To solve this issue, I played them

selected segments with the most engagement and information. Ultimately, this worked out because we had ample content.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research approach, the research design and the methods of data collection. It explained how the methods functioned, either in isolation or together. Furthermore, it established the challenges and limitations encountered during the data collection and how these were managed. The data analysis in the following chapter outlines the steps taken to analyse data.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

This chapter offers the study's findings, which are analysed and interpreted in the context of the literature review (Chapter 2) and theoretical framework (Chapter 3). The analysis provides explanatory insights into the overarching thesis objective to examine online and offline community perceptions of social media activism in Zimbabwe, using a campaign against child sex work in Epworth, Zimbabwe, as a case study.

Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding assists in the data analysis in that it frames the relationship between the campaign creator's preferred encoded message in the campaign against child sex work and ways in which the campaign's online and offline audiences interpret or decode the campaign's message. This study acknowledges that content creators encode messages in relation to their ideological standpoint, world views and on the other hand, audiences decode these messages in line with their own cultural and sociological understanding (Morley 1992, Hall 1993:91). Likewise, constructivism, a paradigm that guides this study, considers that social interactions and context are necessary to interpret a shared message (Matthews, 2003:57).

This study utilises Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2020) seminal six-step process of reflexive thematic analysis of qualitative data. The discussion is generated through deductive (or theoretical) thematic analysis and an inductive approach. This study undertook the coding (step two) and theme selection (step three) which are part of Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis separately. Furthermore, it generated and examined the codes according to three sections: i) Doubt's interviews, ii) Epworth focus group discussions (FGD), and iii) online audience's response to the campaign. Themes were established from the literature, theory, interview, focus group discussions and selected comments from Facebook. After the selection and analysis of the themes, Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory was implemented to mark the reading positions of the online and offline audiences of the campaign against child sex work in comparison to the preferred message in order to determine the perceptions of social media activism in this case as dominant/negotiated/oppositional.

The aims of this study are to:

- 1) Investigate the principles and practices that constitute someone as a social media activist.
- 2) Examine ways in which Facebook, as a participatory platform, mediates activism in Zimbabwe.
- 3) Explore how and if social media activism resonates with online and offline communities.

The two videos used in this research were shared on November the 2nd 2018, and received the following reactions:

Live video: 99 reactions (63 likes, 22 loves, 10 sad, 4 laughs), 528 comments, 12 shares, 5.1 thousand views.

Inciting video: 52 reactions (30 sad, 15 likes and 7 angry), 55 comments, 30 shares and 8.7 thousand views. (02 Nov 2018)

### **Thematic Discussion**

When analysing data relating to theory, it is essential to explain how each study may properly acquaint data. Three identified ways exist in which data analysis and theory may be understood. These are induction, deduction and abduction (Kennedy and Thornberg 2018). This chapter presents and analyses the themes that are a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning. A deductive approach is crucial to this study due to its alignment to the theory, research questions and literature, enabling the study to focus on the study objectives (Schreirer 2014). An inductive approach enables a creative process of examining data while simultaneously allowing room for new knowledge and meaning-making beyond pre-existing theoretical knowledge (Kennedy and Thornberg 2018). This combined approach analysed data retrieved from the online audience and the offline audience.

This chapter does not explicitly demonstrate the generation of every theme in this analysis. However, an example of how these themes were arrived at is given below. As mentioned above, this study followed Braun and Clarke (2006; 2020) six-phase guide to thematic analysis. Phase one is thoroughly familiarising with the data, which includes reading all the transcripts and analysing every one of them. The second phase generates initial codes and themes and groups these into meaningful collections concerning the phenomenon of social media activism and

social media activism audiences. For example, issues of identity and culture or digital divide and access are clustered together. The table below demonstrates each stage of thematic analysis. The final step 6 of reporting on themes is not included, as this is done comprehensively in the following sections.

Example of the demonstration of how the study applied the six step guide to thematic analysis in table 3 below.

Stage	Example
<p>1, Familiarising with the data AND 2. Initial Codes and Themes</p>	<p>-The <b>government has not done anything</b>. The government, through the <b>councillors, get invited by NGOs</b> when they come into the councillor’s ward. The <b>councillors then mobilise the children</b>, and they <b>pin their hopes on these NGOs</b> to <b>assist the kids to get out of sex work</b>.</p> <p>- The <b>community is not doing anything to assist</b>. Once you are <b>labelled a sex work</b>, the <b>community looks down upon you</b>. Even if someone <b>was to beat you up</b>, the <b>community won’t do anything</b> unless if we get there and we know the child then we can help. Otherwise, the <b>community will just look on saying “Hure ngarirohwe”</b>. But then you look at the <b>age of the child and you realise it’s a child</b>.</p>
<p>3.Theme search</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community complacency: Judging &amp; shunning sex workers</li> <li>- Government incompetence: Depending on NGOs to fix their problem (child sex work)</li> <li>- Authorities incapacitation: Councillors pinning hopes on NGOs</li> <li>- Culture -I’m my sister’s keeper</li> <li>- Representation: Adults protecting young sex workers.</li> <li>- Political mileage: Using child sex workers to solicit funding.</li> </ul>
<p>4.Reviewing themes in relation to study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture</li> <li>- Representation</li> <li>- Political mileage</li> </ul>

5 Naming and defining themes	Culture is the way of life Representation Political mileage
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**Table 3:**

Below, we further explore the themes of social media activism as they emerged from the literature, theory, and collected data. This study considers that themes emerge from similar data and dissimilar data among the encoders and the decoders. The final themes analysed are those that speak to the conditions that encourage a participatory culture. The deductive and inductive themes are presented together and combined for online and offline audiences. The themes all relate to the researcher’s exploration of activism and the over-arching theme of participatory, explored in the previous chapters.

*Activism and the paradox of ‘isms’*

This theme integrates the critical scholarship on social media activism on the definitions of an activist and activism. In Doubt Chimonyo’s interview, he initially stated that, “If what I did was activism, then I didn’t know at the time that I was an activist. I thought I was advocating” (Chimonyo interview, 20 January 2020). After probing further about his role in the campaign he said, “Everyone who plays a part in advocating for a cause is in some way an activist.” This exchange demonstrates the confusion concerning the word activist and to whom it applies, even for so-called activists.

The advent of social media activism came along with a sceptical view towards activism that happens online. Terms such as “slacktivism (lazy activism), clicktivism (click activism), armchair activism and keyboard activism emerged to question the worthiness of digital (subsequently social media) activism” (Lim, 2013:638). With regards to the campaign against child sex work, the activity from the online community aligns to the clicktivism as described by Lim (2013) based on the number of people who participated in the campaign, but the results were not reflecting offline. The emergency of web 2.0 came with activism 2.0 (Harlow 2011,5). Social media can instantaneously spread messages to the masses, unrestricted by time or space. (Harlow, 2011;3). Broadly defined, ‘activism’ is the actions of a group of like-minded individuals coming together to change the status quo, advocating for a

cause, whether local or global, and whether progressive or not (Cammaerts, 2007; Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Lomicky and Hogg, 2010).

The 'likes' that structure social media translate to Facebook being a questionable platform to impact activism. No one looks at the authenticity or lack thereof of a story. The simplicity of clicking to 'Join Group' or 'Sign Petition' highlights a valid question of whether members of online social movements genuinely are dedicated to a cause or merely jumping on the bandwagon. Although there are many advances and advantages of activism born from social media, face-to-face communication remains superior in providing data such as body language and facial expressions (Sade-Beck, 2004), hence making physical activism appear to be the more sincere type of activism.

By definition, social activism is about doing, acting, mobilizing the resources and supporting leadership to bring change in society (Dumitrescu, 2015). As mentioned earlier, the 'isms' that fall under the umbrella of social media activism include Slacktivism which is often juxtaposed with practical activism. Ibid (2011:11) defines 'Slacktivism as "political participation that lacks a strong commitment by the participants. Rotman *et al.*, (2011:3) weighs in with another definition of slacktivism as "low-risk, low-cost activity via social media whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity." Based on these definitions, Chimonyo's campaign unquestionably falls into the slacktivism category. This practice is typically juxtaposed with practical activism, referred to as direct, proactive and often confrontational action towards attaining a social change (Rotman *et al.*, 2011:3). These definitions render social media activism inferior to practical activism, which Chiumbu (2015) defines as traditional mobilization methods, such as toyi-toying (a militant march-dance).

Tufte (2014) writes about activism shifting from being just individual activists to groups and organisations. He notes that NGOs, civil society, media platforms have become agents of social change as activism and activism platforms are shifting. Barkadjieva *et al.*, (2018) share these sentiments and simultaneously question the use of Facebook as a platform for activism due to the implications of corporate ownership of social media platforms and the increasing capacity of governments to monitor citizens' behaviour. Additionally, Barkadjieva *et al.*, (2018) question whether 'clicktivism' erodes the physical or embodied participation constituting traditional offline activism.

When everyone broadcasts, no one is listening [and] only the loudest and most opinionated voices survive. Lovink, (2012:7) further criticises social media activism labelling it as a form of ‘detached engagement’ and communicative capitalism. Bruce Mutsvairo (2016:6) points out that, “traditionally, activism has been reserved for ‘activists’, but in the information age dominated by the powerful presence of social media, ordinary citizens making use of mobile media and technological platforms consider themselves activists too”. Hence, the belief that everyone with internet access is potentially an activist is fundamentally flawed. Despite social media activism creating a buzz, there is no evidence that it facilitates practical change on the ground.

In his blog post, Jenkins (2012) writes that most activists are born out of being fans or “someone who feels a strong emotional connection to a particular narrative or in the more active sense of someone who has participated in a fan community or engaged in transformative practice”. In relation to participatory culture, Jenkins’ (2012) definition of an activist would be someone who manages to rope the community in so that the campaign can be community-led. In Chimonyo’s campaign, he managed to get the online community to participate but not the Epworth community, which was the primary audience for the campaign. Does this make Chimonyo less of an activist? He can still be described as an activist because he managed to mobilise the online audience as evidenced by participation via comments, video calling, reactions (likes and loves) and the pledges that participants made even though, according to Chimonyo (interview, 20 January 2020), none of the pledges came through.

Contrary to the disregard of ‘isms’ associated with social media by critics, Fourie (2017:188) opposes critics who view hashtag activism as a form of ‘slacktivism’ because “hashtag movements have the potential to raise widespread public awareness of social justice issues”. Activists viewed tactics of changing emotions and one’s sense of self as necessary for widespread social change and combined them with efforts to change institutions and the state. This view is supported by Whittier’s (2009) definition of an activist who can persuade, enunciate and articulate. The social impacts of the internet and social media, or “change” in society, should be understood due to the organic interaction between technology and social, political, and cultural structures and relationships (Lim, 2012:638). By these explanations and

definitions of activism and activists, Chimonyo can be classified as an activist as his campaign satisfies what is described here as an activism aspect of mobilisation, awareness and advocacy (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019).

However, a technology divide separates a growing number of Internet activists and the people at the grassroots in the country (Chiweshe, 2017: 144). Referencing the Zimbabwean social media activism landscape, Mutsvairo and Chitanana (2019) opine that:

Online social movement activists incline towards drawing attention to themselves as the inadvertency of their activism efforts transforms them into overnight heroes and keyboard warriors. Their followers likewise are keyboard heroes waiting for their big break.

