



Audience inclusion in news reporting on facebook and twitter: the case of #feesmustfall



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ABSTRACT

With the growing popularity of social media as a news source, there is a need to explore the audience-inclusion function of these social media platforms for news reporting. It is imperative to explore how the audience uses these platforms in the production of news to define the transformative nature of the media and its role in empowering society (the audience) to 'break' and tell their own story. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how these social media platforms encourage audience inclusion and provide opportunities for the audience to participate in the production and dissemination of news items. In understanding this, society will be able to situate the role of emerging social media platforms in news dissemination, especially in the 21st century. The study conceptualised the audience inclusion theory to explore and examine the role of Facebook and Twitter in producing and disseminating news, particularly in reporting the #FeesMustFall campaign. It explored how social media allows participation in news production and dissemination and how #FeesMustFall participants used Facebook and Twitter to produce and disseminate news about the protest. The study used a qualitative exploratory approach within the interpretive paradigm to understand the audience inclusion role in news dissemination. Findings indicate that students find recourse in social media as an avenue for news during the peak of #FeesMustFall. There is also a change in news reporting due to audience inclusion provided by social networks. Also, citizens in the form of university students have become more engaged with social media because of its ease of access and sense of connectedness.

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Introduction

Approximately 63% of the world's population uses the internet (Statista, 2022a). Social media engagement forms a significant percentage of these statistics. The World Economic Forum (2016) wrote on its Facebook social media page that if Facebook were a country, it would be the most populated country in the world. Also, the provision of social media sites by Twitter has witnessed phenomenal growth, with an increasing number of tweets published daily (Statista, 2022b). In South Africa, a report by Pew Research Centre indicates that at least half of the country's population is online, and 32% of this population uses social media platforms. This report also listed Facebook and Twitter among the top ten websites with the most significant traffic in South Africa (Pouscher et al., 2018; Statista, 2021).

The 'self-publishing' nature of these social media platforms enables audiences to tell their stories and participate in breaking news and topical discussions of news items (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Wilding, 2018; Bryne et al., 2021). The peculiarities of inclusion and participation in news reporting are engendered by the use and sharing of hashtags (#) to champion societal issues, such as the case of the #FeesMustFall in South Africa (Olagunju et al., 2022). These discussions were initiated by students as an end to corporate

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education championed by the hashtag #RhodesMustFall and gradually shifted to the #FeesMustFall in almost all South African universities. Under the #FeesMustFall umbrella, each university looks for what must fall on its respective campuses, creating different sub-hashtags peculiar to the university (Bosch, 2017; Luescher et al., 2017). Many agreed that social media created the avenue for the #FeesMustFall campaign to move from just a local university protest to a national and then global one, thereby generating news comments even outside South Africa. Several studies have identified the potential of Facebook and Twitter not just as a communication tool among youth but as a news platform to air views on pertinent societal issues (Ghosh et al., 2012; Kelling et al., 2013; Castells, 2015; Bosch, 2017; Wilding, 2018; Khan et al., 2022) This is seen in the sequential reporting of the #FeesMustFall campaign adopted through the use of the hashtag.

With the prominence of Twitter and Facebook in South Africa during this campaign, there is a need to understand the inclusion role of social media for breaking news during protests and explore the role social media plays in students' life as a reporting tool in the 21st century. Therefore, this article aims to address two critical questions: What is the role of social media in news production and dissemination, and how does this role allow for audience participation? How did the participants of #FeesMustFall use Facebook and Twitter to produce and disseminate news about the protest? Firstly, this article will introduce the concept of the inclusion role of social media. Then, it will link this to the theoretical framework for this study. Next, the methods and findings of this study will be discussed. Finally, this article will conclude and draw on the importance of the inclusion role of Facebook and Twitter for news reporting.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

The Inclusion Theory

This study draws theoretical inspiration from Niklas Luhmann's inclusion theory which advocates that for a modern society to succeed, there is a need for delegation of some function (in a systematic way) in order for the society not to suffer anarchy (Nassehi 2005; Schirmer and Michailakis 2015). Inclusion theory therefore, is informed by the 'systemic theory' where social structures are put in place to build a strong society. Loosen and Schmidt (2012) advanced this theory by implying that such social structure (inclusion) can take the form of communication channels between the audience and the media, where the media serves as an information channel to the audience, and the audience in this context is the receiver of such information. A system is established if the audience in turn accepts information provided by the media (Loosen and Schmidt 2012).