This observation reduces social media campaigns to a popularity contests. After Chimonyo's campaign against child sex work, started his NGO called PACT. Additionally, he is currently running a talk show called DDC (Doubt Dehwa Chimonyo) Skool of thought, whereby he discusses social issues that his Facebook followers bring to him. When he started the campaign against child work, he only had the title of 'journalist' to his profile but his following grew after the campaign, and now he has diversified into hosting talk shows on that same page. In this researcher's view, that does not take away his activist title for the campaign against child sex work. However, it does question his sincerity in the campaign.

Mutsvairo (2016) advocates for the exploration of social media activism within context. Profiled below are some (self-) proclaimed activists, specific to the Zimbabwean context, to observe if there are any a common trends or patterns amongst Zimbabwean activist and activist organisations:

Self-proclaimed Activist Tatenda 'Tatelicious' Karigambe has been trending on social media in Zimbabwe of late. Tadelicious Karigambe-Sandberg profile reads:

Queen of Entertainment, HIV & AIDS Advocate and Life Coach Therapist. Joined 2010 followed by 177,361 people<sup>65</sup>. Page: Taateh Sandberg (Oracle Voodoo Priestess) Followed by

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/tadelicious.Karigambe>

62,900 people<sup>66</sup>. She is a transgender activist based in Sweden who uses her Facebook page to advocate for LGBTQTI<sup>67</sup> rights and encourage HIV positive individuals to adhere to medication.

However, the same platform she uses to advocate is the same platform she uses to settle scores with anyone who crosses her path. She calls out, blocks out anyone who opposes what she says as well as expose personal secrets of her friends and fore alike, which has seen other social media users calling her a bully. Additionally, she has been accused for being a fake activist, using her transgender status to gain Swedish citizenship, sympathy and funding from the LGBTQI community.

Hopewell Chin'ono<sup>68</sup> followed by 128,275 people. Although it does not categorically state that he is an activist on his profile, he is regarded as a political activist due to his criticism towards the current Zimbabwean government and the fact that he has been arrested multiple times based on this criticism. Chin'ono is a political activist who has been arrested more than three times for calling out and exposing government alleged corruption on Facebook and Twitter<sup>69</sup>. As much as Chin'ono seemingly fights for the rights of fellow Zimbabweans, he has been labelled an “egotistical, self-centred and self-righteous activist” (social media user, April 2021) who uses activism to solicit western donor funding and getting arrested for political mileage. He was labelled this after referring to Zimbabwean youths as "unfocused" (Next Level Publication, April 2021).

Bustop TV<sup>70</sup> is a youth-run Zimbabwean media house that was established in 2014 and has amassed a following of 190,599 people. They are widely known for political and social satirical skits that comment on pressing issues which they post on Facebook and often go viral. One of the actresses was once reportedly abducted in 2019 for “undermining the government through her skits”<sup>71</sup>. Through its state-funded newspaper *The Herald* and other social media users who

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66 <https://facebook.com/taateh.sandberg>

67 LGBTQTI stands for Lesbian Gays Bi-sexual Queer Transgender Intersex.

68 <https://www.facebook.com/hopewelljournalist>

69 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53477423>

70 <https://m.facebook.com/BUSTOPTV>

71 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49433387>

sympathise with the ruling party, the government accused Bustop of “faking her abduction<sup>72</sup>” to gain favour from the Western donors.

Magamba TV<sup>73</sup> uses parody as a form of activism and has 58,288 followers. It is said to be “Zimbabwe’s leading producer of cutting-edge political satire and comedy shows.” In 2017, Magamba network had their equipment, including computers, confiscated by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and one of their employees arrested for: “subverting a constitutional government through Masterminding a social media campaign to overthrow the government by unconstitutional means, with the campaign allegedly being run under the social media accounts; [@Matigary](#), [@OpenparlyZW](#) and Magamba Network Trust<sup>74</sup>”

The Zimbabwean government routinely suppresses internet activism. Of the activists mentioned above, only ‘Tatelicious’ is a social activist. Even though Doubt Chimonyo’s campaign was based on a social issue, it still circled back to politics because the participants continuously blamed the government and the ruling party for the status quo that bred child sex work:

Key word is kids... how is a child responsible for sexual exploitation? The problem is adults and a crappy government: no young people and children services. If the law was tighter, it wouldn’t be a regular occurrence. Who pays *yaanayo* [whatever they have] for sex? (Hatidzore Tsvimbo, Online Participant, 2 November 2018).

Noise on the streets will not work. Government will give us support when they see us in action. (Masibanda Rue, Online Participant, 2 November 2018).

So even with the difference in their activism styles, one thing in common about activists based in Zimbabwe is that at one point or another, they have been arrested or accused of working with the West, whom the government deem has an agenda for “regime change” (Matsilele, 2019). Such narrative illuminates why activism is viewed as a money-making scheme and receives mainly oppositional perceptions. One social media user asked, “Who pays these

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72 <https://www.herald.co.zw/people-speak-against-fake-abductions/>

73 <https://www.facebook.com/MagambaTV>

74 <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2017/11/breaking-cid-seize-computers-belonging-magamba-tv-organisation-martha-odonovan-works/>

activists” (Duchess Cleo, (28 October 2019), which generated much debate. One interesting response was, “Lol (Laughing emoji) *Abanye* [people] they are giving themselves titles without pay or accreditation. *Haa namhla ngolwesinghakhi* (What’s the date today)?? Have lost track” (Thoko Masiwa, 28 October 2019).

Whilst activist content is visible online, it means very little if people in Zimbabwe have no access or relation to the sentiments. There is already a disjuncture of space and experience. The discussions with the Epworth FGD participants outlined that they cannot listen or believe news about themselves generated miles away from Zimbabwe. This sentiment aligns with Lovink's statement that those with access often will have the loudest voice (2012: 7).

### *Digital divide*

The digital divide is defined as a lack of access to Information and Communications Technology's (ICT) and the internet due to unemployment or level of income knowledge (Van Dijk, 2012). Narratives of exclusion form part of the digital divide debates, including; lack of access and knowledge to operate the technologies.

In the case of Epworth audience, Chimonyo (interview, 20 January 2020) posited that he created the campaign with a strong belief that everyone, even in poor communities, somehow has access to internet.

I wouldn't say that people in Epworth do not have data. Everyone in Zimbabwe has got data, even my grandma in the rural areas have got a “*kambudzi*<sup>75</sup>” phone, even though it's the simplest. But in the community, you will find three or four people with phones that can access social media who will spread the word.

Contrary to Chimonyo's assumptions on social media access, Epworth audience bemoaned a lack of resources as a barrier to social media access:

To access Internet *tinototsvaka* Wi-Fi because *mabundle haatangiki* [To access Internet, we have to look for Wi-Fi because bundles are expensive]. A lot of us in this area cannot afford bundles. Even for WhatsApp, *togona kuita two months tisina kuenda paApp* [Even for WhatsApp, we can go for 2 months without access] (Participant 2, Epworth women's focus group discussion, 11 January 2020).

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<sup>75</sup> A phone that cannot go on the internet, only used for calls and text messages.

Consequently, the Internet further marginalises the marginalised due to the digital divide (Papacharissi, 2009). This is exacerbated by the commercialisation of the Internet, subsequently social media, whereby data cost and usage has become the determinant of access. To this end, Fuchs (2013:342) says, “we live in capitalist societies, and that capitalism needs to be considered as the context of the internet”.

Access is the main attribute of the digital divide. Access is based not only on being physically present in spaces with access to mobile phone networks but also financially participating (Chiweshe, 2017) In this Digital Era, access to and familiarity with technology has become essential to a successful movement (Rolfe, 2005). In reference to the public sphere, the term public entails accessibility and openness (Mokonehatse, 2018). Access becomes a crucial element in any activity partaken in the public sphere, which encompasses social media activism. Many FGDs participants bemoaned the lack of access as a factor in their perception as to why social media activism is a foreign notion to them and why it will not work in their case.

The concept of access emphasizes participation. The internet has provided access to public platforms such as social media, but access to social media is still a challenge. To participate, one needs to have access to the platform and or the activity. In a country where only 12 per cent of the population has access to the Internet, it is improbable that a Zimbabwean Spring will come forth via the Internet (Chiweshe, 2017). One of the online participants said, “I know the assumption is that everyone can access this platform” (Sinyoro Uncle Dhewa, Online participant, 2 November 2018)

Access and interaction are vital for participatory processes but not sufficient conditions for participation (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2019). In the campaign against child sex work, some of these conditions would be local (Epworth) knowledge on child sex work, the way of life in Epworth, and what is and what is not accessible/available to the Epworth community. Online audiences only interacted with the child sex work issue in Epworth through a five-minute video clip of an ‘interview’ with a child sex worker that was posted by Doubt as part of the Facebook campaign. In contrast, the offline community study participants live in Epworth alongside the child sex work issue. Their experience of the issue is either through their own personal

encounters or is inherited from the community's cultural knowledge. Most of this study's participants identified with the campaign because they have read about child sex work before, or they happened to be on Facebook when the video was posted.

### *Culture*

"Your child is my child" was the mantra or *mwana haazvarwi kumwechete* [A child is not born to one family, they are born to the community]. This meant that all adults in the community were responsible for parenting any child despite them not being their biological child. However, the culture of looking out for each other's children seems to have changed with the times. This change is a contributing factor to children getting into vulnerable circumstances to earn a living, such as, child sex work:

We have lost our culture whereby parents are parents for everyone. They would discipline any child wherever they met them and they were misbehaving (interview with Doubt Chimonyo, 20 January 2020),

These cultural factors come into play when participants interpret messages from the encoder (Barker 2013). This is a matter of expectation versus content. Chimonyo can be seen as taking up the traditional role of a parent or guardian looking out for the children practising sex work. However, the platform he used to reach out is marred with suspicions of ulterior motives. Hence, the campaign was perceived with primarily negotiated and oppositional readings.

What we call problems and how we describe the problem to some extent function on the implicit assumptions of our culture, which both limit potential solutions and predetermine what are seen as problems (Seidman, 1983). The term 'prostitution' is fraught with negative perceptions. The term 'sex worker' has fewer negative connotations but sex work itself is culturally frowned upon. Perkins *et al.*, (1994) posit that the term 'sex worker' places emphasis on the work, whereas 'prostitute' places emphasis on the person. Amongst the female FGD participants was an adult sex worker who shared some insights on sex work rings in Epworth. She explained how adult sex workers are referred to as *Magogodera's* (a derogatory term meaning old sex workers) though they also function as protectors for the child sex workers. She mentioned that sex workers go through much of abuse, and the young sex workers suffer the most. Sometimes the younger ones are taken advantage of by 'clients'. For example, if a client rapes a worker or refuses to pay, the young sex workers can report to the older sex workers to help them retrieve their money. She admitted that she (and others like her) could

not take the children out of sex work because they are incapacitated, but at least they can protect them based on their experience and age (Field notes, 11 January 2020).

Jenkins defines participatory culture as a community-driven appropriation of commercial media texts. Jenkins *et al.*, (2016: 191) further defines participatory culture in,

opposition to various forms of culture that limit access to the means of cultural production and circulation, that fragment and isolate the public rather than providing opportunities to create and share culture and that construct hierarchies that make it difficult for many to exert any meaningful influence over the core decisions that impact their lives

To assume that social problems are time, place and context bound is to recognise that what is constituted as a problem represents a particular social construction of reality that becomes widely shared and institutionalised as part of the “collective stock of knowledge” (Berger and Luckman, 1966: 86). Validating that social class influences how a problem is perceived or decoded and termed. Tellingly, a privileged audience would view a girl under the age of 16, who lives in an uptown suburb, goes to a private school, and who sells sex for money, as a delinquent. Conversely, a girl of the same age from a poor high-density community like Epworth as a child sex worker.

Hall (1996:223) addressed cultural identity as "a reflection of the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which present all humanity as one people". This researcher acknowledges that identity, language and representation are integral to understanding culture. The following section will there discuss identity concerning how it contributes to a culture in activism.

### *Identity*

Identity has proven to play a pivotal role in activism. Paolo Gerbaudo defines mobilisation as a process of the “gathering or assembling of individuals and groups around something they share in common” and that commonality is part of what forms identity (Gerbaudo, 2012: 20). One example is of the youth in the DREAMers project who identified and forged common bonds with others who shared similar backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives through YouTube, which contributed to their cause to engage in immigrant rights in order to achieve legislative reform to gain traction (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). Another similar example whereby online identity played a major role in mobilising the masses on social media is the Prita case (Lim, 2013). Prita was arrested on charges of defaming a hospital after her email to friends and

relatives, where she moaned about the bad service she received, was leaked. The public raised money to pay her fine. However, she was released from prison and found not guilty after public outcry on both mainstream and social media, particularly Facebook, with most people who rallied behind her relating that “She is just like us. If this could happen to her, it could happen to me, to any one of us” (Lim,2013:645). This outcome shows the potential for the internet to help construct identity and build trust online, which then could lead to offline mobilisation (Harlow, 2011: 6).

Facebook’s interactivity affords users to refer to each other by name, even though many have never met face-to-face. Such interaction can help strengthen ties among participants, potentially creating trust and building a community identity that has proven essential for a movement’s success (Harlow, 2011:15). The offline audience seems to not have a shared identity with the online audience, let alone Doubt, the campaign creator. This is indicated by some of the contradictory responses about the use of social media between online and offline audiences. Doubt (interview, January 2020) preferred message is that “social media is definitely a catalyst to offline action”. He goes on to give an example of a woman who beat up her husband’s mistress. He believes that posting the story on H-Metro lead to his arrest. However, the offline and online audience readings show oppositional reading to the efficacy of online activism:

Phone *tairamba, haishandi* (The use of the phone/social media is completely useless). They should come physically in the bars and catch them even if using the police (Epworth women’s focus group discussion, 11 January 2020).

Real people interested in change will not go on a campaign trail. (No like) (Lenon Rwizi, online participant, campaign against child work, 2 November 2019):

My little research show that people are tired of cash fund raising projects (Sinyoro Uncle K, online response to campaign against child work, 2 November 2019)

Jenkins (2006), participatory culture stipulates that members should feel some social connection within the participatory culture paradigm (at least they care what other people think about what they have created). Therefore, more than just liking or reacting to a campaign, identifying and relating to it fulfils some aspects of participatory culture. Admittedly, for the

online community as a collective, "Facebook's option for users to 'like' or respond to a comment helped generate debate and create a sense of community and collective identity, furthering the likelihood of users participating offline" (Harlow, 2011:14)

With reference to cultural identity for the diaspora population, Hall (2011) asserts that identity is always in the process of becoming. However, identity online is "messy and ongoing" (Fourie, 2017:187). This observation is demonstrated when a comment in support of the campaign gets the equivalent number of likes to a comment that opposes the campaign. This idea of process and change could be applied to online identity, which explains that online audiences are not homogenous. Being online simultaneously is not enough ground for audiences to share an identity, rather offline contexts influence the identity that an individual carries to an online platform.

It is important to note that audiences can position themselves within the text according to their own identity and as the discourses they are exposed to (Hall 1993, 1997). Senders encode messages according to their views and ideological standpoint, and audiences decode these messages according to their understanding (Hall 1993:91). This is because certain messages are read and interpreted from cultural practices embedded in each social structure (Morley 1992:81).

The failure to give the children (child sex workers) a positive identity potentially belittles the campaign as this can easily be classified as victimisation framing (Benford and Snow, 2000) because it attaches a negative label on the children. The children who are the subjects of the campaign have no identity in the campaign and are referred to collectively as 'child sex workers'. In justifying why he used the phrase 'child sex work' in reference to the children and campaign, Doubt (interview, 20 January 2020) said:

When you use the word 'work,' it means someone is getting paid. As a journalist, if you put a phrase that says, 'a dog bites a man,' it wouldn't sell as much a headline that says a 'man bites a dog', now that is news, everyone would want to know what kind of a man bites a dog. So, when I used the phrase 'child sex work,' it generated interest that children, who are minors, are selling sex, how? Also, they are getting paid for it, so that makes it sex work.

This view adds another dimension to the issue of word selection in campaigns. The language used in campaigns is a deliberate choice in order for the campaign to 'sell'. The mention of the

word ‘sell’ speaks to paid activism mentioned earlier, which concurs with what the Epworth participants mentioned about activists.

### *Language*

In times of crisis, Zimbabweans are known to create metaphorical language to deliberately create ambiguous expressions to name and describe their everyday bitter experiences (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012). Using metaphorical language to describe child sex work in Epworth is a way of underplaying the seriousness of the issue in the community. In one of the FGDs, one man said “*Huku yakachembera yakaoma mutezo haian muto, ndoda huku yechidiki ndoinoita muto unonaka*” [Old chickens do not make nice gravy, I love younger chicken because it makes the best, tasty gravy] (Participant 2, Male FGD, 11 January 2020). The metaphors and softening of language to communicate immoral social behaviour contrast the provocative words conjured to sell an online campaign. Both illustrate the power of language and its existence in a realm that transcends cultural context.

For social media to be truly transformative according to the principles of participatory culture, then local languages, content, social media feature description in local languages needs to be encouraged (Jenkins, 2006). Using local languages has proven to be a key in influencing behaviour and participation in social media campaigns, for example, during the 2019 Hong Kong protests (Quinn and Lily, 2019). Although the participants in the FGDs understood and agreed for the sessions to be conducted in English, they admitted that in communicating issues affecting them via social media, using local languages such as Shona and Isindebele are ideal in order to accommodate and reach the larger populace of the Epworth adults. When telling personal stories, a first language seems to be the best way one can effectively relay their message because it is “a carrier of a people’s culture, culture is a carrier of people’s values; values are the carrier of a people’s self-definition – the basis of their consciousness” (Ngugi wa Thio’ngo 1985). Some male participants concur with Ngugi’s statement saying,

Yes, local languages are important in influencing behaviour, especially when you use indigenous *madimikira ne tsumo* [idioms] you know they are less direct and people tend to remember more when you use these (Male FGD, 11 January 2020).

Chimonyo (interview, 20 January 2020) explained that the target audience for his campaign were Shona speakers. However he still chose to use English in the campaign. His explanation is as follows:

I try to use English because I have followers who do not understand Shona. That's why I was forced to speak English. I even apologise in advance when I use a local language or vice versa.

Interestingly, he said his intended primary audience was Epworth adults who are predominantly Shona speaking, but goes on to say that his concern was for his followers (online) who do not understand Shona. Manyozo (2018) calls for alternative conceptualisations of development practice whereby he positions a pedagogy of listening as an avenue for development alongside communities. Listening and language are inseparable concepts. Against this background, social media campaigns cater to their intended audience by considering their contextual background and using the appropriate language, heeding Jenkins' (2006) call for media to operate within specific cultural and institutional contexts that determine how and why they are used.

Language's role in qualitative analysis is a tool for data collection and an object for analysis (Jensen,2012:271). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o aptly posits that language is culture. Through language, one can understand a people's cultural stance. How someone comprehends and interprets a situation is better understood through the language that they commonly use. Amongst the male participants was one man who openly admitted that he courts young girls for sex because he believes that by doing so, he is doing them and their family a favour. In his words:

*Twudiki twuri kurira haikona zvekutamba* [The young ones are more popular and fresh].

There is a war between older sex workers and young sex workers. Young sex workers are more popular. We go for 'younger stock' with energy. I can't tell you the exact age I go for, but these young ones

... As parents, brothers, or relatives, it hurts to see these children doing child sex work. But we understand them. They are trying to make a living. So, we end up getting the service from them and in exchange we give them money. It's a case of helping each other. So, it's not rape case when we or other older people pay them for sex, we will be helping [Participant 4, Male FGD, 11 January 2020).

With the resolve in the language, one can tell that it takes more than just a Facebook campaign to stop him from soliciting sexual favours from young girls since he also admitted that he would rather "buy a scud<sup>76</sup> than buy bundles to go on Facebook". Considering the participant's mind set above, to mitigate child sex work – qualitative studies that explore the factors contributing

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<sup>76</sup> A type of alcohol, one of the cheapest.

to reasons for engaging in sex work both from the sex worker and the client, needs to be undertaken to build towards a social ecological and contextualised understandings for these choices.

Technology itself is a body of language that needs to be learnt and understood. This study found that some of the children practicing sex work live with aged grandparents after their parents passed on due to HIV/AIDS, a situation that has been discussed by Chiumbu (2015). The fact that Doubt explains that the campaign was aimed at adults (interview, January 11, 2020), an age group within which the aged grandparents fall, automatically excludes them from the conversation as they are not well versed with technology and how it functions.

### *Voice*

Voice signals a way of communicating which is a vital constitutive property for activism (Tufte, 2017). Participatory culture calls for an environment where everyone believes that their contribution matters and does not share without fear or favour (Jenkins 2006). The main question is whether or not social media activism gives voice to the marginalised who are offline. Social media is referred to as a liberated platform, but it causes barriers to participation through silencing and forbidding other voices to articulate their issues, aspirations and struggles. For example, minors and people without internet access or those blocked by social media for going "against community standards" are silenced by those who control social media. In the case of Doubt's campaign against child sex work, it addressed adults as guardians of the community, leaving out the children's voices, thus excluding the voices of the victims. One of UNICEF's co-organisational objectives is to be the leading voice for and with children (Tufte, 2017:2). The fact that UNICEF, an international gatekeeper of children's rights, advocates for the voices of children to be heard validates that voice is an imperative component in advocating for children's rights.

The poor lack the voice and recognition necessary to engage in civic action (Appadurai 2004, 63). Upon the interaction with the Epworth audience, they were very emotional about the lack of perceived right to express their voices in the campaign as the campaign was happening.

As they were played the video of the campaign against child sex work, a participant said:

*Vanhu vanonyepa ivavava, vanotadza kuuya kwatiri vanhu vakuru* [These people are liars, they do not talk to us adults] for example me (commercial sex worker) we are the seniors in the area, nothing of that sort about child sex workers can happen without our knowledge. We

even distribute condoms to these girls. These are the people that lie. They just come and pick their relatives (Participant 1, Female FGD, 20 January 2021).