The audience inclusion theory defined the 'new' relationship between the media and its audiences due to emerging social network sites (Loosen & Schmidt 2012). Audience, "within the theory of Inclusion is used whenever a person benefits or make uses of a social system", for example Twitter, Facebook and thereby "becomes a part of that system's relevant environment" (Loosen and Schmidt 2012, 873). However, the audience may choose to interact with journalists on these social media platforms provided by media institutions or rather discuss outside these institutional platforms thereby creating a different sphere than that which the media institution provides. Examples are manifested in the creation of hashtags such as #blackTwitter, #occupy movement, #RhodesMustFall, #BringBackOurGirls and in the case of this study #FeesMustFall, thereby drawing the public into discussion and into the audience sphere. This conversation can take place within the audience sphere e.g Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other social media sites (Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Schmidt et al. 2013). This is also described by other authors as 'the networked audience' (see Loosen and Schmidt, 2012; Castells and Kumar 2014; Lee et al., 2014) and 'active audience' (see Hermida et al. 2012 and Bolin, 2012).

Social Media Platforms as News Source?

Spaces such as Twitter and Facebook have created avenues for discourse (Valenzuela, 2009; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003 as cited in Bosch 2017; Wilding 2018; Khan et. al 2022). Twitter allows youth to participate in debate and news which they ordinarily might not have chosen to participate in, and therefore has become a platform for the formation of public opinion in the 21st century (Kelling et al. 2013; Bosch 2017; Wilding 2018; Khan et. al. 2022). Peters and Witschge (2015) argue that most of the roles accorded to journalists are now being performed by the audience. This is because social media provides a platform for youth to express their views on issues that affect them in society. Youths are likely not to participate in traditional news media due to influence, control and censorship of the state government on mainstream media; however, Twitter and Facebook serve an immediate need to express their opinions (McKee 2005; Heise et al. 2014; Bosch 2017; Khan et. al. 2022). This is exemplified during the Arab Spring uprising when a blogger tweeted that the public should boycott buying the national newspaper due to the underreporting of the protest (Zhuo, Wellman and Yu 2012). Other similar hashtags movements include #BringBackOurGirls (Maxfield 2016); #BlackLivesMatter; #NotInMyName; #UmbrellaMovement (Lee and Chau 2018) many of which were successful.

Similarly, the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 signaled a transformation process in terms of ownership, staffing and the granting of 'Press Freedom' (Wasserman, Bosch and Chuma 2018). However, Kalyango et al. (2017) observed that most journalists in developing countries still focus more on developmental journalism than their political watchdog role. Moyo (2015) exemplified this in her analysis of citizen reportage in Zimbabwe that beyond the professional ethics of journalism, the citizen/audience provides an individual reportage of witnessed ongoing events in the 'Album of Terror'. This kind of reporting is also evident in the case of

#FeesMustFall (#FMF) protest where students are seen as the pioneers and motivators of this campaign. The students directly (bypassing the traditional media) held the government accountable for tertiary student funding. The commercialisation of freedom of expression by the traditional media makes citizens lack an inclusive channel of communication (Wasserman 2010). Maybe as expressed by Gans (1980: 22 as cited in Bruns and Highfield (2012) “the news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone.”

In addition, the unequal race and economical class structure in post-apartheid South Africa has made the democracy of the media seem unattainable. The struggle of students for #FeesMustFall in higher education in South Africa is largely due to the inequality and class structure brought by apartheid (Wasserman 2010; Oxlund 2016; Wasserman, Bosch and Chuma 2018). Consequently, journalists are torn between the different class structures and how to ‘balance’ their news reporting and coverage. Therefore, the engagement seen on social media during the peak of the #FeesMustFall campaign is akin to the concept of audience inclusion as described by Loosen and Schmidt (2012).

Study Rationale

This article explores the audience inclusion role of social media during and in the aftermaths of the 2015-2017 #FeesMustFall protest with focus on the experience of the ‘audience’ itself, which in this case are university students. It will also discuss how audience participation can become an instrument for better reporting within media organisations. Can the inclusion of these social media platforms result in quality journalism? This paper explores the audience inclusion role of social media with a particular focus on the meaning and lived experiences of students during the reporting of the #FeesMustFall. How are the direct participants (students) of the #FeesMustFall able to use these social media platforms to tell their stories and create news around the campaign?