From reasonable debate to emotional discourse, the politics of voice are common despite concentrated economic power and elite politics (Tuftte, 2017). This account of the interaction between the speakers and the public clearly shows how the possibility of voice is constrained by institutional discourses that excessively empower expertise and close off to citizen participation through a technologisation of issues and associated depoliticisation (Carvalho *et al.*, 2016).

### *Agency*

It is widely believed that voice engenders agency (Dyll, 2020; Dyll-Myklebust, 2014). Agency is an imperative aspect of activism, both in terms of the campaigners' agency and the facilitation of agency for the campaign beneficiaries. Tuftte (2017) rightfully says, agency should not be given but should be inherent to all who are concerned to exercise it. However, with social media activism, the space for agency decreases rather than increases (Wagner and Dankova, 2016 in Tuftte, 2017). This action is due to media control on social media. Specifically, when an individual posts, they control the content they post. The creator determines the contributions and contributors. So, in a campaign like Chimonyo's, not everyone has the agency to contribute however they want. Social media, however, "cannot replace agency, does not necessarily empower individuals, it is not enough to comment, contribute an opinion, or attract reactions on social media" (Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019). In the case of Chimonyo's campaign against child sex work, the Epworth offline audience felt they could not exercise agency in a campaign that sought to address them due to lack of access to the Facebook platform when the campaign was happening in real-time.

### *Representation*

Representations share an essential relationship with culture because they enable us to better understand the world through language and concepts (Hall 2013, Livingstone 2000). In new media, there is a crisis of [political] representation of the ordinary citizen, and the marginalised in particular (Tuftte, 2017:166). The crisis of representation manifests itself as a "communicative disconnect and imbalance between the voice, aspirations and hopes of groups of citizens that feel marginalised and unrepresented on the one side and on the de-facto communicative interventions of governments, agencies, civil society on the other" (Tuftte,

2017:187). A lack of representation is bemoaned by the marginalised Epworth community who feel unrepresented by their local leaders who they believe do not act in the community's best interests and whom are believed to misappropriate funds:

Councillors are useless. All they want is money. This guy who is in the UK won't help anything. *Chero akada kutumira mari, inongotorwa yodyiwa nematicouncillor acho* [Even if he was to send money, the councillors would use it for personal use] (Participant 3, Women's FGD, 11 January 2020).

Chuma (2005) uses the terms 'framing' and 'representation' interchangeably. He refers to framing as "the way in which news media resort to particular interpretive structures to set particular events within their broader context" (Chuma, 2005:6). Within and outside Zimbabwe, there appears to be a crisis of perspective regarding interpreting the country's crisis (Chuma, 2005). The same applies to social media use. In a case like Chimonyo's campaign, the Epworth community felt that he exposed child sex work in a frame that sells to donors at the expense of tarnishing the neighbourhood's image.

This person in the video is misrepresenting us. Instead he is tarnishing our image. He never came to us to find true information. He is lying from the comfort of his home in the UK, where he is eating good food, bread and meat.

Gerbaudo (2012) argues that the ideology of horizontal structure in social media protests ignores that the process of mobilisation involves those that mobilise and those being assembled. Therefore, there are those who lead and those who follow. This implies that audiences hold power in the negotiation of representation and meaning. The decoders give meaning to the encoded message through their interpretation and reading of the message. In the case of the campaign against child sex work, without the campaign reaching the Epworth community and taking their perception of the campaign into account, the campaign remains superfluous. This was one of Chimonyo's (interview, 20 January 2020) considerations, where he explained why the Epworth community was supposed to be the primary recipients and the specific role they have to play:

The inclusion of the adults was to educate the community in Epworth because the perpetrators are not only from Epworth. Some come from outside Epworth coming for these kids. So, the Epworth community needed to be educated on how to protect these kids.

Debates around representative participation are increasingly gaining importance, especially as it relates to the cost of participation for marginalised groups, who (un)willingly hand over this right to others when it comes to social media activism (The Open University, 2017).

Perhaps, as supported by the Shona Karanga culture, the Epworth community would have preferred it to have been done the traditional Zimbabwean *Dare* way. In the Shona culture, a ‘*Dare*’ is a ‘consultative process’ where elders/adults meet physically to discuss issues happening in the community. There is a representative from all sides of the issue under discussion in the *Dare* setup. However, as established in this study, this kind of representation is missing from the discussions on social media. The Epworth community unrepresented in the social media campaign. They had not participated or heard of the campaign against child sex work, even though it sought to address phenomena within their environment. Expressing their resentment about the lack of representation on the campaign, one participant said:

We even hate the fact that he took the issue and posted it on social media. He has tarnished our area and the profession, even for us adult sex workers. He should leave us alone and let us go on Facebook on our own if we feel that it is the best platform to address the issue. We can talk on our behalf and on behalf of our area (Participant 3, Women FGD, 11 January 2020).

Subsequently, this calls for a hybridised form of communication, a combination of social media and communicative forums such as the *Dare*. In this manner, there is both cultural representation through the *Dare* and contemporary representation through social media because, given the resources and fair access to participation, the local and often marginalised communities are willing and do have the ability to engage with and via social media.

### *Victim Blaming Ideology*

Victim blaming refers to the tendency to find individuals responsible for their circumstances without considering the antecedent and contextual economic, social and political factors (Seidman and Rappaport, 1986). Victim blaming ideology makes it difficult to generate a collective consciousness (Kidder and Fine, 1987:52).

The vibe that I got from the Epworth community is that they don’t care. They feel it is the children’s fault. They chose that kind of life. (Interview with Doubt 20 January 2020).

Some of the participants from the female group shared the same sentiments, specifically the group's sex worker, who bemoaned the lack of support from the community due to the victim-blaming ideology. Echoing the other female participants, she said:

The community is not doing anything to assist. Once you are labelled a sex worker, the community looks down upon you. Even if someone was to beat you up, the community won't do anything unless if we get there and we know the child, then we can help. Otherwise, the community will just look on saying *hure ngarirohwe* [prostitutes must be beaten]. But then you look at the age of the child and you realise it's a child (Participant 1, female FGD, 11 January 2020).

Kidder and Fine (1987:50) discovered a similar victim-blaming ideology, stating that "unemployment problems derive from individual inadequacies". Still, many years after their research, service providers are reluctant to assist residents from Epworth:

*Mabasa anonetsa kuwana kunyanya uchibva kuno kuEpworth* (Jobs are difficult to find, especially if you are from Epworth). Epworth is a blacklisted area. If there is a crime and they find out that you are from Epworth they will arrest you and say you are of no fixed abode<sup>77</sup>. (Male FGD participant 2, 11 January 2020).

The above statement is an attestation of how media reportage influences how people are perceived. In the case of Epworth residents and other high-density communities, it is due to continuous negative media portrayal that Epworth and its residents are blacklisted for any opportunities (Mushohwe, 2018).

### *Political mileage*

Politicians select certain campaign drives for political expediency. In the case of child sex work in Epworth and other high-density communities in Zimbabwe, they make promises to deal with child sex work during campaigns, but never deliver:

When the government speaks, they promise to look for jobs/courses or schools for the children to go back to, as well as looking for homes for the children to stay in, opening

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<sup>77</sup> Some of the areas in Epworth are considered illegal settlements, therefore those who stay in those areas are deemed squatters but now it's a label applied to anyone who lives in Epworth.

markets for them to run small businesses but it just ends there with no action (Participant 4 Male FGD, 11 January 2020).

The government come out in the media promising to work on the problem but they never do anything (Participant 3, Male FGD, 11 January 2020).

Politicians' reactions, superficial or genuine, to the calls to end child sex work in their area are to avoid looking inept to the rest of the country and the international community. They are motivated by being "exposed on Facebook *zvinoita sekunge vari kukonewa basa* [it may seem as if they are failing their job]" (Participant 2, Male FGD, January 11, 2020). Tellingly, this statement acknowledges that Facebook is deemed useful for other purposes. Additionally, it indicates that the actual Epworth community does motivate politicians by reporting on child sex work. When comparing this to Chimonyo's outside influence on the Epworth community, it reflects the difference in efficacy between the directly affected raising the issue as insiders, going straight to the responsible authorities, and the social media route, thus sustaining the insiders' mistrust with social media campaigns.

### *Exclusion and Mistrust*

Exclusion and mistrust emerged as themes that went hand-in-hand. The Epworth audience felt excluded from the social media campaign that sought to address a local phenomenon which led to the mistrust of Doubt Chimonyo as the campaign creator:

*Hatingaudzirwi zvenzvimbo yedu nemunhu anogara kuUK. Ngaasatitaurira matambudziko edu. Anotaura zvesex work inoitika kuno kuEpworth kwaasingagari.* [A person from the UK has no business telling us anything about our area and what is happening around here. He can't put our words into his mouth, talking about our area. Talking about sex work that happens here] (Women FGD, 11 January 2020).

As much as Doubt's campaign creation was well-meaning, the sentiments from the Epworth audience about the campaign reveal that they believe him to be an opportunist, which echoes Manyozo's (2017) comments when he describes how, "subaltern voices are produced and appropriated, and how well-meaning experts can easily become oppressors".

### *Ethics*

One of the most complex ethical issues related to the use of social media [activism] is determining the line between what should be kept private and what should be made public (Fourie, 2017). The use of new media tools which can breakdown the traditional norms and practices as professionals has presented ethical challenges to participatory culture and social media activism (Jenkins, 2006). This study grapples with what might constitute ethical conduct in social media activism since children involved in sex work is the topic. Fox and Murphy (2012) support the argument that ethics should be guaranteed by those leading the campaign consultation process. Based on Murphy's arguments, Chimonyo should be responsible for setting the ethical landscape for the campaign against child sex work. This consideration brings a poignancy to his decision to block only a part of the young girl's face when he interviewed her for the campaign video.

Social media has been accused of violating ethics (Mungwari, 2019). It can be argued that including the girl's video interview was unethical since she is underage but at the same time, to authenticate the campaign, there needed to be tangible proof of child sex work happening in Epworth. In his justification for the inclusion of the videos of the young girls, Doubt (interview, 20 January 2020) says:

The inclusion of the videos of the two girls was an intentional choice because social media works in a way that, for the live that I was going to do later on, people would be in the know of the subject. So, it was more of a prelude to the live show. I wanted the audience to familiarise themselves with the content of the show so that we could have a discussion and they would ask me questions based in their own analysis of the video.

The Epworth audience, on the other hand, felt that including the video of the child was inadvertently promoting child sex work:

The truth is what he has done is to market the child. Already there are men out there who doesn't want to sleep with old sex workers. They go for the young ones. If a man can rape a 2-year-old, if they get to know that there is a young girl below 16 'willingly' selling sex, then they are surely going to come here looking for her services (Participant 3, Women's FGD, 11 January 2020).

Webler and Tuler (2006) argue that it is crucial to understand what people think, feel, and want from public participation so that it may be possible to develop ethical and relevant public participation processes. Participatory Culture scholarship illuminates the importance of how media shapes perceptions and are socialised into the emerging ethical standards that should shape their practices as media makers and participants in online communities (Jenkins, 2006: Jenkins et al., 2016).

### *Poverty*

Actions typically stem from our understanding of the causes of problems and the conditions that lead to them (Seidman and Rappaport, 1986). Poverty is the main cause of child sex work in Epworth (Hanzi, 2006: Male and Female FGDs, 11 January 2020). Therefore, the logic of using a platform such as Facebook that requires finances for access (internet and device) is questionable. As one participant rightfully declared:

Such campaigns do not work here in Epworth. Less people use social media here. Even if a person has got a beautiful phone that can access internet, if someone offers them US\$40 for that phone, they sell it (Participant 2 Epworth Male FGD, 11 Jan 2020).

Another participant highlighted this hierarchy of needs in terms of the limited value placed on internet connection within a poverty-stricken community:

If I am to get US\$10 right now, I will head straight to buy mealie meal, not to think of buying social media bundles. We are already struggling as it is. I will think of the important things that are missing from my house because internet bundles are a luxury. I will just wait for a day that I will use Wi-Fi when I visit a place with free Wi-Fi (Participant 3, Female FGD, 11 January 2020).

Even the availability of the participants on a working day during working hours indicates the issue of unemployment that is rampant, and that is one of the main drivers of poverty.

Online audiences also attributed child sex work to be a direct result of poverty:

Most of the lawlessness we are witnessing is directly linked to the economy. In Western countries, when your guardian dies, the state steps in. A child cannot fend for themselves. The

children are left stuck between a rock and a hard place. And the pervs are waiting in the wings to exploit the kids (2 likes) (Hatidzore Tsvimbo, Facebook Comment on the campaign against child sex work, 2 November 2018)

### *Ecology of Communication*

Scholars tend to view the internet's role in social movements as two-fold: the internet can facilitate traditional offline activism, enhancing a movement's existing repertoire by adding email campaigns, online petitions and even virtual sit-ins to activists' existing toolbox (Castells, 2001; Juris, 2005), or it actually can create new forms of activism and resistance (Cardoso and Pereira Neto, 2004; Rolfe, 2005; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2009). Van de Donk *et al.*, (2004) argued that the internet would complement, not replace, existing social movement tactics (Harlow, 2011;5). While researchers have studied the development of traditional offline social movements (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992; Gitlin, 1980), or looked at how the internet facilitates social movements (Atton, 2003; Ayres, 1999; Castells, 2001), little has been written about how social media are organising online activism that moves offline (Wojcieszak, 2009) in Harlow (2011: 2).

Some have found that virtual ties alone, without face-to-face interaction, are doubtfully strong enough to mobilise or sustain a social movement successfully. Real relationships are considered more valuable and effective than impersonal electronic communication (Diani, 2000; Ribeiro, 1998) (Harlow, 2011;6). This observation raises the question, is the internet functioning as the cause or just a catalyst to these movements?

### *Participation*

Participation is a property of culture and culture is at the centre of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, all the above themes relate to the exploration of activism and participatory culture. However, this section addresses a few points relating to participation in application to the data. Of critical importance to participation is consultation. Consultation as a means to participation plays a vital role in mitigating mistrust, exclusion, gaining ample local knowledge for activists before making assumptions. Concerns have been raised about the "usefulness, effectiveness or productiveness of participation in improving community relationships" (Carpentier *et al.*, 2016:60). Interactivity emerges from

the design of the technology while participation emerges from social and cultural processes and practices (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013).

Participation as a critical concept regained popularity in communication and media with the advent of Web 2.0 (Jenkins, 2016). Participation is “equalisation of power relations” (Carpentier, 2011:354). Even though social media promises to grant freedom and allow space for everyone to participate in conversations, it is a double-edged sword, excluding those without access to it, such as the Epworth community, as shown by the results of this study. Tufte (2017:166) augments this position saying, “Contrary to the opportunities the new media developments invite, we are witnessing a critical shrinking of the public space for deliberation and the exclusion of participation and the experience of ordinary citizens to the general public debate”.

This study has exhibited that specific content triggers more responses than others. Issues propagated by mainstream media that engage in urban middle-class interests receive the most coverage (Lim, 2013:646). An example this study gave in previous chapters of #occupyafricacitysquare founded by Itai Dzamara, a mere journalist belonging to the working class that did not gain traction as much as #thisflag propagated by cleric Pastor Evan Mwarire, whose circles are within the middle and upper class. In such circumstances as Pastor Evan Mwarire’s, there is more participation. Lim (2013) admits that framing the struggle of the poor to resonate with the interests of the middle urban class is a challenge. Digital tools may be used to reach international audiences or gain support from members of the middle class, and more tangible and physical demonstrations are used to communicate to and mobilize citizens who may not have access to the Internet or with whom alternative forms of communication may resonate more strongly (Bosch *et al.*, 2018). In the campaign against child sex work, there were 99 reactions (63 likes, 22 loves, 10 sad, 4 laughs), 528 comments, 12 shares, 5.1 thousand views, which appears to be a lot of participation going on (which there was). However, most of the comments were individuals offering money or to adopt children, or someone knowing someone who could help. I asked Doubt how many of those who offered to assist came through with their promise, now two years later and his response was:

The disadvantage of using social media is people become emotional and they start pledging things but they do not follow through with their pledges. Following up on them, they start

giving excuses, and that's what happened with my campaign (Interview with Doubt Chimonyo, 20 January 2020).

This supports Lim's (2013) point that social media is superficial, an criticism of content creators and participants, as is the case here.

Chiweshe (2017:131) questions how feasible Facebook is as the most popular site in the country as a platform to cultivate and foster participation. Activists who use social media believe it is a valuable way to gather support and generate ideas for tackling problems because activists from other communities connect and share their experiences and suggestions. Facebook is often used for lateral linkages to connect with similar movements both within the country and internationally, often leading to the building of important relationships (Bosch *et al.*, 2018).

Examining Facebook comments allows for a unique ground-up approach to analyse how Facebook users frame a campaign. The way these online comments were framed helps explain how a social movement was mobilized online by comments that pointed out the problem, identified solutions, and motivated people to participate offline. For example, one online participant proffered a solution,

Legal implications need careful consideration and exhaustion...and let the support have a system the issues from identification to weaning (Jirvas Munyaradzi Gwanzura, Online participant, 02 November 2018).

Another user added:

My encouragement, based on previous experience, is that there is need to understand the functions of the government and challenges on the ground. Where children below the age of 18 are involved, there are stipulated guidelines which are regulated by the social services ministry (Sinyoro UncleK, Facebook online participant, 2 November 2018).

The above comments indicated the kind of audience that engaged with the campaign as it ran on Facebook. For the most part, an audience knowledgeable in the laws of the country, contrary to the offline audience who are directly affected by the child sex work but did not have the privilege to give their side of the story as the campaign was happening. Therefore, some held an oppositional, others a negotiated stance towards the interactivity of Facebook. Participants

who were in opposition to the use of Facebook shared that they feel Facebook is just used to manipulate them and their problems in order for the campaign creators to gain donor funding (Participants female FGD, 11 January 2020).

For those who shared a negotiated reading they agreed that social media campaigns need to be complemented by physical action;

Campaigns on their own do not work here in Zimbabwe, if you want to assist bring something material, something tangible. So that when you get to a child telling them that you want them out of sex work, you have something to show that you are going to do it and that you will assist them throughout (Participant 3 Female FGD, 11 January 2020)

A social media campaign may work because more people will see the plight. However, it will have more impact if it is someone from here. Still, if it is a local person, he will have to go into bars to do the awareness campaign. The campaign has to be done at a central area where there are many people. For example, at the shops where they can gather people around then spread the message. (Participant 1 Male FGD, 11 January 2020).

### **Significance of themes in response to readings of the campaign's preferred message.**

In the section above, I have presented the discussion on the themes. Table 4 below reveals the similarities and differences in the reading positions of Chimonyo's Facebook campaign against child sex work.

**Table 4**

Theme	Preferred reading	Online Decoding Position Dominant/Negotiated/Oppositional	Offline Decoding Position Dominant/Negotiated/Oppositional
Activism & the paradox of 'isms'	Online activism has more impact	<p>“Real people won’t go on a campaign trail: Oppositional</p> <p>People are tired of cash fund raising projects: Oppositional</p>	<p>Money making scheme: Oppositional</p> <p>Social media may work as it is seen by more people: Negotiated.</p> <p>Opportunist :Oppositional</p> <p>Activist with ulterior motives: Negotiated</p>
Digital Divide (access)	Everyone in Zimbabwe has got data. Even my grandmother in the rural areas.	The problem is you assume that everyone has got data, not everyone can afford it: Negotiated	<i>Phone tairamba, haishandi</i> [We said no to using the internet, we can’t afford]: Oppositional
Culture	We have lost our culture	There was nothing from the data that revealed specific reading from this group.	<p>We look after the young girls, if they get abused we fight in their corner using the resources we have: Negotiated</p> <p>The way Doubt addressed the issue of child sex work is wrong, culturally we don’t air our dirty laundry like that: Oppositional</p>
Identity	Everyone knows that children in Epworth, Hatcliffe are engaging in sex-work so anyone can relate.	No data, revealed specific reading from this group.	They look for people they know so that they can spend the money with their friends/relatives. Yet to get right information and for impact they will have to work with people who go into bars to solicit for sex

			because they have proof and right information and experience: Negotiated
Language	Diaspora community understand English	There was nothing from the data that revealed specific reading from this group.	<i>Dai akashandisa Shona dai aida kutaura nesu</i> [He should have used Shona if he wanted to communicate with us]: Negotiated
Voice		People here (social media) are good at talking, with no action: Negotiated	Our voice was not included, they did not consult us for the campaign: Oppositional
Poverty	Poverty sends the children into the streets.	The struggle for economic Freedom continues: Dominant.	Some of the children are just naughty that's why they do sex work: Oppositional The children are orphans who dropped out of school due to poverty: Dominant
Representation	At the time, they felt represented.	Involve these kids, listen to them and work with them.	There is neither representation of us Epworth adults or the child sex workers: Oppositional
Victim blaming Ideology	Community is the hub, that's where all policing starts	There children are being exploited, it's the fault of the men who pay them for the services but some of the children are just naughty: Negotiated	Some of the children it's their fault. They run away from home to do sex work: Oppositional Some are victims of the situation: Dominant
Political Mileage	We need to work with the government and social services.	We need to include social services: Dominant Government is the biggest obstacle: Oppositional	The government and the local council are useless. Oppositional

Ethics	Kids consented to having their videos posted.	The kids need to get involved: Dominant	By placing the child's video he advertised child sex-work, he worsened the situation: Oppositional
Exclusion and mistrust	My personality ensures trust.	These are damaged children, we need to involve them: Oppositional	These people (activists) only want money, that's why he left us out oppositional. The councillor spends the money meant for development for personal use: Oppositional
Participation	Online audience operate on emotions. Epworth community don't care.	No to sit[ting]back allowing LAW to allow children abuse, The problem is people are good at talking but no action: Negotiated	What works best if someone is to run a campaign to end child sex work in this area is to use us, as the people who reside in the area, 2) as a sex worker and then you go to the back of the campaign. Because if you come in as a stranger, they won't give you information, they can even be rude to you because they don't know you. They will think you want to use them, they can even threaten you. But if you call A (PSEUDONYM) like you did, she will know how, who and where to recruit the people you need: Negotiated

All the themes discussed above are interdependent. Based on data collected and the definition of a social movement, the campaign's originator intended for the campaign to turn into a social movement. However, the thematic analysis reveals that the Epworth context showed a vast disconnect between the Epworth audience and social media as a platform to address child sex work, therefore to them, social media is too elite to deal with child sex work in their community. The next chapter will provide a comprehensive summation and synthesis of the main findings, presented as themes but analysed through the lenses of relevant literature and the Participatory culture, according to the three main research questions.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### Introduction

This chapter synthesises the study's main findings in response to the key study objectives. It also presents some recommendations for further research. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of social media activism by Zimbabwean online and offline communities using a case study of a campaign against child sex work in Epworth by Doubt Chimonyo. The campaign launched on Facebook on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2018. Two videos, in particular, were the subject of the study; the inciting video of a child sex worker then the follow-up live video where the campaign discussion happened.