Context of the Study

The #FeesMustFall campaign is a network movement of students against a corporate education (Castells 2015; Luescher, Loader and Mugume (2017). During the years 2015-2017, there was a shift in the higher educational system of South Africa. The revolutionary cry among young students for an end to social ills and corporate education was spiraled by the use of hashtags from the #RhodesMustFall and gradually built up to the #FeesMustFall campaign witnessed across the country. Therefore, the #FeesMustFall campaign is seen as an offshoot of the #RhodesMustFall (Bosch 2017; Taghavi 2017; Luescher et al. 2017). It is impossible to discuss the #FeesMustFall without mentioning the event of #RhodesMustFall which started in early 2015 (Mpfu-Walsh 2016). The action of a student who threw faeces on a statue (of Rhodes) at the University of Cape Town culminated in several events that eventually led to the removal of the statue from the campus. To the students’ ‘revolutionaries’, the statue symbolises the domineering presence of a white colonial master in a post-apartheid South Africa (Mpfu-Walsh 2016; Bosch 2017). The seeming success of the #RMF campaign united university students across South Africa to initially make a call for an end to yearly increment of tertiary fees and much later a campaign for the total removal of fees in all South African universities. Thereafter, the (hashtag) #FeesMustFall was created to support the removal of fees in South African Universities. #FeesMustFall was recorded to be the most organised and largest protest in the history of South Africa since the end of apartheid (Booyesen et al. 2016). Several Social Networking Sites (SNS) were at the centre of the debate through several hashtags raising the awareness of both online and traditional media ‘contributors’ to the situation (Bosch 2017), thereby facilitating an inclusion role in news distribution. Almost all South African universities began to look out for what must fall in their different institutions with creation of several sub-hashtags peculiar to each institution under the #FeesMustFall umbrella (Bosch 2017; Luescher et al. 2017). The first recorded tweet on the #FeesMustFall as cited by Daniels (2016) was on October 8, 2015 and from the student body (not from a Journalist). De Jager (2016) explained that only 5% of the average 1000 daily posts on the #FeesMustFall were from the traditional media institutions, which means that the gatekeeping and agenda role may no longer reside with the traditional media.

It is noteworthy that the declaration for free education by the then President of South Africa, Mr. Jacob Zuma was in December 2017 (effective January 2018) to all students with the combined annual household income of less than R350,000.00. While the #FeesMustFall movement was a national-wide campaign across higher institutions of learning in South Africa, the study focused on a particular higher institution as a case study for the audience inclusion role of Facebook and Twitter among students during the #FeesMustFall campaign. The aftermath of the Fees Must Fall campaign and the follow-up of events made each university within the country demand for what must fall in their various institutions.

Methodology

The approach used for this study was a qualitative exploratory study within the interpretivist approach. This approach is significant to this study as it explored the in-depth meanings and views of students who were at the center of the #FeesMustFall. By conducting interviews, it gave room for the primary participants of the #FeesMustFall protest to reflect on their responses and their uses of these social media tools to create and disseminate news. Thirteen students all from a university of technology in South Africa were interviewed one-on-one and audio-recorded using a semi-structured interview guide. These students were selected through purposive sampling. The design for this study was approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of the University of Technology in question and gatekeeper permission was also obtained to interview students from this institution.

Participants/students were solicited from the department of Journalism within the University of Technology with the criteria being interest in news. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the interview process. Eighteen (18) students indicated