Below, the study collates and concludes the main findings specific to the research questions.

### **QUESTION 1: In what ways does doing a social media campaign make one a social media activist?**

This question was addressed in part in the previous chapter under the theme Activism and the paradox of 'isms'. The data for this question sought out definitions from critical scholars (Jenkins, 2016; Lim, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2016) and study participants' perceptions of what constitutes a social media activist. In the following section, the study synthesises the findings.

*In what ways does Doubt's social media campaign make him an activist?*

Should an activist be defined by scholars and theorists or by the general populace who are the intended audience for campaigns? This study found that a combination of both is useful. The overall reading of Chimonyo's campaign is its negative association with clicktivism / slacktivism / keyboard warrior / paid activism (Lim, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2016). The inquiry set out to explore whether Chimonyo satisfied the standard of who an activist is.

Terms such as "slacktivism (lazy activism), clicktivism (click activism), armchair activism and keyboard activism emerged to question the worthiness of digital (subsequently social media) activism" (Lim, 2013:638). Akin to Lim's (2013) list of 'isms', Mutsvairo (2016) adds 'paid activism,' a term for activism in exchange for a pay check, also referred to as 'brown envelopes' (Mutero, 2018). These terms question, nearly accusingly, the sincerity of social media activists as they run their campaigns from behind their computer screens. From the findings of this

study, it can be deduced that Chimonyo falls under one or more of these 'isms'. However, Fourie (2017) defends this type of activism based on its potential to raise awareness and facilitate offline action. This study concurs with Fourie (2017) in that the act of starting a campaign as Chimonyo did qualifies him as an activist. The nuances, the sincerity behind the act and how audiences decode it is a different argument.

Lim (2014) calls for activists to construct more than just cultural frames but to mould narratives that fit social media's limitations. She adds on to say that, "to be successful in social media, movements need to frame themselves to impersonate successful viral stories in mainstream popular culture, namely to employ simplified narratives that embrace the principles of contemporary culture of consumption: light package, headline appetite and trailer vision" (Lim, 2014:61). Jenkins (2018) describes that activists are born out of being fans; this was in relation to fandom. However, in the case of Chimonyo, he admitted that he was moved to do the campaign because as

a father, a parent and a citizen I was concerned. I said no matter how hard the economy might be, for a child to sell her body for 50c is not good, something, must be done (Interview with Chimonyo, 20 January 2020).

Chimonyo's response implies that the issue was close to his heart, hence why he decided to act upon it. We cannot call him a fan because the case he campaigned against is not in the spectrum of popular culture. However, his motivation has characteristics of fandom.

From his action of running a campaign to raise awareness about child sex work in Epworth (Interview with Chimonyo, 20 January 2020), Chimonyo also stepped in as a guardian, which, as stated earlier, is a cornerstone of Zimbabwean culture. It may have been with the best intentions but likely within inappropriate or challenging circumstances, hence the Epworth community's oppositional reception. The external constraints of access and cultural beliefs and suspicions of his sincerity as an outsider since he is not a resident of Epworth. Conclusively, social media activism in marginalised communities is a complicated process and phenomenon.

Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019: 74) opine that "Zimbabwe's digital activism practice is still very narrow and full of contradictions". This opinion rings true to the definition of an activist, as evidenced by the findings during the interview with Chimonyo when he admitted that what he did was an activism campaign but denied that he was an activist (interview with Doubt, 20 January 2020).

Taking into cognisance the Epworth audience's sentiments towards Chimonyo's campaign and if they thought it was activism, we could not classify Doubt as an activist. They believe that their lack of access to social media renders any activism addressing their issues useless because:

We believe in activism that happens on the ground, not this Facebook activism. There is no sex worker who has got time and money to be on Facebook, especially from this area. Some sex workers don't even have phones, worse if they are children. So, where and how will they know about anything going on, on Facebook. How will they even participate in that case (Participant 1, Epworth Women FGD, 11 January 2020).

For the Epworth focus group participants, offline on the ground activism was more meaningful. Many of the women in the FGDs believed themselves to be activists within their community. They spoke about how they fight for the rights of the children against abusive men and even women. As an illustration:

Last week a 15-year-old was severely beaten by some woman accusing her for bedding her husband. I later saw her badly injured and I told her to go and report to the neighbourhoods, so that she could get a letter to go get treatment. Within 30 mins she came with two of the community police, but the woman gave the police \$30 bond and the child was dismissed with no assistance. I personally went back with the girl to the police to tell the superiors what had happened, and all they did was give her a letter to go and get treatment from the hospital (Participant 1, Women's FGD, 11 January 2020).

Although she may not have managed to get the attacker arrested, she ensured that the 15-year-old victim received the immediate assistance she needed. Although not an official campaign or sustained action, what she did is considered activism because she stood up for the rights (right to healthcare) of someone (Mutsvairo, 2016). Other women participants also admitted that they have assisted a girl in vulnerable circumstances from abuse or given access to basic services at one point or the other (Participants Women FGD, 11 January 2020).

## **QUESTION 2: How does Facebook as a participatory platform mediate activism in Zimbabwe?**

□ *In what ways do the comments on Doubt's Facebook campaign demonstrate the role of the interactive audience in social media activism?*

“Interactivity comes from the design of technologies while participation emerges from social and cultural practices” (Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013:8). The interactivity of Facebook is determined by the reactions to a post or the comments or videos posted. Social media has altered the author-text-audience relationship through “blurring the line between author and audience and eroding older technological, policy and conventional models for the ‘control’ of the text, its narrative sequencing and its distribution” (Cover, 2006). In social media activism, the audiences’ interactivity plays an integral role. A campaign’s influence is determined by the actions of the users or participants (Green, 2002). Admittedly, the online participants managed to be part of the campaign, but that by no means meant they would share a dominant reading with Chimonyo’s preferred message.

Participatory culture, a theory within which this study falls, is reflected on the Facebook campaign through online audience participation. Interaction covers socio-communicative relationships, while participation covers the field of decision-making processes and power relations (Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013:10). Conversations and information that dominate social media reflect its users' interests, choices, and preferences (Lim, 2013:646). Some of the aspects of participatory culture that were fulfilled include, i) "strong support for creating and sharing one's creations" (Jenkins et al., 2006:3), as evidenced by the ability of anyone to contribute to the live campaign by calling in, commenting and reacting as the live video went on.

ii) “What is known by the most experienced is passed to novices”. Information on how to raise funds was shared, or how to navigate customs should anyone from outside Zimbabwe want to donate to the cause, for example,

Masibanda is right, I can assist on what it takes to register a PVO and Customs Zimra regulations to avoid inconveniences like what we have witnessed with others (Sinyoro Unclek, online participant, 2 November 2018).

iii) One in which members believe their contributions matter (Jenkins et al.,2006:3). Through commenting, it proved the platform was open for anyone to contribute. Considering that Facebook has a function to block comments, the fact that the comment boxes were open and available means that everyone present was at liberty to make a contribution.

iv) Participants feel some degree of social connection with one another (at least they care about what other people think about what they have created) (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006:3). This point speaks to the notion of identity; even though the online participants were set in different countries and places, they seem to have shared a background of coming from Zimbabwe which drove them to participate and want to contribute to the campaign.

However, the same cannot be said about the campaign's influence and resonance on the offline Epworth community. Despite social media activism creating a wave, there was no evidence that it facilitated any practical change on the ground. The first aspect that Jenkins *et al.*, (2006:3) provide to what constitutes participatory culture was not met, this is the aspect of "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement". The main barrier for the Epworth community was access, which subsequently prevented all the other aspects of participatory culture. Consequently, this calls for a hybridised form of communication, a combination of social media and communicative forums such as the *Dare*. In this manner, there is both cultural representation through the *Dare* and contemporary representation through social media. Given the resources and fair access to participation, the local and often marginalised communities are willing and can engage with and via social media.

Facebook means different things to different people. It can be entertainment, a platform for activism, a source of business, or an opportunity to troll. The analysis concludes that it satisfies many functions, including the above mentioned, but how the intended audience perceives and reacts determines a campaign's overall function. Social position may set parameters to the "range of potential readings through the structure of access to different codes" (Morley,1991:80). Judging by the responses from the Epworth citizens, this campaign seemingly intensified the mistrust of NGOs, which is the complete opposite of the intended outcome by the campaign creator. The encoders from the Epworth community shared a mostly oppositional view and a partly negotiated reading on the use of social media as a platform for activism to address child sex work in their community. In contrast, the online audience shared both a dominant and negotiated reading as they shared some of the encoded themes. The Epworth audience direct experience contributed to their stance on the reading of the campaign. Similarly, the online audience's access to alternative account presented by the media may have led to a dominant and negotiated decoding of the message (Morley,1991: 92). The results show a disjuncture between the campaign online and the offline response or lack thereof.

“Simple or simplified narratives that are associated with low-risk activism and are congruent with ideological meta-narratives have a much higher chance of going viral and generate significant activism” (Lim, 2013: 650). As simple as the campaign against child sex work was, it did not garner enough traction to cause a buzz on social media or jumpstart active offline action. Similar to Lim’s (2013) conclusion after studying the Indonesian case, I have learnt that the participatory nature of social media certainly is most suitable to disseminate popular culture-related content, while this “participatory culture can be borrowed for civic engagement and political mobilisation, it is limited in its capacity to mobilise complex issues” (Lim, 2013:653).

Studies of social media activism have tended to “prioritise seminal case studies, such as the Arab Spring, while ignoring relatively small scale but no less important case studies that show contextualised social media practices at the local level, bounded by local contexts and history” (Matsilele, 2019:37). This study addressed this gap by examining Chimonyo’s campaign in the context of its local social, political and economic discourses by speaking to local Epworth residents. One of the study’s main findings in relation to the question on Facebook’s role as a participatory platform to mediate activism, is that in this case, Facebook favours middle-class related issues that get more support and traction. The Epworth community who do not belong to the middle class, mostly refute the interactivity of Facebook because of their challenge to access the platform due to the daily needs they need to meet before they can think of buying data to go online. Participants from the offline community highlighted this hierarchy of needs in terms of the limited value placed on internet connection within a poverty-stricken community.