interest and provided their names and contact details. They were contacted via WhatsApp messages, SMS and phone calls for interviews until the required number of participants were completed. The study initially targeted fifteen (15) participants due to the chances of saturation of data occurring after the first twelve interviews (Guest et al. 2006; Brinkmann & Kvale 2018). The study reached saturation at the 12th interview; however, one more interview was conducted to ascertain this claim. Therefore, the total number of interviews were 13. Out of the 13 participants, three (3) were former executives of the Students' Representatives Council (SRC), while two (2) had worked with the online radio of the institution called 'Radio DUT'. All the participants were undergraduate students in their final year and have at least one or both of the social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook). This is because Journalism students based on their career trajectory are expected to actively read, listen, and view news reports in any kind of media (Qayyum et al 2010:182). Another reason for opting for Journalism students is because of their media knowledge. Although different hashtags have continued under the banner of #FeesMustFall in various ways, the peak of the movement itself was from the year 2015-2017. The study also opted for the final year students because they were the last set of current students to experience #FeesMustFall campaign at its peak. This set of students experienced other students' campaign and protests in the university. The study did not include students from other departments which may be seen as a limitation in the study. However, the focus of this study is on students with active interest for news. Therefore, journalism students studying towards a degree in the art of dissemination of news and information fit the criteria. Purposive sampling is targeted at a population in order to allow for in-depth and clarity on their lived experiences (Marvasti 2004; Yin 2011). It is in the nature of qualitative research not to depend upon random sampling; instead purposive sampling was used to determine the selection of respondents to be interviewed, which means selecting those that "obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subject of study" (Kuzel 1992: 37). This article delved into the meaning of how students explore Facebook and Twitter in news and communication.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Nvivo software tool was used for the coding. Nvivo is a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis System (CAQDAS) used to support the process of a qualitative data analysis; they do not analyse data itself (Uwe 2014; Nowell et al. 2017 and Harding 2019). This tool was employed in the research process primarily because of its flexibility in the organisation of data. Nvivo helps to visualise large data at once. Data obtained were analysed following the 'six phases' thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2006). The data of participants collected includes types of social media use alongside an informed consent form.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The main objective of this article is to understand how Twitter and Facebook encourage audience inclusion among students in news sharing and dissemination using the #FeesMustFall campaign as a case. The findings are grouped under three categories which are: social media Versus the Traditional Media, Assessment of Audience Inclusion and Social Media Movements and Hashtags. The first and second categories discuss the accessibility and easiness of social media platforms compared to the traditional media as experienced by students. This category answers the first question of this article. The third category discusses the transitioning to a new kind of citizen reporting among students. This category answers the second question of this paper. There is an interrelationship between physical protests and social media reporting of such protests as students engaged both methods interchangeably during protests. This is because social media platforms are used to report and show news coverage of protests by students.

Social media Versus Traditional Media

The discussion under this category centered on which medium made the #FeesMustFall movement popular. The participants believed that the traditional media were not always telling their story or reflecting the audience perspective that is why they had to resort to social media. One particular participant mentioned that the #FeesMustFall discussion had started a week earlier on social media before she heard it on the traditional media.

Because I remember quite clearly TV only started broadcasting it after a week that it (#FeesMustFall) started and it was already a big conversation on social media, so it was definitely social media.

The essence of what information counts as newsworthy for the traditional media may be one of the reasons why this participant recalled hesitation on their part in the case of the reportage of the #FeesMustFall. Only a fraction of what is happening globally makes it to the news based on what is perceived as news value by the traditional media (Bahadur 2019; Harcup 2019). Moyo (2015) in the review of literature maintained that social media allows for the democratisation of news since the public (audience) are now co-creator of contents with the traditional media, thereby giving diverse views on issues. Although the ethics of this has been questioned on the premise that it is subject to individualism (see Gladwell 2010 and Morozov 2017), this study found that the #FeesMustFall campaign proves that such diverse views bring to light the voice of the students. Social media allows for what is popularly referred to as User Generated Content and presence of audience inclusion in news content (Loosen & Schmidt 2012). Therefore, students find recourse on these social media platforms because of the certainty that their voice would be heard and they would be able to gain necessary support and attention that may not be provided for by the traditional media.

News agenda setting or discourses for the public by the traditional media may not hold in the face of new media technology. This is largely due to the unlimited space on the social media sphere as against the limited slot time and space allocated to television and print. Therefore, the traditional media is constrained to decide what information is more newsworthy. In DeJager's (2016) analysis of tweets posted during the protest of #FeesMustFall, findings revealed that the old media print and television were lagging behind

in their reporting of the event as experienced by the above student. This indicates that the power to break news is gradually resting more on the 'active audience' based on the opportunity social media platforms provide. The traditional media may now have to follow news on social media to determine what is of news interest to its audience.

Similarly, in the definition of what count as news, participants of this study shared their experience as to what was reported in the mainstream media. The extracts below indicates that there was a difference in reporting style on social media and the traditional media during the #FeesMustFall. This situation may be because of the ethics upheld by the journalism profession.

I was actually forced during that time of Fees Must Fall campaign to actually go on social media and find out more...because television will always give us a one side and a biased view.

Most of the things that were covered on social media about Fees Must Fall were not the thing that were covered on the traditional media.

Because now SABC for example is not coming in and telling both sides of the story, they are not sharing our story, we are telling our own sides of the stories.

The experiences of the above students reflect that the traditional media did not include the voice of the students in their reportage of the Fees Must Fall campaign. This angle of reporting by the media is what Loosen & Schmidt refer to as "audience as recipients" (2012: 869). A situation whereby the media sees the audience as a mere receptor of news and information. However, Loosen & Schmidt (2012) and McGee (2022) argued that the audience should be seen as co-creator of news and not only as a receiver of news. Several researchers have emphasised the relevance of a mutual co-creation relationship between the media and the audience particularly in the era of emerging communication tools (Bruns, Highfield and Lind 2012; Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Heise et al. 2014; Konieczna, Hatcher, and Moore 2018; McGee 2022). The audience voice can no longer be ignored in the creation of news content. The lack of co-creation of content resorted in students telling their 'story' and becoming a 'reporter' on social media. Another major finding of this study is the relationship between social media and traditional media during the #FeesMustFall. While adherence to ethics of the journalism profession is vital (see Lewis 2012), this study observed that there needs to be a symbiotic relationship between the mainstream media and the social media community. Participant's experience of the #FeesMustFall was the ineffectiveness of the mainstream media to include and tell the students' story and was more focused on reporting the violent aspect of the protest. The mainstream media can follow social media discussion by building a 'balanced representation' of reporting both on social media and through the traditional approach as suggested in the audience inclusion approach (Loosen and Schmidt 2012; Heise et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2018).

Another interesting finding under this category is that most participants mentioned that the mainstream media saw the #FeesMustFall protests as mostly violent.

So the traditional media will look at it as violent protest and not the #FeesMustFall movement. The media only realized that it was a movement after it has taken like two weeks...traditional media saw it just as a violent protest, a very violent protest

Because Television will give you one side, when you look at it from the television point of view, you will only see.... They will put it to you in a way that the students are being violent, they are causing chaos, not necessarily telling us what are they striking for? Why are they striking?

Mckee (2005) explained that youth may not necessarily follow the pattern or structure of expressing complaints, but that does not indicate that they are apolitical or anti civil society. Although, the #FeesMustFall campaign was marred with evidence of violence in some campuses (see; Daniels 2016; Hodes 2017; Bosch 2017), that does not dispute that the students are united in one goal that fees must be free. According to Wasserman, Bosch and Chuma's (2018) findings, traditional media report of violent stories get more coverage than any other stories. Likewise, there are still some underlying elements of the apartheid era in today's South Africa (Hodes 2017), this made students situate the fight for free higher education for all under this discourse.

The 'grand' role of the journalist as a watchdog for the public leaves the entire role of 'news making' in the hands of the journalist. However, the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter make it possible for audience participation in the journalistic role as a watchdog or channel of public opinion. Therefore, most of the role accorded to journalists are now being performed by the audience. This is because social media creates avenue for students and fellow supporters of #FeesMustFall to establish new methods of reporting stories thereby pushing against the traditional method of news reporting held on to by journalists. Also, the move towards the fourth industrial revolution especially among young people through the use of mobile devices such as phones, iPads and others created avenue for the #FeesMustFall movement to gain momentum online as evident in the data extract below. Most participants attest that the use of their phone was relevant during the #FeesMustFall campaign.

...the future is the social media...when I have to work, I have my phone on my hand; I can't remember the last time I read a newspaper. So for me as a young person, I know definitely I can get the online version and I have PDF on my phone. I can't put down my phone and grab a newspaper, no!

Assessment of Audience Inclusion

This theme assesses the outcomes of audience inclusion in social media. It also speaks to Loosen & Schmidt's (2012) theory of inclusion among the audience as a result of access to various social media platforms made available through mobile technology. The majority of the participants believed that Facebook and Twitter created an inclusion for them as students and that it is a major reason the movement gained momentum.