If I am to get US\$10 right now, I will head straight to buy mealie meal, not to think of buying social media bundles. We are already struggling as it is. I will think of the important things that are missing from my house because internet bundles are a luxury (Participant 5, Epworth Female FGD, 11 January 2020).

**Question 3: In what ways does social media activism resonate with the offline community?**

□ *What is the Epworth audience's reading of Doubt Chimonyo's's campaign?*

This third question focuses on the Epworth community's reading of the campaign against child sex work as a case study but anticipating that the study may reveal some broader commentary on the relationship between activism and offline communities, particularly in Zimbabwe. Morley (1991) admits that there is a possibility of disjunction between the codes of the encoders and that of the decoders. The themes from the focus group interviews as the decoders provided the relational analysis between the preferred encoded messages and decoded interpretations thereof, signalling whether and how their interpretations are dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings (Hall 1997, Livingstone 2000, Morley 1992, 1998). After thorough analysis, the study found a strong disjuncture between the online audience's reaction to the campaign and that of the offline Epworth audience. The online audience shared mostly a negotiated reading towards the campaign, whilst the Epworth audience shared mostly an oppositional reading, detailed in Figure 3 in Chapter 6.

The results show that social media activism is a double-edged sword. While empowering one group (online audience), it disempowered the other (Epworth community) because the online audience managed to experience the campaign as it happened in real-time, yet were not directly affected with child sex work. On the other hand, the Epworth community, where child sex work is a daily reality of their environment, only managed to 'experience' the campaign two years after it was initiated and even then, it was courtesy of this study's focus groups. Still, in the time that lapsed, they could not recall feeling any effects or influence of the campaign. This researcher acknowledges that the participants were only a fraction of the Epworth population, but still, they represented the community well, based on the criteria used to select them.

One of the concerns that arose from the campaign against child sex work is ethics—the concern regarded including the video of a child sex worker. The question of consent surfaced after she admitted that she was 13 years old and an orphan. Furthermore, how ethical was it to include the video of the girl with only a part of her face blurred while her voice and the rest of the body was unconcealed? To justify the inclusion of the video of the young girls, Doubt (interview, 20 January 2020) says:

The inclusion of the videos of the two girl was an intentional choice because social media works in a way that, for the live that I was going to do later on, people would be in the know of the subject. So, it was more of a prelude to the live show. I wanted the audience to familiarise themselves with the content of the show so that we could have a discussion and they would ask me questions based in their own analysis of the video.

The Epworth audience, on the other hand, felt that including the video of the child was inadvertently promoting child sex work:

The truth is what he has done is to market the child. Already there are men out there who doesn't want to sleep with old sex workers, they go for the young ones. If a man can rape a 2-year-old, if they get to know that there is a young girl below 16 'willingly' selling sex then they are surely going to come here looking for her services (Women's FGD, 11 January 2020).

This oppositional reading is a reflection of how the Epworth audience felt about the campaign overall.

Another concern was a possible brush with the law. As much as the campaign seemed to be a socio non-political issue on the surface, through the interaction with the online audience, concerns were raised of ruffling some political figures. One online participant commented,

Dhewa pliz look at the law in Zim [mbabwe] and here (the U.K.) *zvisazonetsa mangwana* (so that you won't get in trouble in future) you will need safeguarding (Jirvas Munyaradzi Gwanzura, online participant, 2 November 2018).

Another issue raised in the above comment is the disparities between Zimbabwean law and the law of the United Kingdom, where Doubt is based. As discussed in the previous chapters, some laws were put in place in Zimbabwe to censor online activism due to the political dissents spurred on by activism. The study participants similarly believed that the campaign against child sex work would expose the responsible authority's failure to curb the problem, and that would quickly turn the campaign into a political one. The comment implies that Doubt may need to acclimatise to Zimbabwean standards before running a campaign, which cements the need to gather and be informed by contextual information at multiple levels (from on the ground realities to law and policy) before embarking on a campaign.

There is potential for online campaigns to spiral into offline participation, or at the very least to influence offline activities, because information does filter from social media into offline conversations. On the inquiry on what those who used Facebook look for when they go online, one of the responses was;

When I go on Facebook, the first thing I check on is stories in the Facebook groups. You always find juicy gossip and also stories about what's happening in our community. Also, we want to know what people who comment will be saying about the subject being discussed. So that when we then meet physically with others, we can continue the discussion and update those who don't have Facebook or may have missed the story. (Participant 4, Male FGD 11 January 2020)

Overall, workings of a participatory culture (Jenkins,2006) are reflected in the online audience of the campaign against sex work because the Facebook functions encouraged users to express their opinion and interact. The findings from the focus group discussions demonstrated that the use of social media as a platform for activism has class structures determining whose voice is to be heard. In the case of the campaign against child sex work, voice was afforded to Doubt Chimonyo as the creator of the campaign, and the Facebook participants. However, the offline Epworth audience felt misrepresented as they believed the campaign ran on a platform that they could not access and there was no consultation with the adults of the Epworth community by the campaign organisers. Thus 'excluding' them as the owners of the story. Overall, these sentiments speak to the perception that social media is not a sufficient platform for activism in cases whereby issues to be discussed concern marginalised and/or lower income communities.

In comparison to other online campaigns discussed in this study, such as #Thisflag campaign (2016), #ZimbabweanLivesMatter (2020) this study concludes that political campaigns have more potential to create resonance offline unlike social campaigns such as the campaign against child sex work. Considering that the campaign set out to involve the Epworth adult community in finding solutions to curb child sex work in the area, the choice of an online platform is questionable as it effectively excluded the Epworth audience thereby rendering this particular campaign not successful.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

A challenge encountered by this research is that; it centred on an issue concerning children, using a case study whereby children were included in a video to talk about their experiences

online, but as the researcher I could not engage and converse with them. I would have amassed more robust data with the input of the affected children and their perception of social media activism addressing child sex work. However, due to ethical considerations and the time limit placed on writing a Masters, this “red flag” of research was avoided. The closest account of the personal experiences of a child sex worker came by way of an adult sex worker in the focus group discussions. Therefore, I propose a possible interdisciplinary project between psychology and media and cultural studies, a project that is afforded more time, and where these children are participants.

Additionally, given that Facebook is a platform that now offers live video chats, it will be worthy of exploring a campaign whereby the affected community members are facilitated to be present on the live video as the campaign is going on in real-time. This researcher acknowledges that minors are not to be exposed, but it will be important to hear their voice and for them to exercise their agency by giving their responses according to the reality they are living. Equally important would be to keep their faces and identity concealed.

Participation is an integral aspect of activism, and there is no one way to examine participation. Therefore, further research can be on rich qualitative data that examines the effects of participation through social media at an individual and collective level for design directions that support social participation in new ways. Dumitrescu (2018) states that future researchers should concentrate on the ways in which online network members participate in offline activities. These understandings will lead to the development of social media tools that can work to increase the motivation and ability of users to participate in social change (Rotman *et al.*, 2011).

If participation via social media platforms is called mediated participation, because social media is considered the mediator, then by the same logic, can we not classify the Epworth audience’s comments on the video as participation, considering that they only got to share their opinion about the campaign during data collection? The basis of participatory culture is that everyone gets an opportunity to participate in issues affecting them or issues of interest, and there are no set guidelines as to how individuals join the conversation or participate, as long as they add their voice. The crux of this then lies in how the offline and online audiences’ participation was conjoined to achieve a full participation as proposed by participatory culture for both audiences.

There is growing speculation that women and other minority groups may fail to participate fully in activism processes because standard topics in research do not reflect their experiences nor are communicated in a language that connects with their experiences (Chilisa and Preece 2005:21). Perhaps more qualitative research could be conducted that will allow for the type of sharing of experiences revealed in this research. This can then inform a combined approach to offline and online activism.

More so, to mitigate child sex work – qualitative studies that explore the factors contributing to the reasons for engaging in sex work both from the sex worker and the client need to build towards a social ecological and contextualised understanding for these choices.

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## Appendix 1: Gatekeeper Letter from ROOTS



15 July 2019

Dear Dr Lauren Dyll

**GATEKEEPER PERMISSION REQUEST: MISS FRANCISCA NYARADZO NHONGONHEMA,  
UKZN MASTERS STUDENT**

I acknowledge receipt of the gatekeeper request letter for your above named student. As a youth rights lobby organization, Real Opportunities for Transformation Support (ROOTS), endeavors to fight against any form of exploitation for young people, child sexual exploitation being one of our important focus. Having worked with the Epworth community over the years on the issue of child sexual exploitation, we are happy to assist in every way that we can.

Once there is a timeline for when the field work will be done, please do let us know, so that we can assign our officers to render any assistance needed. Find below, contact details for our point persons should you want to get in touch.

Kind Regards

Beatrice Savadye



ROOTS Director

## Appendix 2a: Informed consent form – Shona

### Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 12 November 2019

Greeting: Good afternoon

Zita rangu ndinoitwa Francisca Nyaradzo Nhongonhema ndinogara muHarare, Zimbabwe asi parizvino ndinodzidza paUniversity of KwaZulu-Natal kuDurban, munyika yeSouth Africa ndichidzidza Masters yeMedia and Communication.

Ndinokukokai kuhurukuro maererano nemafungiro e vari pamasai sai nevasiri pamasai sai panhau yekuratidzira social media muZimbabwe ndichishandisa muenzaniso we campaign yakaitwa na Doubt Chimonyo yevana vechidiki vari kuwanikwa vachiita Mabasa ekutengesa muviri muEpworth. u are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on examining the perceptions of online and offline communities on social media activism in Zimbabwe using a Facebook campaign by Doubt Chimonyo on child 'sex work' in Epworth.

Chinangwa chetsvakiridzo iyi ndechekupenengura nekutsvaka kuti kuratidzira pasocial media kunoshanda here munyika yedu yeZimbabwe. Tsvakiridzo iyi inotarisa kushanda nevanhu gumi nevanhu vari mukati uye vakapoteredza nharaunda yeOverspill muno muEpworth. Vanhukadzi vana kana vatanhatu uye vanhurume vana kana vatanhatu ndivo vanodikanwa. Hurukuro idzi dzichaitwa pakasiyana, vanhukadzi pavo voga uye vanhu rume pavo voga. Madanho anotorwa anosanganisira kutsvaka vatambi nekuita burukuro navo. Mhinduro dzichapuwa nevatambi dzichange dzichibatwa nevoice recorder, uye mahwi aya achaiswa mukunyorwa nemaoko. Tsvakiridzo iyi haina organization kana munhu ari kuipa muripo. The aim and purpose of this research is to explore Zimbabwean perceptions on the use of Facebook as an activism platform in Zimbabwe. The study is expected to enroll a maximum of twelve participants in and around the Overspill area in Epworth. Four to six females and four to six males for separate focus group discussions. It will involve the following procedures; recruitment of participants and interviewing. The group interview responses will be recorded by a voice recorder only and transcribed. The study is not funded by any individual or organization.