So even though Fees Must Fall had like people inside box, like Bonginkosi Khanyile and stuff like that, but it put in an awareness that us as student we still have like some voices to voice out...

I wasn't physically active but I was for it on my phone...on social media, I did like those posts.

Data revealed that most students find recourse in online debate because of the protection online participation provides. They feel it is safer to campaign online as against the risk of protesting physically which may lead to exposure to attacks from either the security agents or dire consequences from the university. Evidence from the data under this study revealed that students find recourse in the inclusion role of social media as it gives them an avenue to express their concerns as described by this student.

I feel more comfortable on social media because as much as there can be some sort of argument and so, but the argument are not directly violent, they are not direct to me as a person, that is why people are able to voice out their opinion much better because the physical protest kind of create a protection barrier for you unlike if you are online, you sort of feel protected...you know.

Another angle is the confidentiality social media platforms provide, the strength of posting your views and opinions without the feeling of having your voice subdued. The issue of privacy with regards to contributions on social media were paramount to most participants. People feel safe to participate because it protects their identity. Facebook and Twitter enables its user to adopt a pseudonym through the profile or handle name respectively. One participant says he feels safe to comment because he can always hide his identity:

It is easier online because of the comment and if I don't want to, I don't have to use my name. I can write anything and then the conversation will go on and then I will be like....Its so much easier.

I will write everything without getting disturbed by anyone, without having someone else to ask me why is he saying this? You see, I will write everything even if they do not like it but they will get the message..."

The freedom of expression social media provides made it possible for the above students to express themselves freely. This is in particular relevant in a democratic system whereby everyone can contribute their views and express them accordingly. Habermas (2006) concept of a public sphere described a situation where the public (audience) can comment freely using any platform without fear or coercion. This is enabled through social media discussion as participants express that social media provides an avenue for engagement and effective discussion. A lot of discussion centered on Facebook and Twitter inclusion for people who are camera shy to express and participate in discussion pertaining to their well-being in university.

...you know it is the way of writing something and then you know exactly that no one will be shouting back at you. If you are a shy person like I am, like I cannot stand in front of the camera at all, I am very shy, I cannot do that, but I am very vocal on social media.

Furthermore, social media allows for students who are not vocal to engage with others as described by this student. Just as Zhuo, Wellman, Yu (2012) found that social media allows for groups to organize protest, break communication barriers among protesters, establish another sphere where protesters can communicate, and create a sense of belonging during the Arab spring, findings from this study also revealed that students use social media as a form of activism during the #FeesMustFall.

Social Media Movement and Hashtags

This category discusses the interrelationship between online and physical activism especially during the #FeesMustFall. In this category, we will discover the relationship between students' reporting on social media platforms and the actual protests. One of the prevailing discussions of the social media is if it is indeed 'public sphere' (Gladwell 2010). However, Susen (2011) and Zhuo, Wellman and Yu (2012) pointed out that the role of social media in the 21st century movements is crucial to some of the success recorded. Participants in this study as well believed that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter aided the popularity of the movement. It enabled the students to converge in a 'public space' and tell their stories themselves. The participants suggested that the social media platforms provided a space to first converge and discuss the issues of fees before protesting. In the data extract below, the student indicated that she participated on Twitter and then later joined the movement physically.

Yes, I did campaign because I honestly felt that why should one not go to school because they cannot afford, so I actually went to Twitter and put in my campaign Fees Must Fall...there is one instance I went to UKZN to march...I actually joined the march so that our voices can be heard.

This indicates that there is a relationship between online discussions and physical representation of protest. In the case of the #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2015, Bosch (2017) discovered that Twitter created an avenue for the campaign to go from a local university campaign to national and then global, thereby generating political debate even outside South

Africa. The same was also recorded in the case of #FeesMustFall, one of the participants believed that the social media created avenue for the movement to be popular.

Yoo! It (#FeesMustFall) was a storm; it was literally a social media storm that took a life of its own.

I think we definitely live in the age where protesting is changing like this, it is not just going to the streets and just dancing and chanting, so it's (social media) a new way of bringing attention and so because it is easy as well, it is easy to go to social media and round people up and say we are doing this, it has more outreach, a lot of people can get in touch with a lot of people in a short space of time and you can get your ideas across more quickly.

The experiences of the participants indicated that the use of social media platforms changed the #FeesMustFall campaign. This is possible through the ease it provides to garner support for the campaign. Castells (2015) discussed the inter-relationship between physical and social movements. A lot of what happens during physical protest translates to what is streamed online. This is also manifested in the Twitter-based 'Bring Back Our Girls Campaign' (Maxfield 2016) in Western Africa, and the Arab Spring that took place in Northern Africa between 2011-2012 (see Zhuo, Wellman and Yu 2012) where proceeds of meetings, rallies and gatherings were tweeted.

While many of the participants agreed that Facebook and Twitter created an avenue for the #FeesMustFall to be popular, two participants, one of whom belongs to the student leadership (SRC) mentioned that these social media tools could be abused and it sometimes created an armchair activists/ participation because the number of views, likes, retweets and comments on these platforms do not necessarily represent the number of students that are physically available during protests.

So people are quick to follow and like and add their reply or comment but when it comes to actually doing something they lack with that.

Student's leader will pick an initiative to actually say let us go voice our opinion to management, lets us invite everyone to meet wherever, through social media and people will not come but when we look at Facebook and the page everyone is making a noise, everyone is saying we are hungry, but they were not there...People are not found there, but they are found on social media saying #FeesMustFall, we do not have enough money to pay for our fee, but when it comes to protesting for #FeesMustFall, they are not there....So there is a bit of lack in hard work that social media creates.

The 'slackitivism' of social media protest participation (see Gladwell 2010 and Morozov 2017) does not mean successes are not recorded with the use of these social media platforms for social movements. However, the role of social media in protest is not only to mobilize physical support; social media is important even during protest as it captures events and stories as it is happening. A participant further pointed out that social media enables students to capture all aspects of the #FeesMustFall movement.

With #FeesMustFall the video of students beaten by the police wouldn't have made it to normal main stream media but with social media, people could see those videos.

I even went to Pretoria in 2016 January, I saw student protesting and all that. They were carrying like placards written #FeesMustFall, and then all of a sudden you saw all those video trending everywhere on social media, like everyone, almost everyone knows about the #FeesMustFall campaign. Even there where Facebook campaign, Twitter, Instagram, everywhere there was #FeesMustFall.

The above students' experiences of the fees must fall is the live tweet and coverage it gave the campaign. Since there is no time lag in Facebook and Twitter, this makes it possible for events happening physically to be covered live. This may count as one of the advantages of social media movements. The extracts below from participants also reflect this.

It's the social media obviously, it is the social media because if we didn't use it as a tool like for people to know about it, it won't be so popular, people wouldn't have known about it, they will only think that it was like a protest.

Yeah...I did participate on social media and I think most of the time it was to defend the act on the students. Because a lot of people were actually criticizing students without understanding what was going on, what was the purpose of the #FeesMustFall movement..."

The statement above suggested that social media paved the way for students to deliberate and participate in discussion regarding the protest thereby creating a kind of citizen reporting as described by Bruns, Highfield and Lind (2012). Another interesting angle to this is that while institutions can sanction protest among students, they cannot on the other hand control statements or participation on social media. One of the participants who works with the online radio of DUT shared her experience in the extract below.

I remembered there was one time where we went to cover a Res, we are shooting for 11am and DUT will not allow us to go in there, but because of social media, students were actually able to record certain videos and post certain images on their own social media page without fear of being expelled or fear of being told to take those down.

Therefore, social media provided a platform for students to mobilise and participate in live coverage events during the Fees Must Fall campaign. Although there have been attempts to shut down social media platforms or control the flow of information on these

platforms by various governments across the globe in the past, this effort has proven abortive as these measures and approach are not permanent but rather open up further debate regarding the country or government concerned. A student commented that:

The minute you see a hashtag that is when you know that something is trending and then it is something people must know about.

The use of hashtag to share information within common themes is becoming popular all over social media network platforms. It is interesting to note that hashtags are used in any campaign and movement on social media. Hashtags play a role in the awareness of any campaign as it plays a central role where both the audience and journalists can converge and have a pool of conversation regarding an issue. Hashtags create a convergence for a network community to feel a sense of inclusion in a particular discussion or topic. The participants in this study believed that the use of hashtags were instrumental to the popularity of the Fees Must Fall movement.