Tsvakiridzo iyi inobata nhau iri sensitive yevana vari pasi pemakore e zvichidaro munokumbiriswa kuti musataura mazita evana vamungava munoziva kuti vari kuita zvekutengesa muviri, (pakaita kudomwa kwezita mutsvakiridzi acharidzima uye haarinyori muresearch nyake), Tinovimba kuti tsvakiridzo iyi ichabetsera nharaunda yeEpworth kubetserana kuti social media ingashandisiwa sei kumisa vana kutengesa miviri yavo. The study is of a sensitive nature as it involves an issue concerning minors, therefore the researcher requests the participants NOT to mention any names of

children who may be involved in 'sex work' (and if this is accidentally mentioned in discussion, his/her name will be omitted from the transcription and dissertation). We hope that the study will benefit the community through having conversations on how social media can be used to successfully curtail child 'sex work' which has become a menace in the Epworth community.

Tsvakiridzo iyi yakaongororwa ne yakapuwa mvumo ne This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number\_\_\_\_\_).

Pakava nedambudziko, zvichemo, kana mivhunzo munogona kubata mudzidzi panumber dzinoti, +263774062852/+27631768093 kana paemail inoti nyarienhongo@gmail.com kana kubata UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, panumber nekero dzinotevera:

#### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Hurukuromiyi inoitwa pamadiro uye hapana muripo uripo. This discussion is on voluntary basis, there will be no remuneration for participation.

Munotendedzwa kubuda muhurukuro idzi kana mukange musingachakwanisi kuindirira mberi. You may withdraw participation at any point in the discussion if you feel uncomfortable to proceed.

Semutambi muhurukurom iyi, hamuna muripo wamunobhadhara kana mukafunga kubuda muhurukuro. Zvisinei tinokumbira muyambire mudzidzi pachine nguwa mukaone musingachakwanisi kunge muchiramba muri muhurukuro. As a participant, you will not incur any penalty, discrimination or be liable for any cost should you decide to withdraw from the discussion. However, the researcher kindly requests for the participant to inform the researcher in advance, should they not want to proceed with participation, but is no under obligation to continue if they feel uncomfortable or prejudiced halfway through the discussion.

Mudzidzi anokwanisa kumisa mutambi kana akaona mutambi achitaridxa kunge akadhakwa nedoro kana nezvimwewo zvinodhaka. Researcher can and may terminate a participant in circumstances where a participant is under the influence of alcohol or any substance.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Mudzidzi anovimbisa mutambi kuti zita rake uye Researcher assures the participant that their anonymity and confidentiality will always be upheld. There will not be sharing of information for any other reasons outside the purposes of this research.

Hamumanikidzwi kushandisa zita renyu, munokwanisa kushandisa remadunhurirwa. Zvinenge zvabuda muhurukuro zvichapuwa mutungamiriri wemudzidzi mutgsvakiridzo iyi achitungamirirwa nemitemo yeUniversity of KwaZulu Natal. You are not obliged to use your real name; you may use pseudonyms. Research findings will only be shared with the supervisor who will be guided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal research ethics.

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CONSENT

Ini ..... ndatsanangurirwa nezvetsvakiridzo yetsvakiridzo ine musoro wokuti I (Name) have been informed about the study entitled (Examining the perceptions of online and offline community on social media activism in Zimbabwe: A case of a Facebook campaign on child sex work in Epworth, Zimbabwe) by (Francisca N Nhongonhema).

Ndahwisisa chinangwa neurongwa hwetsvakiridzo ino. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

Ndapuwa mukana wekudavira mivhunzo inoenderana netsvakiridzo iyi uye ndapa mhinduro zvinol have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

Ndinotsidza kuti kuva muhurukuro iyi ndapinda madiro uye ndinogona kubuda muhurukuro chero I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on (+263774062852/+27631768093)

If I have any further questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

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Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent,

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Witness Date  
(Where applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Translator Date  
(Where applicable)

## **Appendix 2b – Informed consent form – English**

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 12 November 2019

Greeting: Good afternoon

My name is Francisca Nyaradzo Nhongonhema from Harare, Zimbabwe but currently studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa for a Masters in media and communication studies.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on examining the perceptions of online and offline communities on social media activism in Zimbabwe using a Facebook campaign by Doubt Chimonyo on child 'sex work' in Epworth.

The aim and purpose of this research is to explore Zimbabwean perceptions on the use of Facebook as an activism platform in Zimbabwe. The study is expected to enroll a maximum of twelve participants in and around the Overspill area in Epworth. Four to six females and four to six males for separate focus group discussions. It will involve the following procedures; recruitment of participants and interviewing. The group interview responses will be recorded by a voice recorder only and transcribed. The study is not funded by any individual or organization.

The study is of a sensitive nature as it involves an issue concerning minors, therefore the researcher requests the participants NOT to mention any names of children who may be involved in 'sex work' (and if this is accidentally mentioned in discussion, his/her name will be omitted from the transcription and dissertation). We hope that the study will benefit the community through having conversations on how social media can be used to successfully curtail child 'sex work' which has become a menace in the Epworth community.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSSREC/00000772/2019).

In the event of any problems, concerns or questions you may contact the researcher at +263774062852/+27631768093 or email at nyarienhongo@gmail.com or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

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Durban

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KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

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- This discussion is on voluntary basis, there will be no remuneration for participation. 1
- You may withdraw participation at any point in the discussion if you feel uncomfortable to proceed.
- As a participant, you will not incur any penalty, discrimination or be liable for any cost should you decide to withdraw from the discussion. However, the researcher kindly requests for the participant to inform the researcher in advance, should they not want to proceed with participation, but is no under obligation to continue if they feel uncomfortable or prejudiced halfway through the discussion.
- Researcher can and may terminate a participant in circumstances where a participant is under the influence of alcohol or any substance.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

- Researcher assures the participant that their anonymity and confidentiality will always be upheld. There will not be sharing of information for any other reasons outside the purposes of this research.
- You are not obliged to use your real name; you may use pseudonyms. Research findings will only be shared with the supervisor who will be guided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal research ethics.

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CONSENT

I (Name) have been informed about the study entitled (Examining the perceptions of online and offline community on social media activism in Zimbabwe: A case of a Facebook campaign on child sex work in Epworth, Zimbabwe) by (Francisca N Nhongonhema).

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on (+263774062852/+27631768093)

If I have any further questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

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Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent,

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Where applicable)Signature of Translator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Guiding questions for focus group discussion with the Epworth community (participants) on the Facebook child 'sex workers' campaign.

Guiding research question: In what ways does social media activism resonate with offline communities? - What is the Epworth audience's reading of Doubt's campaign?

#### PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE:

- 1.) What is your awareness, knowledge and thoughts on 'child sex work' in Epworth?
- 2.) To your knowledge, have there been any efforts made by governmental and nongovernmental organisations to resolve this issue?
- 3.) What media platforms are usually used for these campaigns?
- 4.) In what ways has the Epworth community played a role in curbing this issue? How have they been integrated in any projects to resolve 'child sex work'?
- 5.) Do you use any social media? - Which social media network do you use the most and why? - How do you access the internet? - What do you look for on Facebook?
- 6.) Are you aware of any social media campaigns that aim to address this issue?
- 7.) Have you seen Doubt Chimonyo's Facebook campaign about 'child sex workers' in Epworth? - If so, how did you learn about it? - Or, why do you think you have not seen it before

Researcher shows Facebook video of Doubt Chimonyo's campaign about 'child sex workers' in Epworth that ran on Facebook.

#### PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS ON CONTENT

- 8.) Do you think that what is portrayed in this campaign video is a true reflection of child sex work in Epworth? Please explain.
- 9.) What are your thoughts on the inclusion of a 'child sex worker' in the campaign videos?
- 10.) What do you think is Doubt's main message about child sex work?
- 11.) Do you agree with how this message was communicated with you?
- 12.) Is there anything in this campaign that you disagree with, and if so why?
- 13.) Doubt's campaign was run on Facebook. Do you think that this was the best way for him to try communicate his campaign to people in the Epworth area? Please explain.
- 14.) In your opinion, is there anything that should have been included in the video? Please explain.
- 15.) Having watched this video do you feel inspired/motivated to participate in trying to address this problem in your area? Please explain.

16.) Do you think that this kind of campaign can help with social issues? Please explain.

17.)What do you think about this kind of activism in Zimbabwe?

18.)Coming from a history of lagging behind in technological advances (e.g to get a government document you still have to write a letter and deliver in hard copy), do you think Zimbabweans are ready to adopt the maximum use of technologies specifically social media for 'serious' business



#### **Appendix 4: Semi Structured Interview with Doubt Chimonyo**

Guiding interview question for Doubt on his 'child sex work' campaign.

1) In what ways does doing a social media campaign make one an activist - In what ways does Doubt's social media campaign make him an activist?

INTENTION AND PREFERRED MESSAGE:

1) Why did you choose to run a campaign on 'child sex work' in Epworth?

2) What was the name of the campaign?

3) Why did you choose to produce the campaign on Facebook? - What, in your opinion is useful about Facebook in social media activism?

4) What is the main message of your campaign?

5) Who is your intended audience and why? - Probe: Epworth and international community? - Probe: Why Epworth and what were your specific target areas?

6) What has the response been to the campaign by the Epworth community?

7) How did you hope/anticipate that this audience would respond to this campaign and the problem it raises?

8) Please explain your choice to use Shona, a Zimbabwean local dialect predominantly with no subtitles (given that Facebook is a global platform)?

9) What informed the inclusion of the particular pictures and videos that you incorporated in the campaign. E.g. interviewing one of the 'child sex workers'?

10) In your campaign, you refer to the minors as 'child sex workers', which is a controversial phrase and still is an ongoing debate. Are you aware of this and what are your thoughts?

11) What were some of the similarities and differences from the responses by the offline and that of the online audience?

12) What do you think is the significance of these similarities and differences to the value of activism?

13) Did you personally interact with the Epworth community in creating the campaign and how was the process of finding participants to interview for the campaign?

14) Based on the feedback from the campaign (both online and offline feedback), what are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media as an activism platform?

15) How did the people who participated in making the video (e.g. the child sex worker) respond when viewing the campaign online? Probe: In other words, how did she feel she was represented.

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

16) In your view, what constitutes activism in the Zimbabwean context 'by Zimbabwean standards'?

17) How is this different to global standards, if any?

18) Social media activism has been classified as lazy activism and clicktivism, where do you place social media activism in Zimbabwe based on the responses and reactions from your online audience on your campaign?

19) Do you think social media activism is a catalysis to offline mobilisation or is it activism in and of itself? Please explain.

20) Coming from a history of lagging behind in technological advances (e.g. to get a government document you still have to write a letter and deliver in hard copy), do you think Zimbabweans are ready to adopt the maximum use of technologies specifically social media for 'serious' business.

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE



19 November 2019

Miss Francisca Nyaradz Nhongonhema (219076012)  
School Of Applied Human Sc  
Howard College

Dear Miss Nhongonhema,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00000772/2019

**Project title:** Examining online and offline community perceptions of Social Media Activism in Zimbabwe: A case of a Facebook campaign on 'Child Sex Work' in Epworth, Zimbabwe.

### **Full Approval – Expedited Application**

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 November 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year from 19 November 2019.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Urmilla Bob  
University Dean of Research

/dd