...just scrolling my news feed, you will see like #FeesMustFall #FeesMustFall and surely even if you are not a student, even if you don't know what #FeesMustFall means, you will see that there is something happening in SA and then you will try and get the intel about the Fees Must Fall campaign.

The use of hashtags in conversation on Facebook and in particular on Twitter created a means for students to have an understanding of what the #FeesMustFall campaign is about. Hashtags are symbolic to a lot of social media movements and campaigns in the 21st century. These include the #BringBackOurGirls (Maxfield 2016); #BlackLivesMatter; #NotInMyName; #UmbrellaMovement (Lee and Chau 2018), many of which were also successful. Likewise, participants of this study mentioned that the hashtag was significant to the popularity the campaign gained both within and outside of the country.

The moment you just say hashtag #FeesMustFall2019 if you go online, like it is always adjusted if you just say #FeesMustFall 2019, 5000 people are twitting about that and you get interested that so many people are on this, let me check it out, then you check it out and you like let me retweet it

What makes hashtags an interesting phenomenon is that they can be created by any member of the public. In the case of #FeesMustFall, these hashtags serve as an inclusion for a new kind of participatory culture among students during the campaign as seen in the response of one of our participants.

...So for me, I felt like #FeesMustFall and social media gave a new right to a new type of democracy which I as a young person can relate to. The #FeesMustFall actually create a spark of a new movement and a movement that I as a young person can take part in. So I think #FeesMustFall and the hashtag is a movement that is still going to grow and change the face of politics. Can you imagine if young people were given a chance to like vote through hashtags? And the most important thing about using hashtag for movements is that the sharing option that you are getting on social media enables it to travel much more faster, because if a person with much followers shares that, the shares would keep on growing until everyone has noticed the hashtag.

This is evident in the case of #FeesMustFall where students used the hashtag on social media platforms to solicit the support of members of the public and get the attention of the government towards ensuring that fees fall in South African higher institutions. The above participant shares her experience during the #FeesMustFall and especially among her followers on her Facebook platform. The hashtag serves as an inclusive channel used to communicate their thoughts and feelings on Facebook and Twitter during the campaign.

Conclusion

Citizens in the form of university students have become more engaged with social media because of its ease of access and sense of connectedness. This sense of connectedness has resulted in social media movements where citizens document their journeys: an inclusive form of Citizen journalism. Citizen journalism fosters a network audience community. The various social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, gave the audience a self-publishing 'power.' Therefore, Facebook and Twitter provided the audience included students who needed to air their views and share information during the #FeesMustFall. It is important to note that the audience, which in this case are students, benefit from the inclusion role Facebook, and Twitter provide for news reporting during the #FeesMustFall and wanted the traditional media to co-participate in these audience inclusion avenues.

The findings of this study show that young university students experience Facebook and Twitter as audience inclusion channels during the #FeesMustFall campaign. However, the audience still wants the participation and contribution of the mainstream media in discussions on social media. This shows that social media is changing the perspective of news reporting. These young people's intentions may not primarily be directed toward seeking news on social media sites. However, since these sites are becoming popular in disseminating news and information, they are ultimately exposed to the news.

Similarly, students feel empowered to tell their own stories without the 'influence' of the 'external' media. Citizen reporting was also reflected during the #FeesMustFall. This enables students to experience inclusion in disseminating information through the avenue Facebook and Twitter provides. The advent of Facebook and Twitter makes it possible for the audience and media professionals to occupy the same media space. Likewise, the symbolic nature of hashtags in protests to gain support and create awareness also contribute to students' inclusion in the #FeesMustFall movement.

The findings revealed that students were motivated to participate on social media platforms as it provides audience inclusion in citizen or community engagement, provides easy access to news and information regarding the #FeesMustFall movement, and enriches the knowledge base of students. Another motivation was a sense of connectedness that Facebook brought among students during the movement. The #FeesMustFall was a national student movement in all South African universities. Therefore a similar qualitative study may be done in different higher institutions in South Africa to explore the peculiarities of audience inclusion in the reporting of the movement in each institution.

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